

Selected State Approaches to Support Infant and Toddler Care and Education

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Introduction

Despite the relative increase in early care and education (ECE) investment over recent decades, access to infant and toddler care continues to be a hurdle for countless families across the nation.ⁱ While access is a multifaceted issue, main contributors include a lack of available slots and the high cost of providing care to infants and toddlers.ⁱⁱ Federal programs intended to increase access to high-quality care (e.g., Child Care and Development Fund [CCDF] subsidy) have strict eligibility requirements and only reach a fraction of eligible families.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result, families of infants and toddlers may be forced to choose from a limited array of ECE options or leave the workforce to care for their child. Simultaneously, insufficient compensation, demanding conditions, and minimal supports contribute to challenges with ECE workforce recruitment and retention.^{iv} These factors suggest a need for effective policies and practices to help families find and use affordable care that meets the needs of their infants and toddlers.

This document highlights various strategies that states have used to strengthen the infant and toddler workforce and system of care. While each strategy is described individually, some are combined with other strategies in practice. Strategies described in this resource address the following topic areas:

1. Supply of infant toddler care
2. Workforce standards and professional support
3. Compensation

This resource was originally developed in support of the North Carolina Birth to Five Preschool Development Grant (PDG B-5). To help identify promising policies and practices in the field, this scan used a framework introduced by Zero to Three¹ and the Center for Law and Social Policy² (CLASP), which identifies the following needs of infants, toddlers, and their families: 1) healthy bodies, healthy minds, and healthy parents; 2) economically stable families; 3) strong parents; and 4) high-quality ECE opportunities.^v Based on priorities for the PDG B-5 work, this scan focuses on a select set of state policy and program approaches to support high-quality ECE opportunities.

A team of Child Trends staff reviewed databases (e.g., the [Prenatal to Three Policy Roadmap](#), the [State of Babies Yearbook](#)); reports; policy tools (e.g., the [Child Care State Capacity Building Center tool for strengthening quality of care for infants and toddlers](#)); and public and unpublished memos to identify common and innovative strategies states used to promote positive early learning experiences for infants and toddlers. The team also reviewed evaluation reports, as available, to understand strengths and challenges that states experienced when designing or implementing various strategies. In some cases, we also document how strategies used to support children ages 3 and above may be applicable to the infant and toddler population.

This document is not intended to be comprehensive, but instead highlights a select set of strategies states are exploring to address challenges in promoting positive early learning experiences for infants and toddlers. Throughout the following sections, we include information about the number of states known to be engaging in each strategy (when available), highlight examples to illustrate how states are applying each strategy, and provide additional resources for further reading.

¹ [Zero to Three](#) is a national nonprofit organization that works to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

² [CLASP](#) is national nonprofit organization that works to advance policy solutions for people with low incomes.

Supply of Infant Toddler Care

Infant and toddler care is less readily available compared to ECE for children ages 3 and older.^{vi} In addition to a lack of supply, the cost for families to enroll and for providers to serve infants and toddlers are high relative to other age groups, making it inaccessible to many.^{vii} The following section provides an overview of some state strategies identified during our review that are intended to facilitate and encourage existing ECE providers to serve infants and toddlers.

Increase feasibility of serving infants and toddlers

The following strategies describe options states are exploring in their efforts to make serving infants and toddlers more feasible for interested ECE providers.

Support accessibility of licensing

State and local licensing regulations establish the foundation for a quality program.^{viii} Despite the importance of strong health and safety standards, challenges associated with licensing can factor into decisions to leave the profession (e.g., costs associated with increased requirements, unsupportive inspections).^{ix,x} Home-based providers³ may face additional barriers such as difficulty making required facility improvements, complying with lower infant and toddler ratios which reduce profit margins, accessing licensing information, among many other potential hurdles.^{xi}

To alleviate the obstacles ECE providers may face, some states have made efforts such as offering licensing resources in a variety of languages and platforms (e.g., webinars, written materials); providing grants to help with start-up costs; or providing TA to support the initial licensing process or help with compliance.

If interested in adapting licensing regulations and procedures or providing extra support for providers, determining whether and how ECE providers experience barriers could help the state develop appropriate solutions to address those challenges. In such an assessment, the state could seek input from a variety of ECE providers (e.g., various setting-types, geographic location, language) and stakeholders (e.g., Child Care Resource and Referral [CCR&R], licensing inspectors) to understand the extent of the challenges and gather ideas for possible solutions.^{xii} Other strategies described in this section may also help providers maintain compliance with licensing (see the facilities grants and use of CCDF subsidies sections).

State example

Georgia started a pilot program called [Bridge to Quality](#) that offered TA support for newly licensed providers through information sharing, coaching, and a needs assessment to ensure ongoing compliance throughout the first year of licensure.

Further reading:

[Voices of Child Care Providers: An Exploratory Study on the Impact of Policy Changes](#)

[Family Child Care Educators' Perspectives on Leaving, Staying, and Entering the Field: Findings from the Multi-State Study of Family Child Care Decline and Supply](#)

³ Infants and toddlers are more often cared for in home-based settings than center-based settings (Henly & Adams, 2018).

Support accessibility of quality improvement systems

Nearly all states implement some type of ECE quality improvement system; most have a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).^{xiii} State QRIS are designed to assess and communicate the level of quality in ECE programs while incentivizing continuous quality improvement.^{xiv} Like licensing regulations, some requirements at quality levels may be challenging for ECE providers to meet if they are not relevant to their setting type or vision of quality, or if there are no supports (e.g., TA, resources, funds) to help them achieve the next level.^{xv} If this is the case, some providers may be unfairly excluded from benefits that are tied to progression through quality levels (e.g., tiered reimbursement, financial incentives).^{xvi}

Building continuous feedback loops into the structure of the QRIS may support ongoing, incremental change. **Thirty-one state QRIS have mechanisms for ECE providers to offer feedback** through various platforms such as surveys, focus groups, advisory groups, or community meetings.^{4,xvii}

Efforts to gather stakeholder feedback may provide the opportunity to identify challenges and improve the QRIS.^{xviii} When gathering input from stakeholders regarding QRIS policies and procedures, it would be prudent to consider how the quality standards may be unintentionally biased towards certain providers based on program characteristics^{xix} (e.g., by populations served, race/ethnicity, spoken languages of the families served, geography). For example, program standards may be pre-K- or center-based program-centric, necessitating new or modified standards for infant and toddler populations and home-based programs. In an assessment of QRIS standards, the state could seek input from a variety of ECE providers (e.g., various setting types, geographic location, language) and stakeholders (e.g., CCR&Rs, QRIS assessors). If QRIS level is used to inform other benefits (e.g., workforce compensation strategies), this sort of review and continuous feedback may be particularly important.

