

2023

In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants



Career Pathways

Build
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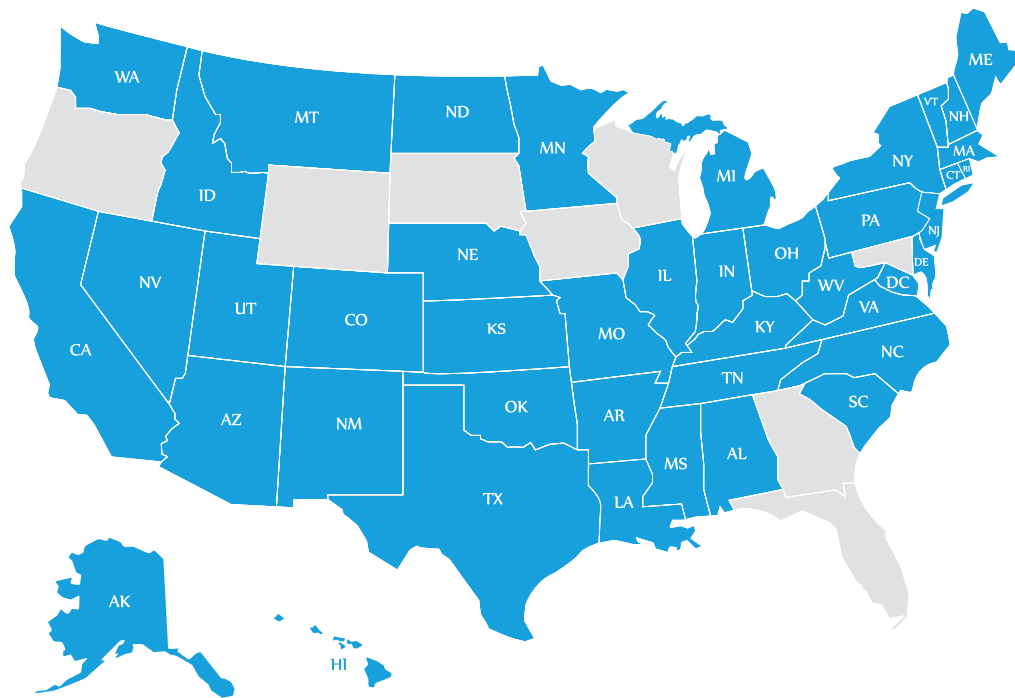
Introduction to *In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants*



States and territories are drawing on the Preschool Development Birth through Five Planning (PDG B-5 Planning) or Renewal (PDG B-5 Renewal) Grant to advance their early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems. These states are undertaking a rich and broad variety of work with this infusion of resources. The BUILD Initiative, ZERO TO THREE, and Start Early, all of whom are members of the National TA Collaborative to Maximize Federal Early Childhood Investments, collaborated on these briefs to share critical early childhood issues that states and their partners are addressing by using the information available in the PDG B-5 Renewal applications. These grants not only provide immediate benefits and long-term systems implications for the states and their communities; they also shed light on the state of the field, which we attempt to outline through this set of briefs.



Figure 1. Map of PDG B-5 Planning and Renewal States 2023



PDG B-5 Planning and Renewal Grants are being used by states across a wide range of content areas in the early childhood care and education system, and in a variety of ways. The federal funding provides a systems framework and seeks to offer flexibility within that framework. The federal funding came with overall guidance focused on coordinating the programs and services within the early childhood care and education system. It aimed to help young children enter kindergarten prepared and ready to succeed by targeting support to populations the states deem priorities based on their assessments of need, particularly their new understanding of the impact of COVID on families and communities. The guidance placed significant emphasis on the early childhood care and education workforce and doing what it would take to attract, train, and retain the workforce needed to maintain high-quality and supportive environments that promote child development and meet families' unique logistical, linguistic, cultural, and financial needs. Within that broad framework, however, states had enormous latitude.





States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them. This work is occurring within a broad framework provided by the federal government. As the review of the grant applications in this series of briefs will make clear, states chart their own course when it comes to early childhood systems development. States are working in many varied and exciting ways as they use these resources to take action to improve their ECCE systems; they are undertaking many different projects and initiatives and, often, multiple projects under each of the required activities.

