

The Santa Cruz County Child Care Planning Council
**Early Childhood Education Workforce Development
Position Statement—Spring 2006**

Endorsed by the Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools and Board of Supervisors.



The national and state-wide focus on the importance of the first five years of life has led to an increasing emphasis on early childhood programs as a key element in preparing children for success in school and in our increasingly complex society. *This emphasis is dependent on the often unspoken assumption that the early childhood program environment is high quality, with excellent ratios, clear outcomes and, most importantly, skilled and knowledgeable staff.* Unfortunately, the issue of staff preparedness, *workforce development*, has not received the same focus of attention (other than the call for a B.A. degree) as has the call for more programs to serve more children.

This document is designed to look at the issues within the early childhood workforce and make recommendations for Santa Cruz County to meet the challenge of providing quality programs for infants to five year olds in our community. We begin with statements reflecting the challenges facing the workforce and the community, and then present a series of recommendations.

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Key Resources: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment: www.iir.berkeley.edu/csce
California Tomorrow: www.californiatomorrow.org
National Association for the Education of Young Children: www.naeyc.org

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The Current Context of Early Childhood Education

Research indicates that *high quality* Early Childhood Education can play an essential and positive role in the lives of children, their families and the community. Quality programs require low child/adult ratios, close connections with families, an educational curriculum which is both developmentally and culturally appropriate; and an atmosphere of playfulness and interaction. Quality programs, therefore, require highly skilled and specifically trained staff.



- The first five years of life are crucial in establishing cognitive functioning, as well as family culture, communication patterns and styles of interacting.
- Children enter care as young as a few weeks of age.
- The younger the child, the more vulnerable they are to the impacts of poor quality care, and conversely, to the impacts of quality care deeply connected to their family culture and values.
- Quality care (i.e. care with well trained staff, low child/adult ratios, close connections with families, developmental approaches, etc.) is positively linked in all the research to future school success and high level social skills.
- Much of the current care available in the United States is rated as poor quality and, in fact, as detrimental to children.
- The child care setting is usually the ONLY social setting that provides daily contact with families who are children's first, most long-term and most important educators.
- California's children are among the most ethnically, linguistically and racially diverse in the world.
- In California, the majority of children under five are cared for outside of their homes by people other than their families.
- Family employment, and therefore survival, is often dependent upon access to care for these young children.
- This care is provided in a wide variety of settings including: informal arrangements; license exempt and licensed Family Child Care Homes; private center based programs; faith based programs; non-profit programs; and State and Federal programs. Each has different standards for staff, for safety, for program design.
- A child may be cared for in a variety of settings within any given week.
- Quality care (i.e. care with well trained staff, low child/adult ratios, close connections with families, developmental approaches, etc.) is positively linked in all the research to future school success and high level social skills.

Challenge: Early Childhood Care & Education is a Complex Job with Few Resources

I need to be a nurse, nutritionist, referee, fund developer, carpenter, marriage counselor, janitor and social worker...and that's along with being a teacher of every subject from science to reading to music to art to physical education to social skills to basic language development"

Teacher two to five year olds

The success of early childhood programs depends to a large degree on the integrated “whole child” approach which incorporates the child’s social-emotional life, their physical care and development, and their cognitive growth. Effective teaching for this young age group requires development of curriculum that is joyful, interactive and playful as well as carefully scaffolded for concept and language development. It requires close relationships with families and frequently involves skills most often identified in the sphere of social workers. Despite the complexity of the tasks facing Early Childhood teachers, they are the most under-resourced of all educational professionals.



- Early Childhood teachers are expected to develop curriculum and to create carefully constructed environments for active and interactive learning opportunities in all areas of learning and development.
- They are responsible for basic one-on-one, personalized care and nurturance, for eating, cleanliness, toileting, napping, dressing and undressing in ways that support children’s family cultures and the child’s developing autonomy.
- They have primary responsibility to prepare children for increasingly academic kindergarten programs while at the same time providing one-on-one, developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction.
- Early childhood teachers play a key role in building a rich speaking vocabulary, which is the basis for later literacy, with children who may speak a variety of home languages. They are expected to develop approaches which both maintain and support home language while simultaneously supporting English language learning.
- They do individualized observation, assessment, and recording of children’s behavior based on developmental, cultural and linguistic understanding.
- They care for and teach children with a wide variety of special needs; participate in I.E.P.s; provide a wide range of specialized interventions; interpret the needs and strengths of the special needs child to the rest of the children while building strong social relationships throughout the classroom.

