Influences on the Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement of the Child Care and Early Education Workforce
A Conceptual Framework

Building and Sustaining the Child Care and Early Education Workforce

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Overview

Child care and early education (CCEE) are essential resources for families and children across the country. Yet qualified educators are choosing to leave their positions, and young professionals are choosing not to enter the field. This instability has been a long-lasting issue and is thought to be driven largely by structural and systemic forces that shape the everyday experiences of the CCEE workforce. These issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report lays out a conceptual framework to serve as a guide for researchers, policymakers, and administrators who are conducting research on the CCEE workforce and who are designing and implementing strategies to improve entry, retention, turnover, and advancement of the workforce. This report is also intended to inform how the field can work to build and sustain this critical workforce.

The conceptual framework consists of three main components that are intended to provide a clear understanding of factors that can disrupt the stability of the CCEE workforce pipeline. By articulating the main components, the conceptual framework encourages researchers, policymakers, and administrators to consider a range of multilevel influences on workforce dynamics when designing strategies and when evaluating whether strategies are working as intended. This framework also aims to underscore that the individuals who make up the workforce—many of whom have been marginalized due to race, ethnicity, social class, and gender—interact with broader social, political, and cultural contexts that shape economic and educational policies, structures, and opportunities.

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Conceptual Framework Main Components

Workforce Dynamics: This component encompasses the four phases of the CCEE pipeline: entry, retention, turnover, and advancement.

Multilevel Influences on Workforce Dynamics: This component includes the four interconnecting influences that act upon workforce dynamics: sociocultural, community, workplace, and individual. These four influences impact and are impacted by one another. The conceptual framework attempts to unravel this complex system by outlining factors within each level of influence, and highlighting sociocultural and community influences, which are not as frequently acknowledged and studied. Some factors may not be unique to CCEE, but there are nuances hypothesized about how they affect CCEE educators.

Workforce Development Strategies: This component includes the mechanisms behind interventions, initiatives, or policies designed to build, advance, or sustain the CCEE workforce. The conceptual framework illustrates the different ways policymakers and practitioners can use strategies to attempt to positively affect the workforce, and the underlying structures that may be critical to implement these strategies successfully.

Introduction

Child care and early education are essential resources for families and children across the country. CCEE settings provide families with a vital work support and a safe and nurturing place for young children with the potential to help build a foundation for early learning that has long-lasting, positive impacts on children's developmental outcome.[1]

Despite the need for CCEE, many qualified educators are choosing to leave their positions, and many young professionals are choosing not to enter the field.[2] The instability of the CCEE workforce is not a new issue and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[3] What drives who enters, advances in, and remains in or leaves this important workforce? Gaps in understanding make it difficult to answer that question and develop research-informed and effective interventions and policies that would minimize the turnover among CCEE professionals. More research is needed on how to better recruit, retain, and advance a qualified, healthy, well-compensated, and stable workforce—one that reflects the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the children in its care.

> The **Building and Sustaining the Child Care and Early Education Workforce (BASE)** project aims to increase knowledge and understanding in child care and early education (CCEE) by documenting factors that drive workforce turnover and by building evidence on current initiatives to recruit, advance, and retain a stable and qualified CCEE workforce.

The CCEE workforce is predominantly made up of women, a large portion of whom are women of color. The demographic makeup and identities of the workforce suggest that educators are likely to experience structural and systemic inequities—like racism, sexism, and classism—that undermine educational, employment, and economic opportunities for upward mobility.[4] These structural and systemic inequities have been cited as the root cause of difficulties building, retaining, and advancing a diverse and qualified

workforce.[5] Further, those difficulties have contributed to the CCEE field's variable funding, its inconsistency in quality, and its status as one of the most underpaid industries in the United States.[6]

Even though wages are generally low and benefits are minimal across the board, there are wage disparities in the CCEE field—by funding source, by age of the children cared for, and by educators' racial and ethnic backgrounds.[7] On top of these disparities in pay are shifts nationally and at state and local levels that have placed an increasing emphasis on raising standards for quality of care, credential attainment, and qualifications. Yet as the demands on the CCEE workforce continue to grow, there have not been corresponding increases in compensation, benefits, or other workplace supports.[8]

One way to address these long-standing issues is through bold investments at federal, state, and local levels to change how the CCEE workforce is recruited, advanced, and retained. Such investments must account for a set of complex, interconnected, and multilevel influences. Specifically, the workforce comprises educators with intersecting identities who operate in different types of settings and within diverse communities, and care for children at various stages of development.

To inform how the field can work to sustain this critical workforce, this report lays out a conceptual framework to create a better understanding of the hypothesized factors and mechanisms that influence the stability of the CCEE workforce. It is also intended to serve as a guide to researchers, policymakers, and administrators who are conducting research on the CCEE workforce and who are designing and implementing strategies to enact positive change.

Purpose and Structure

This conceptual framework highlights four interconnecting, multilevel influences on educators' employment pathways within the CCEE field at the sociocultural, community, workplace, and individual levels. These influences work both independently and in combination to shape patterns of *workforce dynamics,* a term that refers to entry, retention, turnover, and advancement within the CCEE field. This framework also explains how different strategies are put in place to recruit, retain, and advance the workforce.

Researchers, policymakers, and administrators can use this conceptual framework as a tool to inform the study of workforce dynamics, as well as the study and design of strategies or initiatives that aim to recruit, advance, and retain a stable and qualified CCEE workforce. This framework can be used to inform approaches to data collection and measurement. It can also be used to ensure strategies are designed to take a comprehensive and holistic view of the influences that shape workforce dynamics. Individuals attempting to enact solutions must consider that, for example, an educator's decision to leave a position as a CCEE educator or an individual's decision to not enter this workforce has been influenced by factors across individual levels all the way to systems levels.

This framework also aims to underscore that *who* makes up the workforce—historically marginalized groups of educators, due to race, ethnicity, social class, and gender—interacts with broader social, political, and cultural contexts that shape economic and educational policies, structures, and opportunities. These forces influence the everyday experiences and interactions of educators and shape their economic, physical, and psychological well-being and—of great interest in this framework—their workforce dynamics.

The CCEE field uses many terms to describe the individuals in its workforce and the places in which they work. Box 1 defines key terminology used in the BASE project and within this report.

Box 1. Terminology

While terminology varies in the field, in this report key terms are defined in the following ways:

CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION (CCEE) refers to programs and the workforce educating and caring for children from birth to 13 years of age. This includes educators in centers and in home-based settings caring for infants, toddlers, and preschool- and school-aged children. CCEE refers to a larger age group than Early Care and Education (ECE), which consists of services for young children only (e.g., Head Start/Early Head Start, public pre-K, and centers serving children from birth to age 5). ECE programs are included in the definition of CCEE.

