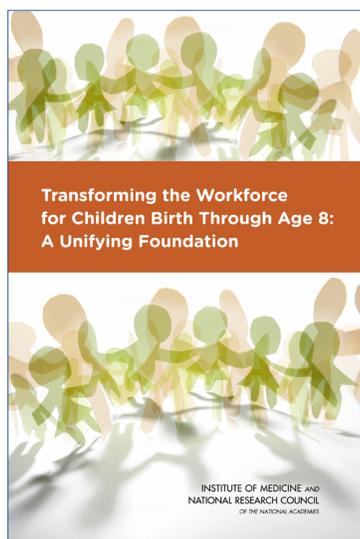


Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education Highlights from Two Reports

May 2018

Early childhood is a time when developmental changes are happening that can have profound and lasting consequences for a child's future. Studies have shown that much more is going on cognitively, socially, and emotionally in young children than previously known. Even in their earliest years, children are starting to learn about their world in sophisticated ways. Development proceeds in ways that are both rapid and cumulative, with early progress laying the foundation for future learning.

Two reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine—*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (2015) and *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* (2018)—explore the science of early childhood development, identify ways to strengthen the competencies of professionals who care for and educate young children, and recommend approaches for financing early childhood care and education in a way that supports high quality and broad access.



TRANSFORMING THE WORKFORCE FOR CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH AGE 8: A UNIFYING FOUNDATION

Emerging science makes clear the importance and complexity of working with young children from infancy through the early elementary years. Young children thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their development and learning.

The system for educating children from birth through age 8 can be improved to better support care and education professionals in acquiring the competencies and knowledge they need. Expectations for these professionals often have not kept pace with what science indicates children need, and many current policies do not place enough value on the significant contributions these professionals make to children's long-term success.

To ensure continuous, high-quality care as children progress from infancy to preschool and through their elementary years, all professionals who work with children need a shared base of knowledge and skills. Across age ranges and settings, care and education professionals need

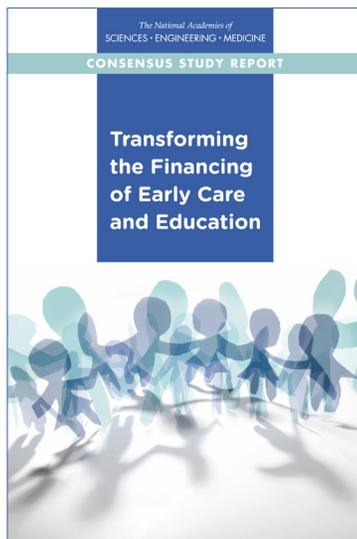
- core knowledge of developmental science and of content,
- mastery of practices that help children learn and develop on individual pathways,
- knowledge of how to work with diverse populations of children,
- the capability to partner with children's families and with professional colleagues, and
- the ability to access and engage in ongoing professional learning to keep current in their knowledge and continuously improve their professional practice.

Educators in particular need a greater coherence in professional learning supports, both in higher education and during ongoing practice. For example, those who provide care and education for infants and toddlers and those who practice in settings outside of centers and schools, such as family child care, need greater access to infrastructure for professional learning.

Better support of early childhood care and education professionals will require mobilizing local, state, and national leadership; building a culture in higher education and ongoing professional learning that fosters a cohesive workforce for young children; ensuring practice environments that enable and reinforce the quality of these professionals' work; and creating consistency across policies and infrastructure.

The report recommends actions geared toward improving higher education and ongoing professional learning, strengthening qualification requirements based on knowledge and competencies, and promoting evaluation that leads to continuous improvements in professional practices. For example, agencies that oversee care and education settings should strengthen and align competency-based qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.

The report also recommends a phased, multiyear transition to a minimum bachelor's degree requirement with specialized knowledge and competencies for all lead educators. Because of the complex issues that accompany a minimum degree requirement, careful planning will be needed for implementation over time.



TRANSFORMING THE FINANCING OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

While high-quality early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry is critical to children's positive development, it has been financed in such a way that it is only available to a fraction of the families who need and want it. Currently in the United States, financing for early care and education is a layering of separate programs with different funding streams, eligibility requirements, and quality standards. The financing structure places a large burden to pay for early care and education directly on families in the form of fees and tuition, making high-quality early care and education prohibitively expensive for many families.

All children and families should have access to affordable, high-quality care and education, the report says. Access should not be contingent on the characteristics of their parents, such as family income or work status. Early care and education (ECE) programs and financing mechanisms should not set eligibility standards that require parental employment, job training, education, or other activities. Federal and state governments should set uniform family payment standards that increase progressively across income groups and are applied if the ECE program requires a family contribution.

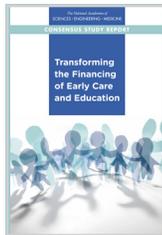
Transforming the financing structure to meet the needs of all children and families will require greater coordination among financing mechanisms, greater uniformity in standards to incentivize quality, and significant mobilization of financial and other resources shared across the public and private sector.

For example, the report recommends that federal and state governments establish consistent standards for high quality across all ECE programs, and link funding to attaining and maintaining these quality standards. State and federal funding mechanisms should also ensure that providers receive payments that are sufficient to cover the total cost of high-quality early care and education. To provide adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding for a unified, high-quality system of early care and education for all children from birth to kindergarten entry, federal and state governments should increase funding levels and revise tax preferences.

In addition, because compensation for the ECE workforce is not currently commensurate with desired qualifications, the workforce should be provided with financial assistance to increase practitioners' knowledge and competencies and to achieve required qualifications through higher-education programs, credentialing programs, and other forms of professional learning.

The flaws in the current financing structure are exacerbated by overall low levels of funding that are not sufficient to enable families at all income levels to access high-quality services, the report says. Drawing from existing literature on the costs of various elements of a high-quality ECE system, the committee produced a national, aggregate estimate of the total cost of providing high-quality early care and education for all children, as well as an estimate of the costs of transitioning to this high-quality system over four phases of implementation.

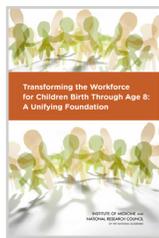
The report's illustrative estimate is that the total cost of providing high-quality early care and education for all children, once fully implemented, is at least \$140 billion per year (from all sources public and private), equivalent to about three-quarters of 1 percent (0.75%) of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), or slightly less than the current average of 0.8 percent of GDP allocated to early care and education for the nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Given the increased costs of a high-quality system, more families will need assistance in order to access and afford care and education, and public investments will need to grow over the four phases by at least \$5 billion (in phase 1) to \$53 billion (phase 4) a year above the actual current level of public investments.



Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education (2018)

Available:

http://www.nas.edu/Finance_ECE



Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation (2015)

Available:

<http://www.nas.edu/birthtoeight>

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For More Information . . . This Highlights was prepared by the Board on Children, Youth, and Families based on two Consensus Study Reports: *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* (2018), sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Alliance for Early Success, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Caplan Foundation for Early Childhood, Foundation for Child Development, Heising-Simons Foundation, Kresge Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation; and *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (2015) sponsored by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Robert R. McCormick Foundation, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Administration for Children and Families and Health Resources and Services Administration), and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization or agency that provided support for the project. Copies of the Consensus Study Reports are available from the National Academies Press, <https://nap.edu>.

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