- They need highly sophisticated social problem solving skills and the ability to employ them in age-appropriate and culturally appropriate ways.
- They must possess complex adult interaction skills, as most programs have multiple staff members working side by side in the same room.
- They must be able to utilize all the above skills with children with special needs, children who speak a wide-variety of languages besides English and children in crisis.
- They function as “extended family” in the support, nurturance and joy of young children and have daily parent contact. They are key support people to families and need high-level skills in supporting families under stress and in crisis.
- They are mandated reporters of suspected abuse and/or neglect.
- They often work closely with families where there are restraining orders in effect, where the program is the legal “neutral zone” for parents to see children, and/or where a parent is incarcerated.
- They are expected to support families and do referrals to the full range of health, education and social agencies.
- The increase in assessment requirements for state and federally funded programs has come about with no increase in staff time and no additional resources to meet the requirements of the current “results” orientation.
- Program requirements change regularly with new expectations for staff without funding for additional staff-time and with minimal training.
- Far too often when training is provided, it is done by people with little or no expertise in working with children under five.

Key recommendations:

Early Childhood staff should be provided with a high level of training by early childhood experts focused on: development and learning specific to children under the age of five; family dynamics and supports; impacts of culture and language on all aspects of a child’s learning and growth.

Resources must be provided to make such training accessible to and economically possible for all early childhood professionals.



Challenge: Lack of Trained Bilingual, Bicultural, and Culturally Sensitive Staff



“Immigrant children face immense culture shock and internal struggle – having to be one person in one realm, and another in another. The Early Childhood classroom can be a bridge across those worlds only if we work closely and respectfully with families. Bottom line: Children need a strong sense of self-identity and the deep conviction that they are competent and intelligent and capable of learning in many cultural and learning contexts. That’s probably the MOST important form of preparation for heading into school that we can give them”.

Ready or Not?

*A California Tomorrow Think Piece on
School Readiness and Immigrant Communities*

Since much of family culture is transmitted through daily care routines, and those functions are increasingly carried out by non-family members, close ties between families and teachers are essential. As long term school and personal success of children is dependent upon family support and connection, it is essential that the Early Childhood workforce be highly skilled in cross-cultural and multi-lingual approaches.

- In the United States, one out of eight children under the age of 6 lives in California. Almost 50% of these children are the children of immigrants.
- In only 2% of California’s early childhood programs do all the children served come from English speaking homes.
- Supporting and maintaining home language is essential for children to ensure the on-going capacity of the family to nurture, guide and advocate for their children.
- As literacy is based on rich language comprehension, early childhood programs must support children’s development of both home language and of English.
- Young children are extremely observant and sensitive to cues about status, power and respect. When only aides, rather than teachers or directors in programs, speak a child’s home language or share the child’s cultural background, they absorb fundamental messages about attitudes towards their families and, ultimately, about their own worth.
- Most classrooms have children from several different cultural and ethnic groups. Feeding, napping, bathroom routines, adult-child problem solving are all highly cultural events. Teachers need explicit skills in working with families to learn their styles of interaction and to integrate those approaches into the classroom community.
- Raising teacher qualifications seriously threatens the diversity of the Early Childhood workforce unless coupled with realistic pathways for advancement for immigrants and people of color especially from low income communities.

Key recommendations:

To effectively partner with families and to fully support children, resources and supports should be put in place to develop and retain bilingual and bicultural teaching and administrative staff.

All Early Childhood providers should receive education and support to cultivate high level skills in cultural awareness, appropriateness and respect.

Challenge: Inconsistent and Inaccessible Certification Systems

It's entirely possible that my child could spend one day with a neighbor, another in a licensed Family Child Care home, another in a Preschool – and no two of those adults are expected to have the same training or expertise!

Mother of a four year old

A Family Home Child Care provider is expected to have 15 hours of health and safety training, a teacher in a licensed Center has to have 12 college units of ECE, a teacher in a State Preschool needs 24 ECE units plus 16 General Education units. The new requirements for NAEYC Accreditation and for *Preschool For All* will require a B.A. including 24 units of Early Childhood education.

- Despite the reality that all early care educators are responsible for meeting the same basic developmental and educational needs of children, requirements for certification or licensing varies based on setting rather than what best meets the needs of the child and family.
- For those settings that require trained staff, college units are the basis of evaluation.
- Practitioners, working full time with young children and their families, need access to course work in the evenings and on weekends and in small segments, yet few colleges offer these options.
- Costs of college tuition and books are often not affordable for low-paid Early Childhood staff.
- Many Early Childhood staff members do not have access to computers, tutors, etc. that make college success more likely.
- The Community Colleges (the institution with the highest level of physical and economic access) are under-funded, understaffed and have few counselors who are knowledgeable about Early Childhood certification.
- College level Early Childhood professional development has mainly been the responsibility of the Community Colleges, although few units transfer to B.A. granting institutions.
- State Colleges and Universities (responsible for the granting of B.A. degrees) have few programs designed to focus on children under the age of five, and even fewer that focus on family support and classroom teaching with such young children.
- The notion that teachers would first get their B.A.'s and then work with children does not reflect the reality that most Early Childhood educators begin working with children after as few as one or two courses.
- There are no clear pathways and career ladders that are consistent across institutions of higher learning or between various licensing agencies or certification systems.
- There is little collaboration or articulation between the Community Colleges and the Four-year Colleges and where it does exist it is locally arranged and only applies to specific programs.
- Despite the value and importance of bilingual, bicultural staff, there are insufficient opportunities for college course work, tutorial, and mentoring in home languages.
- There are few financial incentives for teachers to continue their education and little relationship between additional education and potential salary.