CCEE EDUCATORS and CCEE WORKFORCE refer to current and prospective educators who are paid to care for children from birth to 13 years of age in center- and home-based settings. This includes educators in different positions and roles. For example, center administrators, directors, lead and assistant teachers, and home-based educators are included in this definition. This definition also includes both licensed and license-exempt center- and home-based settings. While the CCEE workforce also includes support staff in centers, like coaches, education coordinators, and behavioral specialists, these individuals are not the primary focus of this report.

CCEE SETTING refers to the physical location (for example, a center, school, or home) where children receive care. Settings can include Head Start child care centers; community-based child care centers; licensed and license-exempt home-based child care settings that receive subsidies; and the home or location of relatives, neighbors, or other individuals who are paid to care for children.

CCEE TYPE OF CARE refers to how caregiving is distinguished by different funding streams and federal, state, and local policies, regulations, and oversight. The BASE project primarily focuses on center-based or home-based care. But the research team also makes further distinctions within those two types, such as Head Start or Early Head Start programs, community-based child care settings, home-based child care settings, and publicly funded pre-K.

STRATEGY refers to an intervention, initiative, or policy designed to build, advance, or sustain the CCEE workforce. It can include a single **APPROACH**—for example, offering a scholarship—or an assortment of approaches, such as offering both a scholarship and coaching.

WORKFORCE DYNAMICS encompass entry into and exit out of the CCEE field as either a self-employed business owner or an employed individual. For those in the field, it includes tenure and advancement, as well as entry into and exit from different roles, settings, and types of care. Workforce dynamics include multiple phases of employment: entry, retention, turnover, and advancement.

Methodology

To develop this conceptual framework, the BASE team comprehensively reviewed existing CCEE literature.[9] The literature review helped to (1) identify how researchers define different aspects of workforce dynamics, and (2) provide information on the multilevel influences that may shape CCEE workforce dynamics. The team also conducted an environmental scan to identify and investigate strategies to support the CCEE workforce that are currently underway across the nation.[10] As part of this environmental scan, the BASE team conducted interviews with key informants, which provided a picture of the range of strategies that exist and how they are developed and implemented.

The team also held several meetings with CCEE professionals who have expertise in federal and state interventions, Head Start programs, professional and workplace development strategies, the workforce caring for infants and toddlers, home-based child care, issues related to workforce diversity and equity, and CCEE evaluation methodology. At the meetings, the team described findings and received feedback on early drafts of the conceptual framework presented in this brief and on cross-cutting themes that emerged from the literature review and the environmental scan. The meetings were essential to helping the team interpret findings and themes and understand the complexities surrounding the CCEE workforce.[11]
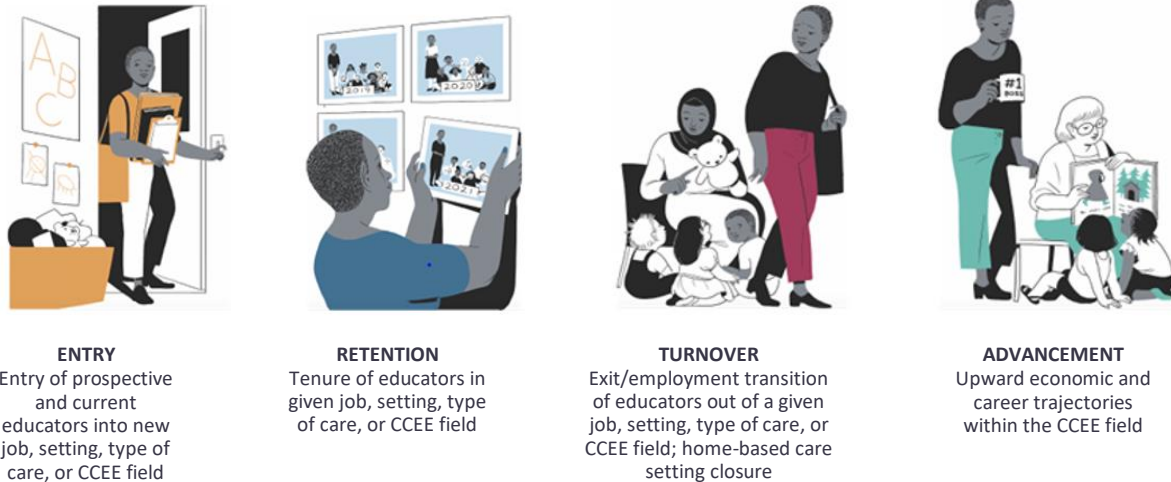
Conceptual Framework

This framework comprises three main components: (1) workforce dynamics; (2) multilevel influences on workforce dynamics; and (3) workforce development strategies that aim to build, advance, and retain the workforce. Collectively, these components can provide a better understanding of the factors that affect stability in the CCEE workforce. The goal of this conceptual framework is to encourage researchers, policymakers, and administrators to consider the full range of multilevel influences on workforce dynamics when designing and evaluating whether different strategies are working as intended.

Each component of this framework is described in more detail below.

Workforce Dynamics

Workforce dynamics is a term that refers to multiple aspects of the CCEE workforce pipeline, specifically entry, retention, turnover, and advancement. (See Figure 1.) It encompasses entry into or exit out of different roles, settings, or types of care, or the CCEE field itself as a self-employed business owner or an employed individual. For those in the field, it includes tenure and advancement in the field.

Figure 1.
Child Care and Early Education Workforce Dynamics

ENTRY
Entry of prospective and current educators into new job, setting, type of care, or CCEE field

RETENTION
Tenure of educators in given job, setting, type of care, or CCEE field

TURNOVER
Exit/employment transition of educators out of a given job, setting, type of care, or CCEE field; home-based care setting closure

ADVANCEMENT
Upward economic and career trajectories within the CCEE field

ENTRY

For a prospective educator, entry is defined as either entry into an early care and education (ECE) degree program with the intention of seeking a job in an ECE program, or initial employment in the CCEE field—into a given job, within a given CCEE setting, in a particular type of care in the CCEE field. For a current educator, it means employment in a new setting or type of care. For example, a Head Start lead teacher could start work in a new setting, such as another Head Start center, but that teacher would remain within the same type of care (Head Start center-based care). Alternately, the Head Start lead teacher could move into both a new setting and a new type of care, such as a family child care setting (which would not operate a Head Start program).

RETENTION

Retention is defined as the tenure of an educator—the length of time worked—in a given job, setting, type of care, or the CCEE field.

