

Power to the Profession

Decision Cycles 7+8

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

ZERO TO THREE

FEBRUARY 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Power to the Profession (P2P) Task Force, in collaboration with thousands of educators, individual stakeholders, and partner organizations, is working toward a bold and audacious vision for a unified early childhood education profession. This profession will have clear roles and responsibilities, professional cohesion, and commensurate compensation. This will ensure 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.

The first six Decision Cycles of the P2P initiative have moved us toward this vision by defining the name, responsibilities, competencies, professional pathways, and compensation recommendations that form the core of the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*.¹ Among other specific recommendations, this framework elevates early childhood educators at multiple designations (Early Childhood Educator I, Early Childhood Educator II, and Early Childhood Educator III). These designations are intentionally connected to and informed by the agreed-upon standards and competencies, and they have been developed so that each and every person in this profession can play a valuable and essential role in the development and education of young children.

In order to fully realize the shared vision, all members of the early childhood education profession, like other established professions, will need to function within and be supported by a broader, more coherent system comprised of:

- ➔ Professional Preparation Programs
- ➔ Employers/Owners²
- ➔ Professional Organizations and Governance Bodies
- ➔ State Governments and Agencies
- ➔ Federal Government and Agencies

While the first six Decision Cycles set out the proposed structure for being part of the profession, the recommendations in this Decision Cycle articulate the interrelated and interdependent

Extensive Engagement

To date, the Task Force has engaged 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 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 has resulted in 21 focus and discussion groups reaching more than 440 individuals across 12 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

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- 1 Learn more about the decisions made in the first six cycles at www.powertotheprofession.org. The decisions intentionally build upon one another, those made throughout the first six cycles are the foundation for the ones the Task Force recommends here.
 - 2 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 this Decision Cycle, 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 this Decision Cycle 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.

supports, resources, quality assurances, and infrastructure that must be in place for each component of the system to effectively support the early childhood education profession.

As a profession, early childhood educators welcome increased, clear, and consistent accountability that is aligned with our definitions of professional competencies and that results in increased compensation. We understand that we can only expect the significant, sustained increases in public financing that are needed to move the profession forward if we are willing to be accountable for their effective use. At the same time, we also understand that we can only be held accountable if we have necessary and sufficient supports, resources, and infrastructure.



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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:³

- ➔ 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 policies that disproportionately and negatively impact educators from communities of color nor children 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.

³ These implementation commitments were initially established in Decision Cycle 345+6. The language has been updated to reflect field feedback gathered during Decision Cycle 7+8.

In this Decision Cycle, and in response to input from early childhood educators, **we explicitly clarify and add another implementation commitment:** *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.*

P2P’s intentional approach for unifying the entire early childhood education profession—not only across settings and states, but also across licensure age bands, provider types, government jurisdictions, and funding streams—is uncharted territory for the early childhood education field. Therefore, in creating the recommendations embedded in the first-edition *Unifying Framework*, the Task Force applied a strengths-based approach to leverage existing national, state, and local early childhood education efforts that are or could be aligned to the recommendations. We relied on current research, expertise from the field, extensive engagement, and lessons learned from other professions.

The recommendations themselves are primarily aligned with a future vision of the profession. Their thoughtful and systematic implementation over time must take into account the realities of the current workforce, addressing systemic and pervasive biases and barriers, while serving as the bridge to take the early childhood education profession from where we are now to where we want to be.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

A fragmented, isolated, and under-resourced system that does not support the effectiveness of early childhood educators.

There are bright spots across the country, in states and cities, in higher education systems, and in early learning settings, where the early childhood education workforce is fairly compensated and well-prepared and where meaningful quality assurance measures are in place. However, this is not the reality for the vast majority of the early childhood education workforce nor the early childhood

There is little uniformity and consistency across professional preparation programs, licensing requirements, and employer guidelines and expectations.

education ecosystem (e.g., practitioners, professional preparation programs, employers/owners, professional governance, and state and federal governments).

Instead, the nation’s collective failure to adequately invest in high-quality child care and early learning has overwhelmingly resulted in children not getting what they need, families paying more for child care than for housing, and the workforce being paid so little that nearly half live in families that depend on public assistance. Overall, public funding in the

United States covers only a fraction of the resources needed by the early childhood education ecosystem.

Lack of resources reinforces a lack of consistency and quality.

This scarcity environment has resulted in a disjointed, inequitable, and undervalued field. As detailed in [Decision Cycles 345+6](#), there is little uniformity and consistency across professional preparation programs, licensing requirements, and employer guidelines and expectations. Professional preparation programs vary in terms of their quality, scope, coursework, age band of focus, oversight, and titles. Employers and work settings that vary widely (from solo practitioners such as family child care homes to large businesses and franchises that employ thousands and operate in multiple

Educators Confront Multiple Barriers Along the Path to Professional Preparation

Many early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8 across states and settings want and welcome the opportunity to increase their education. However, federal and state policymakers, along with institutions of higher education and professional training programs, must address the barriers these educators confront—from institutional racism to a lack of substitute pools in early learning program settings—as they work to attain credentials and degrees. At a broad level, underpaid early childhood educators need financial support in the forms of scholarships, grants, and loan forgiveness in order to put access to higher education within reach. Like many other adults, including those returning to higher education after time away, and those trying to balance work and family, educators also need societal support in the form of access to affordable, high-quality child care for their own children; reliable public transportation; and broadband internet access.

