

Goal 3. Early Learning:

Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

Goal Leader: Ann Whalen, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Delegated the Authority of the Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Public Benefit

Each year, about 4 million children enter kindergarten in the United States. They live in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. They speak many languages, come from diverse cultures, and have differing abilities, which may require individualized services and supports. Parents and caregivers send their children to school believing that one day their children will be able to pursue their dreams—whether that is teaching, protecting their communities as police officers, making scientific discoveries, or helping companies and organizations succeed. All parents hope their child will start school ready for success. And many parents turn that hope into action, seeking out supportive and high-quality early learning opportunities. Unfortunately, not every parent finds those opportunities, and access to high-quality early learning opportunities differs across states and communities. There are large disparities in enrollment based on geography, race, and socioeconomic levels. As a result, too many children enter kindergarten a year or more behind their classmates in academic skills and socio-emotional development.¹ For some children, starting school already behind can trap them in a cycle of continuous catch-up in their learning. As a nation, we must ensure that all children, regardless of family circumstance, immigration status, the color of their skin, disability, or their zip code, have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

Advances in education, developmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine, and economics have helped to demonstrate the benefits of quality early education for young children and that the years from birth to age five are a critical period in children’s learning and development, providing the necessary foundation for more advanced skills.² For example, at kindergarten entry, children with bigger vocabularies at an early age have higher reading and mathematics achievement and fewer behavior challenges.³ A robust body of research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not participate. The gains are particularly powerful for

¹ Yoshikawa, Hirokazu, Christine Weiland, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Margaret R. Burchinal, Linda M. Espinosa, William T. Gormley, Jens Ludwig, Katherine A. Magnuson, Deborah Phillips, and Martha J. Zaslow. Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education. Vol. 9. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development, 2013.

² Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L., Gormley, W., & Zaslow, M. J. (2013). Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base for Preschool Education. Policy brief, Society for Research in Child Development and the Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from the Foundation for Child Development website: fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Evidence_Base_on_Preschool_Education_FINAL.pdf

³ Maczuga, S., Morgan, P., Farkas, G., Hammer, C., Hillemeier, M., & Scheffner, C. 24-Month-Old Children With Larger Oral Vocabularies Display Greater Academic and Behavioral Functioning at Kindergarten Entry. *Child Development*, Volume 86, Issue 5, pages 1351–1370, September/October 2015.

children from low-income families and those at risk for academic failure who, on average, start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers in preliteracy and language skills.⁴

Studies also reveal that participating in quality early learning can boost children’s educational attainment and earnings later in life.⁵ Children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to utilize special education services or be retained in their grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended high-quality preschool programs.⁶ Research also suggests that expanding early learning—including high-quality preschool—provides society with a return on investment of \$8.60 for every \$1 spent with half of this benefit from increased earnings and improved health outcomes for children when they grow up.⁷

The Administration began efforts to increase investments in early learning in its first term and has continued to request additional funding in each subsequent budget proposal—through Head Start, child care, home visiting, IDEA Part C, ELC, and Preschool Development Grants. States and local communities have welcomed the opportunity to partner with the federal government through these early learning programs.

From 2011 to 2013, 20 (of the 40 states that applied for ELC) were awarded grants. These grantees had committed to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of early learning programs across multiple funding streams supporting children from birth through age 5 and serve as model early learning and development systems. By December 2014, nearly 14,000 early childhood programs are ranked in the highest quality tiers of the 20 ELC states’ rating systems—a 63 percent increase since the states applied for their grants—with significantly more children enrolled in the highest quality-rated early learning programs than ever before.⁸ National technical assistance is also available to help all states in building such systems.

In 2013, the President’s Budget proposed a landmark investment to expand access to high-quality preschool, Preschool for All. The President’s overarching vision has been captured in the bipartisan *Strong Start for America’s Children Act* reintroduced in the 114th Congress. This legislation would fund voluntary, high-quality preschool for all four-year old children from families earning below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line in a state-federal partnership, and encourage states to spend their own funds to support preschool for young children with family incomes above that income level. The legislation would also expand Early Head Start-child care partnerships to help raise the quality of services for infants and toddlers and increase IDEA funding for young children with disabilities.

In addition, Strong Start includes authorization for [Preschool Development Grants](#), which were first funded by Congress in 2014. Last year 18 states (of the 36 that applied) were awarded grants to create or expand high-quality preschool programs for 4-year-olds in over 200 high-need communities. This program builds on the achievements of ELC by expanding access to preschool programs that include the following nationally recognized standards: high staff qualifications; professional development for teachers and staff; low staff-child ratios; small class sizes; full-day programs; developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive

⁴ Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. (2000). Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

⁵ See, e.g., Yoshikawa, et.al., Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education, 2013.

