

Strengthening workforce data to support quality: State spotlight on Oregon



Why is workforce data so important?

There are about 2 million¹ early care and education providers in the United States, caring more than 12 million children age 5 and under.² They may be working in child care centers or in a home setting, but regardless of the venue, their work is incredibly important. Young children grow and learn at an amazing rate during the first 5 years,³ and responsive relationships⁴ with daily caretakers play a significant role in fostering their development. In addition to nurturing growth, working parents need their young children to have reliable care that is safe and fun, creating meaningful and educational experiences.

These early care and education professionals face a variety of challenges, particularly around low wages.⁵ As state policies promote, and parents demand, high-quality child care,⁶ states must better understand both the strengths and needs of its early care and education workforce. In 2016, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment launched its biennial Early Childhood Workforce Index⁷ to describe the early childhood workforce conditions and policies in states. Oregon was one of only 19 states rated in the highest tier (“making headway”) on the index’s four workforce data indicators: 1) has a formal data collection mechanism, 2) includes compensation data, 3) reports data publicly, and 4) comprehensive (i.e., includes all child care settings). Their success can be a model for other states.

“Early educators’ skills, knowledge, and well-being are inseparable from the quality of children’s early learning experiences.”⁷

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Oregon’s efforts with workforce data

The Early Childhood Workforce Index identifies several strengths for Oregon’s workforce policies, including legislation to support wage parity for preschool teachers with kindergarten teachers to increase wages in recent years.⁸ The state also has a strong data infrastructure, with a comprehensive process for collecting workforce data that includes information on staff wages and produces publicly available workforce reports. This case study tells the story behind Oregon’s recent workforce data developments and describes the different ways they are using their workforce data to strengthen their early care and education workforce.

What is ORO?

The [Oregon Registry Database \(ORO\)](https://my.oregonregistryonline.org/) captures data on training and education of the early care and education workforce.

Oregon created a workforce registry, known in the state as ORO (<https://my.oregonregistryonline.org/>) to assist professionals as they plan and track their own professional growth as well as guide policy and practice improvements for the state’s early care and education workers.

ORO was designed through a partnership with the Early Learning Division⁹ (a collective organized by the governor to support the state’s educational goals) and the Oregon Center for Career Development in Child Care and Education at Portland State University.¹⁰

What is Oregon learning from its workforce data?

Oregon's original vision was to use the ORO to "insure that our childhood care and education workforce be motivated, be strong, and be informed."¹¹ State leaders plan to use workforce data specifically to improve professional development opportunities and construct better policies and practices to support its early childhood workforce.

Specifically, Oregon is using its data to ask:

- Are professional development opportunities utilized in an equitable manner? For example, are there certain groups who are not taking advantage of opportunities, particularly for providers who serve children with high needs? Does the percentage of trainings offered in other languages match the languages spoken by providers?
- What role does the workforce play in the quality of early care and education programs in the state?
- Are there communities where disparities in quality exist that could be better supported through workforce supports?

To achieve their goals, data from ORO are used in monthly reports¹² to support the ongoing work of state agencies and policymakers. These reports provide county-level data on registry applicants, education awards, and the race and ethnicity breakdown of the workforce. Knowing more about the population utilizing the opportunities allows the agency to make sure that the opportunities meet the needs and demands of that population to help the state meet its goal of supporting the workforce in receiving associate degrees.

Additionally, several larger reports¹² on Oregon's early care and education workforce have been released, providing more information to improve policy and practice decisions. The state's 2016 report¹³ examines the characteristics of the workforce 2 years beyond its inaugural baseline report,¹⁴ describing characteristics of the workforce as well as predictors of participation in professional development initiatives. These larger reports have been used to support the efforts of policymakers, including bolstering work that includes a \$100 million dollar investment in early childhood in the last legislative session.

With ORO, Oregon can:

- Streamline information about the education and training of the workforce
- Update the process for verification of training and education while preserving integrity
- Allow leaders to present the needs of the field clearly and precisely

Strategies for the field

- **Engage state policymakers and the early care and education community** to improve access to accurate and comprehensive early care and education workforce data
- **Identify critical questions that policymakers need answered** about the early childhood workforce to guide decisions on investments and policies.
- **Strengthen the workforce data infrastructures and governance** across agencies and programs that gather information needed to maximize investments in early care and education.
- **Support the staffing and resources** needed to translate workforce data into actionable public reports.

Endnotes

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