EDUCATION LEADERS REPORT

Volume 4, no. 1

January 2018

The Role of State Boards in Improving Early Childhood Education

BY WINONA HAO

NASBE | National Association of State Boards of Education

Table of Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Winona Hao leads NASBE's work on early learning and oversees the ECE State Network. She is also author of "Advancing the Early Learning Workforce through State Policies," *Policy Update* 23, no. 25 (December 2016).

NASBE gratefully acknowledges the Foundation for Child Development for their support, which made possible the creation of this report.

Education Leaders Reports are published by the National Association of State Boards of Education, 333 John Carlyle Street, Suite 530, Alexandria, VA 22314 •703.684.4000 • www.nasbe.org. Kristen Amundson, president and CEO. Valerie Norville, editorial director. The opinions and views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of NASBE, its members, or its sponsors.

Cover illustration: CreativeArchetype/iStockphoto.

The Role of State Boards in Improving Early Childhood Education

By Winona Hao

Recognizing the importance of early childhood education (ECE), federal and state governments have been investing billions of dollars to serve the nation's youngest children.[1] Forty-three states and the District of Columbia provide state-funded preschool, serving nearly 1.5 million children—32 percent of the nation's four-year-olds and 5 percent of three-year-olds.[2] Yet many children still enter elementary school unprepared, and their K-12 schooling largely fails to close those initial gaps. Increasing children's access to preschool is important but insufficient: Even those who attend preschool face vastly uneven quality in programs and in the preparation of the teachers and leaders who serve them.

State boards of education have authority endowed by state constitutions and statutes to position them as key players in improving early education, yet by and large they don't know it. Neither does the early education field. The whole ECE system suffers as a result. Researchers and advocates might be pursuing the wrong policymakers, and state board members might be reticent about participating in state initiatives and conversations. Consequently, opportunities to promote high-quality ECE for all children are aborted or delayed.

A comprehensive scan of state boards' roles in ECE reveals that they have authority in child care program standards, state early childhood standards and guidelines, kindergarten entry assessment, workforce development of teachers and leaders, and financing. Among all the areas, workforce development may be the most significant because of boards' ability to set policies for licensure structure and requirements, educator preparation programs, educator career pathways and professional development, and educator evaluation. And they have significantly more authority in state-funded prekindergarten programs than they have in child care settings.

State boards can support ECE in private and public settings. But they first need a firm grasp of the ECE landscape, their ECE-related authority, and the roles of other players with whom they can collaborate to develop and pass effective policies.

CHALLENGES IN EARLY EDUCATION

Families and businesses in the United States rely on K-12 education to prepare children for college, careers, and success in life, and ECE directly affects college and career readiness. Research found that by age 5, children from economically disadvantaged families have heard 30 million fewer words than their peers in middle- and upper-class families (box 1).

This gap relates directly to gaps in early literacy skills. A 2012 Brookings Institution study estimated that more than half of the children from families living in poverty show up to school unprepared, lacking early math and reading skills, social and emotional skills, or physical well-being necessary to be ready to learn.[3] Because the 30 million word gap appears during critical periods of neurological and cognitive development, its effects are not easily remedied by later interventions. These disadvantages persist into adulthood.[4]

Proactive investment in the quality of early childhood programs will be more effective and economically efficient than trying to close the gap later. Ironically, many of those who agree about the benefits of investing in education generally remain skeptical about the need for more investment in improving ECE. If arguing that 90 percent of brain development occurs during the first five years of life is not enough, but perhaps arguments about return on investment could be persuasive. Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman and his team, who followed a group of children from birth until age 35, found that high-quality birth-to-5 programs for disadvantaged children yielded a 13 percent annual return through better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment in adulthood.[5] Another study found a $17 return for every dollar invested in early education (box 2).[6]

The changing demographic composition of American young children only increases the imperative for addressing shortfalls in early education (figure 1). Between 2000 and 2010, the number of Latino children grew by 4.8 million as the number of white children declined by 4.3 million.[7] By 2020, more than half of the nation's children are expected to be part of a minority race or ethnic group, and by 2050 the number will rise to 62 percent. While the child population as a whole is becoming more diverse, Latino and black children continue to live in neighborhoods that are not.[8]

These changes signal challenges for policymakers and educators. While educators themselves remain overwhelmingly white, they will be dealing with more dual language learners, more children from cultural backgrounds different from their teachers, and more students living in poverty, as higher concentrations are typically found among racial and ethnic minority families.[9] These challenges underscore the need for state policies to support high-quality early education to help all children learn and thrive. The ECE workforce requires increasing support to address the unique

cultures and diverse backgrounds of their students and employ effective strategies in dual language learning.

Early childhood education is a complex, fragmented system, driven by multiple funding streams and governing entities. Consequently, children from birth to age 8 attend ECE programs in many settings and at various levels (figure 2). There are multiple sets of standards and requirements, which has made it hard to achieve coherence and failed to advance the workforce as a whole. Typically, families do not know what credentials to expect in an early educator. Only one-third of preschool teachers in centers or public schools hold bachelor's degrees. Most young children thus end up with teachers who lack degrees or training in early learning.

Current state policies are not adequate to support high-quality ECE. Yet there are many opportunities for state boards to improve ECE policy in their states. This report discusses the ongoing and potential work in several areas of state board authority: child care, Head Start, ECE standards and guidelines, assessment, teacher workforce, leader workforce, and financing. These areas range from those in which few state boards have authority (e.g., child care) to those where many have a fair bit of leverage (e.g., teacher licensure and qualifications).

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Traditionally, state child care programs in formal and informal settings fall under the purview of states' health and human services, social services, or children and families departments. In some states, a stand-alone department oversees all child care and preschool programs, such as Connecticut's Department of Early Childhood and Washington's Department of Early Learning. Since child care programs are usually not housed in state education agencies, state boards of education typically do not have authority over child care programs. The exceptions are in Iowa, Louisiana, and North Carolina.