⁶ Center for Public Education. (2008). The Research on Pre-K. Alexandria, VA.

⁷ White House Council of Economic Advisors. The Economics of Early Childhood Investments, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early_childhood_report1.pdf

⁸ At a Glance: Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Year 2014 Progress Update <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2014apr/rtt-elic-2014-apr-progress.pdf>

instruction and evidence-based curricula and learning environments that are aligned with states' early learning standards; inclusive programs for children with disabilities; employee salaries that are comparable to those for K–12 teaching staff; ongoing program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement; strong family engagement; and onsite comprehensive services for children.

Providing children, including children with disabilities and those who are ELs, with quality early education experiences is essential to strengthening our nation's economy. Significant new investments to expand access to high-quality early learning, improve the early childhood workforce, and support comprehensive assessment systems are necessary to help states, local communities, and parents close the school readiness gaps between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers. Only then can we ensure that all children graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 3.2: Effective Workforce. Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to improve young children's health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.

Objective Leader:

Libby Doggett, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

Securing a well-trained and properly supported early learning workforce is an essential element of high-quality early learning programs. Significant headway has been made in describing and conceptualizing what teachers do in the classroom that results in learning, which is a critical first step in getting teachers into those positions.

On April 1, 2015, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) released *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, which was commissioned by both the Departments of Education and HHS and four philanthropic foundations. The study explores the science of child development, particularly looking at implications for the professionals who work with children birth through age 8. The committee found that much is known about how children learn and develop, as well as the qualifications of the early childhood workforce and the supports they need. However, this knowledge is not fully reflected in the current capacities and practices of the workforce, the settings in which they work, and the qualifications and professional learning that is most effective.

The IOM/NRC Study outlines a blueprint for action based on 13 recommendations for local, state, and national governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic funders, and the business sector to support improvements to the quality of professional practice for early learning professionals who work with children from birth through age 8 and the environments in which they work. The study makes recommendations on improving the quality of the early learning workforce, including higher levels of education such as a bachelor's degree for lead educators, qualifications based more strongly on competencies and knowledge, and the use of evidence-based practices and strategies. Additionally, the study recommends fair compensation to recognize the professionalization of the workforce, as well as other improved supports for educators in their work environments. In the months following the release,

additional communication materials were developed and distributed to the field through conferences, webinars, meetings, and in-service trainings.

ELC states are creating quality professional development systems to improve the skills of current and aspiring early learning teachers, directors, and assistant teachers. Fourteen ELC states are specifically working to provide and expand access to professional development opportunities that are aligned with their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and that tightly link training with professional development approaches, such as coaching and mentoring (CO, DE, GA, KY, MD, MN, NJ, NM, OH, OR, PA, RI, WA, and WI). These states are also using incentives, such as scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives and strategies to promote professional improvement and career advancement. These other strategies include management opportunities, and they promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is based on the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. Fifteen ELC states are working to support educators in improving their knowledge, skills and abilities (CA, CO, DE, GA, IL, MD, MA, MI, MN, NM, NC, OR, PA, RI, VT).

The Preschool Development Grants program sets a high bar for workforce quality in the 18 grantee states. High-quality preschool programs require, for example, high staff qualifications, including a teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a bachelor's degree in any field with a state-approved alternate pathway, which may include coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of knowledge of content and pedagogy relating to early childhood, and teaching assistants with appropriate credentials. In addition, instructional staff salaries are required to be comparable to the salaries of local K-12 instructional staff, and programs must provide high-quality professional development for all staff.

Four states (Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, and Oregon) are finishing up working with the OSEP-funded [Early Childhood Personnel Center \(ECPC\)](#). This work centered on enhancing the personnel system within the states to ensure that personnel have the knowledge and skills to provide services to young children with disabilities and their families. These states developed and are implementing a plan to align their personnel standards with national professional organization personnel standards; develop partnerships with universities and community colleges to ensure that their curriculum is aligned to state personnel standards and to support better alignment between pre-service preparation and in-service professional development; and implement evidence-based practices within in-service professional development. ECPC is in the process of selecting four more states to work with over the next two years. In addition to providing intensive TA with states, ECPC held Leadership Institutes for 20 states. These Leadership Institutes provides strategies for Part C and Part B, section 619 coordinators and leaders within early childhood agencies to work together to develop the workforce so that they have the competencies to serve young children with disabilities and their families. Additionally, ECPC has facilitated national professional organizations coming together to identify a set of competencies that personnel need to serve young children with disabilities. Those organizations include including DEC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Occupational Therapy Association, and the American Physical Therapy Association. Through this work, DEC and NAEYC are in the process of developing an agreement to align their personnel standards. During the fiscal year OSEP, also funded 7 new awards to universities to prepare personnel to work in early intervention and early childhood special education.