Unique among professions, however, investments are also needed to ensure that early childhood education employers and owners have access to substitute pools with qualified educators so that employees can participate in coursework and homework without compromising the health, safety, and quality of care for children. Further, institutions of higher education and professional training programs must create seamless, articulated pathways and provide additional supports, including coaching, mentoring, and coursework in other languages, in order to support the equitable participation of those who are fulfilling a crucial need in their communities by providing early childhood education in languages other than English; and/or those who are coming from inadequately-funded public education systems where they were not fully prepared for college-level coursework. As it stands now, educators unfortunately face a system rife with bias and riddled with barriers and obstacles, each of which must be addressed through these and other solutions in order to fulfill our shared vision, support a diverse and effective profession, and deliver on the promise of high-quality early learning.

states) often are responsible for managing multiple funding streams, and they feel overburdened by complicated and sometimes contradictory regulatory and accountability systems.

A workforce shortage driven by lack of support and compensation.

Many educators still work in states and settings where they are not required to meet even minimal educational qualifications. When educational requirements are raised, sufficient supports are rarely provided. Without these supports, current educators who do not meet the requirements and confront barriers to doing so may be forced to leave their setting or the field altogether. This turnover significantly disrupts their own lives and the lives of children and families in their communities. Even when educators do succeed in increasing their educational attainment, their low compensation does not typically rise to reflect their new educational qualifications. This stagnant pay discourages many talented individuals with higher educational achievement from entering the profession and serves as a disincentive for other talented educators currently in the workforce to pursue credentials and degrees and to remain in the field when they are achieved.

The lack of unified leadership from within the profession has resulted in certain sectors, specifically state and federal government agencies, playing an outsized role in setting and overseeing compliance with accountability expectations, particularly compared to how this process is managed in other professions, such as nursing, architecture, and speech-language pathology.

States and the federal government” have a wide variety of regulatory and oversight structures and systems, depending on setting, age group, or funding stream. Educator licensing and certification requirements vary widely across states and systems, and are focused primarily on public pre-K–12. What early childhood educators have to know and be able to do, how they are prepared, how they are compensated, and how they and the institutions that are supposed to support them are held

These siloed, fragmented, inequitable, under-resourced, mostly optional, and sometimes contradictory approaches to preparation, expectations, and supports have led to an unduly inequitable and ineffective system.

accountable vary dramatically within and across state lines. This leads to even greater fragmentation and confusion for early childhood educators, the frequent loss of talent, and increased turnover and instability. Most federal programs supporting early childhood education remain so deeply under-resourced that they are unable to serve the majority of eligible families or support the recruitment and retention of effective early childhood educators.

These siloed, fragmented, inequitable, under-resourced, mostly optional, and sometimes contradictory approaches to preparation, expectations, and supports have led to an unduly inequitable and ineffective system in which the burdens of cost and access rest on educators and families. In the end, this system and the low compensation that is embedded in it, makes it very difficult to recruit and retain early childhood educators and, ultimately, to provide all children with high-quality educational experiences that help them and their families thrive.

Observations from Other Professions

In developing the *Unifying Framework* for early childhood educators, we looked closely at common practices from other professions, including nursing, architecture, speech-language pathology, and accounting.

Members of the Profession

In other professions, professionals:

- ➔ Meet standards and follow guidelines of the profession, including a code of ethics;
- ➔ Adhere to the responsibilities within their designated scope of practice;
- ➔ Demonstrate mastery of competencies within their professional designation or role (via assessment and/or clinical experience requirements);
- ➔ Complete preparation programs and clinical experiences required to earn a license and/or professional certification; and
- ➔ Play a central role in defining and shaping their profession and the policies that affect it, generally through professional and workforce organizations.

Professional Preparation Programs

In other professions, preparation programs:

- ➔ Earn approval from a state regulatory agency or designated body;
- ➔ Earn accreditation from accreditation body(ies) approved by the profession based on agreed-to competencies held by the profession; and
- ➔ Prepare graduates to successfully complete exams required to earn a license and/or professional certification (success data can be publicized).

Employers/Owners

In other professions, employers and business owners:

- ➔ Hire professionals with a license and/or professional certification;
- ➔ Ensure professionals practice within the scope of their license and/or professional certification;
- ➔ Provide conditions that support the well-being and effectiveness of professionals (professional development, autonomy, compensation, materials, work schedule, staffing models, culture, leadership, etc.);
- ➔ Incentivize professional certifications and professional specializations; and
- ➔ Evaluate employees based on professional standards, professional guidelines, and other employer-driven metrics.

Professional Governance Body

In other professions, a professional governance body:

- ➔ Provides standards and guidelines to ensure the effectiveness of the profession, including position statements, a professional code of ethics, and unifying recommendations;
- ➔ Advocates for the policies and financing required to ensure the profession is effective;
- ➔ Designates and approves accrediting bodies for professional preparation programs;
- ➔ Designates and approves assessments required for regulatory licensure and/or professional certification;
- ➔ Issues, administers, and maintains professional certification (can include a public registry)—with or without state regulatory licensing; and
- ➔ Designates and approves the process for professional specialization certification.