States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them.

Our review suggests that states seem hesitant to take too long a view for their PDG B-5 plans. There are many possible explanations for this. Perhaps it is because each iteration of the federal PDG B-5 competition has been different, and states do not see PDG B-5 as a stable, continuous funding source. It could also be that state decisions that seem to focus on the shorter term could stem from the need to manage expectations and produce near-term results. There could be a lack of confidence amongst the state and territory grantees that state funding will be available to sustain the work. Or it may be that the broad framework used in the PDG B-5 competition, with so many possibilities identified with each of the required activity areas, detracts from states' ability to have a sharp focus, and leads to many responsive, diffuse strategies. We must ask: Would the children and families who want and need early childhood care and education, the workforce that delivers it every day, and the states be better off if the states understood that they could choose to have a concentrated focus on a few projects rather than on so many?

This series of briefs focuses attention on several topics within the current round of PDG B-5 plans. Not all critical topics or aspects of PDG B-5 plans are covered, such as updates to needs assessment and strategic plans, but we anticipate that other organizations will continue to analyze this rich set of plans and share their analyses. We note, as well, that the briefs are grounded in the plans submitted by the states to the federal government. States may modify their plans, and their grant submissions did not allow for the states to provide in-depth information.

To access the full set of briefs in this series, which are being produced throughout 2023, please visit: <https://buildinitiative.org/learningfrompdgb-5systemsbuildinggrants/>

Acknowledgements

With great thanks to the team: BUILD consultants Erin Arango-Escalante, Harriet Dichter, and Ashley LiBetti and BUILD staff Tameika Leslie and Susan Hibbard; ZERO TO THREE staff Jared Busker and Katrina Coburn; and Start Early staff Judy Reidt-Parker. Child Trends is publishing a separate brief; we appreciate Carlisle King for her engagement and partnership as part of the TA Collaborative.

We express deep appreciation to the Ballmer Group, Care for All with Respect and Equity (CARE) Fund, the George Gund Foundation, the Irving Harris Foundation, and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation for their support of the entire series and to the Pritzker Children's Initiative and Ballmer Group for their support of the brief on infant/toddler issues. We also appreciate the many individuals working in states who invested their time in reviewing and editing information about their states.



Why Career Pathways?

Professionals across industries have opportunities to advance in their careers, earning increased compensation and benefits, prestige, and autonomy. Often, workplaces strategically support employees on their career advancement journey, covering the cost of additional education, for example, or clarifying requirements for advancement.

Historically, early educators lacked consistent access to clear and supported career advancement pathways.

Historically, however, early educators lacked consistent access to clear and supported career advancement pathways. As a result, the field has missed out on opportunities to strengthen the early childhood workforce and the ECCE landscape overall.

This brief focuses on the ways that states are using PDG B-5 grant funding to create and sustain career pathways in the early care and education field. “Career pathways” are broadly defined here, referring to a wide range of activities that support prospective and current early educators in advancing in the profession. States’ initiatives span an early educator’s complete career trajectory, from strategies to recruit new candidates into the profession to initiatives that create new specializations for educators who want to propel their careers further.

Career pathways for early educators facilitate two critical end goals. First, career pathways can strengthen the perception of the early educator role. When career pathways are clearly defined, they can map out a professional trajectory that includes the advancement and growth opportunities that are integral to a fulfilling and successful career, allowing prospective educators to “see” themselves in the profession in the long term and communicating the value and opportunity of the profession externally.

Second, career pathways can facilitate meaningful improvements in early educators’ practice in the classroom and work with families. Using PDG B-5 funding, many states created supports to complement and bolster either newly articulated or existing career pathways. These supports give early educators the time and resources to work through career pathways opportunities, building their knowledge and skills in doing so.

Taken together, states’ PDG B-5 investments in career pathways offer insight into how the field might continue to build a robust, stable early care and education workforce.

