SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OREGON’S EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

A FOUNDATION FOR KINDERGARTEN READINESS OF OREGON’S CHILDREN

POLICY BRIEF

Roberta B. Weber, Ph.D.
Oregon State University

Shannon T. Lipscomb, Ph.D.
Oregon State University-Cascades

June, 2015
Professional Development of Oregon’s Early Learning Workforce: Foundation for Kindergarten Readiness of Oregon’s Children

Policy Brief
June 2015

Submitted to:
Early Learning Division

Submitted by:
Shannon Lipscomb, Oregon State University, Cascades Campus
Bobbie Weber, Oregon State University

Acknowledgements:
This brief represents the collaborative work of the Oregon Child Care Research Partnerships and the Early Learning Division, Oregon Department of Education. Thanks for thoughtful reviews go to Dawn Woods, Early Learning Division; Ingrid Anderson, Portland State University; Bridget Hatfield, Oregon State University; and Heather Morrow-Almeida, Oregon Health Authority. Special thanks go to Dawn Woods who recognized the need for the brief and provided invaluable feedback throughout its development.

Funding for this work was provided through an interagency agreement with the Early Learning Division, Oregon Department of Education. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the official views of the funding agencies, nor does publication in any way constitute an endorsement by the funding agency.
Families and communities shape the overall well-being and school readiness of Oregon's young children. Communities include an array of health and human services available within them. Early learning services play an important role in supporting school readiness. The extent to which early learning services successfully support children's development is to a large extent shaped by the knowledge and skills of early learning program staff. As shown in the following graphic (see Figure 1) investment in the professional development of the early learning workforce is linked to improved child outcomes in terms of school readiness and ultimately third grade reading scores. This graphic captures the existing system. We could expect enhancements, such as the ones envisioned in this brief, would strengthen learning and school readiness outcomes.

Figure 1: Early Learning Professional Development Logic Model

Oregon’s commitment to school readiness for all of its children makes it imperative that decision makers have data on the current workforce and existing professional development services and structures. In addition, an assessment of gaps in services will support planning for the future. The brief begins with a review of the research on the efficacy of professional development investments. We then describe the education and training levels of the current workforce. A description of current professional development activities and structures follows. Gaps in the current professional development system are identified along with strategies to fill these gaps and thus support Oregon in reaching its school readiness goal.

Children Ready for School: The Role of the Early Learning Workforce

Research has documented the impact of early learning experiences on the development of young children and has increased attention to the professional development of those who teach and care for them (Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC), 2012; NRC, 2001). Child outcomes are inextricably connected to adult-child relationships. For young children in early learning settings, interactions with
teachers/caregivers are the “primary mechanism” through which experiences affect the child (Pianta, 2006, p. 233). What we are learning from the sciences of child development and early learning reinforces the importance and complexity of working with young children (IOM and NCR, 2015). The skill of teachers and caregivers are critical factors that influence how well early learning experiences meet the needs of young children (IOM and NRC, 2012). Critical behaviors such as language use, and responsiveness and sensitivity have direct and long-term effects on later schooling. Research suggests that three factors have the greatest impact on teacher/caregiver quality and effectiveness: compensation, professional development, and stability (Kagan et al., 2008). Experts worry that a workforce with the required level of competence may not be available without a range of financial and other supports. (IOM and NCR, 2012).

Oregon’s Early Learning Workforce: Characteristics
Successful professional development strategies are grounded in knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of those for whom they are designed. Oregon has data on four characteristics of the early learning workforce that need to be taken into account in the design of professional development: type of setting in which workforce members work with children, compensation¹, level of education, and racial/ethnic backgrounds².

Types of settings. The types of settings in which children receive early learning services include both homes and centers, some of which are regulated and some of which are exempt from regulation. In this brief we focus on those that are regulated: centers³, large home-based facilities, and small home-based facilities⁴. Over 20,000 persons work directly with children in regulated child care facilities in Oregon (Oregon Center for Career Development & Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, 2014). As can be seen in Figure 2, the largest number of children and workforce members are in centers, although substantial numbers of the workforce are employed in home-based facilities.