State Governments

In other professions, state governments:

- ➔ Establish a board to grant state-level licenses to legally practice as part of the profession and address ethics complaints;
- ➔ Ensure state funding and policies are sufficient to protect the public from harmful practices;
- ➔ Ensure state funding and policies target individuals with a professional license and/or professional certification; and
- ➔ Ensure state funding and policies target preparation programs with state approval and/or professional accreditation.

Federal Government

In other professions, the federal government assumes a variety of responsibilities. It may:

- ➔ Ensure federal funding and policies are sufficient to support and, as needed, balance, the supply and demand of the marketplace;
- ➔ Ensure federal funding and policies enable greater access for current and prospective members of the workforce to enter and graduate from higher education;
- ➔ Ensure federal regulatory structures protect the public from harmful practices; and
- ➔ Enable states to make decisions that support the advancement of the profession and/or industry.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

A unified, coherent, accountable, and well-resourced system that supports the effectiveness of early childhood educators

A significant result of shifting to a unified profession is that the profession itself can take the lead in (1) defining roles and responsibilities for preparation and practice, (2) establishing the accountability systems and infrastructure supports to ensure effective practice, and (3) working with others (preparation programs, employers/owners, and government agencies) to ensure the field can achieve its ultimate vision.

This leadership approach mirrors that used by other professions and allows government entities to focus on regulating practice and targeting investments to ensure quality of life, safety, and accountability. In this new configuration of mutual accountability, the profession is responsive to the needs of the public, and the government bodies are heavily influenced by recommendations from the profession and the public. Mutual accountability also demands a clear vision and streamlined responsibilities for each component of the professional ecosystem.

Our 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.

In this new configuration of mutual accountability, the profession is responsive to the needs of the public, and the government bodies are heavily influenced by recommendations from the profession and the public.

Educators, preparation programs, employers/owners, professional governance bodies, and state and federal governments must work together to set expectations for practice and mutual accountability. In addition, early childhood educators as well as their allies and advocates—including parents and families—must partner to demand and advocate for the necessary, systemic changes and investments that will make it possible for children to participate in high-quality early childhood education that

helps them, their families, and their communities thrive. These investments must support existing early childhood education programs as they adapt 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 (birth through age 8) and their families.

Early Childhood Educators

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. Work within their designated scope of practice.

Professional Preparation Programs

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 for Early Childhood Educators* 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)

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 operating family child care and those in small community-based centers who serve both as 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 compensation levels 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*.

Professional Governance Body

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

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

RESPONSIBILITIES: Provide funding to support early childhood educators, professional preparation programs, and employers in implementing the recommendations in the Decision Cycles through 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.