Discussion of Career Pathways Strategies

This brief explores and synthesizes states’ efforts to support ECCE career pathways, as defined in their PDG B-5 grant applications. States proposed strategies in three key areas: 1) recruit prospective educators into the profession, 2) facilitate credential attainment, and 3) strengthen advancement opportunities. Table 1 provides an overview of the three areas and more than a dozen strategies that are addressed by state plans for PDG B-5 grant funding. Discussion of each of these three areas, with highlights from the strategies being used, is found after the table.



Table 1. Career Pathways Overview

CAREER PATHWAYS STRATEGY	AK	AL	AZ	AR	CA	CO	CT	DE	HI	ID	IL	IN	KS	KY	LA	ME	MA	MI	MN	MO	MS	MT	NE	NV	NH	NJ	NM	NY	NC	ND	OH	OK	RI	SC	TN	TX	VA	VT	WA					
Recruit Prospective Educators Into the Profession																																												
Lead recruitment and visibility campaigns	•		•	•				•	•				•		•							•		•			•					•		•	•		•	•						
Develop high school initiatives		•	•												•	•					•								•	•				•		•								
Create and expand registered apprenticeships			•			•			•					•								•					•								•	•	•	•						
Support Degree and Credential Attainment																																												
Create microcredentials and badges										•				•							•							•	•	•	•			•										
Develop stackable credentials								•							•																													
Offer credit for prior learning								•			•																						•											
Provide financial supports for credential completion		•	•					•	•	•		•		•	•	•					•						•		•		•						•	•		•				
Refine articulation agreements								•						•	•														•				•		•	•								
Create new credential types or specializations			•	•	•				•					•	•									•							•													
Define Career Progression																																												
Revise and strengthen career lattices	•							•	•					•	•	•						•		•		•				•						•		•						
Update and align competencies or standards	•							•			•			•									•				•	•	•		•													



Recruit Prospective Educators into the Profession

Table 2. Recruit Prospective Educators Into the Profession

	AK	AL	AZ	AR	CO	DE	HI	KS	KY	LA	MI	MS	MT	NV	NJ	NM	ND	OH	OK	SC	TN	TX	VA	VT
Lead recruitment and visibility campaigns	•		•	•		•	•	•		•			•	•		•			•	•	•		•	•
Develop high school initiatives		•	•							•	•	•					•	•		•		•		
Create and expand registered apprenticeships			•		•	•			•				•		•							•	•	•

Recruitment into the profession is the first step in developing a strong career pathway. States proposed three types of strategies in their PDG B-5 grant applications.

- **Lead recruitment and visibility campaigns** - Fifteen states (*Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia*) plan to use PDG B-5 funds to build visibility around careers in early childhood education and recruit educators into the field.

Louisiana will launch a campaign that emphasizes the importance of early childhood education, its role in promoting kindergarten readiness, and the need for changes in language to recognize the professionalism of early childhood educators (e.g., using “early childhood educator” instead of “daycare worker”). The campaign will include billboards, flyers, advertisements, social media posts, and promotion through the annual Teacher Leader Summit and Early Childhood Education Conference.

Montana will offer retention mini grants to licensed providers to support grassroots, innovative recruitment and retention strategies. Increased staff retention will also increase the continuity of care for children. Programs in underserved communities will be prioritized and grant recipients will work with PDG B-5 grant staff to assess strategy outcomes. The state will consider expanding the pilot, depending on the outcomes from these mini grants.

- **Develop high school initiatives** - Nine states (*Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas*) will use PDG B-5 grant funds to support and encourage high school students to pursue careers in early childhood education.

Ohio, Texas, and North Dakota will focus on helping high school students earn their Child Development Associate (CDA). In *Ohio*, high school juniors or seniors who are committed to completing the CDA coursework, portfolio, and exam upon graduation will receive a scholarship that covers their coursework, a stipend for portfolio supplies, and a \$500 incentive for passing the CDA exam. *Texas* will enhance the Early Learning Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program of Study by providing dual credit toward an early childhood degree, establishing partnerships with high-quality child care programs as practicum sites for CTE students, expanding the existing scholarship program to cover the costs of a CDA exam, sharing information about potential career paths after graduation, and providing compensation support while students are participating in practicum. *North Dakota* will work with the North Dakota Career and Technical Education to pilot a high-school-to-CDA pathway. The state is working with high school CTE teachers to help them understand the national CDA requirements and to design their programs to support those requirements.





