

New York State's Early Childhood Workforce: Challenges, Opportunities, and Next Steps

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Introduction

Major system barriers are challenging the early childhood community's ability to provide quality education programs to New York State's children. Teacher shortages, inadequate teacher preparation and professional development opportunities, and compensation and benefit disparities are creating a heightened need to address a growing early childhood workforce crisis. Because early childhood programs now play a significant role in achieving the state's early education goals, overcoming these barriers will have a lasting impact on New York State's entire education system.

This policy paper outlines the opportunities, challenges and next steps needed to address these barriers. It focuses particularly on the community-based organizations that provide a significant percentage of early education programs across New York State.

The Opportunities...

New York State is making significant progress in integrating early care and education into its statewide educational system (PreK-12). It has accomplished this most notably through the implementation of the Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) program and the implementation of reduced class sizes in grades 1-3. Central to this integrated system is the role community-based organizations (CBOs) play. They provide a significant number of education programs that are the foundation of early learning experiences for New York's children.¹

Integrating early education into the overall state agenda to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all children has placed NYS on the cutting edge of education reform. Further, recognition that high quality programs directly depend upon the quality of the teachers in those

¹ The early care and education community includes service providers and the administrative agencies that care for and educate children from birth through five years old. Programs are provided by community-based organizations (CBOs) and by public schools. The majority of these programs from birth through five are provided in non-public school settings among thousands of independent service providers in every community in New York City. These include Head Start programs, child care centers, nursery schools, 4410 schools, parochial schools, group family child care, family child care and friends, relatives and neighbors. Seventy percent of the Universal Pre-K seats in New York City, for example, are in CBO settings. Overall, the publicly funded system provides care for about 41% of enrolled children, the private sector for about 46%, Pre-K Special Ed, 10% and CUNY child care services for university students, 2%.

programs has led the NY State Board of Regents to raise the professional expectations for teachers by mandating higher standards in teacher certification as well as preparation and training. Taking this direction is supported by years of research underscoring the strong relationship between qualified, experienced teachers, high-quality programs and successful learning outcomes.

The Challenges...

Across New York State, the early childhood community is facing the unprecedented challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified, well-trained and experienced professionals to meet the early education needs of children.

- Compensation and benefit levels of teachers in community-based early childhood programs continue to substantially lag behind those in the public schools for teachers with comparable levels of education;
- A coherent strategy is lacking that would help teachers navigate the multiple components of a career and study plan, and prepare them academically to meet the increasing rigorous certification requirements defined by the New York State Board of Regents (Appendix I), and in NYC, by the NYC Department of Health (Appendix II).

In NYC, and other communities, this challenge is compounded by additional realities:

- An increasing teacher shortage, coupled with the rigorous teacher certification requirements, is resulting in the drain of qualified teachers from CBOs that lack the resources to attract and retain certified teachers.
- As CBOs lose teachers in dramatic numbers to the public schools, they are in increasing jeopardy of losing their licenses and/or no longer being eligible to offer quality early childhood programs.
- The resulting pervasive shortage of early childhood teachers in CBOs has forced the repeated use of teachers on study plans to meet licensing standards, or to use teachers without certification at all.

Next Steps...

Multiple strategies are needed that will address the recruitment and retention challenges of CBOs and create opportunities for those working in the field to meet the new teacher certification requirements.

- **Develop Actions to Ease the Teacher Shortage**
- **Build Cohesion and Collaboration Within the Delivery System**
- **Establish direct links between higher education and early childhood programs to accomplish innovative and coordinated education strategies**
- **Create Local Early Education and Professional Development Centers**

A Coordinated Strategy is Needed...

In meeting the shortage of qualified early education teachers, there are three categories of individuals needing resources and supports...

- Individuals who have been working for years in programs as teachers and will no longer be able to maintain their position as head teacher;
- Individuals who are working in programs who want to become a certified teacher and need to return to school while maintaining their job;
- Individuals who want to enter the early education field but are reluctant to do so because of the increasing academic expectations and the barriers of low compensation and benefits.

In order to coordinate a system-wide strategy to meet the mandate for higher teacher standards, the following steps must be accomplished:

□ Gather reliable data about the early childhood workforce.

- There is data on the certification status of teachers in the public school system, NYC publicly funded community-based early childhood programs, and Head Start programs. However, statewide comprehensive data is needed as to the number of teachers in early childhood programs needing to be trained and already in training programs, and the level of advancement and employment achieved by graduates. This data would help to better prepare and anticipate educational and training needs of the workforce to meet certification requirements.
- Compensation and benefit data must be more comprehensive and detailed. Continued efforts to collect reliable data is needed.