Further reading:

[Quality Compendium 2021 Catalog and Comparison of Quality Initiatives](#)

[Equity is Quality, Quality is Equity: Operationalizing Equity in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems](#)

State examples

[Iowa](#) sends quarterly satisfaction surveys to ECE providers regarding their experience with the QRIS, and [Utah](#) has monthly advisory group meetings to solicit feedback. [New Mexico](#) has implemented multiple mechanisms for feedback, including initial and annual surveys and ongoing advisory groups. These sources inform continuous quality improvement efforts for the system itself.



⁴ We include Washington D.C. as a state in our counts throughout this report.

Facilities grants

Costs associated with acquiring, updating, or expanding facilities can prevent ECE providers from entering the workforce or from serving infants and toddlers, who require additional space and different materials/equipment compared to older age groups.^{xx} There are a variety of programs at the federal, state, and local levels intended to support facility development and renovation for ECE programs.^{xxi} These programs are designed to meet diverse facility-related needs, ranging from needing new paint on the walls, to renovating so that each classroom has a bathroom, to building an entirely new facility.

While facility grants can be expensive, they have the potential to expand availability of infant and toddler slots and ensure facilities are safe for children; they may also be used to support compliance with licensing.^{xxii} Facilities grants may be one strategy to help address child care deserts (i.e., locations across the state where there are limited or no current child care facilities available that meet the needs of families). Implementing a facility grant program would likely require coordination across multiple state agencies and private interest groups (see the employer-sponsored ECE section for one approach to funding a facilities improvement program). To accommodate the range of potential facility-related needs, the grant program may consider the types of improvements that providers commonly face and offer flexibility in program requirements so that it can be adapted to unique situations.

Further reading:

[Bipartisan Policy Center Report on Improving CCEE Facilities](#)

Use of CCDF subsidies

There are many ways to use Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies to support care of infants and toddlers. One common strategy is providing higher reimbursement rates for ECE providers who meet certain criteria (e.g., programs serving infants and toddlers, programs operating at higher quality levels in the QRIS). For example, many states tie tiered reimbursement strategies to QRIS rating to incentivize quality improvement.^{xxiii} Other strategies include attaching higher reimbursement rates to providers serving infants and toddlers, offering care at nontraditional hours, or those who have obtained accreditation status, additional credentials, or degrees.

Establishing contracts with infant and toddler providers is another strategy to stabilize the infant and toddler workforce using CCDF subsidies. Contracts provide funding directly to providers for a set period of time rather than being attached to a subsidy-eligible child.^{xxiv}

State examples

[Washington state](#) implements the Early Learning Facilities grant/loan program, designed to support facility renovation, construction, or purchasing. The program is a public-private partnership managed by a variety of state agencies. Grants range from \$10,000 to \$800,000 and are targeted to providers serving children using state funds (e.g., public pre-K, CCDF). Washington state provides TA to grant recipients and providers interested in the program.

Another example can be found in [New Jersey](#), where the legislature recently passed the Thriving by Three Act grant program in 2022. The act will, in part, award one-time grants to ECE providers to incentivize developing and improving facilities to care for infants and toddlers. Eligibility criteria and grant amounts are still being determined.

State example

In 2019, [Georgia](#) increased the maximum reimbursement rate for providers serving infants and toddlers by \$520-\$1,040 per child; rate varied based on location, type of provider, and age group of children, and rates were higher for those participating in the state QRIS.

Using CCDF subsidies to incentivize or reward ECE providers can be a flexible approach to stabilizing the infant and toddler workforce and building the supply of infant and toddler slots.^{xxxv} Identifying gaps and areas where the workforce needs support may help to inform the design of the strategy.

Further reading:

[Using Contracts to Support the Child Care Workforce](#)

[Payment Practices to Stabilize Child Care](#)

Public-private partnerships to support the existing mixed-delivery system

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are associations between public entities (i.e., government agencies at any level) and the private sector (e.g., families, employers, philanthropies, media, civic groups, and ECE providers). Public-private partnerships support a diverse array of early childhood related activities, from the delivery of care to the coordination of systems.^{xxxvi} They are increasingly seen as a way to address gaps and challenges in ECE that cannot be alleviated by the public or private sectors alone.^{xxxvii} In addition to a variety of structures/methods, PPPs in ECE can focus on a wide range of early learning strategies and activities, such as expanding access to high-quality care, improving or coordinating service delivery, or informing policy and advocacy.^{xxxviii}

While PPPs are an innovative policy approach with the potential to improve systems and reduce gaps in service, there are shortcomings to consider. For example, there may be broader concerns with private interests dictating where public resources are directed, which has the potential to exacerbate existing societal inequalities.^{xxxix} Another concern is accountability. Governments have many checks on their power and actions, but PPPs may not be subject to the same scrutiny.^{xxx, xxxi} Relatedly, the complex leadership structures of PPPs that arise from the hybrid of public and private entities leads to questions about constitutional oversight and transparency in decision making.^{xxxii} There is also limited evidence showing whether PPPs meet goals related to access, quality improvement, equity, innovation, and cost effectiveness.^{xxxiii}

Employer-sponsored ECE

Tax credits for employer-sponsored ECE is one way to encourage more private investment in the child care sector. As of March 2023, the federal government offers an employer-sponsored child care tax credit to employers^{xxxiv} and **18 states offer an additional tax credit or incentive.**^{xxxv} These credits can be offered to offset expenses for businesses that either operate or invest in an ECE program for their employees. Investments can range from funding facility improvements to contracting slots in the ECE program.

Parameters of the program could vary widely, depending on the needs of the families and the ECE industry. According to a 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, employers' use of the federal credit was limited by the following factors: 1) cost and complexity of providing child care, 2) knowledge and understanding of how to use the credit, and 3) design of the credit (e.g., the costs to participate in employer-sponsored ECE exceeded the credit, mismatched needs between their employees and eligibility for the credit).^{xxxvi} Interviewees suggested offering more education around how the credit worked, increasing the maximum credit available, expanding the definition of eligible ECE options, and allowing multiple employers to pool resources for their employees. See the GAO Report for additional considerations.

State example

In 2022, [Wisconsin](#) launched the Partner Up! Grant Program. The program is a type of PPP that requires private businesses to contribute 25 percent of the true cost of care; the grant covers the remaining 75 percent.

