



# Addressing Barriers in Higher Education A State Team Approach

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A Project of the  
T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center



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The conclusions and views reported in this report are those of the authors and the compensation teams, and not those of the funders.

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## Introduction and Background

“Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8,” and its case statement and recommendation that all children have lead teachers with a BA in early childhood education as their foundation on which to build their knowledge and skills has put in motion a national discussion on how to make this happen. Debates are centered around issues of access, capacity of the workforce, cost, barriers in higher education, compensation, and fear of unintended consequences for various populations of children and people in the workforce. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center has been about transforming the workforce in states for many years and has welcomed both the recommendation and the debate.

### The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center (National Center) provides leadership in the early childhood education field to states across the country and to our nation’s policymakers on the critical importance and value of an educated, well-paid and stable early childhood workforce to ensure the long-term success of our nation’s children in school and in life. For many years, the Center has been working on developing strategies to address barriers in higher education for the early childhood workforce. It’s largest national effort, the **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Initiative**, provides the incumbent workforce the opportunity to attend community colleges and universities in their states to take coursework leading to early childhood education degrees. T.E.A.C.H. is also a systemic strategy that serves as a policy driver at the state and local levels resulting in increased funding for early childhood workforce needs, increased awareness of workforce needs and more responsive workforce supports, including a more responsive higher education system.

While this effort has not eliminated all of the barriers to higher education access for the workforce, it has leveraged change toward removing obstacles to college completion for the incumbent workforce allowing them to graduate debt-free.

Since 1990, the **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Program** has had a goal of creating a professional, educated, and fairly compensated early childhood workforce. In the twenty-nine years since its inception, T.E.A.C.H. has grown from a single state program with 21 scholars to a program that that operates in nearly half of the states to provide services to more than 150,000 scholars.

Since 1994, the **Child Care WAGE\$® Program** has worked to stem the tide of turnover of early childhood teachers and increase teacher continuity by awarding education-based salary supplements to early educators to address the key issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce.

## About the Project

Building on the Center’s experiences using a multi-state team approach to address big policy and funding issues and with funding from the Alliance for Early Success and the Foundation for Child Development, the 12 month, *Addressing Barriers in Higher Education* was conceived. Two states were selected through a Request for Information process based on their capacity to engage in this work, their penetration of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships within higher education in the state and evidence that they have leveraged one or more changes within higher education to improve access, affordability, quality and/or success for one or more T.E.A.C.H. scholars. Both states were required to submit a landscape analysis of their state’s early childhood higher education system and identify at least 3 goals to work on to address one or more of the identified systemic challenges in the areas of policy, strategy development/implementation and/or funding at the local, regional or state level.

### Project Objective

Identifying barriers to ECE college admission, coursework completion, and graduation and develop strategies that leverage the investments of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to facilitate the development and/or replication of solutions to identified barriers.

### Participating States

- ❖ Florida – Children’s Forum
- ❖ Pennsylvania – Pennsylvania Child care Association (PACCA)

## Why Would States Want to Participate in the Higher Education Project?

The National Center has had a focus for many years on early childhood workforce issues including providing equity of access to higher education for the early childhood education workforce. This work is accomplished by partnering with states and other organizations to increase demand for an educated workforce; mitigate systematic barriers to equity and access in higher education and better compensation; and support a more meaningful and clear career pathway for educators in the field of early education. These two states joined this project because they (1) considered their state to be ready to address higher education barriers, and (2) thought they might find solutions to higher education challenges as described below.

### Readiness

- ❖ Previous participation in a state team approach with the Center around making measurable improvements in higher education articulation.
- ❖ Recent investments in a study of the early childhood higher education landscape
- ❖ Convening of an initial workgroup to identify ways to address the findings and recommendations that emerged from the landscape study
- ❖ Increased investments in T.E.A.C.H. scholarships
- ❖ Development of a career pathway for early childhood professionals

### Challenges

- ❖ Public four-year institutions geared toward serving traditional students, even with a substantial decline in that student base
- ❖ Lack of coursework and field based experiences for teachers working with infants and toddlers and appropriate options for teachers of children with special needs (0-5) and their families

- ❖ Field-based opportunities insufficiently tailored to student levels and needs
- ❖ Course formats and times not flexible enough to meet the demands of the typically non-traditional early childhood student, especially at the Bachelors level
- ❖ Limited racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity among faculty who are predominately white and monolingual
- ❖ Minimal availability of programs offering tailored assistance for English language learners

## What Did States Agree To Do in Order to Participate in the Higher Education Project?

Each selected state agreed to participate in the following ways to ensure their work progressed over the life of the project.

- ❖ Assemble a diverse team of 8-10 members committed to the work
- ❖ Develop a draft and final Advocacy, Funding and Policy State Action Plan
- ❖ Work as a team to implement the State Action Plan
- ❖ Participate in Center provided technical assistance calls, webinars and a Higher Education Summit that was part of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE\$® National Professional Development Symposium in April 2019
- ❖ Provide documentation of teamwork
- ❖ Participate in Center provided technical assistance calls, webinars and a Higher Education Summit
- ❖ Provide documentation of teamwork
- ❖ Disseminate findings in conjunction with the Center

## Potential Team Members Representation

Representatives from the categories identified with an \* were required to be included on the team.

