

Executive Summary

Career pathways are comprehensive education and training systems that provide a clear sequence of coursework and training credentials aligned with employer and industry needs. Career pathways offer a broad solution to meeting the educational and workforce training needs of adult learners while meeting national and regional workforce demands. Many sectors, including the early learning sector, have a great need for a skilled workforce. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) forecasts that between 2012 and 2022, the percentage of estimated job openings resulting from workers leaving the early learning sector are 29 percent for child care workers and 28 percent for preschool teachers. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* projects percentage increases in employment demand during this period at 14 percent for child care workers (resulting in 184,100 new jobs)¹ and 17 percent for preschool teachers (resulting in 76,400 new jobs).² Additionally, research studies estimate that proposed expansions of public preschool programs will generate the need for approximately 100,000 preschool teachers with bachelor's degrees.³ This need for qualified employees bolsters the use of career pathway systems as an approach for meeting the employment demands of the early learning sector.

The *Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative*, supported by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (the Departments), examines the current state of career pathways in the early learning industry intended to meet the skill, employment, and advancement needs of low-income, low-skilled adults who are in or entering this field. This work signifies the joint commitment of these Departments to support the development of career pathway systems in states to increase access to jobs in the early care and education (ECE) field.

¹ Occupational Outlook Handbook: Childcare Workers. (January 8, 2014). Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-workers.htm>

² Occupational Outlook Handbook: Preschool Teachers. (January 8, 2014). Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/preschool-teachers.htm>

³ Whitebook, M. (2012) Building a skilled workforce: Shared and divergent challenges in early care and education and in grades K-12. Retrieved from http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Building-a-Skilled-Teacher-Workforce_September-2014_9-25.pdf

Giving workers the opportunity to acquire the skills that they need to pursue in-demand jobs and careers is critical to growing our economy, ensuring that everyone who works hard is rewarded, and building a strong middle class. Despite recent employment growth, far too many hard-working individuals still have not been able to find a job or increase their earnings, and many businesses report difficulty hiring workers with the right skills for jobs that they want to fill.

— President Barack Obama,
Presidential Memorandum,
January 30, 2014

This report introduces a career pathways framework⁴ in use by several federal agencies, provides a national landscape of states' requirements for ECE staff related to credentialing, highlights five states at various points in the development of ECE career pathways, and shows how early learning system components used in the majority of states align with the *Six Key Elements of Career Pathways Framework* that other industries use. The elements in this framework are:

Element 1. Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles: Engage key cross-agency partners at the local and state levels, agree to a shared vision, and gain support from political leaders. Clearly define and formalize roles and responsibilities.

Element 2. Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers: Select sectors and industries and engage employers in the development of career pathways.

Element 3. Design Education and Training Programs: Design career pathway programs to provide a clear sequence of education and credentials that meet the skill needs of high-demand industries.

Element 4. Identify Funding Needs and Sources: Raise and/or leverage resources necessary to develop and operate the career pathway system and its education and training programs.

Element 5. Align Policies and Programs: Pursue state and local policy and administrative reforms in order to promote career pathway system development and to support implementation.

Element 6. Measure System Change and Performance: Assess system-wide change and measure performance outcomes to ensure continuous improvement.

This study cross-referenced these elements for alignment with two leading frameworks in use in the early learning sector: the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Framework⁵ and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.⁶ The frameworks were chosen because they incorporate components that can bolster efforts in the development of the six key elements of an effective career pathway.

⁴ The six key elements framework is part of the Careers Pathways Toolkit developed under a U.S. Department of Labor technical assistance contract, and can be downloaded from the LINCS Resource Collection website. <https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-556>. The revised toolkit is available at <http://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-841>.

⁵ QRIS National Learning Center. (2009-2013). A Standards-based ECE system design. Retrieved from <http://qrisnetwork.org/our-framework>

⁶ LeMoine, S. (2008). Workforce designs: A policy blueprint for state early childhood professional development systems. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

An examination of the various components shows that both the QRIS and NAEYC professional development (PD) frameworks can inform the development of these elements. In fact, there is a great deal of integrative potential among existing QRIS, professional development, and other workforce development systems and comprehensive career pathway systems. States' existing frameworks can be used as potential building blocks to further develop or enhance a state's early learning career pathway system. This report's emphasis on credentialing in the ECE field is a particular fit with the third element of the Career Pathways Framework – "Design Education & Training Programs." It should also be noted that this report's findings and emphasis on credentialing are broadly consistent with those in *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* report, which the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) released after the data collection period of this report. The report explores how the science of children's health, learning, and development can be employed to inform how to prepare an early learning workforce. For more on the connections between the IOM/NRC report and this one, see the call-out box on page 28.

Credentials are a foundational component of a successful career pathway, since they serve as both end goals to achieve and provide intermediate milestones along the trajectory toward those goals. To draw a national landscape of state ECE systems, data were collected on requirements related to credentialing for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. These data were organized into two main categories and analyzed to gauge states' readiness for developing career pathways:

1. Early learning standards and systems support (infant/toddler and preschool standards, workforce registries, QRIS, education and training support); and
2. Workforce competencies and early learning staff degree and training requirements (workforce core knowledge and competencies, required infant/toddler credentials, required preschool teacher credentials, required teacher specialized training).

Highlights of the data analysis within the subcategories for early learning standards and systems support show that:

- All of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (100%) have early learning standards in place, either for infants/toddlers, preschool, or both.
- A majority of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (98%) have a QRIS in some stage of development.
- Eighty-three (83%) of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have some form of workforce registry in place.

Highlights of the data analysis within the subcategories for workforce competencies and early learning staff degree and training requirements show that:

- All of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (100%) have at least one required specialized training for teachers in the form of certificates/licenses that cover various age ranges from birth through grade 12 and include special education;
- Ninety-four percent (94%) of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have workforce core knowledge and competencies in place;
- Almost half of the 50 states and the District of Columbia (46%) require a bachelor of arts (BA) degree for preschool teachers in publicly-funded programs; and
- Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the 50 states exceed the minimum requirements of a high school diploma or equivalent credential and a specific infant/toddler credential or certificate for staff working with infants and toddlers in publicly-funded programs.

Finally, the report includes appendices with extensive resources that can be explored for further information, including information for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico for each subcategory of the early learning standards and staff degree and training requirements listed above. The career pathways framework, data collected, examples in practice, and recommendations from an expert panel provide context for state administrators and stakeholders in the early learning field who are interested in developing and strengthening career pathways through examination of the relationship between effective career pathway elements and existing early learning support systems.