TURNOVER

Turnover is defined as an educator's exit from or transition out of a given job, setting, type of care, or the CCEE field. For some home-based settings, this exit means the closure of the home-based child care setting (sometimes referred to as *churn*).
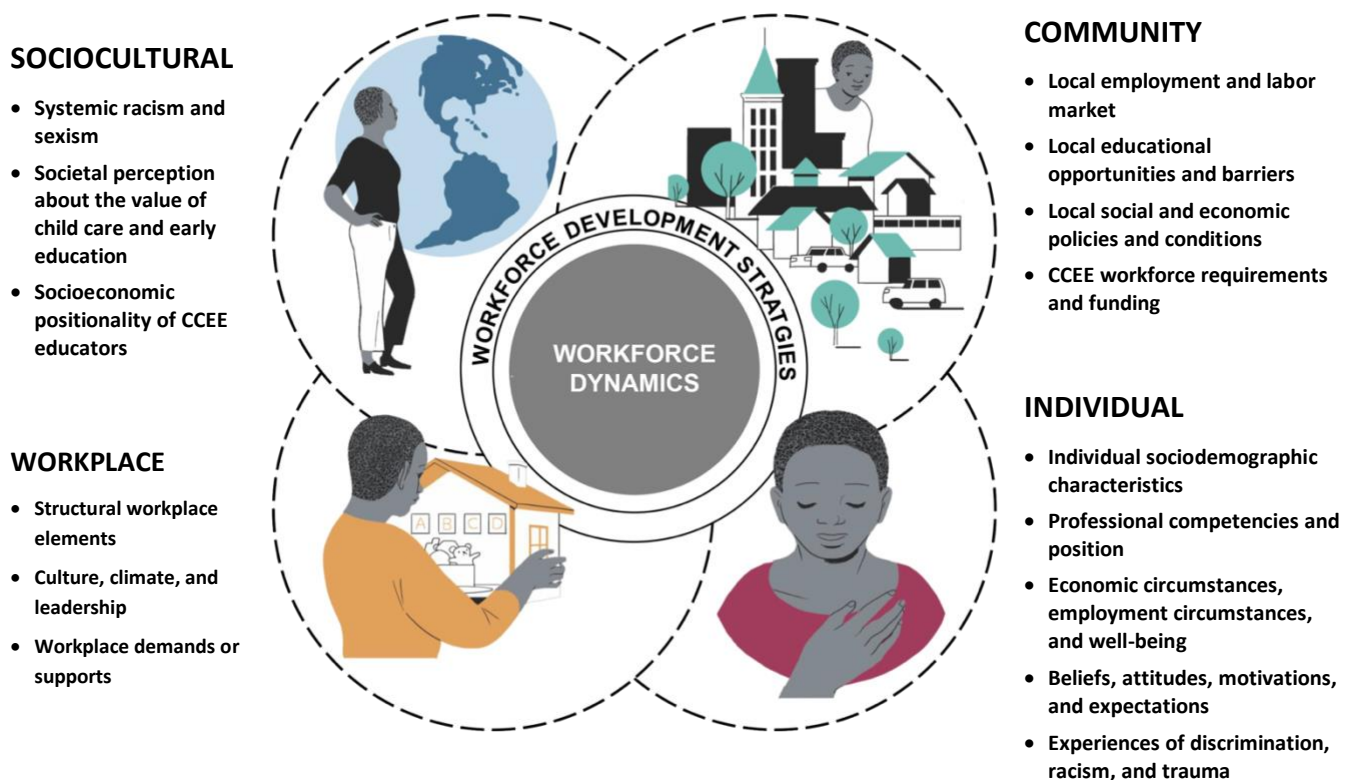
ADVANCEMENT

Advancement is defined as an educator's upward economic and career trajectory within the CCEE field. It is an absolute increase in individual earnings and income, which may or may not be accompanied by a change in job or position within the CCEE field.

Multilevel Influences on Workforce Dynamics

Figure 2 depicts four interconnecting levels of influence that act upon workforce dynamics: sociocultural, community, workplace, and individual. These four influences overlap within the figure to show that they have an impact on one another. Many of the factors within each level are not unique to CCEE, but the differences in their effect on educators within the CCEE field are nuanced. Additionally, the relationship between the levels of influence and workforce dynamics is, in many ways, reciprocal. For example, an educator may leave a job because of a lack of social support (an individual-level influence), but turnover of staff within the setting (a workplace-level influence) may be what caused the educator to feel unsupported.

Details about the levels of influence and the different factors they encompass are described below.

Figure 2.
Multilevel Influences on Workforce Dynamics

SOCIOCULTURAL

- Systemic racism and sexism
- Societal perception about the value of child care and early education
- Socioeconomic positionality of CCEE educators

WORKPLACE

- Structural workplace elements
- Culture, climate, and leadership
- Workplace demands or supports

COMMUNITY

- Local employment and labor market
- Local educational opportunities and barriers
- Local social and economic policies and conditions
- CCEE workforce requirements and funding

INDIVIDUAL

- Individual sociodemographic characteristics
- Professional competencies and position
- Economic circumstances, employment circumstances, and well-being
- Beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and expectations
- Experiences of discrimination, racism, and trauma

Sociocultural

Sociocultural influences exist at a system-wide level. They are the underlying forces stemming from American societal and cultural norms, expectations, and biases about different groups of individuals and communities.[12] They make up a system of forces that are hypothesized to shape individuals' thoughts and behaviors through processes in their immediate contexts.[13] As related to the CCEE field, sociocultural influences linked with the workforce's collective sociodemographic characteristics and what it means to be a CCEE educator may impact workforce dynamics regardless of a specific community's policies and economic landscape.

Systemic Racism and Sexism. The CCEE workforce is made up mostly of women, and women of color make up a larger percentage of the CCEE workforce than they do the general workforce.[14] Because of the social identities of much of the CCEE workforce, systemic racism and sexism—sociocultural influences—are deeply

intertwined with workforce dynamics and the community, workplace, and individual levels of influence.[15] They drive inequalities in which individuals are able to access opportunities for advancement, and they drive economic and social mobility in every industry, including CCEE.

