



EXECUTIVE  
Chapter  
**4**  
SUMMARY

**Trends and Innovations in Early Childhood  
Education Workforce Development**

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# Preface

Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (ELC) is the major federal funding initiative seeking to support states in developing high quality early childhood systems, especially targeted to children with high needs. Launched in 2011 as a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, there have been three rounds of major grants under the ELC, with 20 states now participating and funding that totals just over \$1 billion.

This federal initiative had particular meaning to the BUILD Initiative and its founders, members of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. For more than a decade, BUILD has served as a catalyst for change and a national support system for state policy leaders and early childhood systems development. Not only did BUILD’s work help shape the federal initiative, but it was also the fulfillment of the founders’ most fervent hopes—that states could create detailed blueprints for an early childhood system, with budgets to support significant infrastructure development. BUILD staff, consultants, and many colleagues in the field rose to the challenge and provided extensive support to states as they applied for, and now implement, the federal opportunity.

The Early Learning Challenge supports states in their efforts to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs across the multiple funding streams that support children from their birth through age five. Through the ELC, states focus on foundational elements of a state system: creating high quality, accountable early learning programs through Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; supporting improved child development outcomes through health, family engagement and vigorous use of early learning state standards and assessments; strengthening the early childhood workforce; and measuring progress.

Thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico applied for the 2011 round of the Early Learning Challenge grants with nine states initially and then five more selected from this pool for funding. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia responded to a new 2013 third round of grants; six were selected.

Round 1: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington

Round 2: Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Round 3: Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont

Since the launch of the ELC, grantee states have rapidly moved from concept to implementation. Through this E-Book, we share learnings from the initial implementation of the efforts, highlighting experience, trends, and reflections stemming from the significant federal investment in this strategic work. The chapters are authored by experts who have worked in tandem with state leaders to gather information. By documenting the experience of the states, captured through interviews with state leaders, *Rising to the Challenge* provides a source of learning for all fifty states and territories and puts into practice our leadership commitment to continuous learning in the best interests of the children and families to whom we are all dedicated.



Harriet Dichter  
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## Executive Summary

A growing body of research over the past 30 years demonstrates that the quality of early childhood programs is largely determined by the quality of the providers. Ensuring adequate preparation, training and support for the early childhood education (ECE) workforce is thus the states' greatest area of leverage for improving the quality of children's experiences. Workforce development was one of five key areas of reform in the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (ELC). Former professor and early childhood consultant Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D., interviewed ECE leaders in seven states that received ELC grants. This chapter highlights five common design trends—professional development system capacity, career pathways, coaching for effective practice, accessibility to professional development, and cross-sector collaboration—among a wide variety of creative and innovative approaches to improving professional development opportunities. The states included represent various areas of the country, an array of demographics and size, and all three ELC funding phases, as noted below.

STATE	Total Challenge Award	Workforce Development Allocation (\$)	Workforce Development Allocation (%)
<b>Colorado</b>	\$44.9 million	\$6.6 million	15%
<b>Illinois</b>	\$52.5 million	\$13.1 million	25%
<b>North Carolina</b>	\$70 million	\$23.2 million	33%
<b>Oregon</b>	\$30.8 million	\$6.9 million	22%
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	\$51.7 million	\$8.7 million	17%
<b>Rhode Island</b>	\$50 million	\$14.6 million	29%
<b>Washington</b>	\$60 million	\$24.5 million	41%

## Expanding the Capacity of Professional Development Systems

States are engaged in a variety of innovations to expand the capacity of their professional development systems. **Oregon** provides a useful model of a comprehensive, integrated and aligned professional development system. Both the early childhood education workforce registry and the child care licensing system are integrated into Oregon's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The impact of this comprehensive integration has been significant. Rates of participation in the QRIS have skyrocketed. In the past, an average of 200 early care and education professionals applied to the workforce registry annually. By contrast, recently, over 650 professionals applied in just one month. The increased interdependence between the QRIS and professional development systems has also fostered greater participation rates in training and professional development because staff have to be at higher steps on the registry in order for their place of employment to qualify at a higher QRIS tier.

A \$1.2 million Professional Development Information System (PDIS) now under construction in **Colorado** offers a promising model that other states can replicate. Early childhood professionals will be able to enroll in the state's workforce registry; post professional portfolios—including college transcripts, employment histories, and professional development activities; complete self-assessments with respect to the state's research-based Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators; and create professional development plans. Colorado's PDIS is linked to its QRIS, and programs receive credit in the QRIS when staff enroll in the workforce registry and complete the activities shown above.

