



Nurturing the Caregiving Economy

A Model for Mapping Career Pathways in Early Childhood Education

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Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers, postsecondary educators, and employers, industry groups, foundations, and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. Established in 1974, CAEL, a Strada Education Network affiliate, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership organization.

OVERVIEW

The availability of affordable and high-quality child care has long been an issue for the workforce. The escalation of this challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic brought needed attention and federal funding to support the child care industry and working parents. While such financial support is critical, the early childhood education (ECE) industry also needs to be prioritized within workforce systems to help address the supply problem. Creating a pipeline of qualified early childhood education and child care practitioners will ensure that these services are more readily accessible and affordable. This research brief shares some of the highlights from CAEL’s recent research on ECE career pathways and provides recommendations for workforce boards and postsecondary institutions interested in supporting these pathways in their own work.

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The Child Care Challenge — Before and During the Pandemic

The availability and affordability of high-quality child care is an important need for individual families as well as for the economy as a whole. In “normal times,” access to affordable child care, high-quality or otherwise, is a chronic barrier to long-term, sustainable employment for individuals across all industries, skill levels, and geographic areas. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, as daycare centers and schools began to shut down, working parents faced a child care crisis. And because child care responsibilities are often borne disproportionately by women, the lack of support has contributed to the sharp decline in women’s labor force participation since early 2020.¹ In the year ending February 2021, the U.S. labor force had lost more than 2.3 million women.² According to new analysis conducted by Third Way, the unavailability of child care was one of the top reported reasons for people not working in 2020, trailing only pandemic-related layoffs and furloughs due to reduced business.³ Further, a survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that half of the parents who left the workforce during the pandemic have been unable to return because of issues with child care.⁴ The challenges have been even greater for Latina and Black mothers.⁵

For many parents, finding affordable, high-quality child care has gone from challenging to impossible. In terms of affordability, Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) estimated that in 2019, the average annual cost of child care was \$9,200 to \$9,600, noting that this amounted to 10 percent of the median income for households with children under 18 and 34 percent of household income for single parents.⁶ And, according to the Center of American Progress, the cost of center-based child care and family child care has increased by an average of 47 and 70 percent, respectively, as a result of the pandemic.⁷

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Affordability has not been the only child care challenge made worse during the pandemic. The availability of child care has also been an issue that has long been a problem for many communities. The same CCAoA survey found that from 2018 to 2019, 53 percent of states saw a reduction in child care centers and that 79 percent had experienced losses in family child care providers.⁸ Availability of child care is a particular challenge for communities of color, with “child care deserts” most often found in low- or middle-income regions.⁹ The pandemic has only exacerbated child care access issues. For example, CCAoA found that of the child care centers that were open in December 2019, 13 percent were closed in December of 2020.¹⁰ The

closing of child care centers is a double hit to working women, as 95 percent of child care workers are female.¹¹

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Whether a function of affordability or unavailability, the lack of child care has a steep price that ripples throughout our economy. An October report by The Century Foundation and the Center for American Progress shows that the United States is at risk of losing an estimated \$64.5 billion in economic activity from women’s aggregate lost wages due to the lack of child care and their need to reduce hours or leave the workforce.¹²

Access to child care is a critical requirement for a well-functioning economy, which is why it has been getting the attention of policymakers. The recently passed American Rescue Plan provides \$39 billion in child care relief funding. This includes a Child Care Development Block Grant, child care stabilization funding, and additional funding for Head

Start and other child care programs.¹³ It also increased the Child Tax Credit for 2021 and made it fully refundable for the 2021 tax year, meaning families who pay fewer taxes than the credits they qualify for still receive them in full. While such financial support is critical (and perhaps just a down payment toward the kind of support that is truly needed), the ECE industry also needs to be prioritized within workforce systems to help address the supply problem. Creating a pipeline of qualified practitioners will ensure that these services are more readily accessible and affordable. The industry is certainly struggling and will likely continue to do so for months to come; however, one thing is unlikely to change: people will still need child care. The form the service takes and the venues in which it’s provided may be forever changed by the pandemic, but the need for reliable and high-quality child care will remain.