Key recommendations:

Create a clear, accessible and articulated career path, specifically for the care and education of children under the age of five across all institutions of higher learning.

Develop an early childhood teaching credential which incorporates the current child development permit into the B.A. and provides for specialized ECE training for current Elementary credential holders.

Establish economic and educational supports to build and maintain a highly skilled workforce.

Challenge: Inadequate Compensation and Poor Working Conditions Leading to High Staff Turnover



Over half of child care center teaching staff and a third of directors interviewed in 1996 had left their centers by 2000. ...Among those who left, only half continued to work in child care. While employers generally expect more turnover in low-wage industries, it is problematic to tolerate high turnover in a human service business such as a child care center, where it has been associated with compromised development of children.

*“Turnover Begets Turnover”
Center for the Study
of Child Care Employment*

During the early years from birth to five, *all learning is dependent upon warm, trusting, bonded relationships with stable adults*. One of the key indicators of quality care for young children is staff retention. Over 50% of Early Childhood professionals leave the field every year and program Directors list staff-turnover as one of the key difficulties they face in providing for young children. At the heart of the turnover problem is insufficient compensation and poor working conditions.

- Early Childhood salaries are in no way comparable to the job duties and required training. Despite the level of responsibility required of Early Childhood teachers, they are the lowest paid of all college trained professionals, frequently earning less than dog-walkers and garbage collectors.
- Many Early Childhood professionals earn so little they cannot afford child care for their own families.
- In Santa Cruz County where a living wage is defined as \$12.56/hr the average Early Childhood professional often earns less than that.
- Working conditions in most Early Childhood programs are fraught with difficulties: teachers are exposed to high levels of contagious disease; they are at high risk for back and knee injuries; breaks and lunch hours are often forgone due to lack of staff; substitutes are so difficult to find that many teachers work while sick and are expected to do so.
- Basic worker rights and benefits such as retirement plans, health care coverage, grievance procedures, etc. are frequently absent from the work place.
- There is often not paid time for curriculum preparation, staff meetings, home visits, parent conferences etc., and the assumption is that teachers will do this on their own uncompensated time.
- Job security is an ongoing tension as staff hours are cut each time funding shifts.

Key Recommendation:

In order to provide the essential stability of Early Childhood staffing, professional level salaries, benefits and working conditions must be significantly improved.

Challenge: *Preschool For All* Will Require Intensive Integration between Early Childhood Education and K-3 Systems

“When my daughters were in preschool I felt part of a team, and I felt valued and supported by their teachers. That’s all over now, and I miss the sense of partnership”.
Mother of a 6 and 8 year old

“I know how important it is to support “Desired Results”, but I’ve only had two hours of training, and I’m expected to do all this record keeping with no extra time in my day”
Preschool teacher

“It breaks my heart to take the blocks and paint out of the classroom. I know five years olds need to play in order to learn. But I’m under so much pressure to get the kids ready for the tests...”
Kindergarten teacher

While *Preschool for All* will bring major improvements and opportunity for children and for the early childhood field, it will also increase the urgency and deepen all the current challenges faced by the early childhood workforce.

All researchers agree that *high quality* early childhood programs have positive impacts for children. The effectiveness of quality early childhood programs is based on the huge body of research about developmentally appropriate and culturally appropriate approaches to learning. One of the key premises behind *Preschool for All* is the alignment of early childhood curriculum with that of K—12. Finding a way to integrate the expectations of the K-12 system with the child-centered, family-centered, developmental approach of quality early childhood will be one of the most serious obligations facing the early childhood workforce.

- There is a significant gap in early childhood teachers understanding of K-3 academic expectations for children and in the specifics of the curricula being presented at those levels.
- There is a significant gap in K-12 teachers understanding of the social-emotional, family centered, active learning style upon which successful work with children under the age of five is dependent.
- There is frequently a great discrepancy between the content driven approaches to working with children and the integrated, developmental approaches utilized in quality early childhood settings.
- As the early childhood world is highly fragmented and does not currently have centralized bureaucracy to support it, participation in *Preschool for All* discussions falls on individual directors and teachers during their unpaid, personal time.
- While early childhood professionals are “at the table” in discussions about *Preschool for All*, there is considerable anxiety that high stakes academic pressures will overshadow developmentally and culturally appropriate practice.

Key Recommendations:

It is incumbent upon PFA planners to bring both early childhood and K-6 professionals together to ensure that each influences, teaches and supports the expertise and experience of the other.

As County Offices of Education are assigned the responsibility for administering PFA, it is essential that they develop top leadership with strong expertise and practical experience in working with children under five and their families.

Any certification system for working in the new preschool programs must permit two-way access and training to utilize the professionalism of both K-3 and early childhood workforces and ensure both are fully skilled in the new expectations.