



**Oregon Department of
Early Learning and Care**

Growing Futures: Nurturing Careers in Early Childhood Education

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Document Purpose, Uses, and Overview

This document explores the longevity of ECE as a profession, the importance of collaboration over competition, and effective strategies for recruitment and retention. It also provides valuable tools to introduce potential ECE students and help them discover the career path best suited for them.

*Early Childhood Education (ECE) is more than just a job—
it is a lifelong career that shapes the future.*

Part 1: Background and context

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is important, and the research shows that

A substantial research base confirms that when children participate in high-quality early childhood education, they are: more likely to experience improved cognitive and social outcomes; more likely to graduate from high school; less likely to require remedial education, and generally healthier and able to be more productive contributors to their local, state, and national economies. (NAEYC, 2020.)

Basically, ECE is good for children's growth and futures.

ECE is an essential infrastructure and economic necessity. It provides education for young learners and provides childcare for families. Much like public transit, internet access, roads and highways, it is part of the infrastructure that allows parents to participate in the workforce. When parents are kept out of the workforce, this negatively impacts both state and local economy. Less money is spent at local businesses, our government loses tax revenue, and employers across all sectors experience labor shortages. The [Oregon Workforce Partnership](#) promotes child care as essential infrastructure and a support for all sectors; supporting parents to head to work, strengthening and promoting the growth of our economy.

We do not have enough ECE teachers

Workforce shortages are a worldwide and local challenge. Many regions face significant shortages of ECE professionals. For example, all areas of Oregon have been labeled "[childcare deserts](#)" due to a scarcity of early care and education settings, particularly for families needing infant and toddler care. Efforts are underway to address this gap, but challenges persist in attracting qualified staff.

According to the Oregon Job Vacancy Survey, 75% of childcare worker vacancies and 55% of preschool teacher openings were reported as difficult to fill in 2022. This data highlights the recruitment challenges within Oregon's ECE sector.⁶



260,400

Children age 0-5



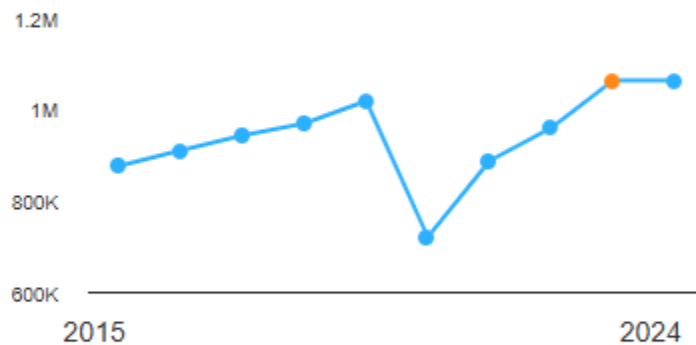
21,700

Early childhood teaching
workforce*

Nationally, the post covid workforce numbers are rising but not enough to meet the needs of families.⁴

Average employment number in child care services ³¹

1,061,967



Average number of child care workers during the second quarter of the year (April–June).

Early childhood job opportunities are expected to grow over the next several years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as a large number of teachers are expected to retire and the emphasis on early childhood education increases. Some 50,000 preschool teaching jobs are estimated to be needed by

2028, along with more than 100,000 kindergarten and early elementary teaching positions. For [infant and toddler](#) teachers, the projected job growth rate is 15% from 2018 to 2028. About 72,900 new jobs for infant and toddler teachers are projected over the next decade.

Infant and toddler teacher salaries have increased by 11% for infant and toddler teachers in the last 5 years. Individuals with a degree in child development or early childhood education can expect a wide range of career options. In addition to the growth in child care jobs, the pandemic highlighted the need for child care in other sectors. In Oregon, initiatives funded by [Future Ready Oregon](#) will need child care to succeed.

While Oregon's population has continued growing, the growth in the child care workforce and capacity has not uniformly kept up, especially for younger children (infants & toddlers) and in many rural counties. Preschool-aged care is improving more noticeably. Public investment has made a difference, but the supply still lags behind what population size/demographics would suggest is needed to fully meet demand. [Many counties](#) have very low access, long wait lists, insufficient qualified early childhood educators, and many child care programs report difficulties filling positions. Some programs have long wait lists because of a lack of qualified staff.

Early Learning Coaching in Oregon

In 2020, at the direction of Oregon state legislators, DELC (then known as the Early Learning Division of Oregon Department of Education) established coaching roles to serve Preschool Promise (PSP) grantees. These coaches joined Oregon Prenatal Kindergarten (OPK) grantee coaches as coaches serving DELC funded programs. These professional learning roles were granted to regional Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.

In combination with establishing professional development roles for PSP, Oregon worked with Hallie B. Ford Center at Oregon State University to establish a capacity building center. This center was officially established in 2021 and is called the Early Learning System Initiative, or ELSI.

This center has been charged to provide professional development to coaches and others working directly with publicly funded early learning programs, including school districts that may be operating programs not funded directly by DELC.