In terms of licensure, Iowa requires school-operated child care programs to either meet the licensing requirements of the Iowa Department of Human Services or the standards for child care programs adopted by the state board of education.[10]

The Louisiana Department of Education maintains jurisdiction over the establishment of licensure, and the state board of education establishes statewide minimum standards for the health, safety, and well-being of children in early learning centers, ensures maintenance of these standards, and regulates conditions in consonance with the department's licensure program.[11]

In North Carolina, licensed administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants in nonpublic and public schools participate in professional development consistent with state board of education policy. Educators in nonpublic school settings who are working toward pre-K qualifications participate in a minimum of six documented semester hours per year.[12]

HEAD START

Head Start programs since 1965 have been providing grants directly from the federal government to local providers, bypassing the state education agency. Nonetheless, as state-funded pre-K programs have grown in recent years, so have the state's roles in overseeing the administration of federal programs.

Under ESSA, each local education agency (LEA) receiving Title I funds is to "develop agreements" with Head Start agencies and, if feasible, other early childhood education entities, which gives state boards an entree in supporting local coordination. They can issue guidance to LEAs on how to make such coordination fruitful. The guidance could cover the state's early childhood and K-12 policies and programs, especially its preschool policies, and the status and ongoing administration of federal early childhood initiatives and grants, such as Preschool Development Grants, Early Learning Challenge grants, or Comprehensive Literacy Grants. The guidance could discuss timelines for LEA adoption of coordination agreements, minimum requirements for agreements, technical assistance, and a sample agreement.

The state board may also want to formalize and standardize the process through a pol-

[BOX 1]

The 30 Million Word Gap

In 1995, psychologists Betty Hart and Todd Risley conducted research on conversations between parents and children at home. They tracked 42 families for three years to obtain samples of the actual number of words parents spoke to their children. The research subjects comprised 13 high-income families, 10 middle-class families, 13 families of lower income, and 6 families on welfare. They found that children from high-income families were exposed to an average of 1,500 more spoken words per hour than children from lower income and welfare-receiving families. That translated to a nearly 8 million word gap in a year, which, by age 4, adds up to 32 million words. The study also found a large gap in tone and complexity of words used and a direct correlation between early verbal experiences and later academic achievement.[a]

[a] Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, 1995).

icy that outlines the timelines, minimum requirements, and monitoring. If it does so, it will seek feedback from state education agency staff, LEA and school leaders, state and local Head Start leaders, the state early learning advisory council, and early childhood and elementary school advocates.

EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have developed early learning standards or guidelines for children ages 3 to 5, and 45 states and the District of Columbia have guidelines for infants and toddlers. These guidelines lay foundations and set goals for what children ought to know and be able to do at each critical stage in their first years. Many states have been trying to align and integrate the guidelines into the state's broader early childhood education system, and many have worked to implement guidelines statewide. However, gaps remain.

Because the field defines early childhood education as serving children from birth to age 8, early education overlaps with K-12. Consequently, there are many standards or guidelines that state policymakers should consider aligning or integrating. For example, state policymakers should consider Head Start standards, kindergarten standards, and Common Core or other state K-12 learning standards during their standards revision process.

Sixteen state boards of education oversee state early learning standards.[13] Over the past decade, some boards have updated their standards twice. The revisions reflect new research, integrate ECE programs, and better align with state K-12 standards. The processes by which early learning standards are developed and reviewed contribute to their credibility and effectiveness. These processes should rely on appropriate expertise, stakeholder involvement, and regular evaluation and revision.

The Illinois State Board of Education drafted the Illinois Early Learning Standards in 2002 and amended them for rerelease in September 2013. Researchers and policy experts as well as key stakeholders from public and private schools, Head Start, colleges, and community-based early care and learning programs collaborated on the revision. The current Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS) align with the Illinois Kindergarten Standards and the Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten. In a statement, the Illinois state board said, "The IELDS are not a 'push-down' of the curriculum; rather, they are a developmentally appropriate set of goals and objectives for young children. Early learners must develop basic skills, understandings, and attitudes toward learning before they can be successful in the K-12 curriculum."

In Michigan, the state board approved the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten in March 2005 and revised them in March 2013.[14] In the most recent revision, the board aligned the standards with Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers, Head Start Performance Standards, Head Start Development and Early Learning Framework, and Michigan's state preK-3 longitudinal alignment data.

[BOX 2]

Perry Preschool at Age 40

Research on the Perry Preschool model program has long been foundational for understanding the long-term benefits of early education for children from disadvantaged families. Beginning in 1962, researchers began following 123 young African-American children living in poverty in Ypsilanti, Michigan, who were assessed to be at high risk of school failure. The researchers randomly assigned 58 of the children to High/Scope Perry Preschool, and the rest received no preschool. The program design included well-qualified teachers who served no more than eight children at a time, parent visits, and daily classes. Researchers have compared children who attended Perry with the comparison group at age 14, 15, 19, 27, and 40.

In 2004, the last report from this study found continuing positive long-term effects for those who had received high-quality early care and education.[a] Overall, the study documents a return to society of more than $17 for every dollar invested in the early care and education, primarily because of the large reduction in male crime. The study produced other major findings:

- More of the group who received high-quality early education than the nonprogram group were employed at age 40 (76 percent versus 62 percent).
- More of the preschool group, particularly females, graduated from high school than the nonprogram group.
- The preschool group had significantly fewer arrests than the nonprogram group (55 percent of the nonprogram group were arrested five times or more versus 36 percent of the preschool group).

a. M. Nores et al., "Updating the Economic Impacts of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 2, no. 3 (2005): 245–61.

State board members should ask many questions when ECE standards come up for revision:

- How was the process used when you developed the standards the first time? What were the weaknesses and strengths?
- Who was involved in the first development process? Who else should you involve during the revision?
- Who led the first development process?
- Who should lead the revision?
- How will stakeholders be involved in the revision? In what format?
- Are there any communications plans?
- What resources are available to support the revision process?
- Which content experts are available?
- What should be the timeframe of the revision process?
- How will the revised document be analyzed and reviewed?
- What is the communication strategy for disseminating updated standards?[15]

KINDERGARTEN ENTRY ASSESSMENTS

The kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) provides a snapshot of children's development. States are increasingly adopting KEA as part of their comprehensive assessment systems. Thirty-three states have developed policies and related resources regarding KEA, and the number of states with such assessments continues to rise.[16]

The federal Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant required its grantee states to develop a kindergarten entry assessment. There are many reasons for assessing young children: to determine appropriate instruction for an individual child, to screen for developmental delays, to ensure program accountability, to monitor the readiness of kindergarten children statewide, and to inform state-level decisions about policy and funding.