Figure 2: 2012 Early Learning Workforce by Type of Care, N=20,873

Notes
1) Workforce is defined as persons who work directly with children in regulated child care facilities.
2) Center includes Oregon Head Start Programs that are regulated by the Early Learning Division. Wages represent those of teachers in regulated centers.
3) Data Sources: Oregon Center for Career Development, 2012 Oregon Registry Online Data and Early Learning Division, Child Care Regulatory Information System 2012 data.
4) Estimate of the number of children served was calculated by multiplying legal capacity by 1.3 in order to account for enrollment of multiple children in a single child care slot (e.g., a child enrolled MWF and another child in the same slot TR).

Compensation. The wages of center teachers are slightly higher than Oregon’s minimum wage, averaging between a low of $9.50 and a high of $13.61. Wages are not known for

¹ Compensation data are based on 2012 data collected from certified child care centers.
² As of 2012 data were collected on all persons working in regulated child care facilities. Analysis of this data has given Oregon a description of the early learning workforce. The 2012 findings are used throughout this brief.
³ In the near future, all Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten and Early Head Start facilities will be regulated. In the 2012 data used in this brief, not all were yet regulated.
⁴ Within regulation, large home-based facilities are called certified family child care and small home-based facilities are known as registered family child care.
home-based early learning providers. Home-based facilities seldom offer benefits and less than two-thirds of centers offer any benefits for their staff. The fact that about 70% of the revenue for the early learning system comes directly from parent fees (Rahe & Sorte, 2010) makes it difficult for facilities to provide compensation at a level to recruit and retain staff with education levels needed to ensure desired outcomes. Substantial state and federal dollars in the education of children from kindergarten through university reduces the cost paid directly by parents once their child is school age.

**Education and training.** Professional qualifications include both formal education levels and ongoing training. Over two-thirds of the regulated early learning workforce has at least some college education with about a third having a BA or higher (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workforce Members with Education Level Reported</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Diploma or GED</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma or GED</td>
<td>3,521</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, certificate, or foreign degree</td>
<td>2,910</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>1,933</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS or higher</td>
<td>4,186</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12,968</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There were 7,905 individuals who were missing data on education which represents 37.9% of the workforce.

Educational levels vary by type of care, with those working in centers having higher levels of education than those working in home-based settings (See Table 2). Higher percentages of workforce members have attained a level of some college or higher in centers (74 percent) than in large home-based (67 percent) and in small home-based facilities (60 percent). Those members of the workforce who are center teachers or directors are the most likely to have BAs or higher. Thirty-nine percent of teachers and 51 percent of directors have a BA or higher degree. This compares to 37 percent of all center staff, 27 percent of those working in large home-based and 12 percent of those working in small home-based facilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Education Level by Type of Care (N=20,873)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Diploma or GED 178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma or GED 2,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, certificate, or foreign degree 2,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA/AS 1,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS or higher 3,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong> 9,656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There were 5,413 individuals in Centers, 928 in Large Home-Based Care, and 1,564 in Small Home-Based Care who were missing data on education.

---

5 Although some additional investments have been made in recent years, they remain small in comparison to the amount spent by parents.
Center staff and those working in large home-based facilities averaged between 19 and 22 hours of training in 2012, depending on type of care. Those working in large home-based facilities averaged the higher number of training hours. Data were not available for those working in small home-based facilities.

**Race and ethnicity.** Oregon’s young children are increasingly diverse with over a third Non-White in comparison to less than a fifth of those 18 and older being Non-White (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Race and Ethnicity in Oregon*

Oregon educational leaders are increasingly aware of the importance to children’s development of having teachers and caregivers whose language and culture are similar to their own (Oregon Education Investment Board, 2012). As can be seen in Figure 4, 23 percent of the early learning workforce is Non-White or Hispanic, less than the 36 percent of Non-White or Hispanic children under age five but more than the 18 percent of Oregonians 18 years and older who are minorities.

*Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity of Oregon’s 2012 Early Learning Workforce*

Within the early learning workforce, race and ethnicity are highly associated with level of education (see Figure 5). The percentage of the workforce with a Bachelor’s or higher degree ranges from 40% of White staff working in centers to 6% of Non-White providers in small home-based settings. Overall, across all types of care, Non-White members of the workforce have lower levels of education. Reducing these discrepancies in education levels across race/ethnicity is essential to improving the school readiness of children from diverse backgrounds.
Current Investments in Professional Development for the Early Learning Workforce

For the early learning workforce professional development includes a spectrum of education and training, from single-event workshops to college degree programs. Currently in Oregon there are minimal requirements for pre-service professional development prior to providing care and education to young children.