Additionally, ELSI has been tasked with developing a career pathway to coaching, which, when completed, will include:

- Pathway to Coach and Mentor Coach endorsement
- Credit for coaching in Oregon's workforce registry
- Consistent guidance for the implementation of coaching

For PSP and OPK coaches we are able to fund approximately 40 PSP coaches statewide, for over 250 PSP programs. Work to count hours for coaching of non-publicly funded early learning programs towards an educator's required professional development in the Early Learning Registry System at the Oregon Center for Career Development is underway and professionals will be needed to fill those roles.

In coordination with Every Child Belongs (ECB), Oregon's initiative aimed to reduce rates of suspension and expulsion, especially for BIPOC families and/or children experiencing disabilities, DELC is expanding the use of *consultation* as a more intense form of technical assistance. Once we are able to increase our coach workforce, we will be able to support programs in their efforts to avoid exclusionary practice with coaching also. The introduction of ECB support also increases the need for EI/ECSE and behavior specialists.

Higher Education is important for ECE

A complex set of knowledge and skills are needed for early childhood educators to equitably and effectively support young children and their families.¹ Early childhood educators' knowledge and skills are acquired through experience and expertise in and outside of higher education settings. Early childhood educators pursue credentials and degrees for reasons that include, but aren't limited to, strengthening their teaching quality and being recognized for their expertise.³ High costs, limited accessibility, long hours with limited to no personal time, and lack of compensation including paid time off are real barriers for early childhood educators pursuing credentials and degrees. Credentials and degrees have a positive impact on teaching quality.⁵

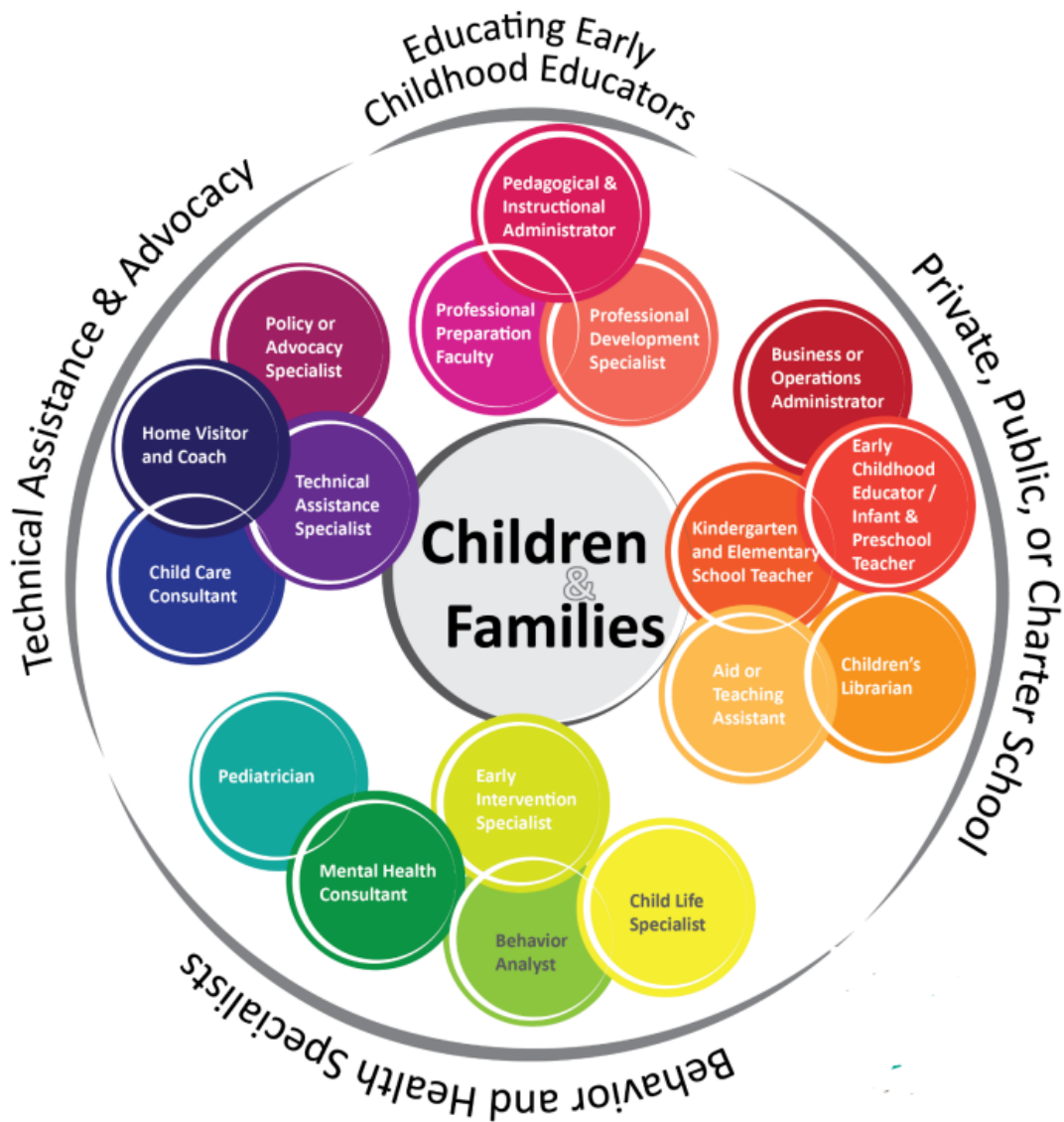
Going hand in hand with fair compensation, educators also need pathways to early childhood degrees and ongoing professional learning supports in order to implement best practices. Emphasizing higher education reflects the

recommendation in Transforming the Workforce (NRC, 2017) to transition to a minimum of a bachelor's degree in early childhood for [ECE] teachers. "In order to fully realize the opportunities for young children, an early childhood educator must be deeply grounded in the science of early learning....." Alvin (2019). As the support for early education as a public good solidifies into policy, the need for higher education will increase exponentially. These conditions can ensure that Oregon retains the workforce it needs, rather than continue to see a quarter of the workforce leaving the field each year.