Further reading:

[GAO Report on the Potential of Tax Credits for Employer-Provided CCEE](#)

[State Approaches to Tax Credits for Employers](#)

Partnerships for coordinated or improved service delivery

Public-private partnerships can also be used to coordinate and improve services that are offered in multiple sectors. One common example of this category of PPP is the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP). The federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) explains that the initiative “brings together the best of Early Head Start and child care through layering of funding to provide comprehensive and continuous services to low-income infants, toddlers, and their families.”^{xxxvii} Some of the benefits of EHS-CCP are additional resources for educators, more quality improvement funds, and support staff for extra training and professional development (PD).^{xxxviii} As of 2021, just 6 states are EHS-CCP grantees.^{xxxix} Other partnerships used to coordinate or improve service delivery may take the form of early childhood councils or hubs.

State example

[Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils](#)

are locally operated councils that allocate public money to support improvements in equitable access to ECE, family resources, and child physical and mental health.

Due to the variety of ways to implement PPPs for coordinating or improving service delivery, it is important to first consider where there is a gap or fragmentation in addressing a community or state’s needs, and then look to see who has interest in filling that gap.

Further reading:

[Summary of State Profiles of Successful Public-Private Partnerships](#)

[Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development](#)

[Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Brochure](#)



Workforce Standards and Professional Support

Qualified and consistent teachers are a core component of a high-quality infant and toddler program. However, staffing challenges continue to burden many ECE programs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xl}

The following sections describe strategies that states have used to support the ECE workforce through standards and PD. While this document focuses on strategies to support the infant and toddler workforce, many of these approaches could apply to the entire early childhood system.

Standards

This section describes three types of standards states have implemented to support the infant and toddler workforce: salaries and benefits, qualifications and competencies, and workplace environment.

Salaries and benefits

Salary schedules provide guidance about appropriate compensation to ensure that providers are compensated at a rate that grows with their qualifications and experience over time.^{xli} Salary schedules could include using the locally assessed living wage as the floor and accounting for job role, experience, and education when setting salary levels. They may also define scheduled or regular adjustments for cost of living and changes in education.^{xlii} Benefits are perks offered to employees beyond their salary that are intended to improve quality of life outside of the workplace.⁵ Benefits may include health insurance, retirement contributions, paid sick leave, paid vacation leave, or receiving regular salary increases according to a salary schedule. Salary schedules and benefits can be designed and implemented at the state or program level.

Some states use QRIS as a mechanism to require programs to develop standards for starting salaries and salary increases over time; however, states may implement standards for salary schedules through other mechanisms as well. **As of 2020, 21 state QRIS included standards for center-based programs to implement salary schedules and/or benefit options.**^{xliii}

States may also set salary expectations or coordinate benefits. For example, the Washington State Legislature approved spending to provide health insurance to child care employees free of cost. Eligibility criteria included qualifications such as living below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and actively working in a licensed child care facility.^{xliv}

State example

[New York's QRIS](#) includes a few program standards related to benefits. One standard requires that center-based programs offer at least one of the following benefits to full-time staff: paid holidays, paid time off, health insurance, or PD days. Another standard requires that center-based programs offer at least three of the following benefits to full-time staff: information on accessing state family leave benefits, flexible scheduling, retirement, life insurance, flexible spending account, dependent care assistance plan, tuition discounts for employee's children, tuition reimbursement for education, employee assistance program, dental insurance, vision care plan, or bereavement leave.

⁵ Workplace environment benefits (e.g., planning time, access to training and PD) are described in a later section.

Standards for salary and benefits may help to build positive work environments.^{xlv} However, as shown in the example of New York’s QRIS benefits standards above, state QRIS standards often leave the specific details of benefit options up to individual programs. A statewide approach could promote more standardization across programs, ensuring that infant and toddler providers are not being undercompensated for their work. Because home-based programs may have unique limitations to providing some benefits (e.g., finding staff to cover sick time), states would likely need to consider the infrastructure needed to support implementation in these settings, such as approaches to securing substitutes for home-based providers (see the substitute teachers section).

Further reading:

[North Carolina Early Childhood Compensation Collaborative Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers](#)

[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020](#)

[New York Quality Standards for Centers](#)

[Washington State Policy on Health Care Premiums](#)

Qualifications and competencies

Statewide minimum qualifications and competencies for the workforce set a baseline for determining who is qualified to work in an infant and toddler program. There are multiple ways to establish qualification and competency standards for the ECE workforce, including the following strategies:

1. Minimum qualification requirements establish baseline qualifications for the ECE workforce. State minimum requirements can align with national recommendations (e.g., the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council’s recommendations on the workforce for children birth through age 8), research, or state-specific goals for the workforce. Minimum requirements can vary by role (e.g., lead teacher, assistant teacher) or by program type (i.e., center-based program, home-based program).^{xlvi} States typically set baseline qualification requirements (e.g., high school degree, experience) via licensing regulations and may scaffold to higher qualifications via QRIS or state career pathways.^{xlvii} **As of 2022, 45 states require no credential beyond a high school diploma for infant and toddler teachers.**^{xlviii}

State example

In 2016, the [District of Columbia](#) adjusted their licensing requirements to set minimum education credentials for each ECE position (e.g., center director, teacher). They allocated six to seven years for educators to come into compliance with this new rule. In 2018, the rule helped to provide justification for pay parity policies between early childhood and K-12 educators.

2. Core knowledge and competencies recognize the essential knowledge and skills needed to work with young children, beyond degrees and credentials. **As of 2019, 46 states have core knowledge and competencies expected for infant and toddler educators.**^{xlix} This may include requiring regular or one-time training courses on specific topics.
3. Infant and toddler credentials or certificates can consist of a combination of education, training, and experiences that establish that an individual is qualified to work with infants and toddlers.^l **As of 2022, 34 states have adopted an infant and toddler credential or certificate.**^{li}

The above strategies have been used by states to increase the skills and competencies of the ECE workforce and, in turn, the quality of care. When setting new standards, states have considered the need for degree reciprocity or transcript translation^{lii} and recognition of experience.

However, establishing stricter requirements could limit the number of individuals who are eligible or willing to join the ECE workforce. Therefore, standards related to qualifications and competencies for the infant and toddler workforce could be paired with strategies to support PD and compensation (see the compensation and professional development sections). Furthermore, standards for qualifications and

competencies should be crafted with stakeholder involvement (e.g., community members, families, providers).