- ❖ T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ program state leadership\*
- ❖ Business leaders\*
- ❖ State ECE advocacy groups
- ❖ Key funders\*
- ❖ Workforce representatives with demonstrated leadership skills (Current Director, Coordinator or Lead Teacher)\*
- ❖ Key state initiatives-QRIS, Pre-K, Head Start\*
- ❖ Legislative staff or policy makers
- ❖ Higher education governing bodies\*
- ❖ Higher education administrators and/or faculty from the associate and baccalaureate levels\*
- ❖ CCDF State Plan Administrator or high level representatives, Head Start Collaboration directors, and other key state agencies\*
- ❖ Minority and/or women's workforce groups

## Types of Supports Offered to States

To support team successes, the Center provided the following throughout the project year.

- ❖ Ongoing technical assistance including monthly individual and/or group calls, quarterly team calls that provided opportunities for team leaders to meet with Center project staff, and the sharing of resources including news articles, reports and research on relevant topics,
- ❖ Webinars on topics identified through team member needs assessments,
- ❖ A face to face meeting with each state team,
- ❖ A higher education summit woven into the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE\$® National Professional Development Symposium, including a strong higher education track of workshop, time for teams to meet individually and together, and both a

keynote and plenary session with topics focused on higher education, which met the needs of both higher education teams and the general symposium audience, and

- ❖ Grants to states to support their travel to the Summit as well as their work as teams in their home states.

## Identified Barriers to Higher Education

Both Florida and Pennsylvania were required to submit a landscape analysis of their state's early childhood higher education system, including identifying current barriers to accessing higher education for the workforce. Identified barriers included the following.

### Florida

- ❖ Infant/Toddler focus is limited in terms of course content, faculty having real-world experiences working with infants and toddlers, and field-based opportunities for students to work with this age-group
- ❖ Other course content and faculty professional development needs found lacking include
  - Teaching early mathematics and STEM
  - Working with children with special needs or those experiencing trauma
  - Using teacher and child assessments effectively
  - Leadership, administration, and supervision
  - Supporting diverse adult learners including coaching/mentoring
- ❖ Field-based opportunities insufficiently tailored to student levels and needs
- ❖ Course formats and times not flexible enough to meet the demands of the typically non-traditional early childhood student, especially at the Bachelors level
- ❖ Insufficient full-time faculty (up to 70% of faculty are adjunct or part-time)
- ❖ Limited racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity among faculty who are predominately white and monolingual
- ❖ Student recruitment and retention are limited by these major factors:
  - Low pay typically expected for those in the early childhood field
  - Low value placed on the early childhood field (50% of Bachelor programs cite a "lack of recognition of the value of early childhood from within the department or school"
  - Unable to meet fully the needs of students who are English Language Learners. Less than 25% of programs offered tailored assistance for English-language-learners

### Pennsylvania

- ❖ Lack of recognition of birth-age eight teacher preparation needs in the PA Chapter 49 review of teacher certification structure
- ❖ Lack of equitable access to higher education early childhood degree programs (locations, times and modalities-online, hybrid, face to face) to meet the needs of working early childhood students
- ❖ Lack of specific coursework for teachers working with infants and toddlers and appropriate options for teachers of children with special needs (0-5) and their families

## Summary of Results

### Goals, Accomplishments and Challenges

Funding and state policies, as is always true in the early childhood education field, played critical roles in each state's successes and challenges. While the two states, Florida and Pennsylvania were selected based on a strong landscape analysis of their state's early childhood higher education system, and both worked hard over the year, the results of their work diverged somewhat throughout the year.

#### Florida Team Goals and Accomplishments

Florida's team has been involved in previous Center led state team projects, which allowed them to quickly develop an action plan that led to specific actions and outcomes. Those broad goals included the following.

- ❖ Provide recommendations for a linguistically diverse curriculum for adult learners to targeted EC college programs
- ❖ Expand the availability of high quality infant-toddler programs through the state college system
- ❖ Leverage resources to facilitate the transition of high school career and technical school students to higher education opportunities

An earlier goal to support greater success with higher education math coursework was added to the team's 2020 goals.

To date the Florida team accomplished the following.

- ❖ Completed a bilingual infant toddler certificate to be disseminated online through Miami Dade Community College (MDCC). Final approvals are in process with the MDCC administration
- ❖ Created and disseminated a policy brief about bilingual issues for review
- ❖ Created a career pipeline that included awarding 1170 T.E.A.C.H. CDA scholarships to high school students. As part of this process, students were involved in surveys of their future educational goals. To date over 1000 students have earned their CDA credential
- ❖ Initiated a trial review of a module to support math development for both children and the EC workforce in Miami with Florida International University

Many of the above factors provided Florida with a state of readiness that appears to have been important to their outcomes.

#### Pennsylvania Team Goals, Accomplishments and Challenges

The Pennsylvania team's goals reflect both the opportunities and challenges being experienced in the state at the current time. While there is an ongoing movement statewide to affect infant toddler curriculum as well as the availability of infant toddler care, Pennsylvania is also experiencing a shifting early childhood environment and upcoming transitions in state professional development structures both within the state and within the state administrative systems. Their goals included the following.