Societal Perceptions About the Value of Child Care and Early Education. Educators in general are undervalued, but there are many indications that Americans consider CCEE educators less professional than K-12 teachers. The discrepancy in how educators are valued can be underscored by comparing the average wages of K-12, pre-K, and CCEE educators. In 2019, the average kindergarten teacher made about $32.80 an hour, while the average preschool teacher made $14.67 an hour and the average child care worker made about $11.65 an hour.[16] During the COVID-19 pandemic, four states disregarded guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and excluded CCEE educators from the phase of vaccine distribution in which K-12 teachers were eligible.[17] Societal perceptions of the CCEE workforce are the result of the identity-based biases described above. Due to sexism, CCEE is often viewed as women's work, which has resulted in very few men choosing to enter the workforce and in the continued lack of respect faced by CCEE educators.[18]

Socioeconomic Positionality of CCEE Educators. As mentioned earlier, the CCEE workforce is predominantly made up of women (a large portion of whom are women of color) and workers with poverty-level incomes. In 2019, for example, poverty rates among CCEE educators ranged from 11 percent in Vermont to as high as 34 percent in the District of Columbia.[19] Moreover, there are wage disparities within the workforce itself. Black CCEE educators earn an average of $0.78 less per hour than White educators, even after adjusting for differences in educational attainment across the groups.[20] These social identities and other background characteristics are jointly associated with inequalities in individuals' experiences.[21] Thus, the socioeconomic position of the CCEE workforce can have negative impacts on their potential upward economic, social, and educational mobility.[22]

Community

Each community has unique policies, cultures, and dynamics that are, in part, shaped by wider sociocultural forces and that in turn shape the factors that influence individual educators' employment behavior and decisions. These community influences may produce changes in workforce dynamics by directly or indirectly influencing the local CCEE system.

Local Employment and Labor Market. Decades of economic research demonstrates that, in most fields, workforce dynamics—particularly job retention and turnover—are shaped by local labor market conditions.[23] These conditions can include local unemployment levels, competing wage opportunities, and job vacancies, which are thought to vary systematically by geography and urbanicity. For example, often higher-wage opportunities are more prevalent in large coastal cities, with fewer opportunities in rural areas and economically distressed areas of the Midwest.[24] Further, local employment conditions are shaped by characteristics of the local labor force and the demands for qualified workers across employment sectors.[25] For example, if there are job openings in sectors, like K-12 education, health care, or retail, that offer better working conditions and higher wages, CCEE educators may perceive greater job mobility and may be more likely to leave their jobs for new ones. However, when local unemployment rates within these sectors are higher, CCEE educators with advanced degrees may be less inclined to leave their jobs, which can result in the CCEE workforce having higher levels of education overall.[26] Thus, local employment and labor market conditions may also affect the demand for non-parental child care, which in turn shapes available CCEE employment opportunities.[27] Dynamics in local labor market opportunities and conditions may also unevenly affect different segments of the CCEE workforce. Employment and labor market downturns, for example, have historically had disproportionately negative affects on employment

opportunities of workers of color.[28] Thus, members of the CCEE workforce may be more likely to experience instability in workforce dynamics with shifts in local employment and labor market conditions.

Local Educational Opportunities and Barriers. Educational attainment is strongly correlated with employment and earnings.[29] Yet higher education (past a high school diploma or GED) is not always accessible. Students with historically marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds or who experience poverty navigate greater structural hardships when progressing through educational systems.[30] A host of factors, like inadequate financial aid, public transportation, or student support services can keep many students from successfully enrolling in and completing postsecondary education.[31] In addition to these barriers, many students are referred to developmental coursework (or remedial education), meaning they must take basic courses in math and English before they can earn college credits. This developmental educational coursework can keep many students from successfully completing postsecondary education.[32] The availability, accessibility, and affordability of these supports vary widely across communities and postsecondary institutions.

In an increasing number of CCEE programs, higher wages are contingent upon educators earning postsecondary degrees.[33] Yet local higher education institutions do not always offer credentialing and degree programs that include coursework focused on competencies aligned with the needs of the CCEE field. The availability and quality of alternative training models, like apprenticeships or credentialing models, can also vary.[34] Discrepancies in the accessibility of higher-education opportunities across communities, in turn, may yield longer-term consequences for disparities in wage growth and career advancement.[35]

Local Social and Economic Policies and Conditions. Low-wage employment and economic experiences are shaped by federal, state, and local policies and regulations and their implementation. These policies and regulations include state and local minimum wage levels; state tax credits for workers; federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits; and governmental forms of means-tested assistance that are enacted at the federal or state levels, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and State Children's Health Insurance Programs. These policies and supports play some role in shaping the economic well-being, earnings, and income of workers and the costs of standard living expenses, as well as a range of other outcomes.[36] Similarly, immigration policies that dictate work eligibility requirements and housing policies can shape local employment opportunities for prospective and current CCEE workers with historically marginalized backgrounds.[37] Thus, diversity across state and local policies and supports can differentially affect the employment and economic mobility opportunities for segments of the prospective and current workforce.

Local zoning and small business regulations; local fire, water, and lead safety regulations; and housing association rules can directly dictate where and how CCEE providers operate and what their intended program models prioritize.[38] These regulations and rules can also determine how providers approach staffing; offering supports; and recruiting, compensating, and advancing CCEE educators. These examples of social and economic policies and conditions are intertwined with the local CCEE system and shape the workforce dynamics of educators as they navigate complex economic and employment decisions.

CCEE Workforce Requirements and Funding. A patchwork of federal, state, and local policies, practices, and regulations influence the program funding, compensation levels, and quality and professional regulatory standards of local CCEE systems.[39] Distinct funding streams are targeted to specific CCEE settings and are given to local CCEE programs through a complex web of intermediary agencies at state and local organizations (both public and private).[40] Other forms of funding may be tied to a targeted population, such as families with limited incomes.

Most federal funds are granted to state and local public agencies—and in some cases private agencies—that provide statewide and local services.[41] For example, the Child Care and Development Fund and state allocations and subsidies fund child care for families. Through the Preschool Development Grants program and the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge program, federal and state departments of education fund and oversee public schools and community-based settings that offer early childhood and early learning programming. State-sponsored pre-K funding streams expand access to and strengthen early learning educational opportunities for young children. Head Start and Early Head Start funding and Head Start Program Performance Standards provide resources and set standards for local Head Start programming, which is often delivered through a mix of public and private organizations that provide CCEE for young children who experience poverty. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides federal funding to the Child and Adult Care Food Program, which offers meals and snacks to children in eligible child care programs. Each of these CCEE-specific system-level policies, practices, and regulations sets different priorities, standards, and expectations for different types of care.[42] In turn, they may create challenges or have unintended consequences for CCEE professionals. For example, different policies and regulations may conflict with each other to create inequities within state and local CCEE systems and settings, and the experiences of CCEE educators.[43] For instance, the expansion of universal pre-K in a community may result in greater turnover or staffing shortages in infant and toddler classrooms as highly educated teachers leave for better pay in a pre-K setting.

Workplace

CCEE settings have structural and process features that shape the day-to-day working conditions of educators. There have been efforts to define and codify organizational quality, such as the Early Education Essentials measurement system and the Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL) survey.[44] Yet these efforts do not often capture insights from other fields of workforce development to articulate which factors and processes shape CCEE workforce well-being and workforce dynamics.