Further reading:

[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020](#)

[NCECQA Trends in Child Care Center Licensing Requirements and Policies for 2017](#)

[Zero to Three State Policy Tracker](#)

[State Of Babies 2022 Map of States that Adopted an Infant and Toddler Credential](#)

Work environment

Statewide work environment standards have been used by some states to promote a healthy work atmosphere for staff in infant and toddler programs.^{liii} Early childhood educators tend to have higher rates of depression and stress relative to national averages of workers in other occupations—a trend that has been exacerbated since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.^{liv} The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) suggests the following work environment standards to better support early childhood educators^{lv}:

1. Paid planning time
 - **As of 2020, 16 state QRIS have a standard for paid planning time for center-based programs.**^{lvi}
2. Paid time for PD
 - **As of 2020, 15 state QRIS have a standard for paid time for PD for center-based programs.**^{lvii}
3. Opportunities for ECE staff to learn about work environment issues and resources available to them via technical assistance or PD⁶
4. Establish the right for ECE staff to organize unions⁷
5. Protect ECE staff who report violations⁸
6. Establish procedures for ECE staff to file and respond to complaints⁹

The CSCCE 2020 Index identified four states making headway on work environment standards: Wisconsin, Vermont, New York, and Massachusetts. These four states were the most advanced in including paid time for PD, paid planning time, and a salary schedule and benefits in their QRIS standards for both centers and homes. As of 2020, Vermont was the only state to have made paid PD time a quality benchmark for home-based programs.^{lviii}

Compensation for time spent planning and participating in PD activities could increase ECE teachers' use of planning time and PD, as well as promote positive mental health, workforce retention, and reduce stress.^{lix}

Other work environment standards, such as the right to organize unions or protections for staff who report violations, can also increase workforce well-being, retention, and feelings of safety and agency.^{lx} Establishing protections for staff who report violations may increase the likelihood that staff report incidents, which would make programs safer for both children and staff. When establishing standards, states may consider whether standards would apply to center-based programs, home-based programs, or both, and the accompanying infrastructure that would need to be in place for each setting type to comply. For example, a home-based program may need coverage to comply with standards for PD (e.g., via a substitute),

⁶ State data is not available.

⁷ State data is not available.

⁸ State data is not available.

⁹ State data is not available.

while a center-based program may be able to find coverage in-house. States may also need to consider who is best suited to develop and implement these standards (e.g., QRIS, licensing, a non-government organization).^{lxi}

Further reading:

[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020](#)

State support systems

This section provides an overview of various state-wide systems that could support the infant and toddler workforce, including workforce registries, recognition systems, substitute teacher strategies, and shared services alliances.

Workforce registry

Workforce registries track the qualifications and PD of the ECE workforce. They function differently between states, but workforce registries typically maintain a centralized record of employment, education, and training.^{lxii} **As of 2022, 42 states have a workforce registry.**^{lxiii} Registries can be administered by state governments, universities, non-profit organizations, or other entities, and can set mandatory or voluntary participation requirements for providers.

Workforce registries enable states to understand the ECE workforce's qualifications, PD, and education. States can use data from workforce registries to inform policy decisions, provide targeted support to the workforce, and inform research.^{lxiv} Either a state government, university, non-profit, or other entity would need to administer the registry and regularly collaborate with ECE providers across the state to maintain up-to-date information.

Further reading:

[Workforce Registries from the National Workforce Registry Alliance](#)

[South Carolina's Center for Child Care Career Development](#)

State examples

[South Carolina](#) is currently developing a workforce registry administered by the Department of Social Services. Participation in the workforce registry will be mandatory for all ECE staff working in licensed programs. On the other hand, [Idaho's](#) registry is voluntary and is administered by the University of Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development. While most workforce registries are free for ECE providers, [Wisconsin's](#) registry has a fee for initial enrollment (\$50) and for each annual renewal (\$25). Wisconsin's registry is run by a nonprofit organization and is mandatory for all staff working in licensed programs.

Recognition systems

Some states recognize and reward participation in PD through existing systems (such as credentialing, pathways, or career ladders) by offering financial incentives, staff spotlights, or other means of recognition. The primary way that states currently recognize educators for completing PD or trainings is through monetary rewards.

States have used recognition systems to incentivize providers to stay in the workforce and continue to participate in professional growth opportunities.

Further reading:

[Idaho's Professional Development System](#)

[Vermont's Blue-Ribbon Commission on Financing High-Quality, Affordable Child Care - Final Report](#)

State examples

In [Idaho](#), ECE providers can apply for Professional Development System (PDS) annual recognition once they have completed 20 or more hours of PD during their PDS registry cycle. College credits, workshops run by the state's QRIS, and targeted technical assistance all count toward recognition. There are six levels to the PDS annual recognition, and each is associated with a monetary award from 100 to 600 dollars.

In [Vermont](#), PD is currently recognized/rewarded through a career ladder, but the state's 2016 commission on high-quality child care suggested another tactic to further support ECE professionals. In the report, a government commission recommended "establishing a range of 'Outstanding Early Childhood Professional' recognitions that are substantial enough to incentivize providers to enter and stay in the workforce."

Substitute teachers

Educators may be absent on short notice for a variety of reasons, causing programs to search for substitute teachers on a tight timeline.^{lxv} Ideally, programs would have an extra staff member on hand to fill in when there are absences (in order to promote the continuity of care), but this may not be a financially feasible option for all providers. Various state and local initiatives have attempted to make the substitute process less arduous for providers.

Substitute pools are one strategy; they provide a pool of qualified substitute teachers from which child care programs can draw upon when needed.^{lxvi} Another common strategy is hiring "floaters," or permanent substitutes. In this approach, the floater is a teacher who works in more than one classroom within the same program on a regular basis. They can fill various roles in a program, including serving as the lead teacher or being more of a support staff member.^{lxvii} Another method to increase access to substitutes is streamlining the background check process, which is notoriously one of the most difficult aspects of hiring substitute teachers.^{lxviii}

State examples

[Washington state](#) has a formal and widespread substitute pool initiative implemented by The Imagine Institute, a family child care provider-founded organization that partners with the Department of Children and Families (DCYF). All licensed and emergency-licensed providers in Washington can access substitute teachers through the pool at no cost if they meet the eligibility requirements; providers simply complete an online form to request a substitute.

[Colorado](#) passed a bill in 2018 that created a new license for agencies that place substitute teachers at child care programs. The legislation requires that agencies conduct background checks for the substitutes they place, which was a responsibility that previously fell on ECE programs. While the bill did not create substitute pools, advocates of the policy argued that it would clear the way for groups (like the state's early childhood councils) to establish local pools.