Oregon has been recognized as leader in early learning professional development, with stable structures for:
- Documenting education and training.
- Approving training and trainers.
- Delivering training across the state.
- Licensing child care facilities.
- Delivering early childhood courses and awarding certificates and degrees.
- Providing scholarships.
- Administering a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and other incentives for improving quality.

Documenting education and training. Oregon created the Oregon Registry Career Lattice (Registry) in the early 1990s as a documentation strategy to support a workforce in which formal degrees were limited and competency had been developed through training and experience. The Registry is managed by the Oregon Center for Career Development (OCCD) at Portland State University. Workforce members submit documentation of their training and education (e.g. transcripts, certificates) to OCCD which verifies these documents and subsequently awards members the appropriate step on the Registry. This system supports increased professionalization of a workforce in which less than half have earned degrees but all have training. Amongst the 2012 workforce, almost a quarter of the center and large home-based workforce were persons who had documented their competency and been assigned a step. Less than a fifth of small home-based providers had done so.
Approving training and trainers. Community-based training is the most common form of early learning professional development in Oregon as well as the nation (Whitebook, 2014). Community-based describes a variety of short-term training delivered by CCR&Rs and other community organizations. To assure the quality and standardization of trainings, OCCD manages a system that sets and manages standards for both trainers and training events.

Delivering training. In the early 1990s Oregon established a statewide system of child care resource and referral agencies. These 13 regional community-based organizations identify early learning facilities and workforce members and deliver a range of professional development services including training, coaching, and mentoring. Regionalization provides the workforce proximity to training and enables tailoring of services to meet local needs. Almost half of the CCR&Rs are managed by a university or community colleges and the others are non-profits. The CCR&Rs are linked and supported by Central Coordination, a part of The Research Institute (TRI) at Western Oregon University that coordinates the 13 regional organizations.

Delivering early childhood courses and awarding certificates and degrees. Oregon’s system of higher education plays an essential role in the preparation of the early learning workforce. Sixteen of Oregon’s 17 community colleges have early childhood education programs with wide variance in the number, types, and names of courses offered, practicum experiences, and certificates and degrees awarded. The options in Oregon’s four-year colleges and universities are even more complex and limited in number with degree programs housed in a variety of colleges and departments and having a variety of titles. Early learning related degrees have a variety of names. Maybe most importantly the names, numbers, and types of courses required for an early learning related degree vary across institutions and requirements for student teaching experiences vary widely. Growth in acceptance of prior learning and the number of e-course options hold promise for this workforce. In addition to certificates and degrees awarded by higher education, the national Council for Professional Recognition awards a competency-based Early Childhood Education credential, the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). Head Start and Early Head Start most commonly use this credential. OCCD awards a number of ECE competency-based credentials.

Licensing child care facilities. The Early Learning Division (ELD), Office of Child Care, manages the child care regulatory system which mandates the minimal levels of professional development needed for workforce members employed in regulated facilities. Regulatory rules require a minimum of 15 hours of annual training for those employed in centers and large home-based care. Small home-based providers are now required to complete eight hours of training over a two-year period (this requirement is expected to increase to 10 hours over a two-year period).

Providing scholarships. The need for certificated and degreed early learning professionals and the low wages associated with early learning make access to scholarships critical. The Oregon Community Foundation continues to provide leadership in the field of early learning, including the creation and funding of the Betty Gray Scholarship Fund, which is operated as two distinct programs.

- The Betty Gray Community College Scholarship program awards grants to 16 community colleges that in turn award scholarships to persons working toward early childhood certificates and degrees. Over its first eight years (2004-2012) almost 900 workforce members received financial help to reduce barriers to certificate or degree completion (Weber, Grobe, & Lipscomb, 2013). Most of the colleges work to ensure that ECE students also participate in other federal and state college assistance programs.
- The Betty Gray Early Childhood Training and Certification Scholarship program is managed by OCCD. Workforce members may receive financial assistance for training and college coursework through OCCD. In the first 11 years (2002-2013) OCCD awarded scholarships to 3,178 members of the workforce (Weber & Grobe, 2014). Federal funds are enabling the ELD to offer Race to the Top Supplemental Scholarships targeted to persons who are either minorities or who work in communities with high percentages of children at risk. These scholarships are reducing barriers to completing certificates or degrees. To date, the ELD has awarded 72 scholarships.