ECE can be a lifelong career

The longstanding narrative is that many educators find lifelong fulfillment in ECE is true and it undervalues and leads to undercompensation of these dedicated professionals in the field. This narrative may be changed by sharing the various roles and specializations that support opportunities for educators to grow professionally. Opportunities include teaching, administration, curriculum development, and advocacy. Success stories from seasoned professionals highlight how this career fosters personal and professional growth while making a lasting impact on the lives of children and families.

Growth opportunities within the field:



Part 2: Personal stories or testimonials from long-term ECE professionals

The program reached a diverse cohort of learners across age, geography, race and lived experiences. Many students shared that their identities – whether as single parents, first-generation college students, Head Start teachers, or full-time caregivers– deeply shaped their educational journeys. One student reflected, *"As a single mom of three with no transportation, this program was the only way I could earn my degree."* Some others in our survey emphasized that the flexibility of online learning allowed them to honor both their cultural responsibilities, community roles while advancing professionally.

A Teacher, A Peer Mentor and a Graduate

A long-term early childhood educator returned to school herself in order to get her long-awaited bachelor's degree. She had been a teacher for many years, but her heart was in being a peer-mentor and trainer for her fellow teachers. Staffing shortages made it difficult to follow that particular dream: rather than continuing training, she had to take over teaching two separate classes in the absence of peers. She persevered through difficult general-education classes which necessitated repeating, and through the profoundly serious illness of her child while she herself was working full-time and was a single parent. Having finally received her much-celebrated degree, she hopes to use her education as leverage to return to being a peer-mentor.

From Nursing to School Janitor to Teacher

One student received his degree while overcoming severe academic disabilities, changing his career and advancing from janitor to teacher. This student had a difficult start, fighting to survive and thrive against physical disabilities presented at birth. He emerged victorious, but still battles academic disabilities in adulthood. He worked in nursing for years, then transitioned during COVID time to be a janitor at a preschool. Management staff, observing his creativity and dedication to the children at the school, encouraged him to get his degree. In order to graduate he pursued not only his classes but extensive tutoring and mentorship to make his dream happen.

Overcoming Language and Cultural Barriers to Become Leaders

One powerful story of perseverance came from a recent graduate whose journey has become a source of inspiration—not only within her own cultural circles but across all the communities she has touched. A mother and full time professional, she pursued her bachelor's degree with us here at SOU in Early Childhood Development with unwavering determination. Throughout her time in the program, she reminded us of the vital role that comprehension in one's native language plays in accessing higher-level thinking and academic success. She taught us that bilingualism is not a barrier but rather a strength—a bridge between worlds, between families, and between children and their teachers. This student also modeled what it means to face challenges one step at a time, with quiet strength and dignity. Her passion was so strong it spilled over into her capstone project, a topic that changed direction as her heart called her to comfort those around her who were needing someone to guide them. Though she was nervous, she presented to her peers during a time of high stress in her community. This natural leader brought her community together in solidarity, in the face of appalling circumstances and social distress. Her story exemplified resilience—not in the absence of hardship, but in her ability to keep showing up, to ask for help when needed, to trust in us the navigators to be there for her and to continue believing in herself. Her graduation marked a personal triumph, but also a collective one for those who saw themselves reflected in her journey. We are thrilled to share that she has now chosen to continue her education by pursuing a Master's at SOU—further deepening her impact as a bilingual educator, advocate, leader, and role model for so many.

Navigation Supporting Completion

Alicia, an Indigenous student, showed incredible resilience and determination throughout her academic journey. She faced multiple challenges, such as unexpectedly becoming the single working parent for three children under age 7, having no transportation, and experiencing the tragic loss of a close family member partway through earning her Bachelor's degree, but still remained committed to her path. Through several counseling and advising sessions, our navigators provided her with resources, encouragement, and guidance. Alicia not only completed her undergraduate degree, but has also chosen to continue her journey by pursuing her MEd at SOU. Her decision to advance her education reflects her deep commitment to serving her community.

From Volunteer to Assistant Teacher

One educator's path began with volunteering in a Head Start classroom, inspired by her children's teachers. This experience led her to enroll in a nine-month program to

become an Assistant Teacher. Upon graduation, she expressed pride in her ability to inspire and empower both children and their parents, much like the educators who had influenced her own family.

Advancing Education and Establishing a Preschool

Mariana's journey in ECE involved earning a Bachelor of Arts degree and subsequently establishing a home-based preschool. Collaborating with three other ECE professionals, she takes pride in educating children within her community. Reflecting on her academic experience, Mariana appreciated the inclusive environment where her ideas were valued, contributing to her professional growth.