Staffing concerns are a longstanding problem in ECE and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.^{lxix} Facilitating access to reliable substitutes may allow the ECE workforce to engage in various

activities (e.g., time off, PD, training) without closing their program. A 2002 study in North Carolina’s Smart Start counties explored various substitute teacher initiatives, such as substitute pools, hiring floaters, and reimbursing the costs of hiring a substitute.^{lxx} Among those three options, the study found that substitute pools were the most costly. The authors of the North Carolina paper suggest that, regardless of the substitute model implemented, the best option is one that “thoroughly supports high quality care, appropriate compensation, and ties priority usage to [ECE] programs supporting professional development.”^{lxxi}

Further reading:

[Washington’s Substitute Pool Program](#)

[Article about Colorado’s Bill Related to Substitute Pools](#)

[Analysis of Substitute Options in North Carolina’s Smart Start Counties](#)

Shared services alliance

Shared services alliances allow ECE programs to address collective needs by accessing goods or services at a group rate, which is typically lower than individual rates.^{lxxii} These models can be implemented for a wide array of services and may relate to a few strategies discussed earlier in this document (e.g., employee benefits, PD, or training) as well as other elements of successful ECE programming (e.g., administrative tasks).

Shared services can have economic benefits, support stability for small ECE programs, support improved service delivery, and allow for increased efficiency (see the partnerships for coordinated or improved service delivery section for one approach to implementing a shared services alliance).^{lxxiii} Shared services are a common strategy for reducing high costs for ECE providers, particularly those that are operating a small home-based program. Challenges associated with sharing services could include difficulty coming to an agreement about types of services to share, applicability to a variety of program types and needs, and the need for one organization or department to manage the service.^{lxxiv}

Further reading:

[Guide to Starting a Shared Service Alliance](#)



Opportunities for workforce development

This section describes strategies to implement workforce development standards, with the goal of making PD more accessible to the ECE workforce and efficient across the ECE system.

Professional development opportunities designed for the infant and toddler workforce

Nationally, about 30 percent of infants and toddlers are cared for in home-based child care settings,^{lxxv} which typically serve multiple age groups. PD opportunities for the ECE workforce often focus on preschool- and elementary-age children in center-based settings, rather than infants and toddlers or mixed-age groups and home-based settings. **Twenty-nine states mentioned plans to improve PD opportunities for infant and toddler providers in their 2019 PDG B-5 applications.**^{lxxvi}

To support infant and toddler workforce expansion and development, it is important to ensure relevant PD is available and accessible. Mapping out the availability of infant and toddler PD content across academic institutions may help to identify gaps and opportunities.^{lxxvii} The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) suggests that high-quality PD includes an opportunity for providers to receive credit for coursework that can build towards a degree.^{lxxviii} Professional development or training programs that are offered at various times, available in multiple languages, and delivered through a variety of mechanisms (e.g., in-person, virtual) may reach a greater audience.

Further reading:

[Explanation of Challenges in Addressing Infant and Toddler Workforce PD Needs](#)

Staffed family child care networks

Staffed family child care networks (SFCCN) are organizations that offer home-based providers various quality improvement services and general support via a paid staff member who may be shared among multiple providers. The staff member may deliver services like TA, PD, and developmental screenings.^{lxxix} SFCCN may also provide opportunities for home-based child care providers to network with other home-based providers and offer support to one another. The networks can be managed in multiple ways (e.g., run by community, city, regional, or state organizations; funded publicly, privately, or both). Many CCR&Rs also offer network services. **According to the 2019-2021 state CCDF plans, 19 states used CCDF funding to support a staffed family child care network.**

Benefits and drawbacks of an SFCCN model vary depending on the support provided by the network. Research speaks to how SFCCN can effectively recruit, support, and retain home-based educators^{lxxx} and improve the quality of participating family child care programs.^{lxxxi} When designing and implementing a SFCCN, Zero to Three suggested considering the following: 1) incentives for providers to participate, 2)

State examples

A number of states identified infant and toddler specific PD opportunities in their 2019 PDG B-5 renewal applications. For example, [Connecticut](#) proposed developing an Infant-Toddler Toolkit to support providers serving infants and toddlers. [Oklahoma](#) proposed a PD plan to strengthen infant/toddler teacher competencies and conduct regional trainings focused on infant/toddler care.

State example

One state with a longstanding SFCCN is [Virginia](#). It is run by Infant Toddler Family Day Care, a nonprofit family child care network that is licensed by the state to recruit, screen, and train providers to work in home-based settings. The organization also provides PD opportunities and business support. Infant Toddler Family Day Care is part of Virginia's CCR&R.

inclusion of SFCCN staff in existing state PD systems, and 3) identification of a stable funding stream to sustain the SFCCN.^{lxxxii}

Further reading:

[Mapping the Family Child Care Network Landscape](#)

[SFCCN: A Research-Informed strategy for Supporting High-Quality Family Child Care](#)

[SFCCN: A Strategy to Enhance Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers](#)

[Issue Brief on Family Child Care Networks](#)

In-service coaching or mentoring

In-service coaching or mentoring for early childhood providers is a strategy to improve teacher practice and the overall quality of ECE programs.^{lxxxiii} Coaches and mentors trained to work with educators can serve multiple roles, including modeling best practices, directly helping to improve an educator's skills in the classroom, and providing feedback on other aspects of the job (e.g., interacting with families).^{lxxxiv} The purpose of coaching may vary based on program needs. Some may focus on overall program quality, while others may coach ECE educators in a particular skill.^{lxxxv}

In-service PD is a common strategy to improve the quality of ECE programs. **In their 2019 PDG B-5 applications, 12 states reported using in-service coaching and mentoring models**, including coaching based on classroom and child assessments like the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3 (ITERS-3) and Infant-Toddler Individual Growth and Development Indicators.^{lxxxvi}

One example of an in-service coaching strategy is partnership between home visitors and home-based providers. Home visiting programs typically target new parents/caregivers to promote positive parenting, home safety, and child health and development. In this strategy, home visiting curriculum would be broadened and adapted to fit the needs of home-based providers while delivering similarly helpful information on development and care of young children.^{lxxxvii}

Virtual coaching, which expanded in many communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic,^{lxxxviii, lxxxix} is another promising option for supporting educators through a coaching or mentoring practice. Coaches and mentors can modify strategies from in-person coaching for a virtual setting, including goal setting, observation and feedback, and modeling. Virtual coaching, even prior to the pandemic, was considered a very promising practice for reaching educators in rural areas where proximity to a coach was limiting their opportunities.^{xc}

In addition to improving practices and overall program quality, in-service coaching and mentoring typically allows ECE teachers to remain in the classroom while receiving support. This alleviates accessibility barriers to trainings such as finding time off, identifying a substitute, or travelling to another location. While coaching and mentoring models have been shown to be effective at improving teacher quality, they are costly to implement because they require one-on-one attention.^{xc, xcii} Across the ECE landscape, coaching models have been most commonly and formally implemented in Head Start and Early Head Start.^{xciii} If considering a coaching or mentoring model operated at the state level, the Head Start program model may provide more information about effective practices.

