

EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership

First 5 Alameda County | First 5 Contra Costa | First 5 San Francisco | First 5 San Mateo County
| First 5 Santa Clara County | First 5 Santa Cruz County

In 2011, California was awarded a 4-year, \$75 million, Federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge grant to improve early childhood education systems and better serve children and families by enhancing the quality of programs, developing quality standards, and aligning disconnected systems. Sixteen counties in California received funding to develop a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to achieve this goal. In the Bay Area, six First 5 County Commissions created the Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership to pilot a regional QRIS approach. The following brief is a product of their experience implementing QRIS locally and as a regional partnership from 2012-2015.

California’s diverse early learning workforce plays a critical role in preparing young children for success in school and beyond. However, there are systemic challenges to ensuring that the workforce is stable, qualified, and supported professionally. Workforce development challenges are one of the largest barriers to universal high quality early education. The Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership views a qualified early learning workforce as one that is educated in early childhood social, emotional, and cognitive development; trained in research-based methods for interacting with children; and well-compensated, with professional standards and opportunities for career mobility. In short, the field must be professionalized. But with low compensation and less-than-ideal working environments, this vision is far from reality for most early childhood educators.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF QRIS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The effort to develop quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) contributes to the establishment of workforce quality standards. The QRIS matrix rates teacher qualifications (early childhood education/child development degrees and/or units) and effectiveness of teacher-child interactions (through CLASS assessment scores). The quality improvement supports that the counties offer as part of QRIS have led to successes in supporting teachers in completing coursework and developing a better understanding of CLASS scores.

However, QRIS is insufficient to raise the quality of the workforce on its own. While the goal of QRIS is to provide a professional development pathway, there are systemic barriers to having a highly qualified early learning workforce that cannot be addressed by QRIS alone, including low compensation, challenging work environments, and limited opportunities for career advancement. In fact, it is extremely challenging for many educators to meet QRIS matrix requirements related to teacher qualifications, screening, assessment, and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEM CHANGES

Achieving the vision of a highly qualified early learning workforce will require a significant paradigm shift to view care of children 0-5 as a part of the education system and those who provide these services as education professionals. In addition to continuing to provide ongoing workforce development through QRIS and other professional development supports, the Partnership recommends the following system changes to achieve the vision of a qualified, professional early learning workforce:

1. **Raise the subsidy reimbursement rate to match the established 2014 Regional Market Rate.** California’s child care subsidies are intended to cover the cost of care up to the 85th percentile of rates charged by early learning educators in their communities. However, these rates have long been out of date and, despite being slightly

increased in the 2015-2016 state budget, continue to be far below what is required for quality care. Inadequate reimbursement rates are creating substandard workforce conditions and pay for the teachers that California is relying upon to care for children while they are in the most significant stages of brain development.

2. Raise early childhood education compensation to match K-12 compensation. Salaries for early educators are significantly lower than their K-12 counterparts (see graphic on page 3). In some areas, local funding is used to supplement wages, but this is not sustainable nor scalable. The extremely low salaries of early educators destabilize the workforce and create a disincentive for prospective teachers to enter the early childhood education field.

3. Develop a 0-8 teaching credential. An early education credential would prepare new teachers to teach in both pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades. The credential would create a continuum of developmentally appropriate education and better prepare all educators of young children.

4. Develop an early learning certificate program. This certificate would create a solution to enhance early childhood understanding in the existing and already credentialed workforce. These teachers are currently instructing transitional kindergarten and other young students.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

First 5 Santa Clara County has made workforce development a priority of their QRIS effort, with multiple efforts underway to raise the quality of their workforce. Two examples include:

- + **BA Cohort:** First 5 Santa Clara County has contracted with San Jose State University to support early childhood educators in obtaining their BA degrees. The 15 educators participating in the pilot cohort benefit from stipends, evening course schedules, and a supportive learning environment, and are making strong progress toward receiving their degrees.
- + **SEQUAL (Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning) Study:** SEQUAL was developed by the University of California, Berkeley to measure how well the workplace supports teachers' knowledge and skills as they develop as practitioners. First 5 Santa Clara County administered the SEQUAL tool to sixty-eight teaching staff at early learning sites participating in the QRIS pilot. Most critical of the findings from Santa Clara were that the majority of respondents expressed worry about their financial well-being—including having enough money to pay their families' bills, routine health costs, and housing costs—as well as concern about losing pay due to illness or family issues. First 5 Santa Clara County is now collaborating with UC Berkeley staff to discuss strategies for addressing issues raised through the SEQUAL surveys.