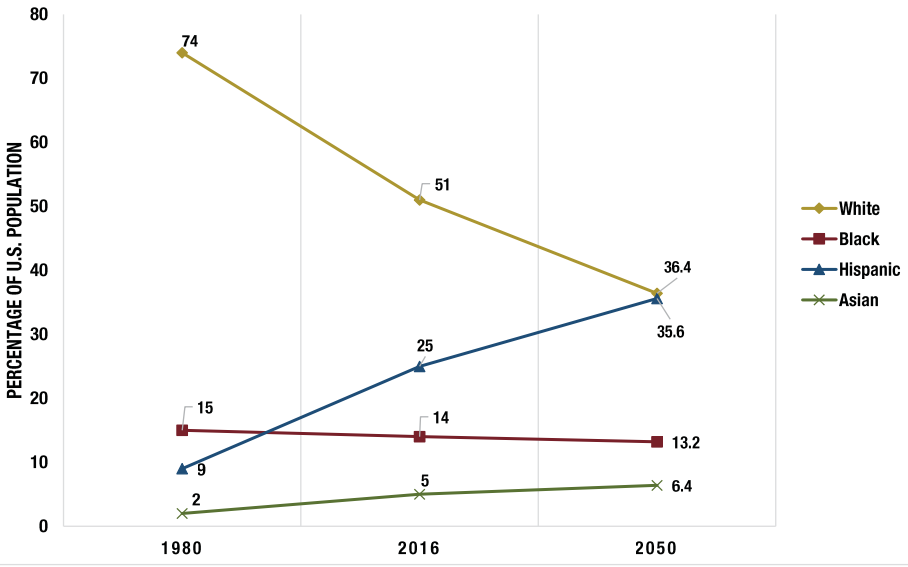
State boards in Colorado, Illinois, and North Carolina have the authority to approve state KEA and the assessment tools for their schools to use. State policymakers should take these steps as they adopt KEA: define "school readiness" to ensure that the measure accurately assesses key domains of development; determine how data from the KEA will be used (and who will be using the data) in advance of developing relevant policies and guidance; and then develop and implement state policies to support developmentally appropriate, valid, and useful KEA (a multistage, iterative process).

Colorado's bill, passed in 2008, charged the Colorado State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to collaborate in creating a seamless system of learning standards, expectations, and assessments from preschool through postsecondary education.[17] The state board and the department of education organized a school readiness assessment committee, with early childhood educators and experts from across Colorado, to advise on implementation of the school readiness initiative. In 2012, the state board voted to offer districts a menu of school readiness assessments, and the first kindergarten school readiness assessment review was conducted. The state board also approved the first assessment tool for the menu. At its October 2014 meeting, the state board voted to add three more assessments, and in the spring of 2017, it updated the menu.

Colorado's CAP4K (Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids) requires that all students in a publicly funded kindergarten be assessed using a state-approved school readiness assessment. The assessment informs individual school readiness plans for each child. Information gathered from the assessments supports instruction. It cannot be used to deny a student admission or progression to kindergarten or first grade.[18]

[FIGURE 1]

Percentages of U.S. Children Who Are Racial Minorities



Sources: 1. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), tables POP1 and POP3, **httpc://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp**. 2. Kids Count Data Center, Child Population by Race, **http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/line/103-child-population-by-race?loc=1&loct=1#1/any/false/870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35,18/asc/68,69,67,12,66,71/424.**

In North Carolina, state statute directs that "the State Board of Education shall ensure that every student entering kindergarten shall be administered a developmental screening of early language, literacy, and math skills within 30 days of enrollment…. The State Board of Education shall ensure that every student entering kindergarten shall complete a kindergarten entry assessment within 60 days of enrollment."[19]

Another law requires the state board to develop, adopt, and provide the assessment to local school administrative units. It is to be developmentally appropriate and individualized; assess students in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades; and it should be capable of assessing progress, diagnosing difficulties, and informing instruction and remediation needs.[20]

In response to Race to the Top, the state board and department of education in 2012 convened a K-3 Assessment Think Tank that included teachers, parents, scholars from seven North Carolina universities, and other stakeholders. The group reviewed scientific findings and best practices, and it solicited input from a wide array of stakeholders, including through a survey of over 2,500 teachers and consultation from over 60 scholars and education leaders. The group's resulting report laid the foundation for the NC K-3 Formative Assessment Process.[21]