An article on partnerships between home visitors and home-based providers from the Urban Institute outlines four key considerations in expanding home visiting for this purpose:

1. Available home visiting services and funding for home visiting broadly are already limited.
2. Program eligibility is narrowly defined with very few programs serving home-based child care providers.
3. Home visiting and ECE systems typically operate in siloes.

4. Home visiting should complement but not duplicate efforts of existing quality improvement initiatives.^{xciv}

As noted above, virtual coaching may be a promising strategy for infant and toddler educators. While virtual coaching has been a quality improvement strategy for years, virtual coaching on a large scale is still an emerging practice. To implement it at a statewide level, the state could consider the capacity of coaches to navigate technological challenges (for both themselves and the educators they work with) and the challenges associated with shifting in-person strategies to a virtual environment.^{xcv} The state could also consider the potential benefits of virtual coaching relative to in-person coaching, including reduced travel time for coaches, which frees them up for their own training, more intentional planning time, and a potentially higher case load.^{xcvi}

Further reading:

[Preparing the PDG B-5 Renewal Application: Insights and Recommendations](#)

[Mentoring and Coaching: Distinctions in Practice](#)

[Introduction to Mentor Coaching from the Office of Head Start](#)

[Early Care and Education Coaching: A Closer Look at Coaching Models in Child Care and Head Start](#)

[Early Childhood Home Visiting and Home-Based Child Care Providers](#)

Cross-sector PD or training

Multiple sectors support infant and toddler development; young children may receive services from public or private ECE programs, early intervention services, healthcare providers, and more.^{xcvii}

Cross-sector PD opportunities reach across these sectors to ensure coordinated services and consistent information sharing.^{xcviii} Cross-sector PD could include supporting a single, cross-sector career pathways model, aligning state policies with national professional standards, facilitating trainings or PD opportunities with all stakeholders, and/or increasing data accessibility and coordination across ECE sectors.^{xcix} States may consider cross-sector PD on specific topics that often involve multiple parties, such as best practices for developmental screenings, referrals, and follow ups.^c The training that occurs through cross-sector PD may be provided through multiple agencies or individuals such as child care health consultants or fire department personnel.

Cross-sector PD aligns best practices across teams and can be more cost efficient than offering multiple PD opportunities.^{ci} Aligned PD can also decrease duplication and discrepancies across sectors. Promoting consistency in practices, as well as aligning best practices, can increase the quality of ECE and other early childhood services.^{cii} Cross-sector PD can also increase coordination and collaboration across professionals, which could benefit referral and follow-up processes as well as child transitions between programs. Referrals tend to have a higher success rate when the family trusts the provider connecting them to services, as well as the provider they will receive services from.^{ciii} To establish a cross-sector PD system, the state would need to identify opportunities to collaborate and align content across multiple sectors.

Further reading:

[Zero to Three Toolkit: Infants and Toddlers in the Policy Picture](#)

[NAEYC Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated CCEE PD Systems](#)

State example

The [Virginia](#) Cross-Sector Professional Development team “promotes planning, development, implementation and evaluation of professional development to ensure coordination of early childhood professional development in Virginia.” The team has a special focus on infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who experience additional risk factors such as socioeconomic disadvantages or linguistic differences.

Pathways to career growth

This section describes strategies to bolster pathways into the ECE workforce and expand the pool of qualified infant and toddler educators.

T.E.A.C.H. and other scholarship programs

The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Scholarship Program is a nationwide strategy to provide higher education scholarships to early childhood educators. **According to 2022 data, 22 states operate a T.E.A.C.H. Program.**^{civ} T.E.A.C.H. is a comprehensive program that covers costs for educators for expenses like Child Development Associate (CDA) assessment fees, tuition for associate and bachelor's degree programs in early childhood education, endorsements for a teaching license, teacher licensure renewal, and credits needed for WAGE\$ eligibility (see the wage supplements or financial incentives section for more information on WAGE\$). Eligibility requirements vary by state and by degree/credential pursued, but generally include criteria such as being employed at a licensed facility and working at least 30 hours per week.

Many states have award programs similar to T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. Education awards may reduce or eliminate the cost of pursuing a credential or degree and can cover the costs of expenses such as tuition, textbooks, and time off from work.^{cv} **In 2020, 46 states had some type of scholarship program** (including T.E.A.C.H.) for ECE educators to pursue their education.^{cvi}

Scholarships and education awards enhance access to educational advancement for populations that historically face barriers (e.g., time, expenses) to accessing higher education.^{cvi} McLean et al. (2021) suggest collecting data related to the scholarship program to identify disparities in access and evaluate whether the scholarship provides sufficient support. They also suggest that the following supports facilitate degree attainment: cohort models, flexible schedules, community-based classes, instruction that is specific to their role, and financial support for other costs (e.g., books, tuition).^{cvi}

Further reading:

[Maine's Zero to Three Workgroup: Proposed State Policy Options for Early Childhood Educator Compensation](#)

[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020: State Policies to Improve Early Childhood Educator Jobs](#)

Partnerships with higher education institutions

Partnerships between colleges or universities and the state can help tailor training and degree programs to meet the needs of ECE educators. These partnerships typically work to expand access to education for individuals seeking early childhood credentials/degrees. Partnerships often include features such as reduced tuition, free enrollment in classes or workshops, and increased flexibility for coursework to accommodate educators' schedules.^{cix} Some partnerships are more extensive and offer technical assistance, topic-specific workshops (e.g., infant and toddler development), and mentorship from field-based coaches. The funding mechanisms used to support partnerships vary by state. For example, some partnerships are initiated at the university level and are funded by the school, while others are funded through a variety of organizations and grants (e.g., PDG B-5).

State examples

Mississippi and Colorado have implemented successful partnerships with higher education institutions. [Mississippi's program](#), which is implemented by the University of Southern Mississippi, offers various trainings to ECE providers through a 40-hour certificate program. The focus of the training is building foundational knowledge to care for infants and toddlers with special needs. [Colorado](#) has implemented a free 'place-based' pilot bachelor's degree program that allows ECE educators to earn their BA at their place of work instead of having to travel to the university. Most program participants (70%) work in infant and toddler classrooms, so professors tailor the content of their program to the recipients.