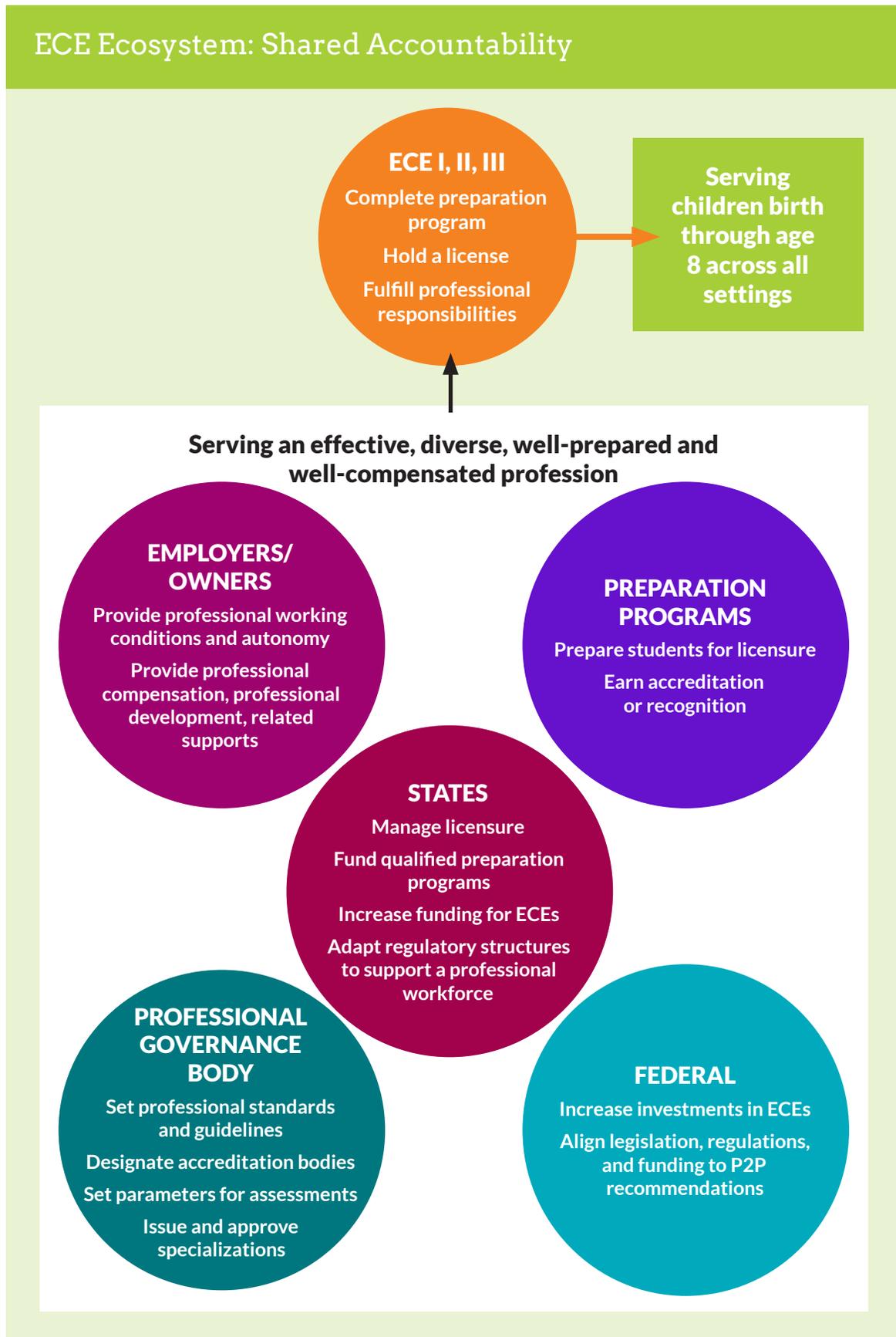
Federal Government and Agencies

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 backbone of financing for 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.

Recognizing the current context of the profession and its components and considering the need for a clear vision and streamlined responsibilities, the Task Force recommends four core strategies that will help the profession meet the expectations of the *Unifying Framework*. Each recommendation focuses on the necessary supports and infrastructure as well as the associated accountability for the components within the system that interact with early childhood education profession. The supports need to be organized in ways that reduce the impact of structural barriers, such as institutional racism, sexism, classism, elitism, and bias, and ensure that the profession reflects the diversity of the young children it serves.

ECE Ecosystem: Shared Accountability



RECOMMENDATION 1

All early childhood educators will hold a professional license to practice and will be funded and supported by professional preparation programs, employers/owners, professional governance, states, and the federal government in order to obtain the license.



To achieve the vision laid out in the *Unifying Framework*, the profession must provide clear guidance to early childhood educators regarding their expected competencies, levels of professional preparation, and requirements for practice, as previous *Decision Cycles* have done. Now, we turn toward infrastructure and accountability, recognizing that:

- ➔ Individuals will be held accountable for meeting these expectations;
- ➔ Infrastructure must be developed and enhanced to support professionals’ readiness to meet these expectations; and
- ➔ Resources must be provided to mitigate the impact of institutional barriers, including racism, sexism, classism, elitism, and bias.

Early childhood educators working in any setting will be recognized as knowledgeable, prepared, and safe by obtaining (and maintaining) a state license to practice at the ECE I, II, or III designation. In order for early childhood educators to meet this expectation, professional preparation programs, employers/owners, states, and the federal government must provide affordable, efficient, equitable, and high-quality pathways to licensure.

Definition of Professional License to Practice

A state-issued license allows an individual to legally practice as an early childhood educator and to call oneself an “early childhood educator.” The license indicates that the individual has the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the responsibilities of an early childhood educator with an ECE I, II or III designation (as evidenced by completing a professional preparation program, completing field experiences, and passing an assessment of competencies), and has passed necessary background checks. Building on the strengths and assets of organizations and individuals now in the field, states may recognize professional credentials in awarding licenses. A credential is offered through a professional organization and acknowledges the individual meets the profession’s expectations of knowledge and skills necessary for effective early childhood educator practice. In some cases, a state may require the individual to hold a professional credential as part of the requirements for meeting licensure.

Recommendation 1a: Early childhood educators, across all settings, will obtain and maintain a professional license to practice.

In order to obtain the license, educators must:

- ➔ Earn a certificate (ECE I) or degree (ECE II and III) from an accredited or recognized professional preparation program,
- ➔ Demonstrate evidence of field experiences, and
- ➔ Pass an assessment of competencies (may include multiple assessments).

In addition, educators must renew, as necessary, their ECE I, II, or III license, issued by a state regulatory body.

Recommendation 1b: Professional preparation programs, professional governance bodies, employers/owners, states, and the federal government will be responsible for ensuring that pathways to licensure are affordable, efficient, equitable, and high quality.

This includes providing early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8 across all settings, including family child care, with:

- ➔ Equitable access⁴ to accredited/recognized high-quality early childhood education professional preparation programs⁵ that:
 - Are part of clearly articulated pathways that allow individuals to seamlessly advance their preparation and role in the profession;
 - Offer flexibility in delivery modalities (including online, where access to broadband internet is a reality), locations (bringing faculty into communities), and times and days of course offerings (nights and weekends) to support working students;
 - Provide additional supports, such as coursework that integrates early childhood education content with foundational academic content and coursework offered in other languages, for individuals who are English language learners,⁶ and those who need developmental/remedial education; and
 - Offer innovative and/or evidence-based approaches such as competency-based programs, use of prior learning assessments for awarding credit, a system that recognizes competencies acquired through degree attainment in another country, apprenticeships, cohort models,

4 Equitable access includes taking into consideration the additional burden of costs, time, and location of coursework for family child care and sole proprietors who may already be fulfilling multiple roles in their work sites.