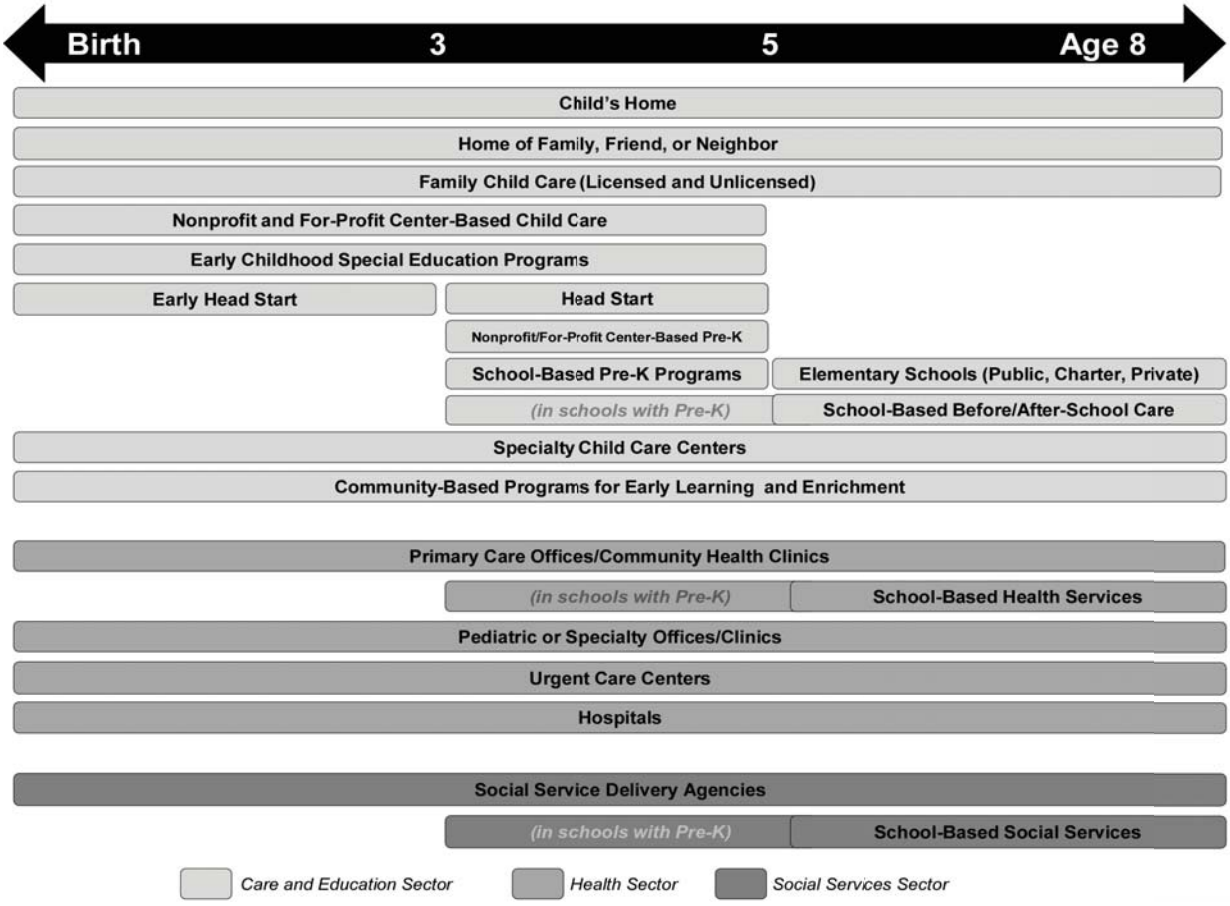
TEACHER WORKFORCE

Young children learn best from quality interactions with adults, so it's important to ensure effective policies are in place to support the development of this workforce. State boards play a significant role in qualifications and licensure, preparation programs, professional development, and compensation (map 1).

There are many obstacles to building a high-quality workforce: inadequate career advancement opportunities, lack of effective professional development, inconsistent policies and standards across different settings from birth to age 8, varied funding streams, low wages and benefits, and low public perceptions of teachers' skill sets.

[FIGURE 2]

Early Childhood Settings



Source: Reprinted with permission from *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Age 8: A Unifying Vision* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 2015), courtesy of the National Academies Press.

Qualifications and Licensure

Establishing core knowledge and competencies for early educators is a prerequisite for states that want to reexamine teacher licensure and certificates. In many states, there are few requirements to become an early childhood teacher. Among the 43 states and the District of Columbia with state-funded pre-K, only 23 require lead teachers to have a bachelor's degree. Outside state pre-K programs, only a few states require child development associate (CDA) credentials or vocational training.

Most states require only a high school diploma or nothing at all. This low bar jeopardizes development of a quality workforce, codifies old norms for what children should gain in early education, and deprives teachers of opportunities for professional development and compensation. The multiplicity of qualifications and certificates confuses administrators and teachers alike. Experts have been calling for lead teachers to have a bachelor's degree and specialized training in ECE and for assistant teachers to have a CDA or equivalent.

Since 2015, the ECE field has been championing a recommendation from a seminal report published by the Institutes of Medicine and the National Research Council suggesting that all lead teachers of children from birth to age 8 have at least a bachelor's degree. Yet less than half of educators working with children ages 3 to 5 in center-based settings and only 19 percent of those working with infants and toddlers have bachelor's degrees.[22]

This year, the District of Columbia stirred up a fierce debate when it announced that all workers in child care centers would need an associate's degree by 2020. Critics argued that college degrees are expensive, time-consuming, and may not improve teaching skills, even as they recognize the problems of abysmal wages and ECE teachers who quit for better-paying K-12 jobs once they attain degrees.[23] However, keeping the bar low for the ECE workforce only reinforces the notion that ECE teachers' main duties are giving hugs and kisses, wiping noses, and changing diapers, for which a college degree is not required. But if in fact the early years are the most critical for learning and skill building, as research suggests, then this notion is worth challenging.

The advancement of the ECE workforce will not happen overnight. Bachelor's degrees have been required in K-12 for decades. At a time when states are seeking a seamless transition for children from pre-K to kindergarten as well as across birth to age 8, policymakers should also consider how to make a seamless transition for the workforce that brings compensation and benefits in line.

