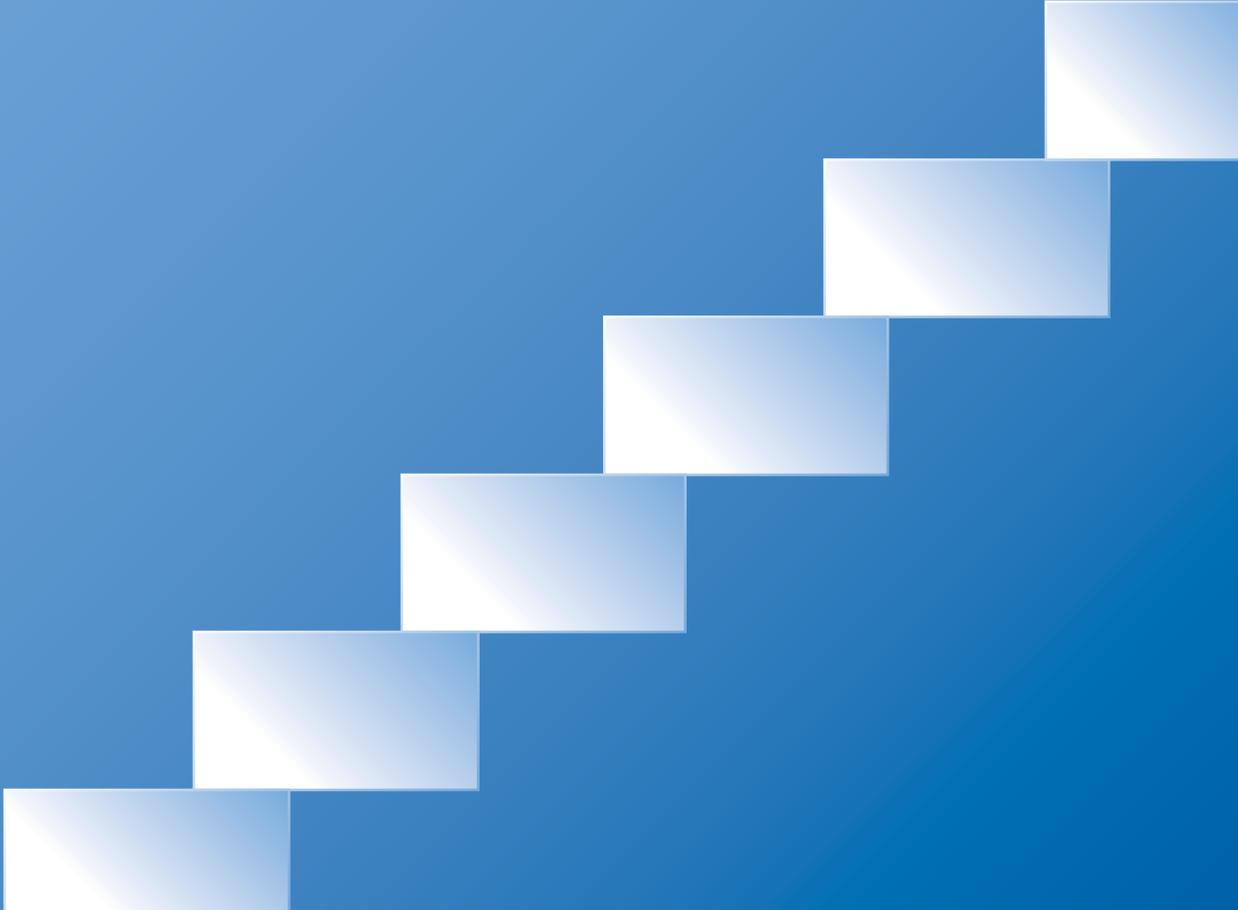




STEPS FORWARD:

Creating a Quality Early Education and Care and Out-of-School Time Workforce



THE SCHOTT FELLOWSHIP
CREATING CHANGE FOR ALL YOUNG CHILDREN
IN THE COMMONWEALTH



MASSACHUSETTS
**Department of
Early Education and Care**



United Way
of Massachusetts Bay
and Merrimack Valley

MORE THAN 275,000

Massachusetts children are cared for by licensed early education and care and out-of-school time programs.

They can spend up to ten hours a day with early education or out-of-school time professionals, individuals whose teaching and influence have an enormous impact on their language development, learning, self-confidence and social skills.