- ❖ Increase infant toddler coursework and/or content in higher education curriculum

- ❖ Ensure adequate funding for infant toddler coursework
- ❖ Leverage transparency of infant toddler curriculum within the broader Pennsylvania higher education systems

Improving access for dual language learners was added later in the year.

Pennsylvania's long-term involvement with T.E.A.C.H stopped in 2012 due a change in governance, state policy and funding and resumed in 2016, and the program is still striving to regain its former strength. The Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA), the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Program administrative home, saw this project as a tool for reestablishing relationships with institutions of higher education and a means to confirm a commitment to Pennsylvania's interest in infant toddler (I/T) quality. Unanticipated challenges affected some of their efforts.

- ❖ The Infant Toddler initiative that T.E.A.C.H. originally intended to fund was transitioned to Rising Star, a scholarship fund for professional development and certificate programs.
- ❖ Pennsylvania established a series of regional Professional Development Organizations (PDO's). The anticipated role of the PDO's is to support credit based stackable coursework that will support degrees. The exact role of the PDO's and start time is expected to be released in the fall 2019. PACCA is petitioning for membership in the advisory boards of all six PDO's.
- ❖ Changes in state leadership created a need for PACCA to create new relationships.
- ❖ Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning revised the policy/priorities for T.E.A.C.H. funding to focus on degree programs. This transition to offering only degree program scholarships necessitated a change in recruitment to spend down existing dollars so as to not underutilize state funding. Through PACCA's leadership the team did make progress in areas related to their goals.

Despite the challenges faced by Pennsylvania, to date, the team accomplished the following.

- ❖ Created a team that reflects the major interests and evolving professional development landscape in Pennsylvania
- ❖ Maintained a strong role in the Start Strong PA infant toddler effort
- ❖ Continued to seek funding through the Pritzker Foundation, William Penn and Vanguard Systems
- ❖ Collaborated with IHE's to fund Child Development Associate (CDA) courses in Spanish in the state's NE region
- ❖ Contracted to provide translation services around T.E.A.C.H. requirements and processes with plans to make them available statewide

Because of the aforementioned setbacks, PACCA debated about continuing with the project. However, based on a strong response to their end of year wrap up interview, the leadership determined that this interview discussion would serve as a starting point for next year efforts.

While Pennsylvania's challenges created some roadblocks to their success, Florida has been able to build on established strengths to sustain their efforts and mitigate their own funding fluctuations. These strengths resulted in significant accomplishments under some challenging circumstances. There appears to be a cumulative impact in Florida's success that is also worth noting. The following have enhanced and challenged the team's efforts.

- ❖ Participation in earlier Center state team-based projects allowed the team to begin this project quickly.
- ❖ Florida received a large amount of T.E.A.C.H. funding that required significant efforts to spend it down within a limited time.
- ❖ The Children’s Forum, the administrative home for T.E.A.C.H. in Florida has been in the process of moving over a period of months, with regular meeting places and offices for many staff unavailable.
- ❖ Involvement of team members from higher education, government, and participants such as the Head Start Collaboration Office provided diverse perspectives and feedback.
- ❖ Multiple levels of leadership and staff from the Children’s Forum were actively involved in the project, bringing a variety of perspectives and skills to the work.
- ❖ The Children’s Forum began a high school to college career pipeline in 2016 that lost its funding. This project allowed the team to resume and expand the previous efforts with new funding and fit into the team’s goals. CDA assessment scholarships were awarded to over 1000 high school students in a career pipeline.
- ❖ Florida’s large bilingual population presented an opportunity to address a pressing need for an infant toddler certificate and a certificate that could be presented through a bilingual curriculum. And with its development in an online format, such a certificate program could be offered to dual language learners working in rural counties whose colleges cannot offer bilingual coursework.

## Lessons Learned and Next Steps

The strength of these projects as identified by both states in their year-end wrap up interviews comes from a team approach that focuses on a problem, often a problem that has seemed insurmountable in the past, be it articulation, compensation or in this case higher education barriers. Both states identified infant toddler issues as being important in their state and both touched on the “math issue.” Infant toddler issues touch on the early childhood care setting still most often associated with “babysitting” and therefore often the least valued. The various strategies from the two states including bilingual education, increased overall credit-based education, and incentives for teachers to come to the field, challenge old thinking. The math issue has in the past been seen as an indicator that the workforce is either not ready or not able to do college level study. Instead both states see it as a barrier that can be addressed.

With funding in hand for a second year of this project, the Center will continue to provide resources and supports to the Florida and Pennsylvania teams as they continue to move their action plan goals forward. We are pleased to report that the administrative home for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® in South Carolina, the South Carolina Center for Child Care Career Development, has joined the project and is currently working to complete its landscape analysis and establish their team and will soon be creating their Policy, Strategy Development/Expansion and Funding State Action Plan to address higher education barriers in their state.

As these states are joined by South Carolina in the next year, we anticipate further incremental steps towards addressing these barriers.