



A JOINT PROJECT OF:
THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY INSTITUTE
AND
SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION
LOCAL 925



Paving the Pathways to Quality

Washington's Early Learning Professional Development Landscape

Over the last several decades, a large body of rigorous research on early childhood education has repeatedly shown what many in the field already know: teachers are the most central figures in the quality of care.

This overarching finding is based on the results of numerous studies examining the differences between high- and low-quality child care and early learning. The research reveals that the quality of care depends heavily on the education, training, compensation, and stability of the workforce. When teachers are adequately compensated and trained, they are more likely to form strong bonds with the children in their care leading to higher levels of teacher-child interaction. Appropriate levels of training and compensation also discourage teachers from leaving the field in search of a living wage in another field and disrupting the continuity and quality of care for children.

In recognition of these fundamental realities, the Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 925 partnered to investigate how Washington State addresses the quality of care via the early childhood education workforce. This research project primarily focuses on the availability of programs and supports that enable Washington's early learning providers to engage in relevant professional development and advance in their chosen field.

The purpose of this report is to inventory programs and document the environment affecting the quality of care. Another goal of the analysis is the identification of gaps and opportunities in the delivery of effective programs resulting in increases in quality. The investigation revealed:

- The diverse early learning workforce is characterized by moderate levels of education, high rates of poverty, poor levels of compensation and benefits, and high rates of turnover.
- A wealth of formal and informal professional development opportunities exist across the state.
- A lack of coordination hinders the existing professional development opportunities.
- The scarcity of financial incentives and supports deters the early learning workforce from pursuing training and education.
- There is strong desire and motivation across involved parties for the creation of a coordinated and integrated statewide professional development system with robust linkages between professional development options and financial supports.

As early childhood education and care increasingly becomes viewed as a critical foundational step in the education of children, a greater amount of emphasis has been placed on the importance and long-term impacts of high-quality care. However, the current landscape of professional development combined with the lack of broadly-available incentives in Washington is not sufficient to ensure high-quality early learning for all children in the state. Additional work is needed to build a system that promotes quality care. Some of the ongoing questions that need to be addressed include:

- How to assist providers in navigating the current training and education terrain in order to take advantage of the resources and opportunities that are available (ex. mentoring, coaching, counseling, web-based tools, and organized resources)
- What supports in addition to financial incentives do providers need in order to engage in relevant professional development activities (ex. substitutes and transportation)
- Ways to link early learning providers with the K-12 system in order to improve the continuity of education across settings (ex. Bremerton school districts initiatives to connect providers with elementary school teachers)
- How to recruit new teachers into the profession (ex. apprenticeships and hiring halls)
- How to build the capacity of current child care settings to address the increasing trend of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs occurring in mixed-delivery settings.

Each chapter of **Paving the Pathways** contains a separate analysis on a particular topic or area:

Chapter I profiles Washington's foremost statewide professional development and compensation programs and initiatives.

Chapter II compares education and training requirements across different licensed childcare and early learning settings and different accreditation agencies.

Chapter III reviews opportunities for formal education in the field of early childhood education in Washington's institutions of higher education.

Chapter IV describes the financial assistance programs available in Washington State to aid the early learning workforce in attaining training and higher education, and some grants and scholarships open to students nationwide.

Chapter V profiles wage and incentive programs for the early childhood workforce in states across the country, including Washington's own Wage Ladder.

Chapter VI looks at some forms of workforce assistance programs locally and nationally.

Chapter VII profiles Washington's early childhood workforce using national and state data sources to provide a description of those who work in the field in terms of size, demographic characteristics, educational attainment, access to benefits, compensation, and turnover.

Chapter VIII reviews the cost of child care and the relationship between fees and family budgets.

Paving the Pathways to Quality is available online at:

<http://www.eoionline.org> and <http://www.seiu925.org>.