



APRIL 2018

## Power to the Profession Task Force Decision Cycles 3-5:

Back to the drawing board to do better for children and the profession.

Unifying and strengthening the early childhood workforce may be the single most important step towards closing the opportunity/achievement gap. The Foundation for Child Development has committed its energies and resources towards professionalization of the early childhood field, improving the quality of professional practice, and enhancing early childhood teacher preparation.

In 2000, the National Research Council's *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* report and the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) *From Neurons to Neighborhood: The Science of Early Childhood Development* report gave the early childhood field its scientific foundation and the standards for high-quality teacher preparation. We also support the long-term vision and teacher competencies proposed by the 2015 IOM report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children from Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Moving forward, the Foundation has positioned the research base and recommendations from these landmark reports at the center of our 100-plus years of funding research into the care and education that all children need for a strong start in life.

### ► The task at hand is critically important for early childhood education and its workforce.

The Foundation's support of Power to Profession was spurred by the 2015 IOM report and the vision it articulated. We acknowledge both the importance and difficulty of asking the initiative's Task Force to do what has never been accomplished in the early childhood field: Envision a unified, diverse, well-prepared, appropriately compensated workforce and determine the competencies and qualifications early childhood professionals must have at every level of practice in order to guarantee that all children have equal access to high-quality early care and education. Recognizing that increasing competencies and qualifications among a diverse workforce would require an equitable pathway for professional development, and the compensation that must come with it, the Foundation also funded the 2018 National Academies' *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* report that outlines a financing framework and funding strategy based on increased competencies while also retaining diversity in our workforce.

Therefore, we view Power to the Profession's work as framed by these seminal reports, which emphasized what works for all children and developed a vision that demands equal access to high-quality care and education, access that begins each day in the arms of qualified professionals across every community, not just for those who can afford the best for their children.

In short, the work of the initiative's Task Force is an opportunity for social and systemic transformation that cannot be squandered. It is within this context that we strongly believe that the draft recommendations in Decision Cycles 3-5 fail to seize the moment to look beyond the systemic and fiscal constraints of the present. Instead, we urge the Task Force to envision *what could be* and embrace what educators do best by setting higher professional standards that lead all children to better school and life outcomes.

The question today is not whether quality early childhood education works, but rather how we can make it work for all children and for all early childhood educators.

Much has been done over the past decade to convince policymakers and the public of a fundamental truth: High-quality early care and education is the vehicle of social mobility, the accelerator of better education, health, social, and economic outcomes for children and our nation. Our charge is to close the opportunity gap that too many children and families in our society experience due to lack of access to quality early care and education.

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The reality is that children in the greatest need deserve early care and education provided by professionals with the highest qualifications—yet they are least likely to get them. A diverse group of competent, qualified, and fairly compensated early childhood professionals, working in every community, is a force that can eliminate the gap and lift an entire generation out of poverty to make sure that each child—regardless of the zip code in which they live—has a clear path to their full potential.

We must see the early childhood workforce as the engine of positive social and economic change that it can be. We cannot be satisfied with the status quo. We cannot be so constrained by the present realities that we cannot envision a new and better reality for children, families, and the profession of early childhood educators.

The time is now. Parents, stretched to the breaking point between their aspirations for their children and what they can afford to provide, demand something better. That demand can be harnessed to drive greater public investment, but only if early childhood educators leverage the trust that parents have in their work and their professional knowledge and skill. We have a golden opportunity to deliver a vision of and transition towards a professional structure that elevates a diverse workforce while providing uniform access to high-quality care and education for all children.

As currently drafted, Decision Cycles 3-5, will fail to accomplish these big but necessary goals.

We cannot have progress without change. The draft document settles for the low bar of the status quo—which further perpetuates the reality that both the quality of children’s early childhood experiences and the compensation for early childhood professionals are highly dependent on the settings in which they are enrolled or work. In its current form, the document does not describe a clear strategy to incentivize and facilitate upward mobility across professional roles in the profession. It does not provide specific individual competencies that would describe what early childhood professionals should know and be able to do across professional roles. Nor does the current iteration of the document ensure that all children and families have access to competent professionals across all settings at every stage of early childhood education and care.

► **Decision Cycles 3-5 set the bar too low.**

Decision Cycles 3-5 set an associate’s degree (AA) as the minimum level for lead teachers in private and public preschools in both center- and school-based settings. This recommendation, in fact, retreats from the current standards and practices of many states, localities, and high-quality programs and presents a step backwards that could do harm to children, especially those in underserved communities. Now, juxtapose this AA minimum with the recommendation in Decision Cycles 3-5 that sets the bachelor’s degree as the minimum qualification for kindergarten through third grade lead teachers. These recommendations do not reflect developmental science.

As the IOM report notes, “The current differential in educational requirements lags behind the science of child development and early learning, which clearly indicates that the work of lead educators for young children of all ages is based on the same high level of sophisticated knowledge and competencies” (page 7).