Intro to In Brief



Why



Discussion

- **Create and expand registered apprenticeships** - Ten states (*Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Kentucky, Montana, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia*) are expanding or creating apprenticeship programs to encourage credential attainment. Apprenticeships provide a practical and effective way for educators to participate in both coursework and hands-on experience while earning an income.

Kentucky, Montana, and New Jersey will expand and enhance their existing apprenticeship programs. Using grant funding, *Kentucky* will revamp its youth apprenticeship program by increasing its portfolio of apprenticeship services, which includes coaching and mentoring, professional development, financial incentives, technology supports, and wage increases for apprentices. *Montana* will invest in developing more relationships with early childhood businesses, higher education programs, and schools to increase the capacity and utilization of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. In *New Jersey*, the Department of Human Services and Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) will partner on incorporating early childhood workforce support into the state's pre-existing apprenticeship infrastructure. PDG B-5 funds will expand this work to benefit early childhood providers through a pilot apprenticeship program, and the state's Department of Human Services and NJDOL will partner to evaluate the pilot and seek sustainable funding sources.

Colorado will create a home visiting apprenticeship program based on its child care specialist apprenticeship. After a collaborative planning process with the Home Visiting Investment Task Force, Red Rocks Community College—the intermediary agency—will pursue federal apprenticeship designation. Then a pilot program will be launched to include free professional development and small stipends will be available for employers, mentors, substitutes (if applicable), and apprentices.



Recruit Prospective Educators into the Profession



Support Degree and Credential Attainment



Define Career Progression



Apprenticeships provide a practical and effective way for educators to participate in both coursework and hands-on experience while earning an income.



Looking Forward



Support Degree and Credential Attainment

Table 3. Support Degree and Credential Attainment

	AL	AZ	AR	CA	DE	HI	ID	IL	IN	KY	LA	ME	MA	MO	MS	NV	NH	NY	NC	ND	OH	PA	RI	SC	TX	VA	WA
Create microcredentials and badges							•			•					•			•	•	•	•			•			
Develop stackable credentials					•						•							•									
Offer credit for prior learning					•			•					•										•		•		
Provide financial supports for credential completion	•	•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•						•
Refine articulation agreements					•					•	•					•		•		•				•	•	•	
Create new credential types or specializations		•	•	•		•				•	•					•					•						

Pursuing degrees, credentials, and career advancement opportunities can be burdensome for early educators. High tuition costs, unclear course requirements, and misalignment between institutions of higher education are some of the common barriers that educators face. To address these barriers, states are using PDG B-5 grant funding to invest in efforts to optimize the credentialing and coursework processes, expand access to education and skill development, and provide financial support through stipends and scholarships. State strategies include:

- **Create microcredentials and badges** - Eight states (*Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, and South Carolina*) will use PDG B-5 funding to explore opportunities to create microcredentials or badges to recognize educators' professional development skills and competencies.

New York plans to build on existing partnerships with the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY) to launch microcredential opportunities. Credit for relevant life experience, prior professional development, and stacking professional development will be recognized, providing a new pathway for educators to earn a degree. *South Carolina* will develop 14 microcredentials, which will cover required CCDF health and safety topics, trauma-informed approaches, inclusion strategies, strategies to limit suspension and expulsion, and strategies to work with dual language learners. Individuals will receive badges and bonuses upon completion of a microcredential. *Idaho* is engaging in an Early Childhood Care and Education Badge Initiative. Each badge is awarded by earning a combination of at least 10 points through approved activities. Point-earning activities include certifications, training, Targeted Technical Assistance, employment history, and/or coaching cycles.

- **Develop stackable credentials** - *Louisiana* and *Delaware* will use PDG B-5 funding to make obtaining credentials more affordable, flexible, and accessible through stackable credentials. To support high school students pursuing an early childhood pathway, *Louisiana* will ensure that the Early Childhood Ancillary Certification (ECAC) programs can be stacked toward an associate and bachelor's degree in early childhood education.





- **Offer credit for prior learning** - Four states (*Delaware, Illinois, Rhode Island, Texas*) plan to use PDG B-5 funding to award college credit for professional experiences acquired outside the traditional classroom.