For the purposes of this conceptual framework, the concept of workplace influences draws upon interdisciplinary frameworks that underscore structural aspects of work environments and the way individuals interact in the workplace, which have been linked with psychological well-being and workforce dynamics.[45] Within a CCEE setting there are three broad sets of influences: (1) structural workplace elements; (2) culture, climate, and leadership; and (3) workplace demands or supports. These influences are discussed next.

Structural Workplace Elements. Structural workplace elements include workplace policies, resource sustainability models, and physical features of the workplace. They are highly regulated by federal, state, and local policies, regulations, and funding streams and are hypothesized to be linked with each other. They also shape the day-to-day operations of a workplace, its supporting infrastructures and practices, and its employees' job demands and stressors. In turn, structural workplace elements are hypothesized to influence individual well-being and CCEE workforce dynamics.

Structural workplace elements are likely to vary by CCEE setting and can shape educators' experiences. They include the following:

- *A CCEE setting's policies and regulations*. A CCEE setting's policies and regulations govern its priorities, operations, and practices for delivering care and ensuring its quality. They also define CCEE educators' priorities, roles, and responsibilities, including the behavior or activities that are acceptable. These policies and regulations are often directly informed by a CCEE setting's participation in and oversight by different federal, state, and local regulatory agencies and

financing mechanisms. Examples of regulatory agencies and financing mechanisms include the Office of Head Start, state and local child care licensing and regulations, state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, state and local child care subsidy and assistance programs, and publicly funded pre-K initiatives. CCEE settings often navigate a complicated web of regulations and standards that all have distinct priorities.[46] This can lead to variation in how settings are resourced, configured, and designed; their priorities for care and job demands; and supports that are available for the workforce. Further, oversight by multiple regulatory agencies and funding streams may pose unique challenges for the CCEE workforce. For instance, Early Head Start and Head Start centers are often overseen by larger grantees; they adhere to a set of federal regulations and reporting requirements (Head Start Program Performance Standards) that may not align with local regulations.[47] It can be expensive and burdensome for practitioners in CCEE settings to deal with misaligned standards, variation in the timing, and discrepancies in required paperwork across agencies. CCEE settings are often required to duplicate their efforts to meet diverse regulations and standards.

- *CCEE resource sustainability models.* Resource sustainability models are plans to generate revenue in order to provide CCEE services. They consider the sources of revenue, income versus expenditures, fixed overhead costs, and available cash reserves or discretionary resources. These resources can lead to wide variation in wages and working conditions, and they can affect the long-term stability and viability of a setting. Further, changes in revenue or income sources can affect day-to-day operations. For example, subsidized care administered through contracts paid directly to settings can fluctuate with children's daily attendance, creating instability in a CCEE setting's availability of resources to cover basic costs of the provision of care.[48] This can lead to instability in work hours and wages and increased turnover.[49]

- *CCEE setting physical features.* Structural aspects of CCEE settings include the physical features of the settings and how the environments are designed and configured. These features are shaped by resources and oversight by different regulatory agencies and funding streams. The physical features of CCEE settings include the type of care provided (for example, Head Start programs, community-based child care, home-based care), the hours and months of operation, the length of operation (such as the number of years operating in the same location), the size of a CCEE setting or workplace (such as the number of children being served or the overall size of the workforce in a CCEE setting), and the organizational and management structure and differentiated occupational roles and responsibilities within a CCEE setting (for example, the number of leadership positions, lead and assistant teachers, or home-based child care providers).

- *CCEE collective composition of individuals.* This structural element includes the collective characteristics and composition of the workforce and the families served within each setting, which can vary. Examples include the composition of age groups of children under care; the number of children who receive care; the sociodemographic and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families served; and other characteristics, such as the number of children with special needs. This structural element also encompasses the collective characteristics and composition of a setting's workforce, such as the number of qualified workers (which is determined by their credentials, education levels, or experience in CCEE), the aggregated sociodemographic characteristics of the staff, and the overall staffing structure. Also included is the composition of educators (e.g., lead and assistant teachers in a classroom or the presence of other adults in a home-based care setting), and the role differentiation across educators in a setting.

Taken together, these structural workplace elements can lead to differences in the working conditions, demands, and supports available in CCEE settings. They are not only linked with each other, but also vary systematically between settings to yield varied CCEE workforce experiences.

Culture, Climate, and Leadership. CCEE settings are dynamic. Each has its own organizational culture and system of shared values, beliefs, and norms that govern how individuals within that setting interact and behave.[50] For K-12 schools, researchers and theorists have conceived "culture" to include the shared expectations, beliefs, and behavior of school administrators, educators, families, and children, as well as the local legislators and policymakers who interpret and apply education policy, standards, and regulations.[51] This framing has rarely been applied to CCEE settings, even though it may be relevant. Therefore, this conceptual framework includes the culture, climate, and leadership of CCEE settings *and* their communities, and the degree to which local families, CCEE oversight agencies, and other relevant individuals embody shared expectations and behavior.

Industrial and organizational psychology research shows that it is important for work environments to be psychologically safe, and for employees to feel valued and respected as they pursue work-related activities and goals without fear of repercussions.[52] Several factors may contribute to creating supportive environments.[53] However, these factors are rarely systematically investigated or acknowledged in relation to CCEE workforce well-being or workforce dynamics. These factors include (1) leadership structure, support, and practices; (2) interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, and support networks; (3) informal mechanisms for regulating behavior and interactions; and (4) implicit bias and discrimination in the workplace. These factors vary across CCEE settings and may privilege some groups of educators over others, which could affect work experiences and, as a result, workforce dynamics.[54]

- *Leadership structure, support, and practices*. CCEE leaders manage the day-to-day operations, culture, and climate of a setting. Leadership structures, supports, and practices aim to establish infrastructure and implementation systems, plans, and supports that ensure the setting's workforce is in place and is well positioned to deliver care to children. This includes procuring and distributing resources (such as materials, professional development supports, compensation, and benefits), and establishing and enforcing policies that govern operations to ensure that the CCEE setting's care model can be implemented as intended. These management practices can create a sense of stability and predictability within settings.[55] Taken together, these factors may be important for shaping CCEE working conditions.

  o Leadership supports and practices also include the psychosocial and interpersonal competencies and personality traits leaders display when they meet the everyday challenges of managing operations. These competencies include emotional responsiveness, adaptability, and decision-making and communication styles.[56] They also include the practices leaders use to instill and support workplace norms, expectations, and values. Examples of these practices include building trusting relationships; encouraging desired behavior and interactions (and sanctioning those that are undesired); and enforcing norms that encourage collaboration, engagement, and relationship-building among CCEE workers and with the families and children they serve.[57]

  o CCEE settings may have different leadership structures, depending on whether they have a distributed or centralized leadership model. For example, some CCEE settings have different individuals who are tasked with the day-to-day management of operations and others that handle instructional support for educators. Other settings centralize management roles and functions under a single individual. Leadership structures are

hypothesized to shape how leadership supports and practices are implemented. These structures, supports, and practices may independently or synergistically create work environments that may or may not be supportive and, in turn, may shape CCEE workforce dynamics.