Informative Background Work in Santa Cruz County

In early 2019, CAEL examined the early childhood education (ECE) industry in one community — Santa Cruz County, California — on behalf of our client, the Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board (SCWDB). At that time, the workforce board was responding to a local shortage of workers for the ECE industry. This work helped to showcase the various occupational choices, contexts, and career pathways within the industry that could be used in efforts to encourage job seekers to consider opportunities in this field.



While our specific area of focus was Santa Cruz County, the career pathways that emerged from the research may serve as a guide for countless workforce boards, economic development agencies, and postsecondary programs that are serving communities facing similar shortages in

the ECE workforce pipeline at a time when communities need to support the return of parents to the workplace. To be sure, in many parts of the country, some of the occupations in these pathways are low-paying and/or lack benefits like health insurance or paid time off, and so efforts to build the pipeline also need to find ways to address job quality issues. Even so, there are pathways to higher-paying occupations in the industry that may not be widely understood.

This research brief shares some of the highlights from our research on ECE career pathways:

- **The different pathways and types of occupations**
- **The education and training options for these pathways**
- **The different job venues that hire ECE workers**
- **Entrepreneurial opportunities**

The brief concludes with a set of recommendations for workforce boards and postsecondary institutions interested in supporting these pathways in their own work.



Pathways Overview

The labor market analysis of local demand for early childhood education occupations was informed by three primary sources of information:

- **Real-Time Labor Market Information.** Burning Glass Technologies' Labor Insight tool was heavily used to pull data regarding the various occupations in the industry. Labor Insight provides data based upon real-time job postings by employers on a variety of job search websites. The information pulled for many of the data points included in the occupational profiles was based on State of California job posting data over the previous 12 months. There are other sources of real-time labor market information that could be used, such as Emsi's Analytics* and LinkedIn's Alumni Tool.
- **Traditional Labor Market Information.** This data was pulled from public labor market information services such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), O*Net, or American Community Survey (ACS). Traditional labor market information serves as a solid foundation to a labor market analysis and can be further enhanced by real-time data-collection tools. Occupations that are directly linked to SOC codes can be easily linked back to these traditional sources for wage data, occupational descriptions, common skill sets, and demand projections.
- **Qualitative Information from Stakeholders.** Quantitative data from the sources highlighted above were validated by child care providers and other stakeholders in the ECE space that are on the ground in the county, entrenched in the work on a daily basis. Through discussions with stakeholders, the initial list of child care occupations grew and expanded beyond the typical SOC codes to more fully represent career opportunities in the industry locally. These conversations with stakeholders took place across two webinars and two in-person meetings.

This research resulted in the identification of four distinct occupational families:

- **Early Child Care**
- **Elementary Education**
- **Administration**
- **Thought Leadership**

* Emsi is an affiliate of Strada
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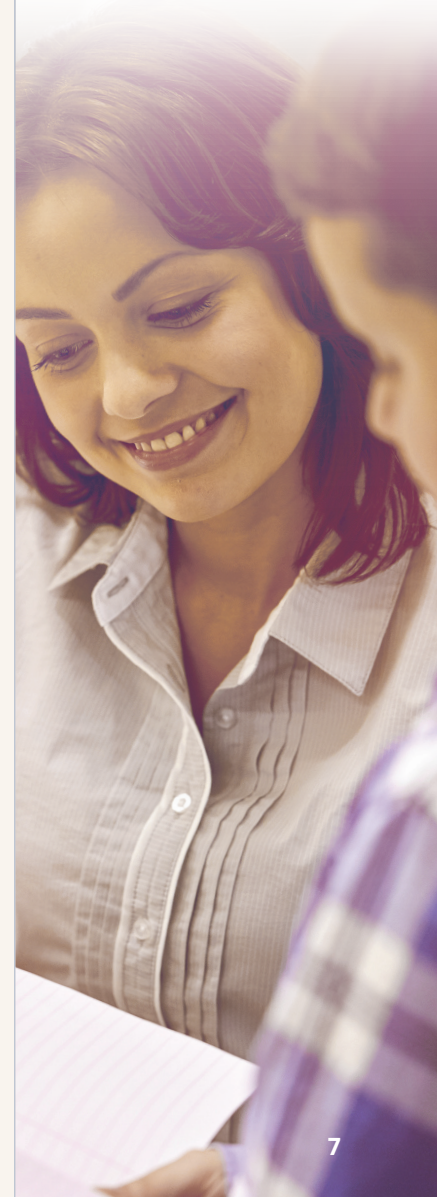
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When we think of the early child care industry, we typically think of frontline child care workers. However, we found that, like most industries, the ECE industry has many different occupations and levels of advancement opportunities. Some of these occupations are in high demand and serve as excellent entry points to an industry dependent on education and training qualifications. The skills and competencies built in these entry-level positions open doors for workers to enter higher-level opportunities that are much more financially sustaining, providing good wages and benefits.