Transitioning to Early Childhood Mental Health

A professional's graduate studies led them from Early Childhood Education to specializing in Early Childhood Mental Health. They became a child therapist focusing on young children, eventually progressing to roles as a supervisor, consultant, and advocate for services supporting the very young. Their leadership extended to serving as the inaugural president of AIMHiOhio, the Association for Infant Mental Health in Ohio.

Embracing Teaching in Early Childhood

An educator shared that choosing a career in early childhood education has been transformative and rewarding. They emphasized the joy and fulfillment found in the early years classroom, stating that if given the chance, they would make the same career choice again.

Overcoming Challenges in the ECE Profession

Another professional recounted nearly a decade in ECE, teaching in various settings including Montessori schools and private non-profits. Despite holding positions as a lead teacher and pre-kindergarten director, they faced challenges such as low pay and high stress. The demanding nature of the job, coupled with understaffing, led to significant stress and physical discomfort, ultimately influencing their decision to leave the profession.

ECE in Higher Education

"It feels like continuing my education and training is fine tuning my skills and knowledge. I just obtained a higher paying job because of the DALE certification and ORO step increase."

"My classes have been an amazing introduction to ECE. It is giving me the tools I need to be successful. I have a better understanding of children's backgrounds and cultures and how to properly navigate challenges. Practicing what I learn in my class in my field placement has given me more confidence, I feel more prepared and feel like I have more tools. I feel more comfortable engaging with children in the classroom. This program has changed my life. It has sparked my passion to pursue my education. I didn't think this would be a reality for me." ~ Javier Saldana

"I have been in childcare for a couple of years now. Started a daycare, loving that I get to help children grow and learn. I found resources to apply for the Preschool Promise Program. My coaches helped me do a professional development plan and had me connect me with the [Partners in Practice Program](#). From that moment, they helped me get into the PIP scholar program. At 37 years old I never would have thought about college. School was a bad experience for me growing up. The navigators knew all the answers to my questions and responded quickly and thoroughly. I love going to school now! The PIP staff has been the utmost positively encouraging people through all of my classes, helping me with applications, and keeping me informed on any news and updates. I have enjoyed all of my classes. I went from a 1 to a 7.5 in my ORO, within a matter of months. Now I am a few classes away from a certification. I am so grateful for the program to reach out and help me go back to school. I could not have done it without the program. It is a blessing to have this program and everyone that helps it run work so hard and are so kind to help. Thank you for all that you do." ~ Dusty Stroud

"As a first generation student who is returning to school after many years there is a sense of guilt that you carry in putting yourself first over your family. Having the ability to receive these funds allowed me the luxury to explore my dreams and equip me to better serve the children and families in my community. I could have never afforded to put my dreams into action without these funds, thank you!" - J.H.

"The leadership, support and outreach from the ECD program was so valuable for my university experience. This summer I had the amazing opportunity to meet my teachers, advisor, and peers at graduation. Thanks to SOU serving Northern California as well as Oregon. I couldn't have walked

in person for graduation if it weren't for SOU's online program. The support from SOU encouraged me to pursue my Master's degree!" - S.I.

"Without this program, I wouldn't have been able to go back to school. I've shown my children what's possible."

Support matters!

Over the 2024/25 academic year, the college journeys of early childhood education students at Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) reflect the powerful impact of tailored navigational and financial support. Many students, (for privacy pseudonyms have been used) like Patience, Micha, and Ronnie, overcame significant personal and systemic challenges, ranging from trauma, poverty, and neurodivergence to balancing family responsibilities and past academic struggles, yet persisted with the help of consistent guidance and encouragement from Professional Development Navigators. Others, such as Eun-ji, Elle, and David, entered or reentered higher education after years in the field or running their own child care programs, using community-based training, prior college credits, or flexible course formats to chart efficient and meaningful paths to professional advancement. Several students, including Noelle and Anicorn, leveraged their growing qualifications and confidence to take on leadership roles or launch new ventures, inspired by both academic success and participation in events like the Grand Articulation Summit (GAS). Throughout these stories, a clear theme emerges: when students receive individualized support, access to financial resources, and recognition of their lived experience and prior learning, they are empowered to reach career milestones, envision broader possibilities, and build a future not only for themselves, but for the children and families they serve.

Part 3: Retention in ECE, Data and Trends

Retention is a challenge in ECE, but understanding key trends can inform better support systems. Data on workforce stability, job satisfaction, and turnover rates provide insights into areas for improvement. Here's a data-rich overview of early childhood education (ECE) workforce retention in Oregon and the United States.

Approximately one-third of centers experienced high turnover—defined as $\geq 20\%$

annual staff churn—in the 2019 [National Survey of Early Care and Education](#)

In 2022, turnover among childcare workers was roughly 65% higher than that of a typical occupation. Meanwhile, turnover among preschool and kindergarten teachers was similar to norms in other fields.

Also in 2022, [Early Head Start programs](#) reported a 29% annual turnover rate and a 9% vacancy rate, with many staff departing for higher compensation.