□ Identify the resources needed to support teachers already working in early education programs and pursuing higher education.

- To achieve permanent certification, individuals must pass the new State certification exams (NYSTE).² Many individuals working in the field as strong teachers in the classroom are not able to pass these exams. They lack the broad liberal arts background and cannot pass several components of the exams. Others have not taken such tests for a number of years and still others may lack the language and other skills to pass. Many teachers take the test repeatedly and fail, losing confidence to try yet again.

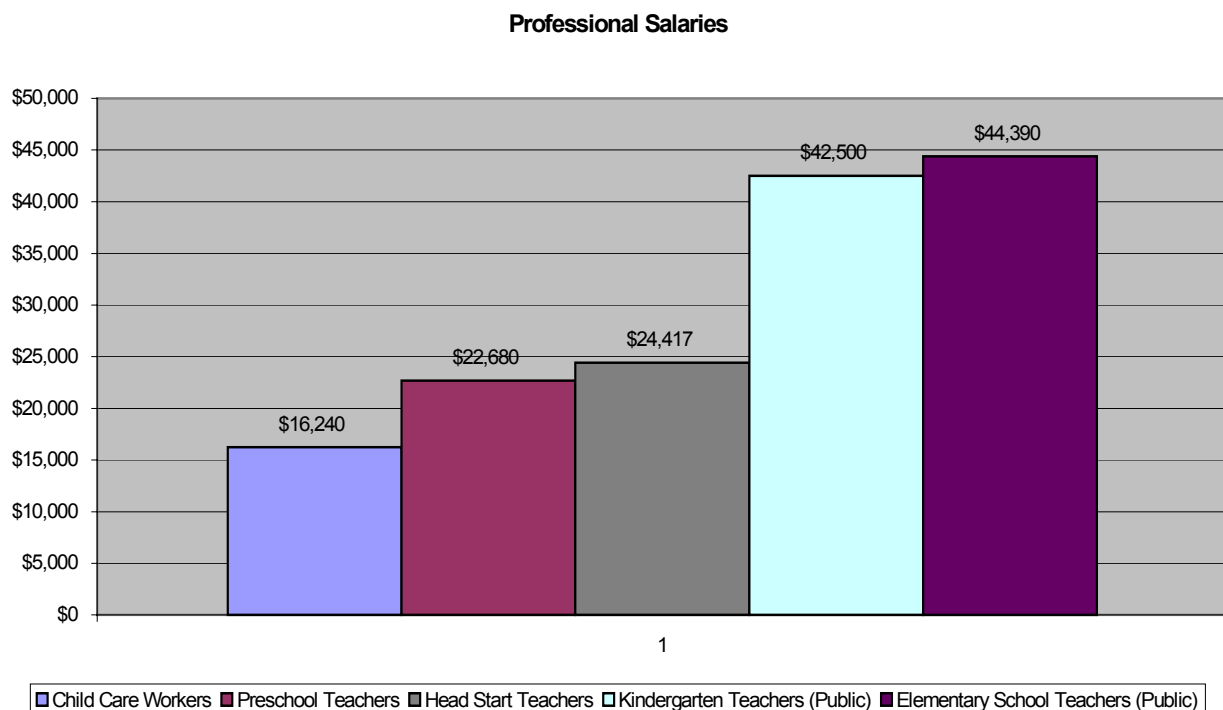
NYSTE preparation courses that help prepare teachers for the exams do not adequately meet many of the remediation needs of individuals. A coordinated strategy is needed to address the knowledge, skill and language gap of those individuals seeking to take the test to obtain certification.

² Teachers in study plans, or provisionally, certified need to complete all educational and experience requirements within a certain time period in order to achieve permanent certification. (See Appendix II)