For example, the Thought Leadership family of occupations can offer rewarding wages. It was not an area we had anticipated at the start of the project; however, during our conversations with stakeholders, we found we were talking with professionals who work for the county government or other local advocacy groups who had experience in the child care industry and now found themselves in thought leadership or policy-related roles. Although the labor market data showed that these opportunities are rarer than other jobs in the industry, they exist nonetheless, and in greater numbers than we had assumed based on our initial scan of the industry. Having researchers, policy analysts, or even consultants with real-world expertise in delivering child care services is beneficial to the organizations that hire these individuals and lends a unique perspective to the professionals delivering the work at those levels.



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Below are descriptions of each of the four occupational families — or career pathways — and the occupations within them. Each occupational profile provides a short description of the occupation, the skills needed, the education typically required, and the salary range.** Some of these occupations also represent entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals interested in that pathway. Educational requirements highlighted throughout this document are the average level needed for these positions. Individual employers may require higher or lower levels of educational attainment than are identified below; educational requirements may also vary depending upon local supply and demand for workers for those positions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Childcare providers work in a variety of different settings. Some work as nannies or babysitters for individual families, some operate or work in Family Child Care Homes, and others work in larger childcare or preschool centers. Childcare providers in preschools teach academic skills whereas nannies may be primarily responsible for caring for basic needs. These jobs typically require some formal training or education and experience, but many do not require a college degree.

ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITY

EARLY CHILDCARE MASTER TEACHER

Provides and maintains high levels of quality by helping and supporting early childcare teachers. Visits classrooms and coaches teachers using reflective practice to improve instruction. May be required to hold State certification.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$33,000 to \$45,000[†]

In-Demand Skills

Teaching, Child Development, Childcare, Lesson Planning, Communication, Teamwork/ Collaboration

EARLY CHILDCARE TEACHER

Instructs infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers in activities designed to promote social, physical, and intellectual growth needed for primary school in preschool, day care center, or other child development facility. May be required to hold State certification.

Education Required

Associate's Degree / Short-term Training

Salary Range

\$26,000 to \$46,000

In-Demand Skills

Teaching, Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Creativity, Communication, Organization

CHILDCARE WORKER

Attends to children at schools, businesses, private households, or childcare institutions. Performs a variety of tasks, such as dressing, feeding, bathing, and overseeing play. This occupation includes nannies and babysitters.

Education Required

On-the-job Training

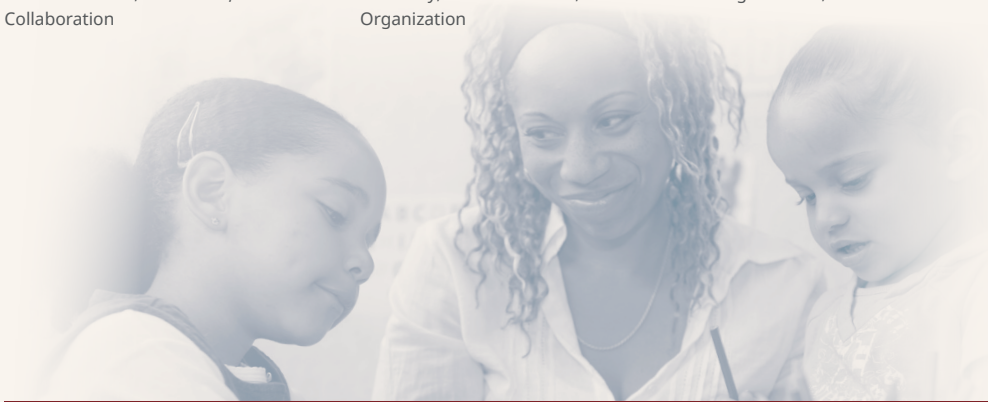
Salary Range

\$24,000 to \$29,000

In-Demand Skills

Child Care, Babysitting, Meal Preparation, Energetic, Organization, Communication

** Wages referenced are 25th to 75th percentile from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2018) for Santa Cruz County. Wages with an dagger (†) are 25th to 75th percentile from Burning Glass Market Wage for the State of California and were used when BLS data was not available.



ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Elementary educators work in public or private elementary schools. Typically, they are either lead teachers, teaching assistants, or special education teachers. The job duties among the three vary, but they are all responsible for teaching elementary-aged students and ensuring a safe environment. These jobs typically require formal education such as an Associate or Bachelor's degree.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

Teaches elementary school subjects to students with mental, emotional, physical, and/or learning disabilities. Includes teachers who specialize and work with audibly and visually impaired students and those who teach basic academic and life processes skills. May be required to hold State Special Education Teaching Credential.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$58,000 to \$97,000

In-Demand Skills

Teaching, Child Development, Childcare, Lesson Planning, Communication, Teamwork/ Collaboration

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Teaches elemental natural and social science, personal hygiene, music, art, and literature to kindergarten students. Promotes physical, mental, and social development. May be required to hold a State teaching credential.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$61,000 to \$94,000

In-Demand Skills

Teaching, Lesson Planning, Child Development, Teamwork and Collaboration, Bilingual, Planning Organization

TEACHER ASSISTANT

Performs duties that are instructional in nature or deliver direct services to students or parents. Serves in a position for which a teacher has ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of educational programs and services.

Education Required

Associate's Degree / Short-term Training

Salary Range

\$28,000 to \$38,000

In-Demand Skills

Teaching, Special Education, CPR, English language, Communication, Writing



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ADMINISTRATION

Administrators oversee the day-to-day management, finances, and budgets of childcare facilities and elementary schools. They also supervise the childcare workers and teachers and ensure staff meet state and local requirements for education and training. Administrators ensure a safe, educational environment for young children, develop curricula in coordination with teachers, and communicate with parents. These jobs typically require a college degree and experience.

ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITY

ELEMENTARY ADMINISTRATOR

Plans, directs, or coordinates the academic, administrative, or auxiliary activities of public or private elementary or secondary level schools. May be required to hold State Administrative Services Credential.

Education Required

Master's Degree

Salary Range

\$90,000 to \$128,000

In-Demand Skills

Budgeting, Scheduling, Staff Management, Communication, Planning, Bilingual

EARLY CHILDCARE ADMINISTRATOR

Plans, directs, or coordinates the academic and nonacademic activities of preschools, childcare centers or home-based centers. May be required to hold State certification.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$37,000 to \$57,000

In-Demand Skills

Child Development, Budgeting, CPR, Communication, Organization, Planning

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Thought leaders are the informed opinion leaders and the go-to people in their field of expertise. They are trusted sources who move and inspire people with innovative ideas. They are commonly asked to speak at public events, conferences or webinars to share their insight with a relevant audience. These jobs typically require a college degree and extensive experience in the field.

POLICY ANALYST

Produces and delivers written and oral assessments of policies affecting the early childhood landscape. Works with external and internal stakeholders to inform organizational policy stances.

Education Required

Master's Degree

Salary Range

\$53,000 to \$77,000[†]

In-Demand Skills

Policy Analysis, Project Management, Budgeting, Research, Writing, Communication

RESEARCHER

Responsible for managing ongoing evaluation projects, designing research approaches and selecting appropriate tools of analysis, conducting research related to early childhood development, and staying abreast of research in the field.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$44,000 to \$73,000[†]

In-Demand Skills

Psychology, Data Analysis, Research, Communication, Writing, Creativity

DATA ANALYST

Collects, stores, and analyzes data pertaining to early childhood education. Brings technical expertise to ensure the quality and accuracy of that data, then processes, designs, and presents it in ways to help organizations and communities make more informed decisions.