[Key factors](#) in attrition include:

- **Manageable workload, fair scheduling, and autonomy** are crucial for well-being.
 - New roles are being created like those at Child Care Substitutes of Oregon (CCSO). CCSO is Oregon's statewide substitute system for early childhood programs. CCSO Substitutes are available for child care programs throughout Oregon: Certified Centers, School-Age Centers, and home-based Certified Family Child Care and Registered Family Child Care. Eligible child care programs get access to 50 hours of subsidized substitute time per calendar year.
- **Competitive pay + reliable benefits** (including retirement, health insurance and paid time off) remain foundational to workforce retention.
- **Career mobility and accessible, relevant PD** support satisfaction and longevity.
 - For those leaving programs due to inadequate compensation and perceived lack of career mobility, but love the field, expanding awareness of Early Childhood Education careers supports retention as well.
- **Supportive relationships and inclusive workplace culture** matter deeply—especially for diverse workplaces.
 - The system increasingly supports retention through access to community through cohort classes and the support of mentors and other teachers both in higher education and community based technical assistance.
- **Intrinsic motivation and meaning** help educators stay despite systemic challenges—but alone, not enough.

- The more that we support teachers to view this as professional work and support them through higher education, the closer we can get to typical turnover rates.
- **Entry level positions require high level training that may not be consistently available**
 - Hiring throughs with a higher education degree or credential provides support needed for both high quality care and investment in the field.

Equity dimensions

- Disproportionate make-up of women with inequitable compensation - The ECE workforce is disproportionately made up of women and women of color, yet compensation and advancement opportunities remain inequitable. (In contrast, higher-level leadership roles are more frequently occupied by men, especially white men.) Many women in the field also shoulder additional caregiving responsibilities at home, including caring for children and elders within their family networks.
- Turnover in underfunded, marginalized communities can disrupt relationships and affect program stability. High turnover undermines **quality of care**, as strong child outcomes depend on stable, consistent relationships, and high quality of care.
- Beyond retention, the workforce shortage in ECE is shaped by low wages, limited career pathways, and challenging working conditions. These factors intersect to make both recruitment and long-term stability difficult, with direct consequences for program quality and family access negatively impacting care connection, relationship, and quality learning.

Some new programs are emerging to meet these challenges. For example, [Washington, D.C.'s Pay Equity Fund](#) raised wages for ~4,000 child-care workers. Programs participating in the fund retained 60% more staff, and the workforce grew by an estimated 7% above what it would have been otherwise.

[New Mexico Is the First State to Offer Universal Child Care \(from NIEER\)](#)

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and the state's Early Childhood Education and Care Department announced that New Mexico will become the first state to guarantee no-cost universal child care starting November 1. The initiative removes

income eligibility requirements and eliminates family copayments, extending benefits to all families. To build capacity, the state will invest in facilities expansion, provider recruitment, and workforce support that include higher reimbursement rates and incentives for programs to offer competitive wages and extended hours. The state has estimated a need for 5,000 more early childhood professionals to meet demand.

Oregon-Specific Snapshot

As noted, compensation remains a major issue in retention in care positions. The low wages earned by early childhood educators often leave them economically insecure and unable to meet [basic needs](#). Oregon is committed to investing in early childhood education as evidenced by the support for early childhood teacher compensation requirements that align with those in the kindergarten environment. Oregon increased investments in publicly funded early childhood programs (i.e., Oregon Pre-Kindergarten, Preschool Promise, contracted slots) to implement those requirements. In addition, the state is working to guarantee professional support such as planning time, paid professional development time, wellness and health benefits, et cetera. In partnership with Early Learning Hubs and other key organizations, the Early Learning Division continues to work on building greater public understanding of the critical role and impact early childhood educators have on children and families.

In addition to compensation, Professional Development & Career Growth is a key factor in both recruitment and retention in the field. Access to ongoing training and education can boost confidence and effectiveness, and clear pathways to leadership roles, such as becoming a director or an ECE specialist like an Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist, enhance retention.

Higher Education plays a key role in overcoming these factors and that means considering the whole student. Since many currently in the field have families of their own, work-life balance is a challenge that keeps some students out of higher education opportunities. In addition, recognition and social value for ECE needs to be present throughout higher education organizations, demonstrated through investments in faculty and support systems in ECE departments, an understanding of the ECE career possibilities, and promotion of them by advisors. The following are just some of the supports that higher education can offer:

- Offering college courses at off campus sites, such as community centers or employers worksites.

- High-Flex programs where students can join online through Zoom, or attend face-to-face or a mix of both throughout a course.
- Provide substitutes so those working in the field can attend college courses during the day.
- Providing bilingual pathways
- Offering Communities of Practice and cohorts for students to support each other through their journey
- Provide consistent, ongoing funding for educational opportunities for early childhood.
- Offering weekly virtual meetings for micro-teaching, writing support, scholarship application, textbook/resource sharing, information sharing, peer mentoring, study skills, Spanish speaking student navigation support, and Q&A sessions.
- Offering strong and targeted advising and mentoring as well as social emotional support and encouragement through personal experiences, strategies, and stories to share
- Supporting mindful moments for mental stress and/or work demands through physical stretch for micro-restoration, and deep listening and understanding to promote well-being and belonging

The NAEYC report, "[Increasing Qualifications, Centering Equity](#)" emphasizes that higher education institutions can best support the ECE workforce by creating:

affordable and accessible pathways that remove significant financial and systemic barriers to degree attainment. This requires implementing comprehensive financial supports, such as

debt-free college or scholarship models that cover tuition, books, and associated costs (e.g., transportation) upfront. Additionally, higher ed must offer high-quality,

flexible coursework—including online classes and those held in communities, evenings, or weekends—to accommodate working professionals who are often caring for their own children. Crucially, institutions should work with states to establish

seamless, articulated transfer pathways from credentials (like the CDA) to associate's and bachelor's degrees, ensuring credits easily transfer and that students can complete field requirements at their current workplace. The ultimate goal is to increase

educational attainment while maintaining workforce diversity, leading to increased professional credibility, opportunities for advancement, and a stronger advocacy voice for ECE educators.

