



# Advancing the Professional Development System for California's Early Care and Education Workforce

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## Key findings:

- Recent studies suggest that many members of California's early care and education (ECE) workforce do not have the desired skills and knowledge to be effective in their work with young children.
- California has taken a number of steps to build an ECE workforce professional development system (PDS), but further work is needed to achieve a coherent system.
- Data gaps mean that we know little about how well existing PDS resources are being used.
- California can implement policies to ensure that existing resources in the ECE workforce PDS are deployed as effectively as possible.
- The state can also undertake reforms to improve the ability of the current PDS to prepare and support an effective ECE workforce.

workforce PDS with the goal of offering recommendations for improvement. The study focused on two central questions:

- Does California's PDS prepare its ECE workforce well and provide ongoing supports to ensure that children receive the developmental benefits associated with a high-quality ECE system?
- Are the public resources that support the ECE workforce PDS in California used to maximum benefit?

In addressing these questions, the study considered the ECE workforce PDS in California as it promotes the preservice education and training, as well as the ongoing professional development, of the caregivers, teachers, and program administrators who work with infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children in home- and center-based care and early learning settings.

This research brief first summarizes the findings with respect to the study questions and then highlights RAND's recommendations for advancing the state's system.

## California Has Taken Steps to Build a More Coherent ECE Workforce PDS, but Further Advances Are Needed

Like other states, California has taken steps to implement components that are part of comprehensive PDSs, such as

- publishing early childhood educator competencies that define the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that educators need to support the development of children from birth to kindergarten entry
- working to address past concerns regarding alignment and articulation within and across the state's two- and four-year colleges and universities that offer ECE-related courses and degrees

As California seeks to improve the quality of early care and education (ECE) programs and access to them, a key consideration is the effectiveness of the state's ECE workforce professional development system (PDS). With increased federal and state resources devoted to ECE in recent years, most states have recognized the need for a coherent system to support the professional development of their ECE workforce. At its core, a PDS defines the qualifications for serving in various capacities in ECE settings and the mechanisms for preparing and qualifying the ECE workforce.

In a continuation of its California Preschool Study, the RAND Corporation conducted a study of the current state of California's ECE

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- employing approaches to promote further education and training for diverse members of the ECE workforce
- providing financial incentives through grants and stipends for those who seek additional education and training.

However, the state has yet to fully realize the potential from these infrastructure components, and other key elements are not yet in place. Concerns include the need to align the state's ECE credentialing system with other components of the PDS; the need to address issues identified in past studies regarding the quality of ECE higher education programs; and the need to more systematically evaluate the workforce investment activities that receive approximately \$70 million in federal, state, and local funding annually. In addition, California is missing a key infrastructure component that many other states have: a workforce registry that can support both system monitoring and evaluation.

The need for a stronger and more coherent PDS is further motivated by the quality shortfalls substantiated in recent data, including weaknesses in the ability of center-based classroom teachers to provide preschool-age children with the instructional support needed for the age-appropriate language development and reasoning skills that are linked to later success in school; limited formal training in working with dual language learners; and scores on overall indicators of quality across the range of ECE settings that typically do not exceed a "good" rating.

### **Information Gaps Limit Our Ability to Identify Inefficiencies in the Current System**

Although California invests substantial public-sector funds in the professional development of its ECE workforce, data limitations preclude the monitoring and evaluation required for evidence-based decisionmaking to determine if those resources are spent well, who benefits from existing programs, and how best to advance the current system.

- California does not have the data systems to track the ECE workforce in terms of preservice or in-service enrollments in education and training programs, degrees received, and performance or retention in the field.
- Little is known about how well ECE teacher preparation programs at two- and four-year institutions provide students and graduates with the competencies required to be effective in working with children as caregivers, teachers, or administrators.
- Existing data preclude accurate counts of the number and mix of individuals who participate in the publicly funded workforce investment programs, and only limited information exists about the effect of the programs on participants' performance in classrooms or longevity in the field. Even less is known about the benefits of participation in the myriad local informal training opportunities available.

### **Recommendations**

Guided by an understanding of research regarding successful approaches to preparing an effective ECE workforce and the initiatives in other states designed to build coherent ECE workforce PDSs, the RAND study puts forth a set of recommendations for advancing California's system that pertains to the ECE workforce, the ECE education and training providers, and the public-sector workforce investment programs (see the table). The recommendations are designed to address the current information gaps to support a more efficient use of existing resources and to build on the existing PDS to better promote an effective ECE workforce.

#### **Use Existing Resources More Efficiently**

In light of the substantial resources currently invested by the public sector in the ECE workforce, a starting point is to ensure that those resources are deployed as effectively as possible. To that end, the study offers the following recommendations:

- Implement an ECE workforce registry, ideally covering all members of the ECE workforce, to track participation in higher education and workforce investment programs and to monitor workforce outcomes such as competencies attained or retention in the field.
- Continue the alignment and articulation of the ECE curriculum within and between institutions of higher education in the state, and evaluate the ability of courses and degree programs to produce a workforce with the required competencies to be successful in working with young children.
- Institute a more rigorous program of evaluation for the state's workforce investment activities, and use the results to streamline the offerings and align the remaining programs with the rest of the PDS.