Education Required

Bachelor's Degree

Salary Range

\$62,000 to \$97,000[†]

In-Demand Skills

Data Analysis, SQL, Tableau, Excel, Problem Solving, Detail-Oriented

Education and Training Needed for These Occupations

Prospective entrants to the industry need to understand what education and training pathways provide the skills and knowledge necessary for success in ECE occupations. In Santa Cruz County, the relevant education for the ECE industry ranged from high school diplomas through the continuum of postsecondary education, including degrees (associate, bachelor's and masters) and certificates. Education providers can include high schools, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, and some community-based organizations.

Job Venues

From our interviews with ECE stakeholders, it was clear that a career in the industry could look very different depending on the setting. The different venues align to some degree with the different job families, but there is some crossover for certain occupations. These venue descriptions provide prospective entrants a better understanding of how the choice of an occupational pathway can influence where they could end up performing that chosen occupation. Below are descriptions of the four venues that make up the industry in Santa Cruz County: early child care centers, elementary schools, family child care homes, and nonprofits/think tanks/local government.

EARLY CHILDCARE CENTER

PUBLICALLY-FUNDED

When working in a publicly-funded center, it's common for teachers to be required to have higher levels of qualifications than privately-funded centers. These public centers are also more likely to cater to a socio-economically diverse range of students.

PRIVATELY-FUNDED

Private centers often feature smaller class sizes and less bureaucracy than publicly funded centers. These centers do not rely on government funding and can often times be more flexible or specialized in the curriculum offered.

Occupations

Childcare Worker, Early Childcare Teacher, Master Teacher, Early Childcare Administrator, Special Education Teacher

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

An elementary school is a school for children from about five to eleven years old, in which they receive primary or elementary education. It can refer to both the physical structure and the organization. Typically it comes after preschool, and before secondary school.

Occupations

Teacher Assistant, Kindergarten Teacher, Elementary School Administrator, Special Education Teacher

FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

Family child care is home-based care provided for a portion of the day in a private family home for compensation. The home must be inhabited by the family/individual who is providing care, and the provider's hours of operation typically may not exceed eighteen (18) hours in a 24 hour period.

Occupations

Childcare Worker, Early Childcare Administrator

NON-PROFIT, THINK TANK, OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A think tank or policy institute typically operates as a nonprofit research institute/center which performs research and advocacy concerning topics related to early childhood education and care.

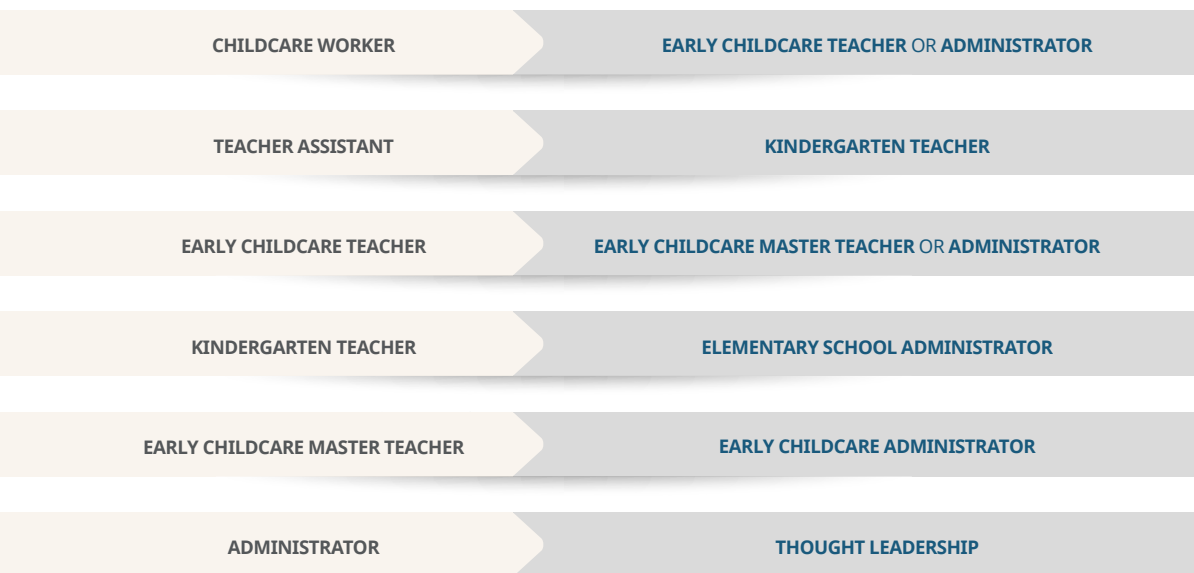
Occupations

Teacher Assistant, Kindergarten Teacher, Elementary School Administrator, Special Education Teacher