The report was developed as a partnership between the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and The Education Trust. It is based on the responses and recommendations from 50 early childhood educators of color who participated in focus groups in New Jersey, North Carolina, and Wisconsin and rings true for support needed for child care workforce everywhere.

Part 4: Joint Recruitment Efforts

College and University partnerships have been incredible supports student's continued success.

For example, Western Oregon University (WOU) and Chemeketa Community College (CCC) have collaborated through shared advising; bridge events—where community college EC students and faculty visit the WOU campus to spend the day in class, attend sessions, and engage with faculty; and WOU EC faculty joining community college practicum or seminar Zoom classes to meet and talk with students and faculty.

The success of one ECE program benefits the entire field. Rather than competing for enrollment and recognition, programs that engage in shared advertising, mentorship, and resource-sharing create stronger communities and attract more educators. Examples of cooperative efforts demonstrate how collective success strengthens the industry as a whole.

College and Childcare Resource and Referral collaborations have developed recruitment videos and media shared at movie theaters and on the radio that brought students to both local and neighboring institutions. Combining efforts for the creation of these field recruitment videos benefits all of the entities involved.

Additional degree pathways would be beneficial for Oregon ECED students. Currently, many community colleges offer students an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) or an Associate of Arts - Oregon Transfer (AAOT). The AAS typically requires students to take many ECED courses, with much less emphasis on general education requirements. Alternatively, the AAOT focuses heavily on general education coursework, but only 12 credits are allowed to be career and technical education (CTE), which ECED falls into. After two years of full time enrollment, the AAS allows students to achieve a Step 9 on the Oregon Registry Online, while the AAOT only places the student at a Step 7. The lower step limits job opportunities and salary increases. Additional inclusion of general education coursework within AAS programs and/or additional degree pathways, such as an Associate of Arts or Sciences in ECED, would allow students to more efficiently transfer to and complete bachelor degrees at four year institutions. The Western Oregon University/Chemeketa Community College partnership mentioned above is an excellent example of a 2 year institution and 4 year institution working together to allow students to efficiently complete a bachelor degree.

Throughout the state, many two year community colleges have articulation agreements with high schools and four year universities. These agreements make it easy for students to transfer their ECE credits from high school to college, then the Associates Degree to a program offering a Bachelors' degree.

Southern Oregon University (SOU) actively engages with regional colleges through Consortia work, a practice that fosters stronger, longer-lasting relationships and ensures all partners remain connected and supported. This collaboration is built on a history of trust and word-of-mouth recommendations, such as SOU's support for SOCC and Rogue Community College (RCC), which includes SOCC sending students to RCC when a needed course isn't available that term. Additionally, SOU offers workshops available to the entire ECE workforce, serving as a friendly introduction to the university system that makes advanced education feel possible for those who might not have considered it. Dedicated navigators from the institutions share successful strategies and ideas, creating a mutual learning environment that significantly increases support for all students and helps programs that may only have one ECE staff person. The relationship between the colleges, often facilitated by local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, also plays a crucial role in internal recruitment and collective growth.

Effective Recruitment Strategies

Recruiting passionate individuals into ECE requires strategic approaches. Some have found success in fine-tuning their individualized approach by offering detailed overview sessions both in person and via Zoom. Employing a Pathway Navigator also plays a pivotal role by attending numerous marketing events such as scholarship days, job fairs, cultural group events, high school fairs, local networking events, and conferences. In addition, brief introduction videos to programs serve as a powerful tool during onboarding processes, enabling Directors to effectively communicate growth opportunities within ECE and assist in recruiting talented individuals to join the field.

Other effective practices include:

Here is the combined and expanded list of effective recruitment strategies for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce, incorporating the strategies you provided:

Enhanced Recruitment Strategies for the ECE Workforce

The following comprehensive strategies focus on increasing the pool of qualified ECE professionals by addressing barriers and improving access to education and career entry:

- **Financial Accessibility:** Prioritizing mechanisms like scholarships, grants, and stipends to make ECE education debt-free or low-cost. There are many scholarships available to fund higher education. Some of these include Oregon Promise that funds two years of community college immediately following high school/GED completion, and private funding such as the Betty Gray Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund (community college tuition) or the Early Learning Degree Pathway Scholarship (community college or 4 year institution) of the [Oregon Community Foundation](#).
- **Flexible Learning Options:** Offering varied course schedules, online, hybrid, evening, and weekend formats to accommodate working adults.
- **Strengthening Career Pathways and Partnerships:** Creating clear, articulated degree paths and fostering strong, collaborative relationships between higher education institutions, community colleges, and ECE employers.
- **Accelerated Pathways:** Developing options for quicker completion of credentials or degrees.