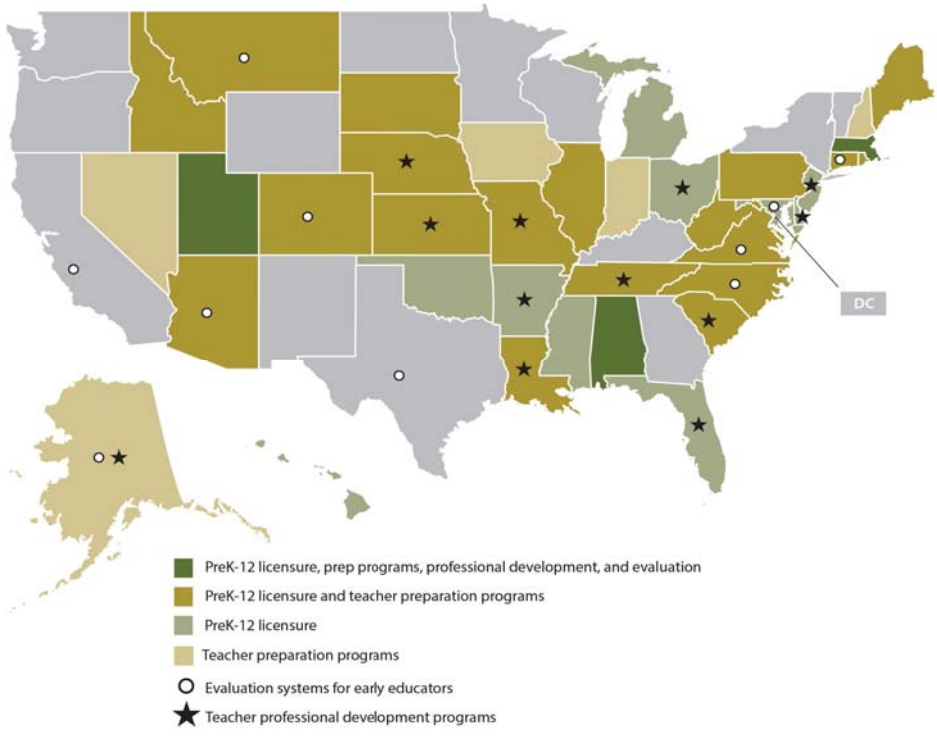
Thirty-two state boards of education have authority over preK-12 teacher licensure (map 1). It is critical to establish common language requirements for these certificates and to limit the number of certificates used within states. States also need to reconsider the stratification of their licenses because teaching young children requires a skill set different from that for teaching older children. Broad licenses, such as K-5 or K-6, may offer more flexibility for teacher placement but hinder the development of teacher preparation programs that train graduates for early learning grades.

Before they change policies affecting the workforce, however, state policymakers must understand what core competencies are needed and what resources they can provide to help educators attain those competencies and become highly qualified.

The Kansas State Board of Education requires all preschool teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree and complete an approved in-state educator preparation program. Preschool teachers in Kansas can choose birth through kindergarten or birth through third grade licenses. Regardless of the endorsement teachers choose, they

[MAP 1]

State Board Authority over Pre-K Teacher Workforce



need to major in early childhood education. In addition to coursework, teacher candidates need to complete a student teaching practicum.

The process of developing these requirements date back to 2004, when the Kansas state board joined NASBE's ECE Network. They convened multiple stakeholders to develop a common definition of school readiness, a single set of teaching standards, and readiness indicators for Head Start programs, childcare, and other public and private preschool programs. The early childhood group worked with a consortium of higher education institutions to shape preparation programs that align with the new early childhood unified license requirements.[24] Most recently, the state board has identified kindergarten readiness as an essential building block for future achievement and academic success. In 2016, the board approved prekindergarten (four-year-old at-risk) program standards.[25] This document reinforces qualifications teachers should have to teach in state-funded preschool programs (box 3).

Another member of NASBE's ECE Network, the Virginia State Board of Education, collaborated with key agencies and constituencies in 2007 to address the need for a high-quality workforce. The board first formed a working committee to tackle teacher competencies for preK-3 and preK-6 endorsements. They added research-based core competencies and proposed an add-on ECE endorsement to the elementary teacher license. The board adopted revised licensure regulations in 2007. Subsequently, the board convened stakeholders from two- and four-year institutions to discuss how to advance a coordinated system for earning a degree and obtaining teacher licensure. They also facilitated articulation agreements between teacher training institutions to create a career path for the early childhood workforce. Currently, there are three endorsements that teachers can attain if they want to teach in preschool settings: early childhood for three- and four-year-olds (add-on endorsement), early/primary education preK-3, and elementary education preK-6. However, only the preK-6 endorsement requires teachers to have a bachelor's degree.[26]

In NASBE's 2016–18 ECE network cohort, the New York Board of Regents is revisiting its core competencies and licensure structure. New York State offers a birth through grade 2 certificate and a childhood education certificate (grades 1 through 6). As part of its work in the NASBE network, the board plans to

[BOX 3]

Kansas's ECE Teacher Requirements

1. TEACHER REQUIREMENTS

Lead Teacher Qualifications:

a. State Pre-Kindergarten Program Requirement

Teaching staff for the State Pre-Kindergarten program must have a current teacher license and must have, at the minimum, a current Elementary Education license. A Kansas license in Early Childhood Education is recommended. KSDE encourages school districts to hire teachers who have one of the following:

- Early Childhood Unified, Birth to Grade 3 license
- Early Childhood Unified, Birth to Kindergarten license
- Early Childhood Education license
- Early Childhood Special Education (ECH) license
- Early Childhood endorsement with a license in Elementary Education.

Lead Teacher Accepted Qualifications:

- Elementary Education, K-6 or K-9

Assistant Teacher/Teacher Aide Qualifications:

b. It is strongly recommended that school districts employ paraprofessionals or aides who have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA certificate) or an A.A. in early childhood education or a related field. This teacher is considered to be a second teacher in the classroom and teaching under the supervision of the Lead Teacher.

Assistant Teacher Accepted Qualifications:

- Be a high school graduate, and complete an orientation session addressing confidentiality and the services to be provided in this program OR
  - have a high school diploma or a GED and complete 48 hours at an institution of higher education OR
  - obtain an associate's (or higher) degree OR
  - pass a State approved assessment that assesses the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics (or reading, writing, mathematics readiness).

review and recommend changes to the coursework required for its birth through second grade certificate and is considering aligning the birth–grade 2 certificate with its birth–grade 3 initiative. They will consider adding requirements for individuals who have earned the childhood teacher certification who are also seeking birth–grade 2 certification.

The board has established a blue-ribbon committee to review New York ECE policies and set priorities for workforce development. Board members hope that by the end of 2017 they can get recommendations from the committee to inform draft legislation they can present to the state legislature and the governor.

Preparation Programs

Most teacher preparation programs do not require students to study early language and literacy, despite the evidence of deficits in these skills among children living in poverty.[27] These programs are also lacking in other foundational areas, such as math and science. Furthermore, few courses focus on topics in diversity, such as working with dual language learners and understanding the race and culture of young learners.[28] In designing their programs, institutions of higher education usually take their cue from state licensure stratifications.

Too often, the wider the grade span a teacher license covers, the less the training for teaching the lower grades. Preparation programs tend to focus on topics more appropriate for teaching older children, with the result that many educators have poor training and coursework in early learning pedagogy and practices.

