Early Childhood Career Pathways: Research-to-Policy Resources

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently released a policy statement providing recommendations to states and territories on developing career pathways to support the learning and compensation of early childhood educators and program directors. Part of the recommendations in the report are based on a recent report by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council that calls on the early care and education field to “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 educators working with children from birth through age 8” (p. 6).

States have begun to incorporate careers pathway programs into their workforce and professional development systems in order to strengthen and support the early childhood workforce. A career pathways approach offers career advancement through a progression of educational qualifications, training, and credentials that build on each other and are aligned with the needs of the industry. Additionally, the career pathways approach includes multiple entry and exit points to allow workforce members greater flexibility in acquiring skills and knowledge. While the terms career ladders, career lattices, and career pathways are often used interchangeably in the early care and education field, the Department of Labor’s Career Pathways Toolkit differentiates between career ladders or lattices as “a group of related jobs that may comprise a career. They often include a pictorial representation of job progression in a career as well as detailed descriptions of the jobs and the education and experiences that facilitate movement between jobs” (p. 135). Career pathways, in contrast, are more comprehensive and defined as “a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training and other services...” (such as counseling and support services) that are aligned to support movement along a career ladder or lattice. Career pathways are specifically designed to meet the needs of diverse learners and non-traditional students.
This research-to-policy resource list compiles publications from 2008 to the present on early childhood career pathways and career ladders or lattices. Resources are grouped under the following headings:

1) State workforce surveys
2) Descriptions and considerations for developing early childhood career pathways
3) State and city efforts to develop early childhood career pathways and career ladders or lattices
4) Evaluations of early childhood career ladders or lattices

**State Workforce Surveys**

One of the recommendations to states in the HHS policy statement on early childhood career pathways is to “conduct and regularly update an early childhood workforce study.” The results of such studies can provide states with the contextual information about the workforce necessary to create policies and investments that support career pathways and allow equitable access for all educators working in a range of settings. The policy statement recommends collecting information about the characteristics of the workforce in terms of education levels, demographic information, and compensation, among other data. Several states have conducted workforce surveys, which can not only help guide the development of effective career pathways but also provide baseline data for future analysis. Below are examples of recent state workforce surveys:


**Descriptions and Considerations for Developing Early Childhood Career Pathways**

The following resources provide descriptive information and considerations for developing early childhood career pathways. Topics covered include: descriptions of existing teacher education pathways and workforce conditions; challenges and barriers facing educators in accessing higher education; considerations for incorporating career pathways within professional development and workforce systems; articulation agreements between 2-year and 4-year colleges; credentialing and electronic badges; and scholarships for educators.
**Descriptions of existing teacher education pathways and workforce conditions**


**Challenges and Barriers Facing the ECE Workforce in Accessing Higher Education**


**Considerations for Incorporating Career Pathways within Professional Development and Workforce Systems**


**Articulation Agreements between 2-Year and 4-Year Colleges**


**Credentialing and Electronic Badges**


**Scholarships for early childhood educators**


State and City Efforts to Develop Early Childhood Career Pathways and Career Ladders/Lattices

The resources below include descriptions of various state and city efforts to develop career pathways and career ladders or lattices as well as cross-state comparisons of preschool and infant-toddler credential requirements.

**California**


**Massachusetts**


**Pennsylvania**

**Texas**


**Washington, DC**

**West Virginia**

**Wisconsin**

**Multiple States**


**Evaluations of Early Childhood Career Ladders or Lattices**

Few studies have evaluated how career ladders or lattices affect the recruitment, retention, career advancement, and compensation of professionals in the early care and education field. Washington State evaluated its ‘Early Childhood Education Career and Wage Ladder Pilot Program,’ which aimed to improve the quality of early childhood education and reduce teacher turnover. The evaluation examined whether increases in wages and benefits, based on experience and education, resulted in greater retention and educational attainment of child care workers and the quality of the care environment. Although reports from this research were first published in 2004, they are included in this list as the only evaluations of career ladders so far. The following are reports of the findings from the evaluation:


Prepared by: Sharmila Lawrence
Last updated: December 2016

*Research Connections* is a partnership between the National Center for Children in Poverty at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, and the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research at the Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan, supported by a grant from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.