Challenges and Next Steps:

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed ESSA, reauthorizing the ESEA. ESSA includes a new Preschool Development Grants program designed to improve coordination of early childhood programs and expand access to high-quality preschool, which may positively affect the early childhood workforce with expanded opportunities for professional development and improved conditions. ESSA also includes language explicitly stating that Title II dollars can be used for early childhood educators. Also in December 2015, President Obama signed the FY 2016 spending bill, which provides funding for year 3 of the Preschool Development Grants. The Departments will be working to secure funding for the fourth and final year of the current Preschool Development Grants program in FY 2017.

Challenges abound in developing an effective early learning workforce. States have hiring challenges, due in part to a lack of available well-trained and effective personnel across multiple disciplines. Some states have experienced high turnover of early childhood educators and consultants due to low wages, attractive offers in other states, challenging financial times, and program management. States that can sustain programs for longer periods have less difficulty recruiting and retaining strong early childhood educators.

The Department and its technical assistance providers are working to address some of these challenges through webinars, peer learning, and pointing out promising practices, such as mentoring and coaching. For example, a study examining career pathways to be released in FY 2016 will provide states with an overview of how these systems are working in a handful of leading states. Reducing duplication of efforts and promoting promising practices is necessary for creating an early learning workforce that can deliver on the promise of these programs. ECPC is currently working with Part C and Part B, Section 619 coordinators to identify additional states with which to work to improve their personnel systems. A challenge that Part C and Part B, section 619 personnel experience is that they are often not included within workforce initiatives within states. To address this, ECPC will continue to hold Leadership Institutes as a way to provide Part C and Part B, section 619 coordinators strategies to engage and become decision makers in workforce initiatives within their states.

Building on the positive reception from the release of the *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, the Departments are developing a plan to fund additional activities addressing the implementation of the recommendations, including funding a study on financing of preschool and convening with IHEs. The study will examine how to fund early care and education for 3- and 4-year-old preschool children that is accessible, affordable to families, and of high quality, including a well-qualified and adequately supported workforce consistent with the vision outlined in the Study. Over the course of 20 months, an ad hoc committee will review and synthesize the available research and analysis on the resources needed to meet the true costs of high-quality early care and education, including resources for improving the quality, affordability and accessibility of higher education; improving the quality and availability of professional learning during ongoing practice; and supporting well-qualified educators and administrators with adequate compensation through complete wage and benefit packages that are comparable across ages and settings.

The committee will gather information and review the available evidence on funding mechanisms that are currently being employed successfully on a large scale as well as illustrative examples of funding strategies that are being employed on a smaller scale but have promise for expansion. The committee will also take into consideration lessons that can be drawn from financing of early care and education in other countries and from workforce development in sectors other than education. The committee will produce a report that

synthesizes the information gathered and, based on their analysis and interpretation, draws conclusions about and makes recommendations for concrete, implementable funding strategies in the public and private sectors at the national, state, and local levels.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Target	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
3.2.A. Number of states and territories with professional development systems that include core knowledge and competencies, career pathways, professional development capacity assessments, accessible professional development opportunities, and financial supports for child care providers ⁹	SY: 2011 30	30	Not Collected	NA	38	NA ¹⁰	NA	NA
New Metric: Number of states that require a teacher with a bachelor's degree in a state preschool program	SY: 2013– 14 15	NA	SY: 2013–14 15	NA	NA	NA	19	20

NA = Not applicable.

TBD = To be determined.

Academic Year (AY) is a collegiate year spanning August–May; School Year (SY) spans August–July and is aligned with a P–12 school year; Fiscal Year (FY) corresponds to a federal fiscal year; Calendar Year (CY) spans January–December.

Data Sources and Frequency of Collection:

3.2.A. CCDF Report of State Plans (HHS/Office of Childcare); biennially

⁹ Metric being removed at the end of the FY 2015 reporting period and being replaced with the metric identified as “New Metric” directly below it. If there is no corresponding “New Metric” identified, new metric TBD. Please refer to appendix B for details pertaining to the removal and addition of metrics. The proposed FY 2016 and 2017 targets for the metric being removed were NA Biennial Metric and NA, respectively.

¹⁰ Please refer to footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.**