



Bipartisan Policy Center



# Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeships

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## THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

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The early childhood workforce includes 2 million workers who care for and educate 10 million children from birth to age 5,<sup>1</sup> who have an undeniable impact on shaping a child's successful development. Yet the field is challenged by notably low wages which make recruiting and retaining quality staff difficult. The average national median hourly wage for child care workers decreased to \$10.72 in 2017 from \$13.74 in 2016, a wage below the poverty line in nearly every state.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, demand for a highly educated early childhood workforce is increasing due to improved parent knowledge, a growing market for child care, and changing programs. Unfortunately, child care workers struggle to improve their wages by means such as increasing their competencies, knowledge, and skills on the job.

A 2018 Department of Labor report showed the early childhood workforce faces significant barriers to higher education and professional-development systems.<sup>3</sup>

Registered apprenticeships, or RAs, part of a career pathway as defined by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, or WIOA, are a compelling option for states to support their early childhood workforce. RA programs combine classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and mentorship to create a holistic, earn-while-you-learn approach.<sup>4</sup> RAs allow states to support the existing workforce through growing skills and increasing wages while also creating a unique pathway for the emerging workforce.

### State Models

States lead WIOA implementation, develop WIOA State Plans, and are instrumental in developing RAs.<sup>5</sup> Several states offer strong models for RAs and demonstrate the unique adaptability to meet communities' needs.

West Virginia's early childhood apprenticeship, the oldest continuous model in the country, includes four semesters of low-cost higher education classes and results in apprentices receiving a journeyperson certificate.<sup>6</sup> Nine West Virginia colleges and universities count a journeyperson certificate toward a bachelor's or associate degree.



## Recommendations

In many cases, state leaders do not have the resources or knowledge to take advantage of the exciting opportunities RAs offer. Nearly all resources for apprenticeship programs are aimed at health care and labor industries, and limited funding and best-practice guidance are available to start new early childhood RAs. We recommend several ways the federal government and state leaders can support states and communities with developing these programs:

- Congress should consider funding start-up costs for states to develop and accelerate RAs as part of an early childhood career pathway.
- The Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services should consider actively promoting RAs as a part of a WIOA-defined career pathway for the early childhood workforce.
- HHS should consider expanding their early childhood professional-development technical assistance to include workforce expertise in career pathways and RAs.
- HHS should consider including career pathways and RAs in the 2022-2024 Child Care and Development Fund Plan preprint.
- States should consider charging their WIOA task forces with developing a WIOA-defined early childhood career pathway and RA program, and they should include this work in their WIOA state plans.
- States should consider including early childhood RAs as part of their workforce funding.
- States should consider using systems-building grants, such as the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five, to fund higher-education institutions to develop and monitor content, coursework, and related instruction in RAs.

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The City of Philadelphia, PA, hosts an apprenticeship that moves apprentices from a Child Development Associate, or CDA, credential to an associate degree. The CDA is a recognized early childhood credential and a stepping stone for career development. The program prepares apprentices for college-level coursework through college-preparation courses, academic advising, tutoring, and study groups. Each apprentice receives an on-site coach, and on average, apprentices earn a \$2,000 wage increase on completion of the program.

Colorado administers a two-year program that supports apprentices through funding community college courses, training, books and other relevant expenses, payments for mentors who advise apprentices, and substitutes to fill in for apprentices when needed throughout the program.<sup>7</sup> Once apprentices have fulfilled all requirements for the Colorado Early Childhood Professional Credential, they earn the designation of a child development specialist.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. *Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018*, “Executive Summary.” Institute for Research On Labor and Employment, University Of California, Berkeley, 2018. Available at: <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-Executive-Summary.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Emily Workman. “Earning While Learning with Early Educator Apprenticeship Programs.” New America, February 21, 2019. Available at: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/earning-while-learning-with-early-educator-apprenticeship-programs/>.

<sup>3</sup>Fang Cheng, Robin Koralek, Adele Robinson, et al. *Career Pathways in Early Care and Education*. U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, February 2018. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Career-Pathways-Design-Study/4-Career-Pathways-in-Early-Care-and-Education-Report.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Emily Workman. “Earning While Learning with Early Educator Apprenticeship Programs.” New America, February 21, 2019. Available at: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/earning-while-learning-with-early-educator-apprenticeship-programs/>.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Department of Education. “*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plans Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan Modifications (PY 2018-2020)*.” Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, June 13, 2019. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rso/wioa/state-plans/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup>West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development. “Apprentices.” 2019. Available at: <https://www.wvacds.org/copy-of-be-a-mentor>.

<sup>7</sup>Child Care Innovations. “Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship.” Red Rocks Community College. Available at: [https://www.rrcc.edu/sites/default/files/Child\\_Care\\_Development\\_Apprenticeship\\_Brochure.pdf](https://www.rrcc.edu/sites/default/files/Child_Care_Development_Apprenticeship_Brochure.pdf).