Rhode Island plans to build partnerships among the Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to create a more accessible and equitable transfer and prior learning assessment (PLA) system. Grant funding will be used to hire a PLA professional to coordinate course recognition across IHEs. To reduce the cost and time to earn degrees, *Texas* will develop transfer agreements that recognize prior learning, which include credit for work experience and competency evaluations. In *Delaware*, grant funds will be used to incentivize policies for prior learning credit.

- **Provide financial supports for credential completion** - Fifteen states (*Alabama, Arizona, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Nevada, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, Washington*) will use PDG B-5 funds to provide financial supports to facilitate credential completion.

Idaho will provide grants to IHEs and individual early childhood professionals to cover out-of-pocket costs or loans used to pay for coursework and degrees that eligible recipients are currently pursuing. Home-based providers who attend school at least part time will have access to living expense stipends. *New Hampshire* will expand eligibility and funding for tuition assistance to teachers serving children in out-of-school time programs, which includes children from birth to grade three. Additionally, the state will increase the number of courses available for full tuition support and allow educators to receive more than one grant each term.

Ohio will expand the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program. Students working toward a degree in health and human services and working in a licensed child care program at least 20 hours a week will be eligible for a scholarship of up to \$5,000 each semester. High school students who commit to completing the CDA coursework and portfolio will receive a scholarship to cover their CDA coursework, a stipend for portfolio supplies, and a \$500 incentive upon passing the CDA exam.

- **Refine articulation agreements** - Seven states (*Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia*) will leverage PDG B-5 funds to refine and develop articulation plans to ensure a seamless transfer experience for educators moving from institution to institution.

Maine will develop articulation agreements across the early childhood professional development and education system, allowing students from the state's CTE programs and Quality Professional Development Network to easily transfer into the state's IHEs. Grant funds will be used to add a staff to align programming and agreements.

South Carolina developed a proposal for an online non-certification track early care and childhood education degree. In the winter of 2022, faculty from both the South Carolina Technical College System and the University of South Carolina set a timeline for articulation implementation for this degree. The articulation agreement will support a smooth articulation of the ECCE associate degree to the four-year degree. Grant funds will be used to support planning meetings, provide administrative support to finalize articulation paperwork, and support contracts for partners supporting ELL cohorts.

- **Create new credential types or specializations** - Eight states (*Arizona, Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, Ohio*) will use PDG B-5 grants to create new credential types or specializations.

To expand the workforce of qualified infant and toddler caregivers, *Hawaii* will expand the Infant and Toddler Caregiver Certificate pathway to all University of Hawaii Community College's early childhood care and education programs. Additionally, Honolulu Community College will offer additional sections of the Infant and Toddler Caregiver Certificate of Competence in the fall of 2023. *Arkansas* will revise the state's Infant Toddler Certificate to ensure that all early educators are supported in gaining the identified competencies.



Define Career Progression

Table 4. Define Career Progression

	AK	DE	HI	IL	KY	ME	MA	MT	NE	NV	NJ	NM	NY	ND	OK	TX	VT
Revise and strengthen career lattices	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•			•		•	•
Update and align competencies or standards	•	•		•	•				•			•	•	•	•		

Advancement opportunities allow educators to refine and develop skills, knowledge, and expertise. Additionally, providing these opportunities helps providers recognize staff contributions, improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and offer new opportunities to specialize. Building out career advancement opportunities requires structured and succinct career paths that outline the required skills, experiences, and milestones at each level.

- **Revise and strengthen career lattices** - Twelve states (*Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, Texas, Vermont*) will use PDG B-5 grants to develop and strengthen career lattices and clarify career pathways.

Kentucky will update its career lattice and transition it into a nationally recognized professional model. One component of this model is incorporating compensation increases that keep pace with professional qualifications. *New Jersey* will revise its current career lattice and integrate a tiered approach within the lattice to create a new pathway for early childhood educators to earn professional certificates.

- **Update and align competencies or standards** - Ten states (*Alaska, Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma*) will leverage PDG B-5 grants to update and develop competencies and standards to support educators pursuing career advancement opportunities.