#### **Improve the Ability of the System to Prepare and Support an Effective ECE Workforce**

Given the evidence that there is room to advance the effectiveness of the state's ECE workforce, there is scope for crafting and institutionalizing a PDS that will produce—through education, training, and ongoing professional development—a workforce that has the required knowledge and skill to promote children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. The study recommends the following steps to achieve that goal:

- Develop an ECE career pathway (career ladder) and associated credentials aligned with the early educator competencies, the postsecondary education and training programs, and other system components.
- Address the need for financial incentives to support ECE providers as they pursue further education and professional development, drawing on proven models where they exist.

### Summary of Policy Recommendations by Domain

| Domain  | Recommendation   |
|---|--|
| ECE workforce   | Implement an ECE workforce registry, inclusive of all members of the workforce, to identify who is in the field, their demographic characteristics, their educational and professional development experiences and credentials, and their employment history; support linking registry to a database of ECE programs to identify the context in which people are working |
|   | Develop a well-defined ECE career pathway (career ladder) and associated credentials aligned with the early educator competencies, the postsecondary education and training programs, and potential or actual QRIS (including the potential reintroduction of a Preschool–3 teaching credential)   |
|   | Drawing on proven models, address need for financial supports for practitioners to pursue additional education and professional development either through the workforce investment programs or the QRIS if one is implemented   |
|   | Through QRIS or other mechanisms, address other barriers to attaining high-quality care with fully competent providers (e.g., deficiencies in curricula or classroom materials, lack of paid preparation time, inadequate support for ongoing professional development, lack of a collaborative learning environment, high turnover, low compensation)                   |
| Education and training providers  | Continue the process of alignment and articulation of the ECE curriculum within and across the CCCs and CSU system, as well as alignment with the early educator competencies and career ladder; evaluate the effectiveness of higher education programs in promoting required ECE competencies  |
|   | Continue to address gaps in higher education program capacity, course offerings, opportunities for practicums, and faculty quality and diversity   |
|   | Phase in specialized accreditation for ECE AA and BA programs  |
|   | Implement approaches to better serve the diverse needs of the current and potential ECE workforce seeking to advance their professional development; draw on proven models, including the use of cohort models, dedicated counseling, and technology-mediated professional development   |
|   | Develop competencies for ECE teacher educators, trainers, mentors, coaches, resource and referral personnel, and staff in other organizations who support the professional development of the ECE workforce  |
| Workforce investment dollars  | Collect the required information through the workforce registry to track workforce investment program participants and their outcomes (e.g., retention)  |
|   | Institute a more rigorous program of evaluation for funded programs, including measurement of effects on participant competencies, quality of care provided, retention in the ECE field, and child developmental outcomes, and how those impacts are mediated by the work environment  |
|   | Streamline and align the set of programs in light of evidence of program effectiveness and other system changes (e.g., ECE competencies, career ladder and credentialing, potential QRIS)  |
| NOTES: AA = associate degree; BA = bachelor’s degree; QRIS= quality rating and improvement system; CCCs = California Community Colleges; CSU = California State University. |  |

- Address other gaps in ECE program quality that constrain the ability of fully competent providers to deliver high-quality care and early learning services.
- Continue the process of improving the quality of the state’s ECE teacher preparation programs, and phase in specialized accreditation for associate and bachelor’s degree programs in the ECE field.
- Implement approaches to serve the diverse needs of the state’s current and potential ECE workforce, drawing on proven models, where possible.
- Improve the quality of ECE education and training programs by defining competencies for teacher educators, trainers, mentors, coaches, and others who support workforce professional development.

Viewed as a whole, the interdependent recommendations in the table are designed to provide a comprehensive approach to an effective ECE workforce PDS. Some of the recommendations build on statewide initiatives that are already under way (e.g., the alignment and articulation of the ECE higher education teacher preparation programs); the new ones may benefit from similar efforts in effect at the county level or in other states (e.g., a workforce registry). As the system improves, attention should also be paid to aligning the ECE workforce PDS with California’s K–12 system, including the new transitional kindergarten program established by the 2010 Kindergarten Readiness Act. ■

This project was requested by the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System (CAELQIS) Advisory Committee, which was established by the California state legislature under Senate Bill 1629. Funding was provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Four companion reports and associated research briefs are also available:

- *Who Is Ahead and Who Is Behind? Gaps in School Readiness and Student Achievement in the Early Grades for California's Children*, by Jill S. Cannon and Lynn A. Karoly, TR-537-PF/WKKF/PEW/NIEER/WCJVSF/LAUP, 2007, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR537.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR537.html)
- *Early Care and Education in the Golden State: Publicly Funded Programs Serving California's Preschool-Age Children*, by Lynn A. Karoly, Elaine Reardon, and Michelle Cho, TR-538-PF/WKKF/PEW/NIEER/WCJVSF/LAUP, 2007, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR538.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR538.html)
- *Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education for Preschool-Age Children in California*, by Lynn A. Karoly, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Gail L. Zellman, Michal Perlman, and Lynda Fernyhough, TR-539-PF/WKKF/PEW/NIEER/WCJVSF/LAUP, 2008, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR539.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR539.html)
- *Preschool Adequacy and Efficiency in California: Issues, Policy Options, and Recommendations*, by Lynn A. Karoly, MG-889-PF/WKKF/PEW/NIEER/WCJVSF/LAUP, 2009, available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG889.html>.



This research brief describes work done for RAND Labor and Population and documented in *A Golden Opportunity: Advancing California's Early Care and Education Workforce Professional Development System*, by Lynn A. Karoly, MG-1188-PF/BECF (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1188.html>), 2012, 172 pp., \$25, ISBN: 978-0-8330-6011-2. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

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