5 "Once the profession establishes the generalist foundation and as it becomes reflected in key state and federal policies, the profession can mobilize to create and/or promote specializations. Specializations should help those in the early childhood education profession deepen their knowledge and practice and create a professional niche. [...] Professional organizations, not state or federal agencies, should be responsible for developing, administering, and issuing specializations." From Task Force recommendations in [Decision Cycles 345+6](#).

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.

State Roles

Each state will create a system for licensing individuals at the ECE I, II, and III designations. This system will:

- ➔ Use licensing assessments approved by the professional governance body,
- ➔ Include criminal background check requirements, and
- ➔ Include licensure reciprocity agreements with other states.

States will create a board to administer state licenses, hold individuals accountable for working within their scope of practice, and address complaints about those who breach the code of ethics.

academic and career counseling, technology training and support, work-based supervised practicum/clinical experiences, and intensive degree programs with shorter duration.

- Equitable access to comprehensive supports and scholarships, including those that address, as needed:
 - Tuition and fees;
 - The cost of books and other course materials, including technology needs such as internet access, computers, software, and training;
 - The cost of transportation to higher education institutions and field experience settings; and
 - The cost of child care and food/housing assistance.
- Licensure assessments that have multiple measures, are affordable, and do not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, and linguistic biases.
- Autonomy for licensed early childhood educators to make professional decisions within their scope of practice.
- Employers/owners that have access to release time and substitute pools in order for them and/or their employees to take courses and complete the required field experiences.
- Employers/owners that create conditions in the early learning setting that promote the well-being of employees and that support the implementation of effective practice (see Recommendation 2b).

Accreditation

To create coherence, advance quality, and reduce regulatory bureaucracy and burdens, the Task Force recommends that state governments require that all programs preparing ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III professionals be accredited by an early childhood professional accreditation or recognition body designated by the professional governance body. This accreditation should be used as a proxy for full state program approval or major components of state program approval.

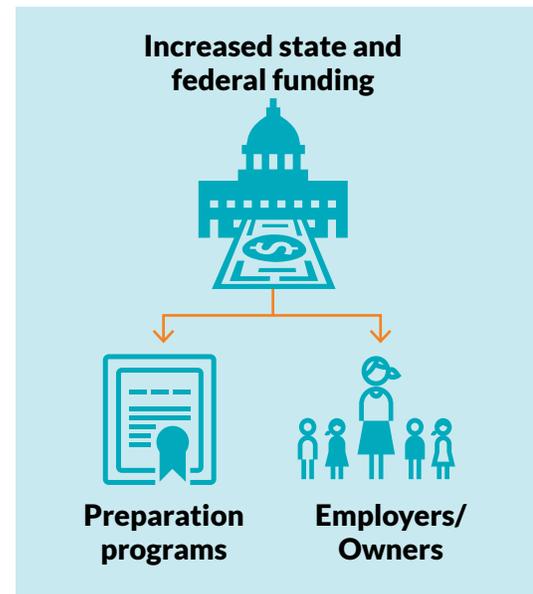
Supporting Educators Who Speak Languages Other Than English

Many children in the United States come from families with diverse linguistic skills. At the same time, 27% of the current early childhood education workforce working in child care settings speak a language other than English and contribute valuable skills and knowledge in early learning settings. They also contribute to building effective family partnerships in their communities. Professional preparation programs must support linguistic diversity by embracing educators who are English language learners, just as educators must embrace children who are dual language learners. To meet the requirements of professional practice, some English language learners may need additional supports such as mentors and coursework in their home language. States and professional preparation programs will need to make a dedicated effort to ensure the development of sufficient infrastructure and supports so that English language learners are not excluded and left behind as the profession changes.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Professional preparation programs and employers/owners will be held accountable for supporting the early childhood education profession, as public funding is increased to allow them to meet these expectations.

Professional preparation programs⁷ leading to ECE I, II, and III designations and employers/owners 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. At the same time, preparation programs and employers/owners depend on increased public funding and other resources and supports to meet their obligations and accountability expectations. In particular these resources are needed so that professional preparation programs can create and maintain programs of study that effectively prepare early childhood educators. The resources also will result in employers/owners providing conditions that support the well-being and effectiveness of early childhood educators and that support workplaces and employees who demonstrate practices aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.



Recommendation 2a. Direct increased public funding to professional preparation programs that meet the following accountability expectations:

- All professional preparation programs must operate as part of an organization or institution that is legally approved by a designated state government agency or entity;
- All professional preparation programs must earn accreditation or recognition from an early childhood professional preparation accreditation or recognition body approved by the professional governance body;
- All professional preparation programs must ensure 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
- All professional preparation programs must advance 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.