The Task Force’s recommendations are out of sync with *Transforming the Workforce for Children from Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* and with its companion report, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*, which provides a collective North Star for supporting all young children and the adults who support them. We strongly urge the Task Force to slow down Decision Cycles 3-5 and develop a process for serious input that includes vigorous and transparent discussion from a broad range of perspectives.

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We believe that such input will result in a significantly revised document that will be a powerful long-term vision of where the field of early childhood education should be: A revision that reflects the science of early development, outlines a clearly articulated plan for equity and diversity, and describes individual competencies across the range of professional roles. We believe that, ultimately, we all want to set systems in place that enable the entire early childhood workforce to achieve higher professional standards that meet the high expectations parents and society have for early education and care.

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## **Towards a North Star for the early care and education workforce: A 15-year vision**

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We offer our comments as a point of departure to ignite robust conversation, NOT as a unilateral solution to one of the most complex and intractable issues in early childhood education. Below, we propose a North Star for the early care and education workforce with a set of goals, ground rules, and system changes that we believe are essential to transform the profession within the next 15 years. This vision, we believe, is consistent with developmental science and high-quality practices—and achievable by our community’s will and perseverance.

Every young child in an early childhood program has diverse and well-prepared early educators who possess the competencies needed to promote children’s healthy learning and development, are supported in their own professional growth and development, and who are compensated appropriately. The professional designations across all birth-third grade settings are easily understandable to both professionals and parents, and incentivize and reward experience and expertise among early care and education professionals. Individual competencies associated with professional designations are defined clearly.

### **► The end goals we all want:**

- All young children reach their full potential; the opportunity/achievement gap has been closed.
- All early childhood educators are well-prepared, appropriately compensated, and supported in their professional growth, regardless of settings in which they work across the birth-third grade continuum.
- Systems are in place to ensure equity and diversity across the workforce, including a clear path for upward mobility across early childhood professional roles.

### **► Ground rules to shape our vision:**

#### **1. Diversity**

- Across the spectrum of professional roles (such as early educator aide, early educator assistant, lead early educator, master early educator, early educator supervisor), early childhood professionals reflect the diversity of the populations of children and families served across all birth-third grade settings.

#### **2. Competencies and settings**

- A degree, credential, or certification, completed within a preparation system, signals demonstration and mastery of a specific set of competencies for a specific role or professional designation.
- Competencies, compensation, and professional roles remain constant across early childhood program settings or auspice. For example, lead teachers in Head Start programs, private provider settings, and school-based settings have the same competencies, compensation, and professional roles.

### **3. Preparation and professional learning**

- There are mechanisms for full funding of the costs related to completion of competency-based, high-quality teacher preparation programs, so that economically, ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse candidates have access to higher education enabling them to become accomplished early childhood educators.
- The appropriate support systems are in place to provide preparation and ongoing professional learning across professional roles.

### **4. Full-day and full-year programs**

- Programs meet the needs of children and families; early childhood services are offered 10 hours a day, 12 months a year.
- Full-time work hours for early educators are based on an 8-hour work day, which includes planning, professional learning, child contact/instruction, breaks, etc.

### **5. Compensation and financing**

- The early childhood education system is financed at a level sufficient to fund the true cost of high-quality early learning experiences in all settings for all children across the birth-third grade continuum.
- Early childhood programs no longer operate within a market-driven economic frame that relies upon inadequate compensation for competent early childhood professionals and payment by families in poverty and a struggling middle class. Early childhood programs are no longer subsidized on the backs of low-income women of every race and ethnicity who work long hours, receive low wages and limited benefits, and often find themselves on public assistance while working full time.

#### **► Essential systems changes needed:**

- Increase public financial investment in all early childhood education settings from birth through third grade to support the true cost of the availability of and access to high-quality programs for all children.
- Transform teacher preparation to ensure that a degree, credential, or certification really means that the candidate has mastered a specific set of competencies.
- Mastery of these competencies results in increased compensation for all early childhood professionals from entry to expert levels; both salaries and benefits across professional roles in all settings are, at least, equivalent to local public school compensation scales and packages.
- Increase access to and availability of teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional learning to result in equal opportunity to move across all professional roles within the birth-third grade continuum of settings.

- Remove fiscal and structural constraints that impede achievement of a diverse early care and education workforce in all professional roles and across settings.
- Acknowledge and address head-on the issues of institutional racism and implicit bias in the work environment and within systems such as recruitment, retention, promotion, and compensation policies.
- Plan for the possibility that family child care and home-based settings might require unique implementation plans and timelines, depending upon their current starting point.

**Early childhood professionals and the children and families they serve cannot wait any longer. We have the tools to envision a better future. Do we have the will?**

The **FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT** is a national private philanthropy based in New York City that supports research to help researchers, policymakers, and advocates develop high-quality, evidence-based early childhood systems to serve the needs of all children. The Foundation focuses on identifying areas of child well-being where there is little to no research in order to fill those gaps, build new fields of knowledge, and promote policies and practices that improve the lives of young children and their families.