BUILDING COLLABORATION WITH HIGHER EDUCATION

In March 2015, the Partnership jointly hosted “Advancing Early Learning: A Dialogue on New Opportunities for the Field of Early Childhood Education,” a convening of higher education institutions from all six counties. Forty-six higher education faculty attended. The event opened a dialogue with these key partners. Presentations provided information on the QRIS matrix, the Partnership's findings about workforce needs and gaps based on 1.5 years of QRIS implementation, updates on state and federal early childhood policies and funding, and an overview of the University of Washington's Early Childhood and Family Studies online bachelor's degree program.

The event also provided time for county-specific conversations about quality and the role of higher education, harnessing regional momentum to build local relationships focused on quality and the workforce that the First 5 commissions could continue to foster following the event.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is a critical component of the effort to develop a qualified early learning workforce. Institutions of higher education provide coursework and associate's and bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and child development. This coursework is key to providing educators with knowledge and understanding to help them be effective teachers, in addition to being aspects of achieving high quality ratings. However, there are numerous barriers to educators already in the field accessing higher education, including course scheduling, affordability, and language requirements.

The result of this is that many educators are not trained to QRIS standards, and significant investments must be made by First 5 Commissions and other agencies both to support educators in completing early childhood coursework and to provide intensive ongoing professional development and coaching to fill significant knowledge and training gaps. With First 5 Commissions facing declining revenue, it is imperative that other sectors and institutions be involved in preparing and supporting the workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

To achieve the vision of a highly qualified early learning workforce, higher education must undergo a shift so that it is an equal partner in preparing that workforce. Two recommendations to support this are:

- Higher education institutions should offer accessible degree coursework in early childhood education that is aligned to quality standards and adequately prepares students to successfully achieve high QRIS ratings.**

Specifically, they could:

- Offer courses that accommodate full-time workers, such as evening, weekend, and distance learning opportunities, in order to be accessible to the existing workforce.
- Provide adequate supports, such as language-specific learning cohorts, ECE advisors, professional development plans, and scholarships to help students successfully complete their degrees.

LOW COMPENSATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Hourly Wages for Child Care Workers and Preschool Teachers

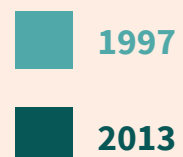
CHILD CARE WORKERS



PRESCHOOL TEACHERS



KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS



Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <http://www.irl.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ReportFINAL.pdf>

- c. Collaborate with nearby colleges to align coursework across institutions.
- d. Work with local QRIS Consortia and educators to ensure that curriculum includes QRIS matrix components and prepares students to use the tools and techniques that will be required of them when working in the field.

The Partnership and other QRIS leaders across the state can contribute to the workforce efforts by convening local higher education institutions, communicating the matrix expectations, and serving as a bridge between the higher education system and early learning program employers who see gaps in training and knowledge among their teachers.

2. Statewide policy barriers to early education degree attainment must be eliminated. There are a number of statewide policies that make it difficult for the early education workforce to attain degrees. State-level organizations working on early childhood should engage with the governing bodies of higher education to collectively change these policies, including:

- a. Make unit-bearing classes available in languages reflective of the workforce. Completing general education classes in English is a barrier for educators who lack proficiency in English, but who otherwise would be able to complete early education courses—and who serve a central role in educating children as California’s linguistic landscape becomes increasingly diverse.
- b. Increase the availability of scholarships to support those seeking early childhood degrees, including non-English speakers.
- c. Offer four-year early childhood education degrees at community colleges. A pilot program approved in 2015 will enable 15 community colleges to offer four-year degrees in a range of fields that are underserved by four-year institutions. Expanding this pilot to include four-year early childhood degrees would help create an accessible, affordable option for educators who can’t readily obtain such degrees at four-year colleges.
- d. Formalize the connection between licensing and higher education to shift the expectations for both the workforce and the higher education system. This can be done through two steps:
 1. Require AA and BA degrees as part of teacher and administrator credentialing.
 2. Align AA and BA degree program requirements with credentialing requirements.



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

The Contra Costa Community College District is one of the largest multi-college community college districts in California, consisting of Diablo Valley College, Contra Costa College, and Los Medanos College. First 5 Contra Costa County contracts with each college to provide educational advising and professional development supports. Faculty-qualified advisors support teachers working towards a Child Development Teacher Permit, an Associate Degree in ECE, or BA transfer requirements. In addition, advisors provide academic supports and incentives to early educators to achieve higher levels of professional development and education. Academic supports include individual advising and educational planning, Child Development Permit application assistance, “Cohort” classes in Math, ESL/English/GE study groups and tutoring, textbook loans, and “Lost Wages” scholarships for students participating in a practicum that takes them away from their work. Advisors also offer reflective practice seminars as a companion to some college courses, in order to help teachers apply coursework concepts into classroom practices.