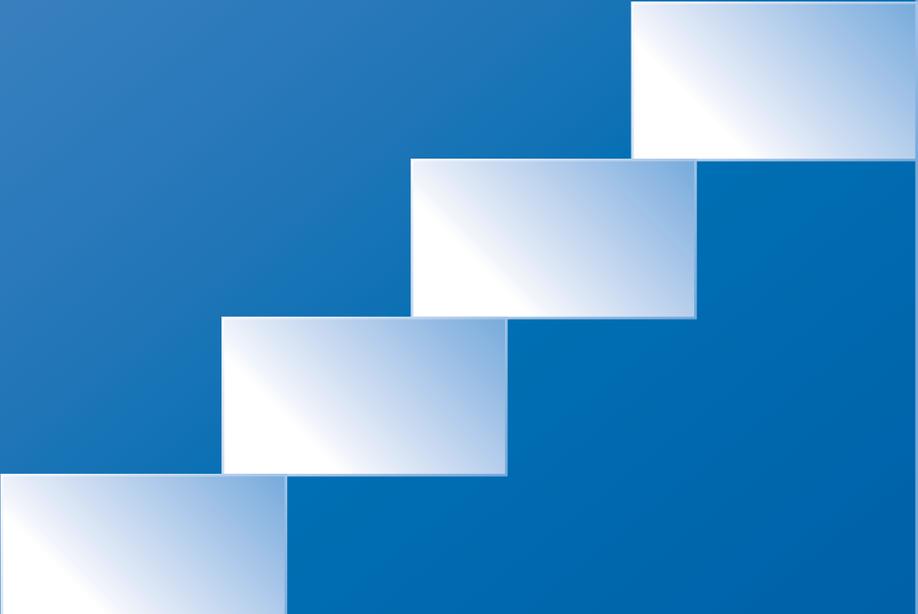
And yet, preschool teachers in Massachusetts, who care for our children during their most critical stage of development, earn less than half the salary of the average elementary school teacher. Since the 1980s, the number of early childhood educators in Massachusetts who hold a four-year degree has declined by nearly 20 percent. On top of this, inconsistencies among higher education programs and credit policies lead to duplications of credit and/or not receiving professional credit for courses taken at all.

In 2007, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and the Schott Fellowship in Early Care and Education convened the Early Education and Care and Out-of-School Time Task Force. We knew it was time to take action. We knew we needed a comprehensive workforce development system. By creating a clear career path for early education and care and out-of-school time practitioners, we recognize their valuable contributions and foster ongoing learning and skill development. We are creating opportunities for advancement, and in turn, developing a highly-skilled workforce that will empower our children to grow up capable, healthy and happy.

The Workforce Development Task Force has developed key recommendations and strategies:

- Establish core competencies for all early education and care and out-of-school time professionals
- Create a well-designed orientation for all members of the field to clarify roles and expectations
- Delineate a clear and motivating career path with achievement-based compensation
- Ensure consistency in state policies to encourage higher education

We hope that you will join us in working to further these recommendations, to raise the standards and opportunities for a stronger, more effective early education and out-of-school time workforce. Together we can ensure that quality early education and care and out-of-school time services promote positive child development and high-quality learning.



RECOMMENDATION #1

Endorse and establish core competencies for all early education and care and out-of-school time professionals.



A core competency is a fundamental knowledge, skill, or expertise in a specific subject area. Research has shown that the qualification—knowledge, skills and expertise—of a child’s educator is one of the most important elements that contribute to his or her success.

Establishing core competencies—for early education and care and out-of-school time professionals, youth workers and administrators working with children from birth through age 14 in a variety of settings—helps to ensure they are prepared and capable, and know how to work effectively and successfully with children and their families, including cultural competency and meeting individual development needs.

The following eight areas of core competency are recommended. Those who work with children and youth must:

- Understand the principles of the growth and development of children and youth.
- Guide and interact with children and youth.
- Partner with families and communities.
- Understand health, safety and nutrition.
- Understand how to create and implement learning environments and curricula.
- Be skilled in the observation, assessment and documentation of children’s progress.
- Demonstrate program planning and development skills.
- Exhibit professionalism and leadership.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Require an orientation to the field within 120 days of entering the early education and care and/or out-of-school time workforce.



