



Higher Education and Early Childhood

Helping our early education workforce attain degrees is essential. The groundbreaking 2015 report from the National Institutes of Medicine, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, goes as far as saying that bachelor's degrees should be the goal.

The national Power to the Profession project lays out the situation quite starkly, noting that the wide range of professional preparation programs vary in quality and lead to many different national and state credentials. This lack of coherence makes it challenging to measure program effectiveness. The report also notes that most child care training is not credit-bearing or aligned with higher education programs, giving educators little help to build their formal educational credentials.¹

The majority of the early childhood professionals nationally do not hold bachelor's degrees. As of 2016, 52% of center-based early educators nationwide have a postsecondary degree, but only 35% of these are bachelor's degrees. Thirty-one percent of licensed family child care early educators hold a postsecondary degree; only 17% of these are bachelor's degrees.² While Minnesota-specific data are not available, these percentages are likely lower in rural areas with fewer educational opportunities.

Additionally, a smaller percentage of African-American, American Indian, and Hispanic Minnesotans are enrolled in high education programs in general. These communities have lower levels of degree attainment than their white or Asian counterparts.³ This disparity has not been explicitly measured in early childhood degree programs but is likely to be similar.

Minnesota's higher education landscape for early childhood includes over twenty institutions in every region of the state offering a wide range of diploma, credential, and degree programs. Several programs are entirely online. However, programs throughout Minnesota face problems with low enrollment, aging faculty, and a lack of institutional support. A recent survey of **Minnesota's early childhood higher education faculty** found that:

- 30% plan to change careers or retire in the next 3-5 years.
- 25% are uncertain if their higher education program will remain open.
- 21% did not believe they were fairly compensated for their work.
- Only 12.5% believe their faculty reflect their students' racial and linguistic diversity.
- Many feel unsupported by their institutions of higher education.⁴



Nationally, higher education programs are also struggling.

- Almost two-thirds of higher education programs have experienced a decrease in student enrollment.
- Over one-third of programs have seen a decrease in ECE candidates graduating.
- 30% of programs have experienced budget cuts.
- 18% of programs have experienced faculty and staff cuts.
- 2% of programs have closed during the pandemic.⁵

Additionally, higher education leaders are under pressure to prepare graduates for living-wage careers. However, early childhood educators are among the lowest-paid college graduates and early education programs tend to hold the lowest status within higher education institutes.⁶

Nationally, in 2016, early childhood educators with a bachelor's degree earned an hourly average of \$14.80 in non-public settings. While this was a significant increase over the average hourly wage of child care workers without advanced education (\$8.70), it was far below the hourly wages of school-based prekindergarten teachers (\$20) or kindergarten teachers (\$25). In addition, only 15% of these early educators had employer-sponsored health insurance.⁷

We will be working with partners during the 2022 Legislative session and beyond to explore how we can better support the higher education system in Minnesota to address these challenges so that our early educators can pursue their higher education goals. While we have developed scholarship programs, such as T.E.A.C.H., that help defray the cost of degrees, these programs do little to improve the early education higher education system itself, and do not address the inadequate compensation for graduates of early education programs.

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¹ Power to the Profession. A Unifying Framework for the Early Education Profession. March 2020. Accessed on 2/17/22 from <https://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Power-to-Profession-Framework-03312020-web.pdf>

² Whitebook, Marcy, et al. Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2016 (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2016. Accessed on 2/17/22 from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2016-index/>

³ Minnesota Compass. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Higher Education. Accessed on 2/17/22 from <https://www.mncompass.org/data-insights/articles/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-higher-education>

⁴ Voller, Vanessa. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota. Survey of Early Childhood Faculty at Minnesota's Institutes of Higher Education. Accessed on 1/28/22 at <https://ecworkforcemn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Results-Survey-of-Early-Childhood-Faculty-at-Minnesotas-Institutes-of-Higher-Education.pdf>

⁵ National Association for the Education of Young Children. Preparing a Profession: Perspectives of Higher Education Leaders on the Future of the Early Childhood Education Workforce. Fall 2021. Accessed on 1/28/22 from https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/higher-ed/final_higher_ed_leadership_report.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Whitebook, 2016.