- **Increasing Awareness & Prestige of ECE Careers:** Actively marketing the importance, impact, and professionalism of ECE work.
- **Holistic Supports:** Providing comprehensive services that address students' needs beyond academics (e.g., transportation, childcare).
- **Targeted Recruitment:** Directing outreach efforts toward specific, underrepresented populations or communities.
- **Language Accessibility:** Ensuring materials, courses, and support services are available in multiple languages to reach diverse populations.
- **Support Services & Navigators:** Employing dedicated **navigators** and peer mentors to guide students through the application, financial aid, and academic processes.
- **Creative Placement Processes:** Developing flexible and supportive practicum and field placement models, including allowing students to complete requirements at their current workplace (**flexible practicum placement**).
- **Gen Ed Course Supports and Alignment:** Ensuring general education courses are aligned with ECE needs and supported to improve student success.
- **Campus Visits, Workshops, or Workshop Series:** Organizing introductory events (like **SOU workshops**) to demystify the university system and increase comfort for potential non-traditional students.
- **Community Engagement Programs and High School Outreach:** Targeting future graduates and community members early in their career exploration.
- **High School ECE Symposium:** Offer an ECE symposium on college sites for ECE high school students to attend, meet faculty and experience a college classroom.
- **Internship and Apprenticeship Opportunities:** Providing paid, high-quality, on-the-job training.

- **Highlighting Career Advancement and Long-term Benefits:** Clearly communicating opportunities for growth, leadership, and stability within the ECE field.
- **Showcasing Diverse Paths within the ECE Field:** Presenting the full range of ECE careers, not just classroom teaching.
- **Regular Visits by Higher Education Navigators to ECE Classes:** Bringing support directly to current ECE students and workers.
- **Regular Posting in Resource Centers:** Utilizing high-traffic, accessible community locations for information distribution.
- **Regular Attendance at local Early Learning Conferences:** Engaging face-to-face with the current ECE workforce.
- **Hosting Listening Sessions Each Term:** Gathering feedback directly from ECE professionals to continually improve support and program design.
- **Dedicated Supports Website:** Creating a single, easy-to-navigate online hub for ECE career and education resources.
- **Direct CCRR Outreach to specific communities** (e.g., Federated Tribes): Leveraging Child Care Resource and Referral agencies for hyper-local, culturally responsive outreach.
- **Use of regional newsletters** and local media for consistent communication.
- **Hosting ORO credit workshops to demystify and remove negative images of higher education** (e.g., making it less intimidating and more practical).
- **Advertisements on radio and movie theaters** for broad public awareness.

The real-world examples below illustrate strategies that have recruited and retained enthusiastic new professionals into the workforce.

Drawing from successful strategies across various institutions, recruitment and retention efforts are significantly boosted by creating accessible and supportive pathways into

the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field. One effective strategy involves hosting ECE symposiums for high school students on college campuses, providing them with a mini-lecture, campus tour, and direct information on enrollment and scholarships, which gives students a clearer understanding of college life and immediate next steps. Furthermore, higher education consortia are vital, as structured financial and non-financial supports make students feel more capable and financially secure during degree pursuit. A key support is offering Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), which acknowledges existing field experience, supports degree completion, and has been shown to benefit the ECE workforce significantly.

Institutions are also developing formal programs, such as a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program for teacher's aides, which provides paid on-the-job experience while working toward a certificate or degree. Other successful initiatives include Summer Summits that bring together potential transfer students, advisors, and faculty for workshops and community building, resulting in increased student transfers. Finally, fostering a culture of professional growth through traveling workshop trainings provides affordable professional development and credit opportunities, serving hundreds of ECE professionals and students, while leveraging platforms like the ORAEEYC Early Learning Conference is crucial for strengthening retention through peer networking, focusing on topics like burnout and self-care, and aligning with state workforce development goals.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a vital profession that serves as essential infrastructure for families and the economy, yet it faces significant workforce shortages and high turnover rates. This document demonstrates that while financial hardship and challenging working conditions contribute to these issues, a solution lies in a concerted, collaborative effort to professionalize the field and provide robust, holistic support to educators.

The data shows that turnover rates for childcare workers are substantially higher than for other occupations, and many programs report difficulties filling positions. To address this, the document highlights successful strategies that focus on Financial Accessibility,

such as debt-free college models and scholarships; Flexible Learning Options, including online and hybrid coursework; and Stronger Partnerships between higher education institutions, community colleges, and ECE employers. Personal stories throughout the document underscore the powerful impact of these supports, showing how students have overcome significant barriers—such as being a single parent, navigating academic disabilities, or overcoming language barriers—to not only earn degrees but also to take on leadership roles and serve their communities. ECE is a fulfilling and essential career that deserves greater recognition and support. By working together, sharing knowledge, and providing clear pathways for students, we can build a stronger future for early childhood education.