Partnerships with higher education can help reduce turnover and improve classroom quality by increasing educators' level of education while allowing them to remain in the classroom.^{cx} Partnerships could promote equity by increasing access to higher education and may support higher quality practices by offering more relevant coursework.^{cx1}

Further reading:

[Mississippi's Higher Education Partnership](#)

[Colorado's Higher Education Partnership](#)

Apprenticeship programs

Apprenticeship programs are one strategy to facilitate entrance into the ECE workforce and increase the applicant pool for open ECE positions.^{cxii} Apprenticeships provide on-the-job training to individuals interested in an ECE career. These partnerships often involve incentives for the learner, such as reduced tuition, sponsored time for mentoring, and compensation increases. The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning outlines the following components of an apprenticeship:

1. Employer involvement,
2. Structured on-the-job learning,
3. Related instruction,
4. Rewards for skill gains, and
5. An industry recognized credential.^{cxiii}

We found no evidence of infant and toddler specific apprenticeship programs in our search, but, **as of 2023, 35 states have registered apprenticeship programs in place.**^{cxiv} During the summer of 2022, the Child Care Services Association (CCSA) T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center announced a pilot apprenticeship program in six states (Arkansas, Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) to begin in the fall of 2022.^{cxv} The program is designed to go hand in hand with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship and consists of mentorship and access to institutions of higher education. Apprentices in the program will work under the supervision of a mentor for at least one year or until they complete their credential/degree. Participants will complete 2,000 hours of on-the-job training, with pay increases along the way.^{cxvi} The lead organizations in each of the six states where the pilot is taking place will receive guidance and technical assistance from CCSA as they develop and implement their apprenticeship programs.

State example

[West Virginia's Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist \(ACDS\)](#) is the longest running ECE apprenticeship program in the country. It is a four-semester program consisting of 300 hours of instruction and 4,000 hours of on-the-job training. Each semester focuses on a different age group. Benefits of the program include raises (these vary by program) and the ability to apply coursework toward college credit.

Apprenticeship programs can reduce barriers (e.g., cost, time, access) to advancing in the ECE field while building a more qualified workforce.^{cxvii} This type of training also promotes knowledge-sharing among professionals. However, a successful apprenticeship program requires careful funding and implementation considerations. For example, the program design may consider the current workforce and the needs of underrepresented providers such as those who serve infants and toddlers and those in home-based settings.^{cxviii} Apprenticeship programs could also be considered alongside other ECE policies such as compensation reforms and investments to increase the supply of high-quality child care programs (see the compensation section).^{cxix} The apprentice-mentor relationship is based on strong coaching practices, so in order to be successful, programs must ensure effective methods are in place.^{cxx}

Further reading:

[The Bipartisan Policy Center's Brief on Apprenticeship Programs](#)

[Realizing the Promise of Early Educator Apprenticeships](#)

[Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program: A Pathway to Build Competencies and Pay](#)

[Early Childhood Education Apprenticeships: The Why, What, and How](#)



Compensation

The early childhood workforce is the foundation of the infant and toddler ECE system. As expectations for qualifications and competencies for the workforce have generally increased over recent years, commensurate strategies to address compensation¹⁰ have lagged behind, particularly for the infant and toddler workforce.^{cxxi} According to researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, infant and toddler educators typically earn between \$2,180 to \$8,375 less per year than their peers in other early childhood educator roles.^{cxxii} In addition to the salary disparity within the ECE field, there is also a major gap between early childhood educator salaries and those of kindergarten teachers. In 2019, the average early childhood educator's salary was \$11.65 per hour, compared to \$32.80 per hour for kindergarten teachers.^{cxxiii} Early childhood educators are also underinsured compared to teachers who work in the K-12 system; as of 2019, just 48 percent of the early educator workforce had any kind of health insurance.^{cxxiv} Higher compensation and improved benefits may increase interest in joining the workforce, increase retention rates, improve workforce well-being, and promote higher-quality experiences for children.^{cxxv}

The following sections consider several approaches for increasing workforce compensation, which could be implemented independently or in combination with one another.

Periodic or one-time supplements for financial relief

Periodic or one-time supplements for financial relief are common strategies used across the nation. They may be used strategically while longer-term approaches are in development or as an ongoing approach to supplement pay.

Wage supplements or financial incentives

Wage supplements and financial incentives are typically periodic or one-time financial relief strategies that seek to improve educator retention by supplementing ECE workforce salaries. **As of February 2022, there were 16 programs in 13 states providing wage supplements or financial incentives to early childhood educators.**^{cxxvi}

As of 2023, six states operated programs based on the Child Care WAGE\$ Initiative, an evidence-informed model developed by the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center in North Carolina.^{cxxvii} In the WAGE\$ model, eligible educators apply for pay supplements that are distributed once every six months. Educators must meet criteria to be eligible, such as staying in their current program for a certain amount of time and working there for at least 10 hours per week.^{cxxviii} The supplements increase with level of education.

Similarly, financial incentives are salary bonuses designed to encourage ECE professionals to maintain consistent employment in a child care program or motivate other types of growth associated with higher

State examples

North Carolina operates two incentive programs, [Child Care WAGE\\$](#) and [Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\\$](#). The AWARD\$ program supports full-time infant and toddler educators in North Carolina by offering education-based salary bonuses. AWARD\$ works alongside WAGE\$ to promote a more educated and stable infant and toddler educator workforce.

New Mexico and Nebraska implement retention strategies with an eye towards equity. For example, [New Mexico's ECECD Wage Supplemental Pay Program](#) offers an extra incentive to bilingual teachers. [Nebraska's WAGE\\$ program](#) has an eligibility requirement that states that educators must serve children who receive subsidy or have a plan to do so.

¹⁰ The term "compensation" is used to cover strategies that address pay, financial support, and/or benefits.

quality care (e.g., increased qualifications).^{cxxxix} Many incentive programs also have eligibility criteria such as a maximum salary cap, coursework completed in ECE, minimum hours worked per week, and amount of time worked at a given child care program.

Short-term financial relief initiatives like wage supplements and incentives can reduce teacher turnover.^{cxxx} Wage supplements or financial incentives can also encourage retention of specific groups by targeting priority populations (e.g., bilingual teachers, those serving children receiving subsidies). If the initiatives are tied to qualifications, they may also encourage educational advancement. While these strategies have been beneficial in various states, they can be expensive to implement and may not provide a consistent stream of income to the ECE workforce like some of the longer-term financial relief initiatives described in this section.