Research illustrates that training significantly improves the quality of interactions between practitioners and the children they care for. Adults entering the field of early education and care and out-of-school time come from a wide range of professional preparation and backgrounds. Therefore, a well-designed orientation, based on the core competencies listed in Recommendation #1, will not only recognize the important work of educators, but will also help them to understand what is expected of them. This will help to ensure that every staff member has the shared common knowledge that is needed to meet the needs of children and families.

Key points:

- 40 hours of orientation to the field are recommended within the first two years for all educators, with 10 hours in the first 120 days.
- Link the content of the orientation to the core competencies (see Recommendation #1).
- Use the *Professional Development Data Management System* being developed by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to track the completion of orientation hours.
- Establish minimum professional qualifications for orientation trainers.
- Require all professionals participating in orientation to demonstrate relevant competency after completing each content unit.
- Create appropriate accommodations for individuals who qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as speakers of languages other than English.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Establish a roadmap (called a “career lattice”) for early education and care and out-of-school time professionals that details steps for career entry, development and advancement based on education, experience in the field, and evaluation of competency. Compensation should be tied to the career lattice.



Because the field of early education and care and out-of-school time welcomes people from a variety of backgrounds with diverse skill sets, it is critical that Massachusetts establish a flexible lattice that identifies multiple entry points and clearly defined pathways for developing staff skills and career advancement.

Key points:

- Base the career lattice on the core competencies (see Recommendation #1).
- The lattice should be evidence-based and continually evaluated for effectiveness and should address the needs of nontraditional learners and linguistically diverse populations.
- Ensure that the lattice applies to professionals in a variety of settings and tie certificate and degree acquisition to ongoing professional development.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Revise and enforce the current college credit transfer policy in the Commonwealth to both clarify and ease the pathway toward associate and baccalaureate degrees.¹

Establish new and uniform statewide policies to acknowledge and award credit for prior learning.²



The development of core competencies and a career lattice require a strong partnership with higher education institutions as a primary delivery system. Earning a degree not only benefits the professional, including increased earning potential, but it is also directly associated with higher quality programs and increasing positive child outcomes.

The current system, however, makes it difficult for students to transfer credits earned at one institution to another (because of variances in course content and titles) and apply credit for prior learning and experience toward a degree.

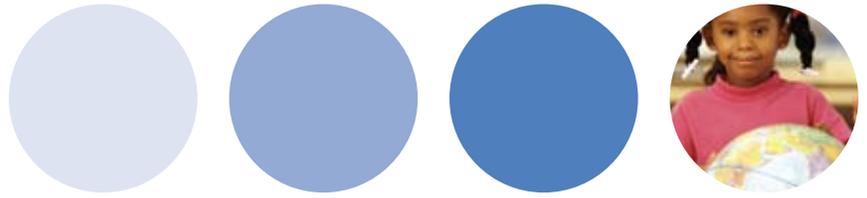
A better defined and enforced credit transfer policy, and the establishment of new and uniform statewide policies to acknowledge and award credit for prior learning and experience, would make it easier for the early education and care and out-of-school time workforce to transfer the college credits and prior learning and experience seamlessly toward associate and baccalaureate degrees.

Key points:

- Build a directory of statewide early education and care and out-of-school time course-to-course equivalencies.
- Establish common names and numbers for courses.
- Adopt a statewide electronic transfer delivery system.
- Create a statewide transfer website to guide students through the transfer process.
- Require that the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is accepted for at least six college credits.

1: "Transfer" is the process whereby a student transfers earned credit from one higher education institution to another. It is a critical pathway toward degree attainment and will have a positive impact on the cultural and linguistic diversity of the workforce.

2: "Prior learning" encompasses the knowledge and competencies acquired through nontraditional schooling, employment, volunteer, and other learning experiences for college credit, which is another critical pathway to increase the number and percentage of people with a postsecondary degree in the field.



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GET THE WORD OUT

Talk to your co-workers, friends and family about the importance of workforce and professional development for early education and care and out-of-school time professionals. Discuss the recommendations with colleagues, parents and community leaders.

E D U C A T E

Speak with your colleagues about what early educators should know and be able to do. Explain the connection between positive child outcomes and the knowledge and skills of the adults who work with those children.

A D V O C A T E

Ask your state or local elected official to visit your program. Let them see first-hand the importance of the adult's work with children and youth!

If you are interested in staying informed about the progress of this work or if you have additional suggestions about the recommendations, email stepsforward@supportunitedway.org.

To read the full report, please visit one of the following web sites:

www.schottfellowship.org www.supportunitedway.org www.eec.state.ma.us



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