

# Making It Work for Early Education and Out of School Time Professionals



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# Our Window of Opportunity

Massachusetts has long had a professional development system for those who teach in traditional school settings. However, for those working with children before they enter kindergarten or in an out-of-school time environment, professional development is not standardized nor is there a statewide professional development system for the field.<sup>1</sup> As a result, many practitioners<sup>2</sup> outside the public school system lack the training and higher education demanded by the profession. Furthermore, many of these practitioners are paid very low salaries with few or no benefits, creating additional barriers to professional development.

Great progress was made when, in July 2004, the Massachusetts legislature created a new public agency, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). EEC was established to coordinate standards and funding for all early education and care programs in the Commonwealth and to oversee licensed out-of-school time programs. The law that created the EEC (Early Education for All; Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2004) included a first-time mandate for a statewide workforce development plan for early education and out-of-school time practitioners.

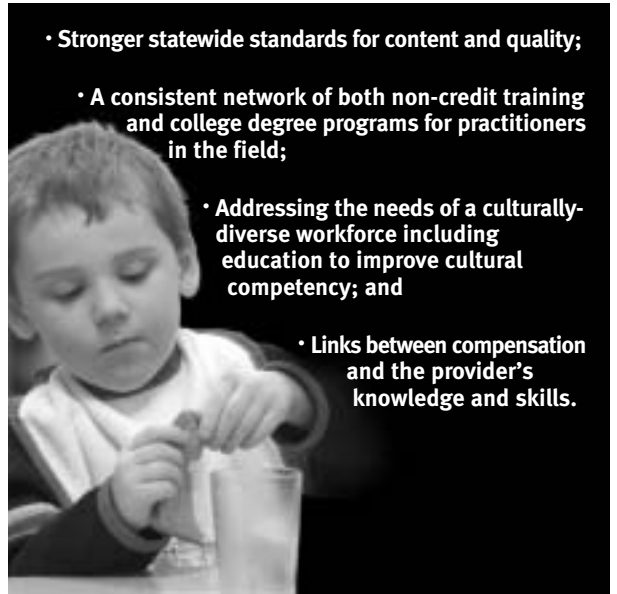
## Did You know?

The number of early childhood educators in Massachusetts who hold a four-year degree has declined by nearly 20 percent since the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

## Conversations for a Stronger Workforce

With the passage of the legislation, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and the Schott Foundation Fellowship in Early Care and Education (Schott) saw a unique opportunity to facilitate a series of discussions about effective approaches to workforce development. Participants in these discussions included representatives from direct service agencies, resource and referral organizations, the public policy arena, public and private sponsors, and higher education. The result of this collaboration is a report to EEC that summarizes the findings from the meeting series, supports the mandate to complete a plan, and presents our recommended next steps. (Available at <http://www.uwmb.org/making-it-work.pdf>). United Way, Schott and 100 persons from the field in Massachusetts, and outside experts, have concluded that the most important needs and issues challenging the creation of a workforce development system are:

- Stronger statewide standards for content and quality;
- A consistent network of both non-credit training and college degree programs for practitioners in the field;
- Addressing the needs of a culturally-diverse workforce including education to improve cultural competency; and
- Links between compensation and the provider's knowledge and skills.



This work will require new thinking to let go of certain long-held assumptions and beliefs. It will also require the willingness to take some risks as well as a continued commitment from those leading this work to ensure all voices are heard.

## The Need for a Workforce Development System

While the various stakeholders in the field have specific perspectives, adhering to a set of core values will keep us focused on our larger mission to serve children and their families, and it will keep us moving forward with a sense of purpose and unity. Drawing upon the lessons of other states, United Way and Schott believe that the new workforce development system should:



### Five “Must Haves” for an Effective System

Many adults who work with children in the field still do not have the tools, resources and support they need to understand child development or to deliver the kind of education and care children require in today’s social environment. With its mixture of program types and provider settings, and its diversity of children and families, the most effective way to address the complex issues of workforce development is through a comprehensive, statewide system.

United Way and Schott offer five recommendations to create a professional development system that will build upon prior successes and draw from the lessons learned in other states:

- 1. We need good data to make sound decisions.** Collecting and understanding the credentials and salary levels of professionals in the field would allow policy makers and sponsors to analyze workforce conditions, to establish benchmarks for progress and to help make more informed funding decisions. It would also provide individuals with a way to track their career growth over time.
- 2. An increasingly diverse Commonwealth needs teachers who can teach across different cultures.** A more culturally competent workforce will be better able to respond to the needs of the children and families they serve.
- 3. Establish a clear set of credentials that set the path for career development.** It is time for the entire field to have defined and required skills for all roles and levels of responsibility. Creating a foundation of core competencies will provide the basis for workforce credentials and advanced degrees.
- 4. Make accredited higher education accessible.** Today, the workforce has many choices for professional development including some where extensive coursework may not necessarily lead to credentials or degrees. Access to accredited higher education provides opportunities to improve salaries, and to turn non-credit learning into credits towards a degree.
- 5. Fund the system.** Project-specific funding efforts to support professional development or address the compensation gap have been ineffective. Substantial funding will be required to get a new system off the ground, including money to provide scholarships and increased pay and benefits.

# Massachusetts Must Act Now

The results of the outlined approach will have long-term benefits in supporting the development and academic achievement of our young people by providing educated and skilled workers in the field, by decreasing turnover and by implementing policies that equip practitioners at every level with greater skills and knowledge.

Now is the time to build on our own previous successes, and to learn from the experiences of other states in building a long-term, comprehensive approach to professional development for the field.

We encourage you to stay informed and to become actively engaged with this issue at both the community and state level. For information and suggestions on how to do so, please visit [uwmb.org](http://uwmb.org) or [schottfoundation.org](http://schottfoundation.org).

## Did You know?

The average salary of a center-based preschool teacher is \$22,640, 40 percent less than the average kindergarten teacher's salary.<sup>4</sup>



## Did You know?

Research shows children do better in programs where teachers are better educated.<sup>5, 6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term "field" is used to refer to all people who work with infants, toddlers, preschool-aged children, and school-aged children (birth through age 14) in all public and private early childhood and out-of-school time settings in Massachusetts.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to professionals who work in all sectors and roles of early child care and education and out-of-school time, serving children and families of all ages, in a variety of settings.

<sup>3</sup> Herzenberg, Stephen et al. *Losing Ground in Massachusetts Early Childhood Education: Declining Workforce Qualifications in an Expanding Industry, 1980-2004*. Economic Policy Institute, Foundation for Child Development and The Keystone Research Center.

<sup>4</sup> *Massachusetts Early Care and Education Staff Recruitment and Retention Research and Recommendations*. Office of Child Care Services, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, Nancy L. et al. *Massachusetts Capacity Study Research Brief: Characteristics of the Current Early Education and Care Workforce Serving 3-5 Year-olds*. Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *Massachusetts After-School Research Study (MARS) Report*, Intercultural Center for Research in Education (INCRE) and National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), 2005.