**Washington** is making professional development more accessible and affordable primarily to attract a more diverse workforce. The state developed and now offers online courses and related scholarship programs that are aligned with its QRIS standards. As a result, it has seen increased participation by family child care providers and other non-traditional learners. Washington also developed a four-day, intensive "Early Achiever Institute," offered in English and Spanish to providers who participate in the state's QRIS. Institute participants study the observation tools that are

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fundamental to the QRIS, learn about the research that supports high-quality instructional interactions, and focus on practical implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve child outcomes.

**Rhode Island** created its \$14 million Center for Early Learning Professionals to transform the way early childhood professionals are trained. Before the Center was established, providers trained their employees informally. Training provided by the Center is aligned with the state's workforce competencies for ECE professionals. The Center also works closely with state officials, enabling it to approve professional development activities toward training required for child care licensing. The Center has a central hub, satellite locations and offers training online, in Spanish as well as in English.

## Stronger Career Paths Support Greater Professionalism

One important goal in the field of early childhood education is to see ECE professionals accorded the same respect as and receiving equitable compensation to other professionals who work with children and families: elementary school teachers, social workers, etc. Improving the quality of training for ECE professionals is critical to that goal. States have adopted a variety of strategies to improve professional development opportunities for the workforce. **Oregon** established a mechanism, through its ECE registry and community colleges, to give ECE professionals college credits for prior learning and work experience.

To help ECE providers focus on developing specific competencies, **North Carolina** shifted from awarding training hours to awarding Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The state also increased the number of contact hours required for approved trainings, establishing five contact hours (one-half a CEU) as the minimum. The content of training that carries CEUs must be evidence-based, research-based, and developed by university faculty.



**Rhode Island** extended its ECE competency framework to include early childhood special education and early intervention roles and competencies. The state also created new frameworks for family child care providers, administrators, educational coordinators, and professional development providers. The inclusion of the latter has expanded the pool of people qualified to provide professional development and technical assistance to the ECE workforce, thus accelerating the movement toward higher quality and professionalism.

**Pennsylvania** is in the process of developing competencies for home visitors. The state also recognized the need for continuing education of “knowledge mediators,” those who assist others in professional development activities, and is developing new credential programs for Peer Mentors and Master Consultants.

**Illinois** is in the process of piloting new credential programs for Family Child Care providers, Family Specialists, and Technical Assistance providers.

## Coaching Supports Improved Practice and Efficacy

One-on-one coaching is becoming more prevalent as a professional development strategy. It can take the form of mentoring, technical assistance and/or observation. Colorado already had coaching competencies and a Coaching Credential in development when it allocated \$847,000 to build out an equitable state-wide coaching system. Based on a needs assessment, the state is planning a two-day training with follow-up webinars for 47 coaches around the state. The training includes a focus on reflective supervision. **Colorado** has also hired four regional coaching consultants to provide ongoing support, supervision, and regional training to coaches working toward their Coaching Credentials.

**Washington** is investing \$17.5 million to develop a coaching network that can serve as a conduit for a variety of professional development offerings in the future. The state created a coaching and technical assistance framework—integrated with its QRIS—and solicited feedback on implementation from people across the ECE sector (e.g., Head Start, center-based and family providers, state-funded pre-K teachers). Prospective coaches must become proficient in the observation/assessment tools used in Washington (e.g., CLASS and Environment Rating Scales). They receive training in practice-based coaching and adult resiliency and wellness. Before earning coaching certificates, they complete an internship and demonstrate an ability to



improve program quality. They will eventually receive college credit for their training. Coaches and their protégés have access to an online video tool that the state developed with philanthropic investment called The Coaching Companion. Providers who receive coaching use The Coaching Companion to videotape themselves practicing new skills, then upload their videos for their coaches to review and give feedback. Coaches can also connect providers with each other in small groups so that they can learn to give peer feedback and offer support.

## Incentives Make Professional Development Affordable and Accessible

A variety of approaches demonstrate the range of outcomes for which states are introducing incentives. **Washington** allocated \$12 million from its federal Child Care and Development Block Grant for scholarships to QRIS participants continuing their college education. The scholarship program has resulted in more individuals choosing to participate in the QRIS from an earlier point in their careers, more ECE workforce members attending institutions of higher education than ever before, and new faculty being hired to meet the demand created by increased enrollment. The state allocated another \$6 million to professional development incentives for individuals. Funding is used to encourage participants to join the ECE registry, reward participants who move up to higher levels on the registry, and support individuals to continue along their educational pathway. The investment has yielded a better understanding of the composition and needs of the ECE workforce and a better understanding of the educational pathways that they pursue.