- *Interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, and support networks.* Positive, collegial, and supportive relationships play a central role in fostering a sense of belonging and purpose and have been shown to affect an individual's psychological and physical well-being.[58] Professional learning communities are a type of support network that can provide instrumental support to educators. Conversely, a lack of supportive relationships can contribute to social isolation and loneliness.[59] For example, many home-based child care providers may feel isolated because they operate as solitary small business owners and may lack support networks in the CCEE setting. Taken together, these aspects of workplace relationships are hypothesized to be key elements of the culture and climate of CCEE settings, and they may be experienced differently across settings and by different segments of the CCEE workforce.

- *Informal mechanisms for regulating behavior and interactions.* The culture and climate of a workplace is regulated by social mechanisms of control that reward or sanction different types of behavior, activities, and interactions. Informal mechanisms of control include positive and negative social interactions and the reactions of individuals or groups (like collegiality, peer pressure, persuasion, praise) to convey workplace norms. Informal mechanisms of control may encourage different types of behavior and activities. They may also be shaped by formal mechanisms of control, such as written policies, standards, and procedures that aim to define a code of conduct, expectations, and values. However, the policies, standards, and procedures of a CCEE setting may not be clear or transparent, which may shape not only how individuals understand the setting's culture and climate, but also the extent to which norms and standards are proactively applied and how and when they are enforced. Moreover, the way informal mechanisms of control are applied or are experienced by different groups of educators may vary within a given setting or between CCEE settings. For example, sanctions may be more severe for certain types of behavior (such as expressions of frustration) that come from some individuals than from others. This affects CCEE educators' day-to-day experiences and could create an unsupportive work environment, which could affect workforce dynamics.

- *Implicit bias and discrimination in the workplace.* Implicit bias and discrimination may occur in work settings when stereotypes are unconsciously associated with individuals.[60] In turn, these biases influence actions, behaviors, decisions, or attitudes of individuals toward their colleagues, which could affect workers differently based on their sociodemographic positionality within the workplace.[61] Within a CCEE setting, this may affect power dynamics—whose perspectives are valued, when disciplinary actions or consequences are enacted, what allowances are made for vulnerabilities and mistakes—and the inclusivity of peer groups and networks.[62] Racial bias can also influence the hiring process.[63] A study of CCEE program administrators showed that they tended to favor applicants who were the same race as they were, and Black and Hispanic applicants received fewer interview requests.[64] Ultimately, the work experiences of different segments of the CCEE workforce may be unevenly shaped by structural and systemic barriers caused by racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination. In turn, these forces may unfold and be reinforced within a setting, which can also perpetuate disparities in work experiences.

Workplace Demands or Supports. Like other professions that serve children, CCEE work is physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding, which may affect educators' psychological and physical well-being and workforce dynamics.[65] CCEE settings have worker roles with different daily workload demands and task complexities.[66] Some allow for worker roles with more job autonomy and self-directed control.[67] They have different program models, defined and prioritized approaches to care, quality of learning environments, prescribed activities, and desired outcomes.

In addition, the cultural, linguistic, and other sociodemographic characteristics—of both the educators and the families and children being served—fluctuate across settings.[68] This variability can influence the relationships among educators, children, and families.[69] There may be differences in beliefs about the respective roles of families and educators, about cultural norms regarding family engagement in children's education, about how emotions are expressed, and about how conflicts are resolved.[70] Taken together, these factors can create different types of work experiences for CCEE educators. Because of this, CCEE educators may face dissimilar job expectations, workloads, and psychosocial demands in different settings. Further, settings' intended models and pedagogical approaches to care may also interact with the characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, and competencies of the CCEE workforce to differentially affect CCEE workforce dynamics.

CCEE settings put into place different *implementation infrastructures*. They provide different supports and resources to educators to address stressful job demands and working conditions and to ensure that the workforce is positioned to implement and deliver the CCEE model as intended. The implementation infrastructure that a setting puts into place and the supports and resources it provides to its workforce can include the following:

- quality and professional development supports (such as curricula, training, coaching, and mentorship supports)

- data infrastructure, collection, and monitoring to inform feedback loops and continuous program improvement

- workload management, job demands, and support strategies (e.g., scheduling of work hours; substitute staff coverage; and paid training, planning, and break times)

- staff compensation and benefits (e.g., wages and paid sick and vacation days)

- recruitment, retention, and advancement strategies (e.g., recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices to identify, screen, and select qualified staff; and career development and advancement practices to ensure that qualified staff are retained and advance)

Across settings, implementation infrastructure, supports, and resources are thought to vary in their availability, robustness, and predictability. For example, home-based educators have fewer protective regulations, supports, and structures compared with center-based educators.[71] Collectively, these factors are hypothesized to create or undermine supportive work environments. In turn, these inputs may shape CCEE educators' workforce dynamics by affecting their day-to-day work experiences. The availability, design, and implementation of these infrastructures, supports, and resources are likely to vary across CCEE settings and may be experienced differently by CCEE educators in different positions and with different sociodemographic characteristics and experiences.

Individual

CCEE educators' identities influence not only the career pathways they take but whether their job experiences are distinct from those of their colleagues. Six individual-level factors that are thought to influence workforce dynamics are described below.

Individual Sociodemographic Characteristics. Every aspect of an individual's identity and cultural and linguistic background may have an impact on that individual's experience as a CCEE educator. Components of identity include—but are not limited to—race, ethnicity, immigrant status, culture, language, age, sex, gender identification, sexual orientation, level of education, income, marital status, and religious affiliation. The intersection of educators' identities and cultural and linguistic assets and strengths, along with various systems of oppression, converge to shape their unique experiences.[72]

Professional Competencies and Position. Several factors help determine the positions that individuals are offered or whether they are likely candidates for advancement: their educational backgrounds, competencies, and qualifications (such as whether they possess particular certifications and licenses); their current job responsibilities and roles; their engagement in professional and career development activities; their prior work experience; and their tenure in the CCEE field. Further, educators' active engagement in professional and career development activities, as well as their educational and professional backgrounds, determine their likelihood of identifying alternative employment opportunities and how competitive they may be in their local job markets, contributing to their ability and desire to leave a given position.