⁷ Professional preparation programs are defined in [Decision Cycle 345+6](#), refer to preservice preparation, and include professional training programs, early childhood associate degree programs, and early childhood baccalaureate/initial master’s degree programs. Other qualifying professional preparation programs, particularly non-degree-awarding programs or programs in freestanding institutions, will also be incorporated, as needed, when the *Unifying Framework* is implemented. Additional training, both continuing education to maintain licensure and specialized training to deepen practice in a particular area, may be developed and approved by the profession.

In order to meet the accountability expectations, professional preparation programs must have adequate oversight—such as having at least one full-time faculty member responsible for an early childhood education program in each institution of higher education—and further need to receive and provide the following infrastructure, resources, and supports.

Supports for Faculty and Professional Development Specialists

- ➔ All faculty and professional development specialists have qualifications aligned to the expectations set by early childhood professional preparation accreditation/recognition bodies.
- ➔ Faculty and professional development specialists are adequately compensated for the work that they do.
- ➔ 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 have access to relevant and ongoing professional development.
- ➔ Faculty and professional development specialists reflect the diversity of 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 provide exposure 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 are allocated 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, formal mentoring, and advising programs, with particular attention to those who speak a language other than English, who require developmental education, and who are 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.

Recommendation 2b: Use increased public funding to ensure employers/owners meet the following accountability expectations.

- ➔ Provide and/or have access to salaries and competitive benefits packages (e.g., paid leave, medical insurance, and retirement savings) for employees that are comparable to the public K–12 education sector for similarly qualified employees.
- ➔ Implement hiring, promotion, supervision, and evaluation practices that ensure employees can effectively meet their responsibility to provide high-quality early learning and care for young children. As such, employers/owners must:
 - Hire qualified staff to perform responsibilities that are within their designated ECE I, II, or III scope of practice, with a priority for hiring a diverse workforce that reflects the population served;
 - Ensure hiring and promotion practices minimize the impact of bias (including implicit); and
 - Provide supervision and performance evaluations that strengthen employees' implementation of the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* and that are aligned with the guidelines of the profession and the responsibilities of employees' ECE designations.
- ➔ Provide working conditions that promote the well-being of employees and support their implementation of the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. As such, employers/owners must:
 - Implement personnel management policies and practices that allow for a level of professional autonomy that reflects the employees' designated responsibilities and depth of preparation;
 - Implement work schedules, materials and staffing models, culture, leadership, employee assistance programs, and other components of a system that lead to effective development and education of young children and of employees;
 - Provide robust professional development that supports the needs of the early learning setting, advances individuals' knowledge and application of the professional standards and competencies, and supports individuals' requirements for meeting renewal licensure. For those who are sole proprietors, such as educators working in family child care settings, this may include participating in staffed community-based networks for additional support and supervision; and
 - Provide release time for staff to pursue professional preparation and development.

Self-Employed Professionals, Business Owners, 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.

In order to meet the accountability expectations, employers/owners need the following infrastructure, resources, and supports:

- ➔ 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 ECE 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 early childhood educators can pursue professional preparation, including completing field experience requirements in settings other than their employer's; and
- ➔ Additional supports such as peer learning networks and innovations in supervision to address the specific strengths and needs of early childhood educators working in and operating family child care and other self-employed settings.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Create a clearly delineated governance structure that supports both professional autonomy and self-governance.

Because of the structure and expertise of the current Task Force, we intentionally did not address all of the elements needed to establish the early childhood education profession. Some of the key responsibilities that remain outstanding for early implementation include:

- ➔ Designating the professional guidelines such as the *Code of Ethics* and the *Professional Standards and Competencies*,⁸ and ensuring they are appropriate for early childhood educators in all settings.
- ➔ Exploring and setting parameters for the professional assessments required for ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III licensure and renewal, such as:
 - Deciding whether to construct and offer the licensure assessments or designate that responsibility to another body;
 - In doing so, acknowledge and build upon the strengths and assets of existing assessments, organizations, and individuals now in the field;
 - And then, regardless of where the assessments at each designation are housed:
 - Ensuring the content of the professional assessments is aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and associated leveling;
 - Ensuring that assessments are culturally and linguistically relevant and that racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other forms of bias are avoided; and
 - Ensuring they are appropriate for early childhood educators working in all settings.
- ➔ Creating or recognizing exemption policies to address the current workforce and state policies that are not aligned to the P2P recommendations, including establishing meaningful timelines to meet the requirements and a process for demonstrating professional competencies.
- ➔ Advocating for states to have birth through age 8 licensure bands and licensure reciprocity.

In order to take on these responsibilities and move forward the recommendations from the Decision Cycles, there must be a formal, cohesive, profession-led body to implement, monitor, and support them. 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. In addition, states and the federal government will continue to play important roles in governance, through funding, legislation, and regulations, but putting the profession in the lead will right-size the role that states and the federal government have in influencing and regulating the profession.

8 Current professional organizations hold important elements of the profession such as the *Code of Ethics*, the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, accreditation systems, and specialist competencies. The proposed Professional Governance Body will not ask these organizations to give up ownership of the elements but to work in concert with the organizations to ensure these elements are aligned with the purpose of the profession and updated as needed.