Twenty-eight state boards of education approve teacher preparation programs (map 1). States should consider narrowing the grade span or create a more focused licensure to allow higher education to develop programs designated for teaching young grades, such as preK-3 or birth to age 5. Allowing higher education to provide early childhood education as an add-on endorsement is also an option, but such endorsements should consist of more than a test.

"Too often, the wider the grade span a teacher license covers, the less the training for teaching the lower grades."

When states revise ECE licensure policies, they need feedback from higher education. States should also provide resources and support for higher education to make changes in their preparation programs. Such changes cannot happen overnight; states should develop a feasible timeline for providers to prepare, plan, and implement new programs.

Most recently, the Montana State Board of Education approved a request by Montana State University to add a preK-3 endorsement option to its undergraduate degree program for early childhood education and child services.[29] The endorsement will be required for all teachers in public preschool programs by July 1, 2018. The university also proposed for board consideration a new curriculum for its ECE and child services undergraduate program to better align it with the state's teacher standards. Moreover, Montana is planning to provide financial assistance to teachers working toward their preK-3 endorsements.

The Iowa State Board of Education oversees all 32 preservice teacher training programs in the state. They joined the NASBE Network in March 2017 to develop Iowa's early-literacy standard of care, which will define knowledge and pedagogical competencies for teachers who teach K-3. The board will be involved with the development of an in-service reading coaching project to ensure meaningful participation from Iowa's colleges and universities. The board will work with elementary teacher training programs to revise accreditation requirements.

Professional Development

Professional development gives teachers opportunities to meet the growing demands on the ECE workforce and provides teachers new information on early learning. Although professional learning is crucial for teacher growth, hardly any paid professional development is available for the ECE workforce, even for teachers in center and family care settings. States can examine the needs for professional development in different settings and allocate funding to provide job-embedded training. By providing such incentives, the early learning system could progress toward higher qualifications for teachers. When advancing professional development policies, guidance, and materials, states should also consider how to equip teachers with skills and knowledge to support dual language learners.

Although states usually leave the final decision to local and district administrators, state boards can play key roles in this area by defining high-quality, effective professional development to encompass time, frequency, intensity, and content, which can serve as a baseline for state and local agencies; promoting effective models; creating a career ladder; and collecting data on the effectiveness of teacher learning activities.[30]

State boards of education oversee teacher professional development programs in 15 states. In 2007, the Nebraska State Board of Education established core competencies for early education professionals and developed training modules on the competencies. They implemented a broad dissemination plan with the Early Childhood Training Center and Early Childhood Professional Development Partnerships and Regional Training coalitions, and they conducted training sessions for trainers.

This year, the Louisiana State Board of Education approved allocations to finance professionalization of the early learning workforce.[31] It decided to support the development of early childhood ancillary certificate programs to help teachers in early learning centers gain professional credentials. This program is part of a broader effort to unify workforce requirements in the state's early learning system.[32]

Evaluation

While it is not a prevailing practice, 13 state boards oversee evaluation systems for early educators (map 1). Colorado Senate Bill S. B. 10-191 would require the state to evaluate all licensed educators with state-approved quality and performance standards at least annually.[33] As a Race to the Top recipient, Colorado focused on its early learning and development system and built a unified approach to supporting young children and their families. Its Early Learning Challenge aims to make sure that more children, especially those with high needs, enter kindergarten ready to succeed. In accepting these funds, Colorado agreed to deliver better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful education and training for early educators. The evaluation was developed through a set of aligned elements: early learning development guidelines; Colorado competencies for early childhood educators and administrators; school readiness assessment and individual readiness plans for children in publicly funded preschool and kindergarten; and Colorado Shines, the next generation of Colorado's Quality Rating and Improvement System.

LEADER WORKFORCE

The qualifications for ECE leaders are just as important as those for ECE teachers, as those leaders oversee the quality of early learning experiences for children in various settings. ECE leaders often lead in selecting instructional content and professional learning for teachers, hiring, connecting stakeholders across the setting that they oversee, and providing teachers with resources for teaching. However, many ECE leaders lack the capacity to support high-quality instruction and services.[34]

"The qualifications for ECE leaders are just as important as those for ECE teachers, as those leaders oversee the quality of early learning experiences for children in various settings."

ECE leadership comprises child care center directors or program directors, family childcare owners, elementary school principals, and other supervisors and administrators. When child care center and program directors fail to enable their teachers to give children high-quality learning experiences, it is due to a lack of specialized training in ECE instructional leadership. The failure of principals from the elementary schools stems from the way they are prepared and recruited and, often, their lack of exposure to early childhood development research and instructional best practices for pre-K and primary grades.

For principals, states require a fair bit of education to obtain their licensure:[35]

- Forty states require elementary school principals to have a master's degree or higher.
- Five states and the District of Columbia require principals to have at least a bachelor's degree.
- Four states require coursework beyond a bachelor's degree.

However, most states offer only a general K-12 principal license or preK-12 principal license. Such licenses are insufficient preparation for leading early learning.

- Only nine states reported that they explicitly require principals to have coursework in early learning, child development, or both.
- Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia reported that they do not.
- Only three states—Alaska, Nebraska, and South Carolina—require principals to have teaching experience in the elementary grades.
- Twelve states do not even require teaching experience for principals.

In principal preparation programs, most states do require clinical experiences, but they do not need to be specific to elementary schools. Only ten states said they require elementary school principals to have clinical experiences specifically in elementary schools.

Only New Jersey, Vermont, and the District of Columbia require center directors to have a bachelor's degree for licensure. Seven states require an associate's degree for center directors. Forty-one states do not require center directors to have even an associate's degree.

In terms of teaching experience, 27 states allow people to become center directors without any work experience in child care. Most states do not require center directors to get a license. While 30 states and the District of Columbia offer director credentials for early childhood leaders, only four require center directors to obtain this credential for licensing.

State boards have the same types of authority over principals as they do teachers regarding qualifications and licensure, preparation programs, professional development, and evaluation (map 2).

- Twenty-four state boards determine principal licensure.
- Seven states retain state board authority in principal preparation.
- Twelve state boards oversee principal

professional development programs.