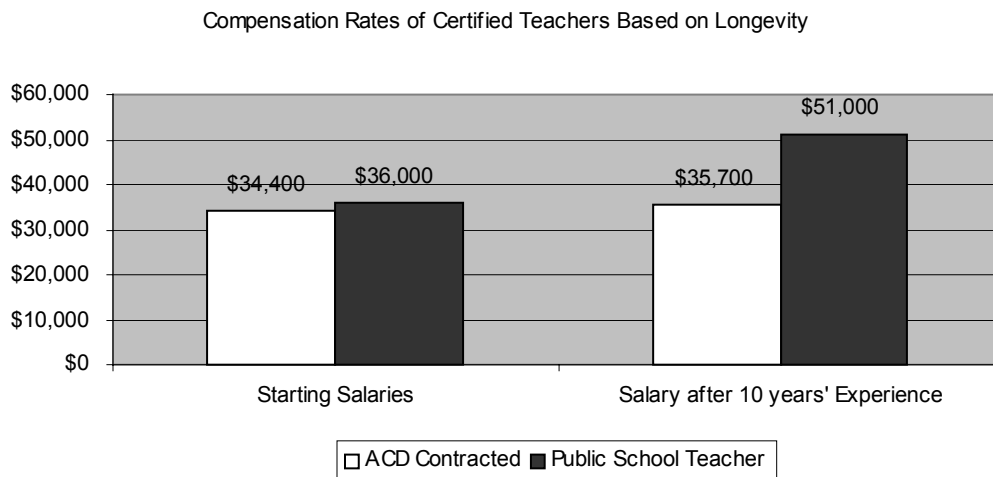
- The cost of credit bearing courses is high. Even when teachers are reimbursed, tuition is usually required up front.
- There is a shortage of ongoing professional development. Less experienced and less qualified teachers need more intensive, ongoing, on-site support. New teachers, in particular, report feeling ineffective and discouraged. They need more help to integrate content, pedagogy and performance. Veteran teachers need on-going professional development to keep them informed and skilled in the most current, best practice approaches.
- There is a shortage of experienced directors. Many directors have come straight from the classroom and, while their teaching experience is important, they lack the management experience needed to effectively direct a program. Research shows that a good on-site director can greatly influence the quality of a program and the ongoing professional development of its teachers. Few day care center directors, for example, have an Administrator's Credential or the more advanced Supervisory and Administration Degree (SAS) that help prepare individuals for the complex work that supervision entails.

□ Address Compensation Levels and Disparity Between Teachers in CBOs and in Public Schools.

- The incentive to enter the field of early childhood education, and to remain in the field is greatly diminished by comparably low wages, and lack of benefits to the public school system. Average statewide compensation in the publicly funded early childhood and school age programs falls significantly short compared to public school teachers.



In NYC, while the *starting* salary of teachers paid in the various early education delivery systems (ACD Contracted, Head Start, Board of Education) appears to be competitive (see Appendix III) the compensation rate for ACD contracted and Head Start teachers stays relatively stagnant, losing its value the longer one remains in these programs compared to teachers in the Board of Education. *After 10 years of experience, a fully certified teacher in a publicly-funded child care program will earn \$35,761, while the same teacher commands \$51,000 in the public school system.* It can also be argued that the comparability of compensation rates further widens when one considers significant differentiation in benefits packages and the fact that teacher compensation in early childhood programs is based on 12-months, whereas a teacher in public schools works a 10-month year.



□ **Create a cohesive system of training and professional development opportunities linked, when appropriate, to academic requirements for certification.**

- Few articulation and joint registration agreements exist, making it difficult to transfer credits between two-year and four-year institutions.
- Most training is not linked to academic credit, advancement or certification.
- There is no single source of updated information about training and professional development opportunities.

First Steps Toward a Coordinated Strategy...

The diverse members of the early care and education community must work collaboratively with government officials, local government agencies, education and special education providers, teachers' and administrators' unions, advocates and early education experts. Together they must create a system-wide strategy to meet the challenge of preparing, recruiting and retaining a qualified, early education workforce.

The State Education Department (SED) is already advancing a number of commendable initiatives that will provide numerous opportunities to meet the goal of quality education programs for all NYS's children, Pre-K through 12.

- Starting in 2003, SED will issue a new Birth – Grade 2 teacher license in addition to a Grade 1-6 license. This is intended to ensure that teachers are well versed in a curriculum that is age-appropriate and that focuses on how young children learn and develop.
- SED has mandated that every teacher have a mentor during the first year of teaching. School districts will be given much discretion in deciding how to fulfill this requirement. Implementation in the early care and education arena has still not been determined because Pre-K operates in public school and community-based settings.
- SED, acting to ensure more rigorous standards for teacher education programs, now mandates that 80% of students must pass NYSTE in order for institutions of higher learning that offer degree programs to maintain their accreditation. This will force more rigorous standards for teacher education programs. The result of these efforts should be more and better qualified early childhood teachers.

Additionally, higher education institutions are moving to establish early childhood concentrations in undergraduate and Master's Degree programs to meet the need to train more early childhood teachers.