Recommendation 3a: Establish a transition committee to set up the initial Professional Governance Body (PGB).

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 the funding structure, composition, and terms of service for the PGB. 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 in recommendation 3b, including equally shared power and transparency.

Key PGB Responsibilities

- Professional ethics, standards
- Licensing parameters
- Government liaison
- Grandfathering policies
- Accreditation parameters
- Specialization approvals
- Framework updates

Recommendation 3b: Beyond the transition committee, establish the initial PGB as a functionally independent and structurally sound body to immediately support implementation of the *Unifying Framework* and advance the long-term sustainability of 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*. We are concerned that immediately

establishing a new organization—one that could not have a proven track record in financial and programmatic management—would divert time, funding, and focus from the professional educators the Task Force has been charged to support.

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.

As such, we recommend that the initial PGB that will be constituted by the transition committee be established as a semi-autonomous body formed around five core principles.

1. **Publicly accountable and rooted in the profession.** A significant portion of the PGB will be comprised of individual early childhood educators, representing those who work in each setting, including family child care, community-based programs, and school-based programs, and who do not serve on behalf of organizations. Public members also will serve on the PGB, and these individuals could include researchers, related professions representatives, and parents.
2. **Equally shared power.** All members of the PGB—organizational representatives and individuals—will have equal voting rights.
3. **Transparency.** All members of the PGB will abide by mutually established decision-making processes and protocols, firewalls, conflict-of-interest policies, and formal delegation processes in order to ensure that decisions are made openly, appropriately, and in the best interest of the entire scope of the early childhood education profession birth through age 8.
4. **Lean operations.** The PGB will operate with maximum efficiency in order to maximize available funding for the profession the PGB is designed to advance. As such, the PGB will develop a

process to disperse any revenue, beyond the expenses needed to operate, to educators to help them pursue professional preparation needed to meet the new qualification requirements embedded in the ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III requirements.

5. **Leveraged resources.** The PGB will acknowledge and build on the strengths and assets of organizations and individuals now in the field as they work to meet their new responsibilities and obligations.

The Task Force shares a commitment to the long-term effectiveness of the PGB and recognizes the need for a comprehensive, substantial, and independent review of its initial structure, including the connection to the host entity, to ensure that the early childhood education profession and the PGB's principles, including transparency and independence, are being best served.

Review the structure in three years to ensure the PGB remains best suited to meet the principles, with independent decision-making authority and effective stewardship of limited funds.

The initial PGB will commission this review, which requires time and expertise beyond the scope of the Task Force and the transition committee. The review will include individuals versed in diverse and specific expertise in governance matters who will examine the structure and offer recommendations. We anticipate that the review will be concluded and reported to officers, stakeholders, and the public by the end of the PGB's first three years. We further anticipate that, having received this report, the PGB, with engagement from the members of the early childhood education profession, will respond with any appropriate alignment and/or adjustments needed to ensure an effective long-term governance structure.

Recommendation 3c: Ensure that the initial PGB has clear responsibilities with broad organizational and individual representation.

In addition to the outstanding responsibilities not taken on by the Task Force, which are identified at the beginning of Recommendation 3, the initial PGB will be responsible for:

- Ensuring alignment to licensure requirements (initial and renewal) for candidates' education, assessments, and experience;
- Setting the parameters for professional preparation accreditation and recognition bodies;
- Recommending the required guidance, support structures, and autonomy for educators working in family child care homes to be effective in their practice;
- Approving specializations for the early childhood profession and approving the necessary requirements that lead to certification in that specialization;
- Establishing 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; and
- Updating the *Unifying Framework* as science, research, and practice evolve.

The PGB will be overseen by a board that includes organizational stakeholders in the profession, individual early childhood educators, and public members. Organizations that are eligible to have representation on the board must meet the following criteria:

- ➔ Represent members of the early childhood education profession and/or address an element that is a core component of the early childhood education professional ecosystem, including but not limited to organizations that address accreditation, specializations, licensure, professional preparation, certification, credentialing, or housing professional competencies;
- ➔ Be a nonprofit entity or institution (this parameter does not apply to educators and/or directors working in for-profit early childhood education programs); and
- ➔ Members of the board must represent the extensive diversity of the profession and the families the profession serves.

Recommendation 3d: Initially host the PGB at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) so the organization can provide the legal, administrative, and programmatic infrastructure that allows the PGB to operate immediately, efficiently, and, most important, with independent decision-making authority.

In keeping with the recommendations above and after intensive reflection and deliberation, the Task Force recommends that the PGB be initially hosted by NAEYC as a semi-autonomous body. As outlined in Recommendations 3b and 3c, this structure will be independently reviewed within the first three years of its establishment. This will ensure that the governance body is structured to be best suited to meet the principles and the paramount needs for independent decision-making authority and good stewardship of limited funds. The recommendation that NAEYC initially host the PGB is based on the following rationale:

- ➔ NAEYC is willing to leverage its organizational assets to launch the governance structure in ways that support action and implementation;
- ➔ NAEYC currently hosts semi-autonomous bodies and commissions and can expertly support the development of policies and procedures that ensure independent decision-making;
- ➔ NAEYC's brand will not reflect or influence the PGB's marks and branding;
- ➔ NAEYC can extend its Director's and Officer's liability coverage to the PGB's governing members;
- ➔ NAEYC can license to the PGB certain intellectual property (i.e., *Professional Competencies* and *Code of Ethics*) in conjunction with governance documents; and
- ➔ NAEYC's membership and elected governance system, built over generations, provides a much-needed practitioner-focused accountability structure, which will help keep the voices of the profession front and center.