Administering a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and other incentives for improving quality. The potential for increased earnings provides motivation for earning certificates, credentials, and degrees. Given the low wages associated with work in early learning facilities, the need for incentives has been identified as a major
issue. The OCCD manages an Education Awards program through which workforce members may earn financial awards for reaching milestones—levels of achievement. The implementation of Oregon’s QRIS has made numerous incentives available to both early learning facilities and workforce members. TRI at Western Oregon University administers QRIS and partners with CCR&Rs who hire Quality Improvement Specialists to deliver support locally. Persons and facilities committed to improving quality may receive personal coaching and financial incentives. In addition, entry into QRIS requires that staff have earned a step on the Registry, thus providing an incentive for individual workforce members to document their level of competency and develop personal professional development plans.

Strategic Investments. Pilot programs managed by ELD are testing systemic improvements to professional development. In addition to the Supplemental Scholarship program described above the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Grant (ECE PD Grant) program is testing early learning teacher training program innovations. Both projects target persons who are either minorities or who work in communities with high percentages of children at risk. Both programs provide navigators to ensure that barriers to successful certificate and degree completion are removed. Consortia of higher education and CCR&Rs in two parts of the state are implementing the ECE PD Grant. As a part of this effort, work is currently underway to create a statewide standard 30-credit ECE certificate. In addition to the two programs managed by ELD, Early Learning Hubs are working with CCR&Rs across the state to improve the skills of those working in areas with high concentrations of children at risk. They have created focused Family Child Care Networks built on evidence that staffed networks increase the skills of workforce and quality of care (Bromer, 2009).

Gaps in Oregon’s Early Learning Professional Development System and Potential Strategies for Filling Them

Appropriate and accessible professional development is essential if we are to ensure a skilled and effective early learning workforce for our young children. Oregon has a number of professional development structures in place and is delivering a range of services to this workforce. Yet, as this brief has documented, gaps exist. These and other evident gaps are listed below with a strategy for addressing the gap noted in italics below a brief description of each gap.

- Skilled workforce whose ethnic, racial, and language characteristics match those of young children.
- Consensus on workforce needs and how to meet those needs.
- A professional development system that meets the needs of the diverse early learning workforce.
- Alignment of professional development standards and educational services across preschool to grade 3.
- Alignment of early learning and family resource manager professional development.
- Highly qualified stable workforce.

Skilled workforce whose ethnic, racial, and language characteristics match those of young children. As noted earlier, the population of Oregon’s young children is increasingly diverse and young children benefit from having teachers who share their cultural and linguistic background. Although minorities are better represented in the early learning workforce than in the general population, there are still not sufficient numbers for the increasingly diverse population of young children. In addition, Non-White members of the existing workforce have education levels well below those of Whites. We need increased access to professional development for minority workforce members and those who work in communities with high percentages of young children at risk.

*Increase access for targeted populations: Efforts to recruit minorities and reduce barriers to participate in professional development are needed. Education and training efforts need to use tested methods for reaching under-represented and under-educated members of the workforce and supporting their efforts to complete certificates and degrees. Outreach, coaching, mentoring, and tailoring of services are all tested methods for increasing educational outcomes of underserved populations.*

Consensus on workforce needs and how to meet those needs. A number of independent organizations and institutions are involved in the training and education of the early learning workforce. These include: OCCD, CCR&Rs, ELD child care licensing, higher education, The Oregon Community Foundation, and TRI at Western Oregon University. We lack consensus among professional development providers as to the educational needs of early learning workforce members and the complementary roles each plays in meeting those needs. Despite the fact that many of these organizations have a history or working collaboratively, the system remains confusing...
and moving through it challenging (Anderson, 2014). Many colleges and universities have articulation agreements but they typically are between individual institutions rather than system wide and must frequently be renegotiated. Some community colleges have agreed to give credit or waive course requirements for markers of achievement such as earning steps in the Registry, but again on an individual basis. Although many partners have met annually for many years, we do not have an institution-level structure that enables representatives of all these organizations and institutions come together to create strategies that work across all systems. A high-level consensus on workforce needs and how the array of services fit into a whole is missing.

