



Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

Before the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committee, in support of L.D. 1652 “An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educator Workforce”

May 11th, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, my name is Heather Marden and I am writing testimony on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) in support of LD 1652.

MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children and families.

We support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, with scholarships for credentials and degrees and a focus on compensation, because high quality early care and education (ECE) is essential for children, families, and Maine’s prosperity.



We have about 64,500 children under age 5 in Maine.



The first years of a child’s life are the period of the most rapid brain development.



Children, their families, and our state benefit from early childhood education in ways that are immediate and long-lasting.



But the extent of the benefits they reap depends on the depth of the quality of their experiences and education.



And the depth of that quality depends on the strength of the early childhood educators providing it.



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Early educators' skills, knowledge, and well-being are inseparable from the quality of children's early learning experiences. Yet, under our system of preparing, supporting, and compensating early educators in the United States, the almost-entirely female ECE workforce struggles to provide for their own families and, in many cases, to put food on the table. Such unlivable wages mean ECE workforce turnover is common, putting children's development at risk, while parents struggle to pay child care costs. In this mostly privatized system, no one wins. (The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018)

Unmet Need for Early Care and Education in Maine and an ECE Workforce Shortage

In Maine, families are looking for child care. They are on waiting lists. They are living in parts of the state where options are few. They are piecing together arrangements to try and have some reliable care for their young children so they can go to work. At the same time, our child care programs are struggling to find and keep qualified staff.

A few months ago, MaineAEYC conducted a quick survey reaching out to our members and network to get a sampling of information from ECE programs in Maine. We asked about issues around recruiting and retaining early childhood teachers. Directors of child care centers reported back high turnover and a desperate need for qualified teachers. They are shifting around groups of children, having support staff and administrators fill in teacher positions, focusing more of their time on recruitment/hiring than on leading high quality early learning, closing classrooms, and decreasing enrollment. *(survey data attached)*

Well-Being of the Workforce & Policy Recommendations

This workforce experiences more stress than many other fields, and teachers who are struggling to care for themselves will have difficulty caring for young children. With responsive state policies, we can increase educators' quality of life and job satisfaction, improve job stability in the field, and attract high-quality teachers.

First and foremost, wages that are commensurate with the qualifications and demands of the job are necessary to maintaining an effective workforce. Early educators working in child care centers and family child care programs earn poverty-level wages, earning significantly less than their K-12 peers. And

these large income disparities persist between educators working in different settings even when their education levels are comparable.

Second, the cost of higher education can be an additional financial burden. Because increases in educational attainment are not usually followed with meaningful increases in pay for birth to age 5 educators, it is important that students do not take on significant debt to pay for higher education. Scholarships have increased access to higher education for early childhood teachers in many states.



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Higher Education and Professional Learning Contribute to Quality Practice

We have a big divide in the early childhood continuum, from birth to 3rd grade, in terms of what type of professional learning is required and what is accessible. Why? There are separate qualification and certification or licensure policies for educators in different settings. This divided system for B–5 and elementary school educators perpetuate misconceptions that working with younger children requires less knowledge and skills. These disparities foster inequities in compensation, making it more difficult to recruit and retain B–5 educators. Solving this problem is not as easy as simply increasing qualifications. Educators will need time and support to meet new guidelines. We must ensure that increases in education are coupled with substantial salary increases.

In Maine, the qualifications a child can expect her teacher to meet depend more on what her family can afford and the types of programs available in her area, than on her developmental and educational needs.

In order to have well-qualified teachers who possess all the knowledge and skills they need, policies should acknowledge that all educators of children B–8 need a similar foundation of knowledge and skills, including a focus on child development, early literacy, math, science, and how to maximize everyday interactions with children by participating in high-quality clinical experiences. In Maine, we have a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood education programs (B-5) called Quality for ME. For programs wanting to reach higher levels, they must have teachers with associates and bachelor's degrees.

Pathways to ECE Credential & Degree Requirements

It is important to remove barriers that keep early educators from gaining more training and education. Early educators, making very low wages, are usually unable to go back to school because of the high costs of attendance and time constraints. We can take steps to increase access to higher education and support educator success by offering comprehensive scholarships to higher education and more than one way to enter the profession.

Entering the ECE profession might begin with a CTE program or an apprenticeship program, or with an Infant & Toddler credential from Maine Roads to Quality's online course offerings. We can build career pathways by linking these programs with Maine's community colleges and four-year institutions through articulation agreements that create stackable credentials. Career pathways operate on two levels: a systems approach for the workforce at large and an individual approach for each professional seeking advancement.

As a member of the MaineSpark coalition, we support Maine's goal that by the year 2025, 60% of adults in Maine's workforce will hold a postsecondary degree or credential of value in demand by Maine employers.



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We are not starting from scratch. Maine was a national leader in the development of articulation agreements and the creation of an ECE Core Knowledge program (180 hours of training) that can translate to 9 credits at Maine’s community colleges. The University of Maine campuses with teacher education programs have 2+2 articulation agreements with all of Maine’s 2-year community colleges. These agreements provide a seamless process for students who want to obtain a bachelors’ degree in early childhood education as well as teacher certification. We have already started to build stackable credentials, and now we can add to and refine the current agreements to have multiple, accessible career pathway options.

A Snapshot of Maine Teachers at Early Care and Education Centers

- 8,473 center-based ECE professionals (data from Maine’s ECE Career Lattice Registry)
- 17.8% have less than High School Diploma or GED
- 18.5% have a high School Diploma or GED
- 13.4% have some college credits (less than two years)
- 7.9% have ECE credential or certificate (one year)
- 12% have an Associate Degree
- 25.8% have a Bachelor’s Degree
- 4.5% have a Master’s Degree or Doctorate

We likely have over 2,500 teachers working in center-based programs with education and training equal to their public-school peers. According to federal statistics, the average salary for elementary and secondary teachers in Maine is around **\$50,000** (2015-16). Using per hour median wage data, we can estimate the average salary for ECE teachers in Maine is somewhere between **\$22,500 - \$30,000**, depending on what type of program they work in and what age children they teach.

In a pandemic economy, the child care industry is struggling even further to recruit and retain a child care workforce. As we saw women leaving the workforce in record numbers to care for their children and support remote learning, child care programs felt the exodus as well. It is why it is vital now to put policies into place that support longevity of the child care workforce.

We ask for your support for LD 1652 to support compensation, career pathways, and educational attainment for the early childhood workforce in Maine. Please show that you value the highly skilled and hard work that these educators do each and every day.

Sources:

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Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education

Issue Brief for Policymakers

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