New Mexico and *North Dakota* will update and revise their core competencies for early childhood professionals. *New Mexico* will update the New Mexico Common Core Content Early Childhood Educator competencies and ensure that early childhood preparation program content is relevant and responsive to child development research, special education, and cultural and linguistic diversity. *North Dakota* will convene a Professional Development Working Group to revise the existing Core Competencies for Practitioners and align them with the NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. Additionally, the Working Group will conduct a crosswalk of the revised competencies with the state's Early Learning Standards.

“Advancement opportunities allow educators to refine and develop skills, knowledge, and expertise.”





Looking Forward

If the ECCE field is to maintain a robust early childhood workforce, it is critical that prospective and current early educators have access to thoughtful, supported career pathways. Without clear advancement opportunities, the early childhood profession will continue to struggle to achieve the standing and prestige that early educators deserve. These states leveraged PDG B-5 funding to work toward that goal; the strategies they propose surface lessons for how federal, state, and local leaders can further support early educators career advancement in the future. Two lessons in particular stand out:

“Without clear advancement opportunities, the early childhood profession will continue to struggle to achieve the standing and prestige that early educators deserve.”

Recognize educators for their experience and expertise. The majority of the career pathways strategies—both in states’ PDG B-5 applications and the field more broadly—measure career progression through degrees, credentials, and coursework. That approach is not surprising: Calls to raise credential requirements for early educators continue to proliferate, and credential hierarchies offer a clean, discrete set of standards to use as a benchmark of achievement.

The reliance on credentials, however, needs to be balanced out with an equal emphasis on the value of educator experience and demonstrated expertise. The skills that early educators build in on the job, while supporting children and families, are invaluable for their practice. It is critical that early educators be recognized for expertise gained outside of credential coursework and training. Doing so, however, can be logistically complicated, particularly in a policy environment that measures progression in credentials.

As discussed, several states are using PDG B-5 grants to fund strategies to efficiently and effectively measure experience and expertise, including strategies focused on microcredentials, badges, credit for prior learning, and registered apprenticeships. States should continue to explore these and other strategies with similar goals. At the federal level, leadership can play a critical role in serving as a “connector” between the early care and education field and other industries and professional spheres, particularly industries with a longer track record of measuring experience and expertise.

As these state and federal efforts to measure experience are underway, states should also inventory the credentials they are currently using to measure career progression. Early educators can earn a range of different types of credentials to meet education requirements depending on the role, program setting, age of children, and state.¹ In this inventory, states should assess the different types of credentials to mitigate conflicts or duplication across them and, most importantly, ensure that a shared set of educator competencies and standards undergird all credentials. If educators are to be recognized for their experience and expertise, the competencies they demonstrate through those experiences must be clearly on par with and equal to the competencies expected during credential attainment.

Career advancement must work in tandem with compensation. As states continue to develop robust career pathways for early educators, it is critical that leaders maintain a mutually reinforcing relationship between compensation and career advancement, wherein an early educator’s compensation and career grow together and at the same pace. If the early childhood field is to be a sustainable, sought-out profession, prospective

¹ McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf/>



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early educators must be able to map out a professional future, one that brings additional compensation alongside additional responsibilities and expectations.



Why

States can foster this connection between compensation and advancement by clearly defining the compensation that early educators can expect based on their qualifications, such as Kentucky's updated career lattice discussed above. States can also explore salary scales, as discussed in the [Workforce Compensation](#) brief in this series; several states are using PDG B-5 funding to align salary scales with career pathways and credential frameworks.



Discussion

At this point in time, the majority of early educators are not adequately compensated for the importance and complexity of their role. With that in mind, state and federal leaders must pursue opportunities to increase baseline educator salaries as they build out career advancement pathways. For more information on how states are leveraging PDG B-5 resources to do so, see the [Workforce Compensation](#) brief in this series.

Well-developed career pathways, particularly those accompanied by strategic educator supports, are a necessary component of any sustained effort to maintain a robust early childhood workforce. The states highlighted here have invested resources, time, and capacity into building a strong workforce, creating an early care and education landscape conducive to children and families' success in the process.



Recruit Prospective Educators into the Profession



Support Degree and Credential Attainment



Define Career Progression



Looking Forward



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