MILE MARKERS:
Teacher Education Requirements, Skills & Compensation

There has been renewed attention and debate on the level of education and skills early educators need to effectively teach young children. Several factors have elevated this debate.

First, the rise of state-funded pre-K programs across the country has fueled the debate on the level of education needed to teach in these programs. Research shows some pre-K programs that have consistently delivered results tend to have bachelor-level trained teachers (Barnett, 2008; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013).

Second, recent research shows the importance of the first five years in a child's development. Advances in neuroscience show that 85-90 percent of a child's brain is fully developed by the age of 5, and more than one million neural connections are formed each second in the first few years of life (Center on the Developing Child, 2009). These early experiences greatly impact children's futures.

Third, professional organizations in early care and education are developing plans to help professionalize the field. These plans focus on the establishment and articulation of a common framework for career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

SUMMARY

Research shows the work of early educators is complex, and a bachelor's degree in early childhood education can create an advantage.

In order to address this complexity, the early care and education system needs innovative solutions to attract and retain a qualified workforce, including alternative pathways to a degree and ongoing professional learning supports.

Compensation issues need to be addressed within the overall context of improving the early care and education system. As competencies increase, so should the compensation.

by: Early Learning Indiana

Fourth, in 2015, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council released its report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* that articulates 13 recommendations the early childhood field needs to address collectively (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). Since its release, ten states have engaged in high-level discussions to develop a work plan to address recommendations. In October 2017, Indiana began addressing specific recommendations with assistance from the National Academy of Sciences.

This report takes a deeper look into the recommendation from the 2016 Early Learning Indiana report, *Success Starts Early: Indiana's Roadmap to Pre-K Expansion*, focused on increasing teacher education requirements, skills and compensation. In the following pages, we examine the research regarding teacher education requirements and the supports needed to sustain the workforce, and make recommendations for consideration as Indiana discusses and grapples with providing a high-quality workforce to educate our youngest learners.

Do early childhood educators need bachelor's degrees?

In 2017, Washington, D.C., passed regulations requiring that early childhood teachers earn a college degree. While local leaders were attempting to be at the forefront of a movement to increase education and compensation for teachers, the backlash to the new rule was immediate. Headlines labeled the city's attempt to require degrees as misguided, and the regulations renewed the debate on whether early educators provide care or education. Understanding this debate requires background knowledge about research regarding whether a bachelor's degree for early childhood educators leads to better outcomes for children.

The research is clear that, over the course of the last decade, the early care and education workforce has not kept pace with the science of what we know about how children develop and learn (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). Children begin learning at birth, and their learning is complex. Early educators must understand typical child development to prepare engaging and effective experiences that build on children's skills and natural curiosity, as well as know when to screen and refer young children for services if they suspect a developmental delay. Early educators may also work with children who have experienced significant trauma and toxic stress in their young lives. Effective teachers require skills and competencies, as well as specific training and education. The skills needed for an early educator are very similar to the skills and competencies of an early elementary teacher.

Rigorous studies of high-quality early childhood programs that have licensed teachers with bachelor's degrees have shown significant effects on children's development (Barnett, 2008; Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Research conducted after the 2007 Head Start Reauthorization Act indicates some improvements with Head Start classroom and instructional quality that may be associated with teacher education requirements (Kaplan & Mead, 2017).

In addition, the report by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015) presents a thorough review of the research base and concludes that early child care teachers need a bachelor's degree to work effectively with children to promote positive developmental outcomes. Building on that research, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed an initiative, Power to the Profession, to

better define the workforce and to provide direction on career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation for early childhood educators (NAEYC, n.d.).

However, not all studies have shown the same positive results, leading to a somewhat confusing and contradictory research base. Some studies have found no associations between a bachelor's degree and classroom quality or child outcomes (Early et al., 2007; Kelley & Camili, 2007). Even so, none of the researchers concluded that the degree does not matter. The research is too complicated to interpret clearly because the studies were not specifically designed to test whether the education level of the early educator made a difference in child outcomes. Rather, teacher education level is one of many variables in these studies.

Critics may point to these uncertain results to strengthen the argument that a degree is unnecessary. However, researchers are clear about one area. A degree alone does not guarantee higher quality instruction that leads to positive child outcomes (Early et al., 2007; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). A mix of supports can help teachers become more effective in their practice. These supports include the quality of ongoing professional learning opportunities and improving the working conditions and environment for early care and education teachers.

Policy attempts to only address the educational status of teachers will not be successful if other factors related to quality teaching are not addressed (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). Improving the overall early education and care system and its supports will have a greater impact than isolating one specific element. The next section will address some promising strategies to help support all teachers in the field.

HELPING TEACHERS EARN A DEGREE

In Indiana, an estimated 51 percent of early childhood educators hold a bachelor's degree (Indiana AEYC, 2014). To support the current workforce, apprenticeship programs for educating teachers could be an option.