Formal legal documents will dictate the relationship between the PGB and NAEYC, providing clear protections against conflicts of interest, delineating clear roles within both entities, and ensuring that the PGB is able to leverage NAEYC's legal, financial, and programmatic infrastructure, while operating with independent decision-making authority. Staffing structures for the initial PGB will be determined in order to further ensure independence, transparency, and shared leadership.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Federal and state governments and agencies use targeted funding, legislation, and smart regulation to advance the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*.

Recommendation 4a: State governments and agencies will organize professional licensing and regulatory bodies that offer cohesive oversight in order to protect the public from harm and provide support for early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8, across all settings.

Establishing this infrastructure should be undertaken in partnership with the early childhood profession with an eye toward streamlining existing state quality standards, policies, and regulations, which, with the implementation of the *Unifying Framework*, may become less meaningful

Establishing this infrastructure should be undertaken in partnership with the early childhood profession.

and more burdensome to the profession than they are now. Indeed, the Task Force does not intend for the recommendations in this or any other Decision Cycle to be layered on top of existing state systems; rather, our vision includes the unwinding, reorientation, and realignment of existing systems, in order to free up funding that can be redirected toward the thing that makes the biggest difference in driving access and quality: the workforce.

To that end and, specifically, in their efforts to advance the profession, states will be responsible for:

- Adopting and, as needed, adapting, the *Professional Standards and Competencies* as their early childhood education competencies.
- Approving all programs that prepare individuals for ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III roles, where program approval requires alignment to the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and accreditation by an early childhood professional accreditation or recognition entity designated by the PGB, which serves as a proxy for full program approval or major components of program approval.
- Creating a board that includes individuals with early childhood education content and legal expertise 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.
- Overseeing professional licensure for the ECE I, II, and III roles, including:
 - Creating licensure credentials that include the following components:
 - Graduating from a professional preparation program that has earned accreditation/ recognition from an early childhood accreditation or recognition body,
 - Ensuring the professional preparation program includes field/clinical experiences in an early learning setting that allow for observing and applying the *Professional Standards and Competencies*,
 - Passing early childhood education assessments established by the PGB, and
 - Passing a criminal background check.
 - Participating in licensure reciprocity agreements with other states.

- 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 professional preparation program approval, licensure, career lattices, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.

Recommendation 4b: In alignment with federal funding, states will increase public funding to incentivize individuals and professional preparation programs to advance quality and meet the expectations defined by the *Unifying Framework*.

In order to meet this recommendation, states must direct investments toward:

- Increasing compensation for early childhood educators;
- 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;
- Ensuring public funding is available to enable compensation commensurate with education and ECE designations for all educators in all settings;
- Supporting preparation programs seeking accreditation or recognition;
- Increasing access to broadband internet, particularly in rural areas, to address access to online and hybrid coursework;
- Holding employers accountable for compensating early childhood educators commensurate with increased public funding; and
- Creating and maintaining shared services models for family child care providers and other small early learning settings.

Strengthening the educator voice will lead to stronger stakeholder engagement and better outcomes for children and families.

In addition, states must commit to engaging with and being responsive to members of the profession and professional organizations (such as associations and unions) and to addressing barriers to membership in such organizations. Strengthening the educator voice 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 all 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 for infants/toddlers, early grades, and preschool, as well as those who have worked with children with special needs and dual language learners.

Recommendation 4c: The federal government will serve as the backbone of financing for the early childhood education system and protect and invest in early childhood education as a public good.

Various components of the federal government will bear responsibility 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 covering birth through age 8, with specialized knowledge of the developmental ranges, skills, and competencies encompassed for that age range and in all settings;
- ➔ Promulgating regulations that advance the health, safety, and learning of young children, including all settings;
- ➔ Providing technical assistance to states with diverse regulatory structures and systems to help states learn from one another; and
- ➔ Along with states, engaging with and being responsive to members of the profession and professional organizations (such as associations and unions), and addressing barriers to membership in such organizations.

CONCLUSION

Our audacious vision—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—is the North Star for our profession. The recommendations in our eight Decision Cycles provide the outline of an implementation roadmap to realize that vision.

The voice at the forefront of implementation must be the early childhood profession. As federal, state, and local governments and agencies move forward to implement the Task Force 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 education 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.

There is significant work ahead to build a cohesive early childhood education system in which all elements of the system—early childhood educators, professional preparation programs, employers/owners, professional governance, states, and the federal government—are fully supported, have sustainable infrastructure, and meet all responsibilities and accountability expectations.

Fortunately, each of these sectors has much to build on to begin intentionally implementing the recommendations. Power to the Profession, led by and responsive to the voices of early childhood educators, will continue to galvanize their collective will to do the hard work of systems change.

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