Create a framework for delivering professional development. Develop consensus among higher education and other professional development providers as to the educational needs of early learning workforce members and the complementary roles each plays in meeting those needs.

A professional development system that meets the needs of the diverse early learning workforce. The diversity in workforce members’ levels of education necessitates that a range of training and educational services be available. For the most part, training hours and course work are not designed to fit together. Workforce members typically have to advocate having prior training or education accepted when they begin work on a certificate or degree. These degrees vary in name and makeup across institutions so it is difficult to move across institutions. The absence of standardized certificates and degrees and portable, stackable training and education present major barriers to completion of early learning certificates and degrees.

Create standardized certificates and degrees and portable and stackable training and education. Ensure that training is designed so that training units can build toward completion of college courses and credits (stackable training and education). Similarly, college courses need to be portable and flexible so that students can take courses in a number of institutions and not lose credit toward certificates and degrees when they need to transfer to another institution. Acknowledging that many students continue to work, these programs should offer classes at times amenable for attendance. E-courses and degrees hold promise for this population.

Alignment of professional development standards and educational services across preschool to grade 3. The lack of alignment between early learning and K-3 professional development impairs children’s successful transitioning from early learning programs to kindergarten. The Head Start Child Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) provides standards for what preschool age children need to know (Oregon Legislature, HB 4165, 2012). The Oregon Department of Education is doing substantive work aligning ELOF and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Yet, this work has not yet been incorporated into professional development systems. Alignment is made more difficult by the fact that the majority of early learning workforce members have limited to no knowledge of ELOF or CCSS.

Align professional development standards and educational resources across preschool to grade 3. Work is needed to: a) create training and college coursework on ELOF and CCSS and the relationship between them, and b) develop strategies that result in high levels of participation by members of both early learning and K-3 teachers.

Alignment of early learning and family resource manager professional development. Many of the children and families that Oregon is targeting in its efforts to ensure that all children are ready for kindergarten need health and social services as well as early learning. A central part of Oregon’s strategy for ensuring children are kindergarten ready is the development of regional Early Learning Hubs. A key strategy of the Hubs is coordination of family resource managers to ensure that families receive the constellation of services they need. Early learning workforce members need to know how to work as a part of an integrated early learning system. Alignment of family resource manager and early learning workforce professional development would support reaching children at risk and integration of services.

Align early learning and family resource manager professional development. Due to its role in managing both Early Learning Hubs and training of the early learning workforce, the Early Learning Division is in a unique position to ensure that integrated training is created and delivered.
Highly qualified stable workforce. Recruitment into and retention of the early learning workforce is challenged by the inadequate compensation associated with this sector. Facilities are constrained from improving compensation by the size and nature of revenue streams.

**Improve compensation of the early learning workforce.** Given that child care affordability is a major issue in Oregon, raising fees charged to parents is not a viable strategy (Weber & Finders, 2013). Nationally and in Oregon blending public funding with parent fee-generated revenue appears to be a promising strategy. Targeting these efforts in communities with high percentages of children at risk is a core component of these emerging efforts. A related strategy is to provide higher incentive payments to facilities that have achieved a certain QRIS rating. In combination these strategies hold potential for increasing the professionalization of early learning workforce members working with children at risk.

Summary

As demonstrated graphically in the Professional Development Logic Model at the beginning of this brief, there is a clear link between investments in the professionalization of the early learning workforce and children’s readiness for kindergarten and reading ability at grade 3. The increasing percentage of young children with diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds requires a workforce that meets their needs and mirrors them to the extent possible. Fortunately, the current early learning workforce is substantively more diverse than Oregon’s overall adult population, but still does not match the increasingly diverse population of young children. In addition children receive early learning services in a variety of settings. Professional development strategies need to work for workforce members working in different types of care and with a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Oregon has an early learning professional development system that is the envy of many states. Yet, a number of gaps in that system exist. Building on the existing system and the strengths of other sectors, Oregon has the opportunity to increase the professionalization of the early learning workforce and thus improve school readiness and 3rd grade reading scores of its young children.
References


For additional copies of this brief, contact:
Oregon Child Care Research Partnership,
OSU Family Policy Program
231 Hallie Ford Center
Corvallis, Oregon 97331
Telephone: (541) 737-9243
Email: bobbie.weber@oregonstate.edu