

The Critical Role of the Early Childhood Workforce in the Preparation of our Young Children

Every child deserves a high quality early care and education experience. Quality depends on the professional knowledge, skills, and practice of teachers. Early childhood teachers work in various types of settings with children from birth to five years of age and have varied educational backgrounds. These early care and education settings include child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start and pre-kindergarten classrooms. Young children who attend high quality early childhood programs with well-prepared teachers are more likely to become productive and engaged citizens.

1. Why are knowledgeable and well-prepared early childhood teachers important?

Early childhood teachers must be knowledgeable and well prepared to have long-lasting positive effects on educational achievement, economic productivity, social responsibility, and a significant return on investment. Early childhood programs with knowledgeable and well-prepared teachers lead to—

- Better educational outcomes, including enhanced school readiness and academic performance from elementary school through college, and reduced need for remedial education and special services.
- Less criminal activity and substance abuse.
- Higher earnings in adulthood.
- Strong returns on our investments. For every dollar spent on high quality early care and education, taxpayers save between \$6-\$12 because of the reduced need for academic, welfare, and criminal justice services.

2. What should early childhood teachers know and be able to do?

We must ensure that our nation's children and their families have access to early childhood teachers who have the knowledge and skills to do their jobs well. Teachers in high quality early childhood programs—

- Promote children's development and learning so they can work and play well with others.
- Have sound knowledge of content areas and are able to provide children experiences that help them learn and be ready for school.
- Have the core knowledge and skills to use effective teaching and assessment strategies.
- Engage in supportive and stimulating interactions with children to push their thinking and motivation to learn.
- Build positive relationships with children, families and communities.
- Engage in ongoing education and training to gain new skills and knowledge.

3. What can we as a nation do to ensure every young child has a teacher that supports her/his development and learning?

Investments in early care and education must ensure that—

- All young children have access to early childhood teachers who know and use effective teaching practices.
- All early childhood programs adhere to high quality program standards including standards for teacher qualifications and practice.
- All early childhood programs provide supports for teachers in their efforts to enhance children's development and learning.
- All early childhood teachers have access to affordable and effective education and training, including higher education and research-informed training.
- All early childhood teachers are fairly compensated.

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