- Thirteen state boards oversee principal evaluation methods.

One of Nebraska's goals is to enhance its Principals Early Childhood Leadership Program by providing video-based trainings aligned with priorities the state board identifies for early childhood education. They are aiming to build the capacity of local administrators who oversee early childhood programs. In addition to identifying key areas for training, the board plans to conduct interviews, make classroom observations, and review environment rating scale scores in rural Nebraska.

FINANCING

ECE remains the most underfunded area in education. The average per student spending in K-12 during the 2015–16 school year was $12,509.[36] Yet after years of advocating for pre-K education, the per student spending increased to $4,976 in the 2015–16 school year.[37] This average masks wide variety in state funding of pre-K programs. In 2015–16, Washington, D.C., spent $15,748 per child, and Mississippi spent less than $2,000 per child. Six states have no state-funded pre-K—Idaho, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana.

Some states have been increasing funding. Programs in the District of Columbia, Florida, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin now serve more than 70 percent of their four-year-olds. State funding for preschool in California and Texas rose 8 percent in 2016 to about $7.4 billion, a $550 million increase driven mostly by additional spending.

Traditionally, funding for public ECE comes from the federal government, state government, and local communities. There are 12 federal programs that fund ECE. The most well-known are Head Start, Child Care and Development Block Grants, Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grants, and Preschool Development Grants.

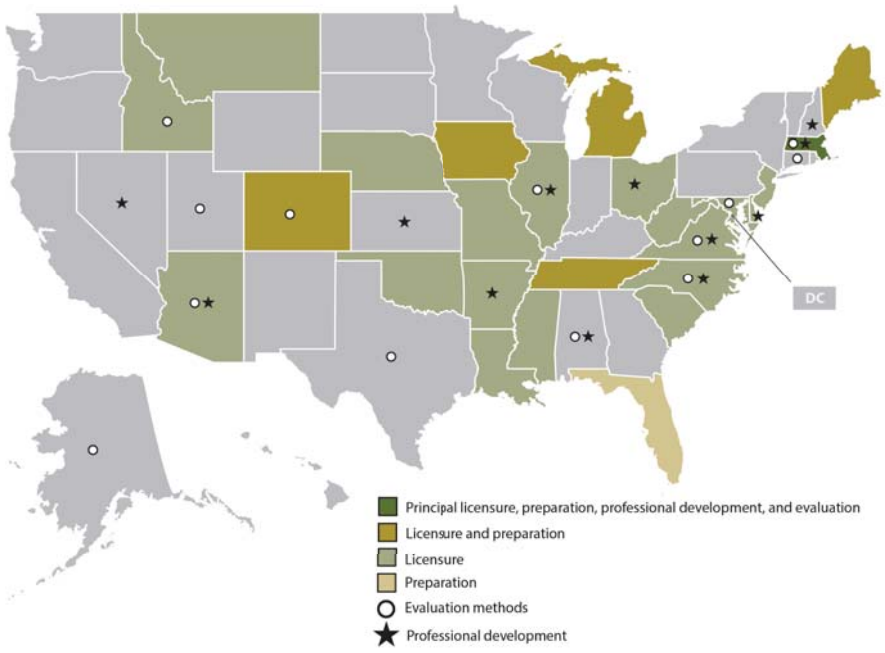
The most prominent problem with low levels of ECE funding is the abysmal wages for ECE teachers. About 46 percent of the ECE workforce is enrolled in public support programs and relies on $9 per hour paychecks on average, which restricts opportunities for becoming a high-quality teacher as well as achieving overall well-being.[38]

In state-funded programs, salaries and benefits for pre-K teachers are lower than average public elementary teacher salaries, even though 23 states require a bachelor's degree for pre-K. A pre-K teacher with a bachelor's degree or higher can expect to earn about $10,000 to $13,000 less per year than her colleagues teaching in elementary school. For a similarly educated pre-K teacher working in a community-based program, the earnings gap increases by $20,000 to $22,000 less per year, with fewer benefits as well.[39] Only a few states have policies in place to ensure that pre-K teachers in publicly funded programs, regardless of setting, can expect salaries, benefits, and access to paid professional learning on par with teachers of children from kindergarten through third grade.[40]

In 31 states, state boards maintain some degree of authority over funding and allocations for K-12 children, whether it be manifested in the form of grants or budgetary approvals. Early this year, the Louisiana board approved an allocation of $74 million in state funds for high-quality childhood educational experiences for four-year-olds deemed at risk. The board allocated $6.6 million in state funds for collaboration with nonpublic schools and child care centers on programming for at-risk four-year-olds, and $10 million in Preschool Development Grant funds for improving preschool programs in select communities through comprehensive services and teacher coaching in the classroom. Other boards have similar responsibility and approval authority for special funds and grants. New Hampshire's state board approved a motion to support full adequacy funding for the Kindergarten Initiative Development Support Grant.

[MAP 2]

State Board Authority over Pre-K Leader Workforce



The Arkansas state board awarded grants totaling $101 million for renewal of the Arkansas Better Chance program, which provides funding to the highest-need pre-K programs in the state.

In Missouri, the duties of the state board are more conventional. They oversee federal education programs and the distribution of federal funds to school districts. In Maryland, the state board upholds authority over multiple budget areas: the state education agency's headquarters budget, state aid to local education budgets, and the state-aided institutions budget. The Illinois state board approved a $266.4 million (3.6 percent) increase in the general fund's appropriations for fiscal 2018, demonstrating the extent of its fiscal authority.

CONCLUSION

State boards of education have more authority for early childhood and education than they know. It is critical for state boards and other state policymakers to understand the importance and unique features of ECE so they can examine and strengthen policies that promote high-quality education for the nation's youngest learners. ECE has an undeniably direct connection to college and career readiness, yet current state policies are not adequate to support it. By investigating and applying state boards' authority in collaboration with other state leaders, states can develop more effective policies.