Some cities are piloting apprenticeship programs. Philadelphia launched a program in 2017 to help early childhood teachers who already held a Child Development Credential (CDA) earn an associate degree in early childhood education. Students receive on-the-job training and classroom instruction. Employers sponsor the apprentice and pair them with an experienced on-site mentor (*Groundbreaking Apprenticeship Program*, 2017).

While a promising approach, the initiative is too new to report findings. A recent news article reports that the program is experiencing some success, but is also having difficulty finding qualified on-site mentors, recruiting high-quality early care and education providers to sponsor the apprenticeships, and retaining participants (McCarthy, 2017). These early findings point to the difficulty of creating programs to help educate the early care and education workforce. Still, this effect serves as a promising approach so that others can learn from their initiative. Because this is a new concept to the early childhood field, it will take time to learn from other cities so that Indiana can develop a strong and robust apprenticeship program.

Improving teachers skills and competencies through induction programs

How can the overall system for increasing teacher skill and competencies be addressed? To answer this question, we can look to the research and innovative practices around supporting new K-12 teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future noted that "teachers are not 'finished products' when they complete a teacher preparation program" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). During the first few years of teaching, educators establish norms and attitudes regarding their practice and oftentimes rely on them for years after completing a degree. This is the point where the learning tools gained during a degree program are put to practice and are either strengthened or weakened.

In some K-12 contexts, schools have adopted induction programs as a process to support and retain educators as they transition into their roles. Structurally, induction programs are guided by strong mentors that help new teachers navigate the first few years of their teaching experience. This approach has shown to be successful in K-12 settings. Studies found that a comprehensive approach to induction that lasts at least two years can boost student achievement and yield a return on investment of $1.66 for every dollar invested (Schmidt, Young, Cassidy, Wang, & Lagurada, 2017; Villar & Strong, 2007).

Currently, there is no formal structure in place in Indiana to support an induction program for the early childhood workforce. Because of the variations in education, skill and experience of Indiana's early care and education workforce, an induction program could be a strategy to help familiarize teachers to the field. In consultation with the Indiana Department of Education, state policy makers could consider piloting an induction program for new teachers by using the following strategies:

Partner with local universities to pilot an induction program. Universities that prepare associate- or bachelor-degreed teachers for the early childhood field have an interest in making them successful. Similar to an advisor–student relationship, new teachers could continue to be mentored by faculty or other advisors as the new teachers navigate their first few years in the field. Universities could partner with the local child care resource and referral agency to connect new teachers with their local coach for additional professional support and collaboration.

Use the existing coaching system in Indiana to connect newly degreed teachers with support. The existing coaching structure for Paths to QUALITY™ could be used to bolster the development of new teachers. These coaches – often master-degreed professionals – could provide resources and work with teachers' directors or administrators in helping to guide their practices. In addition, the professionals working on the newly created Master Coach credential could help mentor new teachers in their area.

Create online communities of practice for new teachers. Online communities of practice could help support new teachers from a variety of educational backgrounds in sharing their questions and experiences. These communities could be moderated by a variety of professionals with teaching experience at both the university and child care resource and referral level. Participation in online communities could become part of a required professional learning experience for new teachers.

Focus on core knowledge and competencies that all teachers - regardless of their current degree - need to be successful educators. In 2015, Indiana adopted a set of core knowledge and competencies (CKCs) that all educators and professionals that work with the birth through eight population need in order to be successful (Indiana Professional Development Network, n.d.). While still somewhat new, the CKCs need to be better understood and distributed so new teachers understand what is expected of them in their teaching practice. Additionally, the CKCs – while comprehensive – need to be simplified so professionals understand how to use them in training and staff development.

Improving teacher skills and competencies

While induction programs can support new teachers regardless of their current educational attainment, professional learning supports such as training, curriculum suppport, instructional support and on-site coaching can support teachers throughout their career. Research is clear about what types of supports are more effective (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2010). Professional supports should be:

- ongoing and intentional,
- reflective,
- goal-oriented,
- based on specific curricula and materials,
- focused on content knowledge and children's thinking, and
- embedded in the classroom.

Professional learning supports are more effective if they are based on content that develops teacher knowledge and skill in teaching subject-matter knowledge. Furthermore, they should focus on developing a teacher's ability to effectively implement a research-based curriculum with fidelity. This support is best delivered in the classroom with the teachers so that coaching and training are connected to teachers' experiences (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

Standards for professional learning supports should include designing learning that weaves theory, research and practice together to help teachers achieve long-term results. Supports can be delivered via embedded coaching and communities of practice where teachers can discuss and continually improve their instructional strategies. Additionally, teachers need leaders that support their ongoing practices and help them use data to improve their practices to ensure all children benefit (Learning Forward, 2014). When professional learning supports are provided in this manner, teaching quality increases and children's learning benefits.