**Colorado** is funding three incentive/scholarship programs to encourage degree attainment. The state invested \$345,000 in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, increasing its investment by 300%. Colorado also offers dollar-for-dollar matched funds through the Colorado Community College Foundation to community colleges for students preparing for ECE careers. All 16 of the state's community college early childhood programs are participating, and a recent report indicated that almost 75% had raised the matching funds. Through its special education program (SPED), the state offers scholarships and loan forgiveness to students interested in early intervention and early childhood special education. Out of Colorado's \$160,000 investment in SPED, 50% was used for scholarships, 25% for loan forgiveness, and 25% for recruiting and retention.

In **North Carolina**, where 85% of centers are rated at 3 stars or above in the QRIS, the state incentivizes top quality by awarding professional development bonuses of \$500 to \$3,000 (based on center size) to centers that achieve 4- or 5-star QRIS ratings. To qualify for the professional development bonus, centers must meet several requirements, including that each staff member must have an annual, individual professional development plan. It is taking time for centers to qualify for the incentive program because addressing the developmental goals and needs of individual staff members is a new practice for most centers.

## Cross-Sector Collaborations Support Innovation

Collaborations among various ECE sectors, other child-serving systems, and/or institutions of higher education can move the entire field toward greater professionalism and public recognition. In **Pennsylvania**, a five-day Governor's Institute brings together ECE professionals with K-12 teachers and administrators to form relationships and exchange information about the PreK – 3rd grade concept.

**North Carolina** is making grants to 24 community colleges to support their ECE programs' applications for NAEYC accreditation. The Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning at **Rhode Island** College targets the incumbent ECE workforce, offering BA-level courses along with targeted advising and remedial reading, writing and math support to help ensure that these students, many of whom are non-traditional students, succeed at their college studies. Courses are offered at night, on weekends and online. **Illinois** is funding collaborations between community colleges and four-year institutions

aimed at improving professional development for the ECE workforce. One example is a partnership that created flexible pathways that allow students to pursue degrees while taking some classes at a community college and others at a four-year institution.

## Conclusion

ECE workforce and professional development systems are being successfully built, strengthened and expanded. Within these systems, the definition of quality is being clarified, formalized and extended to wider segments of the ECE workforce through the implementation of coaching models, the creation of new categories of professional credentials, and the articulation of competencies for an increasing number of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Institutions of higher education are emerging as essential partners in ECE workforce and professional development. They are collaborating with state ECE leaders to address the needs of non-traditional students, including language needs and academic supports, and these efforts are guided by a common goal of valuing and retaining the diversity of the ECE workforce while simultaneously increasing levels of professionalism.

The state leaders Wolfe interviewed face common challenges. One is engaging all segments of the ECE community (e.g., center-based programs, family child care homes, resource and referral networks, Head Start, infant and toddler centers) so that the entire workforce is strengthened and all children benefit, no matter their age, socioeconomic status, location, or the ECE context in which they are served. Many states are finding it challenging to construct universal definitions of quality given the differences that exist among the participating sectors. Another common challenge derives from the language needs of the workforce as well as the young children being served.

Compensation, as well as workforce support, remains the elephant in the room. If the issue of adequate, comparable compensation is not remedied, ECE professionals with training and preparation equal to K-12 teachers will continue to migrate to the K-12 system. Similarly, until ECE reflects and expects an appropriately high level of professionalism, the field runs the risk of losing capable, creative people who elect instead to enter areas that proffer better pay, better benefits and greater respect.

## About the Author



**Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D.**, has worked in ECE for more than 35 years. She has taught preschool, directed a child care center, and developed a family support center. She was a professor of Early Childhood Education at Northern Illinois University for 10 years. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2007, Randi has focused on ECE workforce development and policy. She created an Early Care and Education Workforce Initiative that awarded grants to collaborations of community colleges, universities and feeder high schools aimed at removing barriers and creating pathways to ECE careers. She instituted an incentive program to provide stipends to ECE teachers completing college coursework and pursuing degrees. And she built the LA County ECE Workforce Consortium and secured \$37 million in funding.

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