Call to Action for Higher Education Leaders

By investing in the next generation of ECE professionals, you are investing in the future of education itself. To build a stronger future for ECE, we must collectively commit to this work. Acknowledge the critical role you play in preparing a qualified and diverse ECE workforce. Invest in flexible, accessible, and financially supportive pathways that meet students where they are, and collaborate with your peers and community organizations to build a seamless system of education and support.

Appendix/Tools, Tips, and Resources

1. Tools for ECE Career Exploration for High School Students

For students to consider ECE as a viable career, they need access to clear and engaging information. Tools and resources should include:

- Interactive digital content (videos, quizzes, infographics)
- Mentorship and job-shadowing programs
- Hands-on classroom experience opportunities

- Career pathway guides tailored for different ECE roles

2. ECE Career Pathway Tool

Self-assessment quizzes to match students with suitable ECE careers: A structured career exploration tool can help students identify the ECE path that aligns with their strengths and interests.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w9lqTfRLTMUFXx_o9Ov-8aNAS7Oezd_gFt5DBAjrvMk/edit?usp=sharing

3. Explore ECE Careers Site:

[Department of Early Learning and Care : Explore Careers in Early Childhood Education : For Providers : State of Oregon](#)

4. ECE Careers Flier

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10jVkrWIPUdRnOytBVMqf_9WhOi6A38lo/view?usp=sharing

5. The Importance of Higher Education in ECE Flier

<https://www.oregon.gov/delc/providers/ECE%20Documents/Importance-of-ECE-and-Higher-Education.pdf>

6. Consortia Success

[Higher-Education-Consortia-Success.pdf](#)

7. Importance of Teaching Infants and Toddlers

[YC_Nov_2015_Book](#)

8. Oregon Early Learning Workforce Report

<https://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/oregon-early-learning-workforce---2022-key-findings.pdf>

<https://health.oregonstate.edu/early-learners/research/oregon-early-learning-workforce-2023-report>

9. NAEYC EC Career Center

<https://www.naeyc.org/get-involved/advance-your-career/career-center>

10. Infant Mental Health Endorsement® (IMH-E®) Requirements

<https://www.orimha.org/infant-mental-health-requirements#:~:text=Each%20IMH-E%C2%AE%20category%20has%20specific%20work%2C%20education%2C%20in-service,young%20children%2C%20aged%200-36%20months%2C%20and%20their%20families>

11. Oregon College/University ECE programs

- Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · ECE phone: 541-278-5163. [Blue Mountain Community College](#)
- Central Oregon Community College (COCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · Main: 541-383-7700. [Central Oregon Community College](#)
- Chemeketa Community College — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · Program: 503-399-6072. [Chemeketa Community College](#)
- Clackamas Community College (CCC) — Early Childhood Education & Family Studies (AAS & certificates) · Office: 503-594-3203 · 503-594-6158. [Clackamas Community College+2Clackamas Community College Catalog](#)
- Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS) · Main: 541-506-6000. [Columbia Gorge Community College](#)
- Eastern Oregon University (EOU) — B.S. in Early Childhood Education (online options) · College of Education: coe@eou.edu, 541-962-3762. [Eastern Oregon University](#)
- Klamath Community College (KCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · 541-880-2212. klamathcc.edu
- Lane Community College (LCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificate) · Program/Center line (Child & Family Center): 541-463-5517. lanecc.edu
- Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificate) · [Linn-Benton Community College](#)
- Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) — Early Childhood Education & Family Studies (AAS & certificates) · Dept. line: 503-421-7129. [MHCC](#)
- Oregon Coast Community College (OCCC) — Early Childhood Education (career pathway certificate) · Main: occc@oregoncoast.edu, 541-867-8501 · [Oregon Coast Community College](#)
- Oregon State University (OSU) — College of Education (ECE/Early Childhood pathways via HDFS/teacher prep) · COE: askcoed@oregonstate.edu, 541-737-4661. [OSU College of Health](#)
- Portland Community College (PCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · 971-722-8687. [Portland Community College](#)
- Portland State University (PSU) — Early Childhood (master's, grad certificates incl. Infant-Toddler Mental Health) · Admissions advising: askcoe@pdx.edu · COE Online Programs: 503-725-4619. [PSU | Portland State University+2PSU | Portland State University](#)

- Rogue Community College (RCC) — Early Childhood/Elementary Education & Family Support (AAS & certificates) · 541-956-7168. roguecc.edu
- Southern Oregon University (SOU) — B.A./B.S. in Early Childhood Development · Program contact: KC (Katelyn) Sam, 541-552-6936. sou.education
- Southwestern Oregon Community College (SWOCC) — Childhood Education & Family Studies (AAS & AS) · Program email: ece@socc.edu. ecatalog.socc.edu
- University of Oregon (UO) — Educational Foundations (B.A./B.S.) & Early Childhood/ECSE graduate pathways · COE: coesas@uoregon.edu · Educational Foundations: edf@uoregon.edu, 541-346-8186. education.uoregon.edu
- Umpqua Community College (UCC) — Early Childhood Education (AAS & certificates) · Enrollment Services: enroll@umpqua.edu, 541-440-4600. [Umpqua Community College](http://UmpquaCommunityCollege)
- Western Oregon University (WOU) — B.S. in Early Childhood Studies (non-licensure) · Program: ryanrc@wou.edu, 503-838-8605. wou.edu/early-childhood

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