Addressing the compensation conversation

Increasing teacher education requirements and strengthening their professional supports raises the question of compensation parity for early educators. Increasing compensation for higher degrees and more rigorous expectations for practices makes sense, and it could also help attract and retain a more highly qualified workforce.

However, increasing educational requirements has not always translated to higher compensation. After the reauthorization of Head Start in 2007 required lead teachers to have bachelor's degrees, compensation did not universally follow the degree. While the legislation was successful in increasing the number of Head Start lead teachers with degrees – in 2015, 74 percent of Head Start lead teachers nationally held a bachelor's degree – it did not necessarily equate to higher compensation (Kaplan & Mead, 2017). Head Start is dependent on federal funding, which has remained relatively stagnant with small increases, but not enough was federally allocated to pay higher salaries to each teacher. Thus, the system – using research to mold its policies - mandated higher educational requirements, but it did not provide adequate funding to support this change.

The issue of higher compensation is where the science of early childhood meets the realities of policy. The broader systems at the state and federal level must develop solutions without jeopardizing the system or creating inequities between and among different child care systems and teachers. While some states offer tax credits or utilize special

funding sources to pay teachers and support early education programs, these are not always the most reliable options over time. To be sustainable, higher compensation for the early care and education workforce needs to be embedded in both state and federal budgets.

There are implications for instituting sweeping policies and requirements for teachers to hold a bachelor's degree. Data indicate there is already a shortage of qualified early care and education professionals, and that shortage may increase if new requirements are placed on teachers. However, given the research base, degree requirements for early educators should not be dismissed as an unattainable goal. Rather, stronger educational requirements need to be carefully implemented in conversation with higher education partners, leaders in the early care and education system, teachers, and policy makers at both the state and federal levels. Increasing compensation for the field is a strategy that will take time.

In addition to its 2015 groundbreaking report about how to transform the early care and education workforce, a new report by the Institute of Medicine is slated for release in early 2018 that will address how to finance a high-quality workforce. Solutions for financing a high-quality workforce must address innovative and sustainable financing strategies that do not put the brunt of the cost of higher education on parents. Recognition and a shift in public opinion about the value of an educated early care and education workforce is necessary. It is unfathomable to think that a K-12 teacher would not have earned at least a bachelor's degree. The time has come to think of early childhood educators in the same way.

Recommendations

Develop more robust pathways for early childhood teachers to earn a degree.

In consultation with higher education, Indiana's Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning, the Indiana Department of Education and other stakeholders, develop a standards and competency-based career pathway for those educators that may not be able to attend a four-year college. This pathway must be as rigorous as a four-year degree for it to be comparable in quality. The requirement must phase in gradually for those teachers who are starting with little to no early childhood education credentials. In addition, for teachers who have been in the field for years and for whom returning to college is not an option, consider offering college credits for standards-based training, coaching and prior learning experiences that lead to a degree in early childhood education.

Embed requirements for higher education into existing state-funded programs.

Policy makers should consider building in teacher education requirements into the Paths to QUALITY™ standards and the state-funded pre-K system. A graduated approach would encourage early care and education providers to hire teachers who are working on or who have earned their bachelor's degree in early childhood education, thereby, over time, improving the educational level of the entire field.

Develop and maintain a comprehensive professional development system.

A well-developed professional development system for early educators should include a system with portable and stackable credentials. For example, teacher credentials should be transferable for credit

across higher education institutions and credentials should build upon one another, allowing teachers to move from a certificate to a degree program easily. Creating an induction program for all new early childhood educators that enter the field and offering credits for standards and competency-based training and coaching should also be considered.

Address compensation issues through state and federal policies.

Nearly 60 percent of the cost of early care and education is paid for by parents, while state and federal sources account for the rest. In comparison, in the K-12 education, family costs are minimal. If high-quality early care and education is to be made available to more families, it must be recognized to be as important as the value of K-12 education – and its professionals must be compensated at the same level.

Examine the recommendations in the new report from the Institute of Medicine on how to finance the workforce.

Stakeholders throughout Indiana's early care and education field are working with the Institute of Medicine on recommendations for improving how Indiana supports the early care and education field. Issued later this year, policy makers should closely consider the group's findings and implement its recommendations if feasible.

Conclusion

As Indiana continues to invest in early education, especially high-quality pre-K, addressing the educational requirements of those that teach our youngest children and what they earn is an essential component of the discussion. Indiana cannot maintain the overall quality of its early care and education system without attracting and retaining a qualified early care and education workforce – and that requires compensating them accordingly. Moving forward, policy makers and early care and education providers, as well as advocates, must come together to tackle this issue in a fiscally responsible, fair and long-term manner.

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