Economic Circumstances, Employment Circumstances, and Well-Being. An individual's circumstances and well-being are multifaceted and include economic, employment, psychological, and physical components. Economic circumstances and well-being are defined in terms of an individual's earnings and family income, ability to afford basic needs or engage in discretionary spending, and financial and material hardships. For example, wages may be consistent across a particular position within a workplace, but combined with an individual's financial circumstances, the adequacy of the wages for meeting basic living expenses could vary greatly from one person to another. Employment circumstances and well-being include individuals' employment characteristics, such as the intensity, adequacy, and predictability of their work hours; their concurrent employment in multiple jobs; and their feelings and perceptions about employment. Examples include an individual's job satisfaction; commitment; stress; burnout; or intent to stay in or leave a particular CCEE job, setting, or field.[73]

Psychological and Physical Well-Being. Psychological well-being includes aspects of psychological functioning and mental health, such as depressive symptoms, psychological distress, burnout, and job stress. Economic and psychological well-being are closely intertwined, especially for CCEE educators who have low wages and limited benefits.[74] Furthermore, caring for young children can be mentally and physically exhausting and as a result can take a toll on educators' mental and physical health. For instance, a 2019 study of depression among CCEE educators found that 86 percent of teachers reported some symptoms of depression, and 1 in 10 teachers reported symptoms that were clinically significant.[75] Educators who are employed in a workplace with high turnover tend to have higher levels of stress; those who experience more support and stability tend to have less psychological distress.[76] Educators whose psychological well-being is negatively affected by their jobs are more likely to indicate that they intend to leave their positions rather than move within the field.[77]

Beliefs, Attitudes, Motivations, and Expectations. Educators have beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and expectations that drive decisions about their career trajectories and how they approach and experience their jobs and the world around them. These factors may be driven by human capital, financial capital,

career advancement goals, or goals related to caring for young children. For example, one father may decide to enter the CCEE workforce because if he works at his local preschool, his children can attend free of charge. Another educator may choose to enter the CCEE field because of a deep love for and commitment to caring for children. Others may feel a sense of linguistic and cultural pride and resilience. The extent to which different beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and expectations are in alignment may influence employment decisions. For instance, when economic well-being and expectations are not being met, an individual's desire to teach in CCEE due to a love of teaching and of children may not be sufficient to keep that individual in the CCEE workforce in the long term.

Additionally, motivation—particularly intrinsic motivation—may prompt an individual to seek out additional professional development opportunities that are not required.[i] Research has shown that intrinsically motivated educators are more likely to pursue professional development and to report that they intend to move within the CCEE field rather than leave the profession.[78]

Experiences of Discrimination, Racism, and Trauma. The historically marginalized identity of many CCEE educators means inherently that many experience various kinds of ongoing discrimination, prejudice, and bias—and, as a result, trauma.[79] These experiences may occur in their current jobs, but traumas experienced in past jobs or in their personal lives may inform how individuals react to their current situation.[80] Studies have shown that perceived racial discrimination at work negatively affects employees' attitudes about their jobs, their psychological and physical health, and the perceived diversity climate of their workplaces.[81]

Workforce Development Strategies

The final part of the BASE conceptual framework focuses on CCEE workforce development strategies that are being designed, implemented, and evaluated. These strategies aim to generate a stable pipeline of skilled individuals to enter the CCEE workforce, create opportunities for individuals who are already in the workforce to build their competencies and advance, and discourage the departure of qualified CCEE educators. In Figure 2, workforce development strategies are depicted as a ring around workforce dynamics to show that they influence workforce dynamics. Figure 2 also shows that workforce development strategies are implemented in the context of a larger ecosystem and that these strategies are subject to the multilevel influences described earlier in this brief.
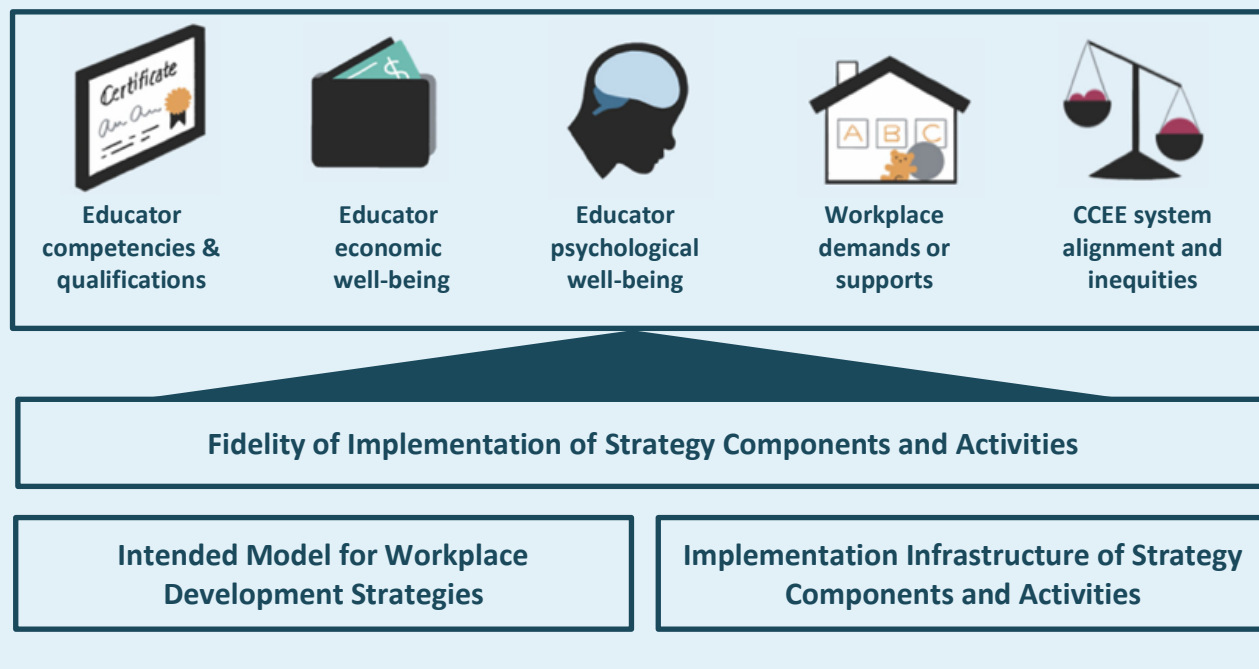
Potential Levers of Change

Figure 3 breaks down the third component of the conceptual framework: workforce development strategies. It illustrates the five *levers of change* that strategies can target to positively impact the workforce, and the underlying structure that needs to be in place to implement those strategies successfully. The levers of change are hypothesized to be malleable—in the sense that policies, programming, and practices can alter them—and they are thought to be closely linked with CCEE workforce dynamics.

Figure 3.
Child Care and Early Education Workforce Development Strategies

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[i] Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement in an activity that is self-driven and motivated by the activity itself (e.g., genuine interest in activity) rather than an external reward or benefit (e.g., money, course credits).