Common Advancement Opportunities

It can also be helpful to consider the possible advancement pathways that are common within the ECE industry. Some of the common pathways are within the different occupational categories — for example, from child care worker to early child care teacher. There are also, however, pathways that cross the different occupational families — for example, from kindergarten teacher to elementary school administrator. Making such pathways transparent can help workers understand the full breadth of opportunities and what additional education, credentials, or experience might be needed for future opportunities.



Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Child Care Services

One of the most unique aspects of the early child care industry is its ease of entry for aspiring entrepreneurs. The types of entrepreneurship range from the simplest (babysitting or nannying) to the more complex (operating a full-service child care center), with a range of options in between (becoming an in-home child care provider). The regulations governing different child care services vary by state and region, and most of this information is readily available on state or local Social Service Department websites.

Recommendations for Workforce Boards and Others Focused on Developing the Early Childhood Education Talent Pipeline

As an important first step, regions that are interested in building their ECE talent pipelines should conduct their own research, examining local data on:

- The specific ECE occupations: current demand, average wage rates, and the skills, credentials, or licenses that are required by employers
- Occupational diversity: People of color may be underrepresented among ECE directors and other leadership.
- Common career pathways within and across occupational families in the industry
- Specific job venues (venue types as well as specific employers)
- State or local regulations on the licensing of child care workers and child care centers
- Local issues and challenges for ECE employers and workers

Building a better ECE talent pipeline will require time and attention, as there are likely many complex local factors that may need to be addressed. This will require strong coordination and leveraging existing resources wherever possible. In particular:

- **Build on existing resources.** Ensure there is a consistent, coordinated effort to enhance the ECE talent pipeline by leveraging existing resources, replicating and/or scaling existing efforts, and creating shared messaging across the county.
- **Don't limit your messaging.** Promote expansive career awareness across your region. Move beyond pathways specific to individual schools and other training providers to draw more people to the ECE field.
- **Share your data with other stakeholders.** Provide those responsible for guiding career and education decision making at the K-12 and postsecondary levels in order to build broader awareness of the various career opportunities for this industry.

- **Be inclusive.** Ensure that education and training providers make their programs accessible to those who do not speak English as their first language, and make sure that programs are designed with the adult learner in mind: offer programs evenings and weekends and in multiple locations throughout the region; develop accelerated education programs; develop regional pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs; and explore other experiential and earn-and-learn models. Commit to promoting occupational diversity wherever it is lacking, being mindful not only of front-line leadership positions, like center directors, but thought leadership roles as well, where an inclusive perspective also is critical.
- **Provide incentives and support for ECE students.** Provide supportive services such as transportation, child care assistance, scholarships, and other financial assistance to those who pursue ECE education and training programs. Look for additional opportunities such as funding for loan forgiveness to incentivize graduates to work and remain in ECE careers.
- **Address ECE job quality issues in your region.** Work with local ECE employers to upskill the incumbent workforce, provide incremental wages increases, and provide better and more consistent benefits. Advocate for policy changes at the state and local levels that lead to increased wages for child care workers. For example, apprenticeship programs drive wage growth and career progression from entry-level to leadership roles, further supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Engage employers on the issue of child care access and affordability.** Employers should be encouraged and incentivized to open on-site child care centers that can lead to more affordable opportunities for their employees. Development of new, employer-funded child care centers will also lead to increased career opportunities for individuals working in or looking to begin a career in early childhood education.

A healthy early childhood education industry is critical for ensuring a strong local economy as well as the return of women to the workforce. With dedicated effort and resources, regions can take important steps to build an ECE talent pipeline while also working to make these occupations good choices for job seekers. Contact cael@cael.org for information about how CAEL can help convene communities of practice around child care and other issues critical for social mobility and equity.

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