The Career Development Initiative (CDI) has been the vehicle for the development of a new Children's Program Administrator Credential (CPAC). CDI has developed a comprehensive list of competencies that fall under six specific topics that form the foundation for appropriate college level coursework. The New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC) is the credentialing body. Courses are currently offered at a small number of institutions across the state. However, Empire State College offers courses on-line and Pace University has developed a program that incorporates the CPAC course work in a graduate program that would lead to a supervisory certificate (SAS).

Within New York State a number of important and innovative training and professional development models exist. Funding these models so that they can realize their full potential would provide the foundation upon which to build more cohesive training and professional development strategies. (See Appendix IV)

The early education system can build upon this foundation. The following are a number of possible steps, identified by a broad range of experts in the field of education, to consider taking in building a system-wide strategy.

□ **Develop Actions to Ease the Teacher Shortage**

- Adopt **salary scales** that reward both increased qualifications and longevity on the job.
- Continue to **reduce salary disparities** between public education teachers and teachers in publicly funded child care systems until parity is established.
- Include **tuition support** in all recruitment efforts.

- Develop ways to create **certification alternatives** for teachers in CBOs as well as in public schools.

□ **Build Cohesion and Collaboration Within the Delivery System**

Convene a series of forums with key stakeholders from the early childhood provider system with government officials, local government agencies, education and special education providers, teachers and administrators' unions, advocates and early education experts. These forums could seek to accomplish the following:

- Identify and prioritize the most pressing recruitment, training and retention issues of early care and education teachers and directors.
- Identify strategies and resources to collectively strengthen the early childhood workforce vis-à-vis training, mentoring, supervision, career counseling, NYSTE test preparation, and certification.
- Determine the feasibility of leveraging resources (financial and personnel) across systems to expand access to training/professional development services.

Out of these forums inter-agency/stakeholder committees could be established to ensure a long-term commitment to achieving changes within the system.

□ **Establish direct links between higher education and early childhood programs to accomplish innovative and coordinated education strategies.**

- Develop effective loan forgiveness and scholarship strategies.
- Assess the ongoing training and professional development needs of teachers in early care and education classrooms today.
- Develop a program that links veteran directors and teachers with higher education institutions as adjunct faculty to enable some community-based organizations to offer training that is credit bearing.
- Create mentoring and supervision models that meet the developmental needs of teachers, i.e., new teachers, teachers lacking strong qualifications, and veteran teachers.
- Explore the feasibility of professional development schools (perhaps a network of accredited programs) that are models for best practices for the early care and education at large. These schools could serve as centers for training across the system.
- Establish Higher Education/Early Childhood Provider collaborations that are comprehensive and credit bearing. Lay the groundwork for more site-based education that creates a new role for higher education *in* the field.
- Establish consistently high standards of matriculation in teacher education programs.

- Advocate for articulation and joint registration agreements between two and four- year higher education institutions that really work. Discern the extent to which this is a serious barrier to teachers moving toward baccalaureate degrees and certification.
- Work in partnership with the State Education Department to include the early education workforce in its teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

□ **Create Local Early Care and Education Professional Development Centers**

- Collect reliable community-based data to determine the training and education needs, compensation disparities, and gaps needed to be filled given the demand for certified teachers.
- Coordinate and publicize training opportunities across the system.
- Coordinate, strengthen, and better target NYSTE course preparation among various institutions and agencies. Develop a diagnostic tool to assess teachers' strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis NYSTE. Counsel teachers towards appropriate preparation or more intensive remediation.
- Review teachers' credentials and map out individual plans to move towards certification.
- Create a hotline where teachers can call for information re: training, NYSTE preparation, and certification.
- Develop innovative professional development models.
- Create local recruitment hubs and job clearinghouses for early childhood programs.
- Develop and coordinate a strategy to help paraprofessionals and option teachers, many of whom have been in the classroom for years, to begin movement towards certification.

CONCLUSION

Several major barriers to maintaining and expanding quality early childhood programs have been outlined in this paper, including teacher shortages, inadequate teacher preparation and professional development opportunities, and compensation and benefit disparities. Overcoming these barriers will not be accomplished by short-term or piecemeal solutions. It requires an investment in resources to support teacher recruitment, training and retention, including higher wages. It also requires strategic collaboration and coordination of resources and expertise with the higher education community and the willingness of all parts of the early childhood field to work together to build a system that can ensure a qualified workforce prepared to meet the needs of educating young children in the 21st Century.