NASBE has been deeply committed to advancing early childhood education for at least three decades. With its influential task force report "Right from the Start" in 1988, its "Caring Communities" report in 1991, and the creation of its Early Childhood Education Network in 2006, NASBE has been working closely with state boards, state education agencies, and other state agencies to create an infrastructure to support the delivery of quality services to children and their families. Through cohorts of ECE Networks, state boards have been able to set research-informed standards, curriculum, assessments, and teaching practices. They have also strengthened teacher preparation and professional development in line with research; they worked toward building systems for evaluation and accountability that improve student outcomes.

NASBE recently reactivated its ECE State Network with a new cohort of four states, led by their state boards, to advance policies that promote high-quality ECE for all children.[41] Each state board is exercising its authority to promote ECE in different ways. NASBE will report on these initiatives as the hard work of these boards begins to pay off.

NOTES

1 Lisa Guernsey et al., "Beyond Subprime Learning: Accelerating Progress in Early Learning" (Washington DC: New America, 2014), 2–18.

2 Steven Barnett et al., "The 2016 State of Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2017).

3 Julia B. Isaacs, Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 2–20.

4 The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, "High Return on Investment" (Philadelphia, 2015), **https://www.impact.upenn.edu/our-analysis/opportunities-to-achieve-impact/early-childhood-toolkit/why-invest/what-is-the-return-on-investment/.**

5 Jorge Luis García et al., "Research Summary: The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program" (2016), **https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/.**

6 Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al., Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40 (Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope Press, 2005), 194–215.

7 David Murphy et al., "America's Hispanic Children: Gaining Ground, Looking Forward" (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends Hispanic Institute, 2014).

8 William H. Frey, "The New Metro Minority Map: Regional Shifts in Hispanics, Asians and Blacks from Census 2010" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, August 2011).

9 Leslie A. Maxwell, "U.S. School Enrollment Hits Majority-Minority Milestone," *Education Week* (August 19, 2014).

10 IA Code § 256.11 (2016).

11 28 LA Admin. Code § CLXI, bulletin 137, "Louisiana Early Learning Center Licensing Regulations" (2017).

12 10A NC Admin. Code, chapter 9—Child Care Rules (2016).

13 Illinois State Board of Education, "Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards: For Preschool, 3 Years Old to Kindergarten Enrollment Age" (Springfield, IL, revised 2013),

14 Michigan State Board of Education, "Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten" (Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Education, revised March 12, 2013).

15 Teachers College and University of North Carolina–Greensboro, "Early Learning and Development Standards Resources: Planning the Revision Process," website, **http://www.earlylearningguidelines-standards.org/content.php?s=planning_the_revision_process**.

16 Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, "Fast Fact: Information and Resources on Developing State Policy on Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)" (Washington, DC: CEELO, February 2014).

17 Colorado Rev. Stat. § 22-7-1001, Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment Act (CAP4K).

18 Colorado Department of Education, "Assessment Choices and School Readiness Plans," webpage, (2014), **http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolreadiness/assessment.**

19 North Carolina Gen. Stat. § 115C-83.5, "Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment" (2009).

20 North Carolina Gen. Stat. § 115C-174.11, Components of the Testing Program (2009).

21 The K-3 North Carolina Assessment Think Tank, "Assessment for Learning and Development in K-3" (Raleigh, NC, 2013).

22 Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC), Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015).

23 Mary Alice McCarthy, "Rethinking Credential Requirements in Early Education" (Wash-

ington, DC: New America, 2017).

24 National Association of State Boards of Education, "State Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Education: Findings and Results from NASBE's Six-State Early Childhood Education Network" (Alexandria, VA, 2005).

25 Kansas State Department of Education, "Four-Year Old At-Risk Program Standards and Requirements 2017–2018," **http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/PreK/StatePreK-Standards.pdf.**

26 8 VA Code § 20-22-160 (2007), Elementary Education Prek-6.

27 Hannah Putman, Amber Moore, and Kate Walsh, "Some Assembly Required: Piecing Together the Preparation Preschool Teachers Need," presentation (Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality, June 2016).

28 IOM/NRC, Transforming the Workforce.

29 Montana Board of Public Education, Board of Public Education Agenda, March 16–17, 2017, **http://bpe.mt.gov/Portals/119/PDF/BPE-Agendas/2017/BPEAgendaPacketMarch 2017.pdf.**

30 Winona Hao, "Professional Development in a Standards-Based Learning System," Policy Update 23, no. 7 (Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, 2016).

31 Jim Garvey to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, Meeting Minutes, Baton Rouge, LA, January 24, 2017, **http://bese.louisiana.gov/docs/bese-official-minutes/2017-01-24-bese-meeting-minutes.pdf?sfvrsn=2.**

32 Louisiana Department of Education, "Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate Frequently Asked Questions," Louisianabelieves.com, August 2017, **https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/early-childhood-ancillary-teaching-certificate-faq.pdf?sfvrsn=4.**

33 Colorado Department of Education and Early Childhood Practitioners, "Colorado State Model Educator Evaluation System: Practical Ideas for Evaluating Early Childhood Educators" (July 2015), **http://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/practicalideasece.**

34 IOM/NRC, *Transforming the Workforce*.

35 Abbie Lieberman, "A Tale of Two Pre-K Leaders: How State Policies for Center Directors and Principals Leading Pre-K Programs Differ and Why They Shouldn't" (Washington, DC: New America, 2017).

36 U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "Expenditures," **https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66.**

37 Barnett et al., "The State of Preschool Yearbook."

38 Marcy Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index: 2016" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

39 Marcy Whitebook et al., "Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2014).

40 Marcy Whitebook and Caitlin McLean, "In Pursuit of Pre-K Parity: A Proposed Framework for Understanding and Advancing Policy and Practice" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2014).

41 National Association of State Boards of Education, "NASBE Builds an Alliance of Network States to Strengthen Early Childhood Education Workforce," press release, June 2017.

NASBE | National Association of State Boards of Education

333 John Carlyle Street, Suite 530
Alexandria, VA 22314

The National Association of State Boards of Education is the only national organization giving voice and adding value to the nation's state boards of education. A nonprofit organization founded in 1958, NASBE works to strengthen state leadership in educational policymaking, promote excellence in the education of all students, advocate equality of access to educational opportunity, and ensure continued citizen support for public education.
Learn more at www.nasbe.org.