Further reading:

[Child Care WAGES Nebraska](#)

[New Mexico's ECECD Wage Supplement Pay Program](#)

Tax credits

Child care workforce tax credits are a yearly financial incentive distributed to individuals through the state income tax system. **Two states have recently offered tax credits:** Louisiana (ongoing) and Nebraska (2017-2021). Renewal for the Nebraska School Readiness Tax Credit Act was proposed during the 2022 legislative session, but the bill was indefinitely postponed for unclear reasons.^{cxxxix} Both state tax credits were designed on a sliding scale based on criteria such as Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) level and teacher qualifications, and were only available for some providers (e.g., those serving children receiving CCDF subsidy or working full-time).

Tax credits can encourage workforce retention and provide financial relief to the workforce. However, as with other short-term approaches to financial relief, tax credits may not offer an ongoing source of financial stability if they are only allocated once per year. A benefit of this compensation strategy is that tax credits can be designed in a way that does not impact income-based eligibility for other public benefit programs—other compensation approaches may not have this benefit.^{cxxxix} Implementing tax credits for the ECE workforce would require coordination across multiple state departments (e.g., the department with data related to eligibility criteria and the department handling tax refunds). Beyond financial relief and workforce retention, Louisiana hypothesized that their tax credit strategy would also improve program quality because they included criteria tied to QRIS rating level and teacher qualifications.^{cxxxix}

Further reading:

[Louisiana's Credit for Child Care Directors and Staff](#)

[Louisiana's Credit for Child Care Providers](#)

[Nebraska School Readiness Tax Credit Act Guidance](#)

Student loan relief

Education awards and grants are helpful for ECE workforce members who have not yet gone back to school, but they fail to address the needs of those who have already achieved additional degrees or credentials and have burdensome student debt. Student loan relief programs such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program often provide forgiveness for ECE educators at publicly funded programs (e.g., Head Start) or non-profit programs, overlooking the educators who work in the private sector.^{cxxxix} Some states

State example

In 2021, [Vermont](#) established the Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program, designed to provide annual payments (up to \$4,000) to those who received a degree in early childhood within the last five years. Individuals must apply for funding and meet various eligibility criteria.

have implemented student loan forgiveness programs for the early childhood workforce to overcome this barrier.

Student loan relief may be one way to reduce the burden of education costs for ECE workforce members who have already obtained a degree and bolster workforce recruitment and retention.^{cxxxv} As with other subsidies for education, providing loan relief would be costly and requires a stable funding stream.

Further reading:

[Vermont's Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program Information](#)

[Colorado's Educator Loan Forgiveness Program](#)

Long-term and ongoing compensation strategies

This section describes long-term and ongoing approaches to compensating the ECE workforce. We touch on topics such as salary/wage increases and standards for workforce benefits.

State minimum wage and benefits

Minimum wage and state-provided benefits ensure a basic level of compensation for employees. **As of 2022, 31 states have a minimum wage higher than federal standards** (\$7.25 per hour); most of these (25 states) have a minimum wage of \$10.00 per hour or greater.^{cxxxvi} However, minimum wage does not necessarily ensure that people are paid a living wage in their respective state. Similarly, federal laws such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) do not guarantee that individuals have access to sufficient health care and leave policies.^{cxxxvii} Some states, however, have systems in place that facilitate access to these programs.

Adjusting state minimum wage and benefits to ensure they set a livable standard can put the state on a path towards improving compensation for ECE providers, as well as that of families who use ECE. Higher wages and better benefits can result in increased quality of life, including greater access to essential resources and supports, such as food, housing, and health care.^{cxxxviii} In addition, a higher state minimum wage could potentially improve pay parity among early educators by establishing a higher minimum level of compensation. Still, a minimum wage is not always a living wage (i.e., income needed to meet basic needs).^{cxxxix} While some cities have increased their minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour or greater, in 2021, researchers estimated that a true living wage that could support housing and food security would be between \$20.00 and \$26.00 for an adult with one child, depending on the state.^{11cxl} If the state established a higher minimum wage, ECE programs would need to pay staff more, increasing the cost of child care for families and the state.^{cxli}

State example

The [District of Columbia](#) runs a health insurance marketplace called DC Health Link which operates the Health Care for Child Care program (HC4CC). The platform was created in the wake of the ACA to help DC residents get better access to affordable and quality health care by offering resources and information targeted towards families, small businesses, and employees. All early childhood educators and people working within early childhood programs are eligible to receive health care free of cost through the HC4CC program, which began in 2022.

Further reading:

[Prenatal-to-3 State Minimum Wage Resource](#)

[Article on a True Living Wage from Drexel University](#)

[Bipartisan Policy Center blog on minimum wage increase impact on CCEE workers](#)

¹¹ These estimates assume that the individual is working full time. They do not include income needed to set aside money for retirement/savings or engaging in any other non-essential activities (e.g., occasionally eating out, streaming services).

Pay parity policies

Pay parity policies align compensation between ECE and K-12 educators based on qualifications and experience. These policies are most often relevant to providers receiving some public funding (e.g., state pre-K funds) and include one or a combination of the following components: starting salary, salary schedule, and benefits (e.g., healthcare). **According to the 2019 CSCCE, 27 states had implemented a pay parity policy for at least some staff working in state pre-K settings.**^{cxliii} Even though infant and toddler teachers are, on average, paid even less than other ECE professionals, the CSCCE did not identify any states that had addressed pay parity for the infant and toddler workforce. Since this report was published, however, DC has developed a plan to implement a pay parity approach for infant and toddler teachers.

Pay parity policies may increase interest in joining the ECE workforce, improve retention rates, and advance overall workforce well-being.^{cxliii} As with other long-term compensation strategies, pay parity offers a more stable source of ongoing financial support than short-term or periodic lump sum strategies. States with pay parity strategies vary in the extent to which they cover benefits beyond compensation. To include components such as health care and time off, the state government may want to consider the partners needed to implement the strategy successfully (e.g., the same healthcare provider that public schools use or a separate entity). There are also fundamental infrastructure differences between ECE and K-12 programs (e.g., hours worked, qualifications, experience, availability of substitutes), which would need to be considered when developing a plan to achieve alignment.

Further reading:

[Alabama's Approach to Pay Parity](#)

State example

In 2018, the [District of Columbia passed the Birth to Three Act](#), establishing what is known as the Pay Equity Fund. This fund is being used to [increase salaries](#) of assistant and lead teachers to a level commensurate with kindergarten teachers. Initial payments went out as one-time supplements while the District set up systems to provide more fluid increases directly into teacher salaries.

Suggested citation: Harris, P., Pines, A., & Diamond, Z. (2023). Selected state approaches to support infant and toddler care and education. *Child Trends*. <https://doi.org/10.56417/4368a6142a>

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