Potential Levers of Change

Educator competencies & qualifications | Educator economic well-being | Educator psychological well-being | Workplace demands or supports | CCEE system alignment and inequities

Fidelity of Implementation of Strategy Components and Activities

Intended Model for Workplace Development Strategies

Implementation Infrastructure of Strategy Components and Activities

These levers of change include the following:[82]

Educator Qualifications and Competencies. Strategies that target this lever of change aim to improve the qualifications and competencies of participating individuals and include apprenticeship, scholarship, or credentialing programs.

Educator Economic Well-Being. Strategies that target this lever of change aim to improve the income, earnings, or economic well-being of participating individuals and may include offering or putting into place financial incentives, wage increases, wage supplements, benefit supports (for example, expanding access to health insurance), career ladders, collective bargaining, or business coaching models and other business supports.

Educator Psychological Well-Being. Strategies associated with this lever of change aim to enhance how participating individuals perceive or cope with existing job demands and may include workshops and training sessions on topics like mindfulness and stress management.

Workplace Demands or Supports. Strategies associated with this lever of change aim to meet licensing requirements and address structural-, social-, and setting-level factors or job-related factors. They may aim to reduce job stressors or provide resources to help educators accomplish work-related goals. Approaches may include marketing services, scheduling support, and substitute networks.

CCEE System Alignment and Inequities. Strategies associated with this lever of change aim to coordinate and align strategic initiatives that are underway to support and advance the CCEE workforce. They may make efforts to integrate and align data systems, and may also attempt to align, create parity, or bring cohesion to regulatory, funding, compensation, professional development, and monitoring activities, resources, and supports.

Strategy Inputs

The bottom portion of Figure 3 illustrates the underlying infrastructure needed to put any strategy in place successfully. Informed by implementation research frameworks that were applied to CCEE, it outlines three broad features of strategies.[83]

Intended Model for Workforce Development Strategies

A strategy needs to have an *intended model* that defines the activities and supports—its core components—that are included to achieve outcomes. A strategy's planned activities and supports, combined with its expected outcomes, are considered its *theory of change*.

Strategies are in various stages of development—ranging from being under development to being fully implemented at a large scale. Strategies vary in robustness, intensity, and the degree to which they incorporate evidence-based components and practices. They also target different populations of prospective and current CCEE educators and have diverse approaches to recruitment, screening, and selection of eligible participants. These aspects of workforce development strategies are expected to shape which levers of change are successfully altered, and the degree to which a strategy affects CCEE workforce dynamics.

Implementation Infrastructure of Strategy Components and Activities

Strategies need plans, resources, and staffing—collectively referred to as implementation infrastructure—to be put into place. Examples include professional development supports and data systems, which may be critical to ensuring that the strategy components and activities are implemented well.

Strategies and their implementation infrastructure function within broader systems and are shaped by local contexts. A strategy to improve economic well-being may leverage existing infrastructure supports and capacities. For example, in Colorado, a statewide collaboration across government and nongovernment agencies helped to integrate data across state and local agencies, including human services, health, labor and employment, higher education, housing, K-12 education, and criminal justice, which allows for tracking CCEE workforce dynamics to inform evidence-based decision-making for state, local, and community investments aimed at supporting the ECE workforce.[84] Thus, the successful implementation of strategies would also benefit from taking into account potential coordination and alignment of investments across different levels of CCEE systems.

Fidelity of Implementation

A strategy's intended model determines what kind of activities and supports are put in place. Its implementation infrastructure determines how those activities and supports are put in place and whether they are implemented as intended (meaning they are implemented with fidelity). This includes how well the strategies' recruitment, screening, and selection criteria enable them to reach prioritized eligible participants and the extent to which targeted participants are engaged and receive the anticipated supports and services as planned. Accordingly, fidelity of implementation is thought to directly shape which individuals benefit from the strategies, what outcomes the strategies affect, and, in turn, CCEE workforce dynamics.

Strategies are designed for and operate in many community contexts and are aimed at serving different segments of the prospective and current CCEE workforce.[85] The local variation in contexts, in turn, is expected to affect the implementation and effectiveness of strategies.

Conclusion

It can be difficult to develop comprehensive strategies that have a significant impact on improving entry, retention, turnover, and advancement of the workforce. This is due to the complex, intertwined influences acting upon the strategies and the workforce. This conceptual framework outlines four different levels of influences upon workforce dynamics: sociocultural, community, workplace, and individual. It works to unravel this complex system by defining the influences at each level, especially by highlighting factors beyond individual and workplace levels of influence that are not acknowledged as frequently in research.

This framework lays out implications for the study of workforce dynamics and for the design and implementation of CCEE workforce development strategies. It highlights the way sociocultural and community influences intersect with the more proximal workplace and individual influences that are hypothesized to shape CCEE workforce well-being and workforce dynamics. Further, the framework draws attention to potential compounding influences across different levels that intersect and are hypothesized to uniquely shape the economic, employment, and educational experiences, well-being, and dynamics of the CCEE workforce.

Researchers of the CCEE workforce can leverage this framework to better understand the interplay between the different levels of influence and the effects they have on workforce dynamics. This framework can also be used to identify underexplored contextual influences at the sociocultural and community levels.

For designers and implementers of strategies that aim to support and advance the CCEE workforce, this framework underscores the importance of taking a holistic view and targeting multiple influences to generate meaningful change. In practice, this may translate to implementing a package of well-aligned and coordinated solutions and strategies, rather than small-scale initiatives that target individual educators or a single lever of change. Designers and implementers of strategies can use this framework to identify underexplored contextual influences at the community and workplace levels of influence; they may discover unique opportunities to optimize the effectiveness of initiatives that are underway. Furthermore, this framework underscores the promise of federal-, state-, and community-level initiatives to ensure that resources and funding are available for lasting and wide-reaching change that affects the entire workforce and culture surrounding CCEE educators. Strategies that target multiple levers of change and are implemented on a broad scale across the CCEE system—such as the Department of Defense's military system for child care educator training and wage progression—acknowledges the way multilevel influences interact with each other. Specifically, the military's child care system acknowledges that contextual factors at system, community, and workplace levels can influence individual educators differently to destabilize the CCEE workforce. After a system overhaul that followed the passage of the Military Child Care Act of 1989, the Department of Defense started providing holistic supports that target educator economic well-being, educator qualifications and competencies, and workplace job demands and supports. These supports were intended to ensure the quality and affordability of child care for military families.[86]

The CCEE workforce plays a vital role in the United States economy. Despite its importance, continued reports of instability and low entry of educators into the field underscore the need for CCEE workforce investment.[87] The goal of this conceptual framework is to serve as a guide to inform efforts to study

workforce dynamics and efforts to design and evaluate potential strategies that aim to recruit, advance, and retain a stable and qualified CCEE workforce.

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