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## Early Care and Education Workforce Data System

As the Obama Administration moves to implement its groundbreaking agenda to improve and expand high-quality early learning opportunities, a necessary focus will be efforts to recruit, prepare, support, and reward teachers of young children. Estimates cobbled together in 2002 from extant data suggest that approximately 1.2 million people, almost exclusively female, are employed in the formal early care and education system in the United States, working in licensed public and private child care centers, Head Start programs, pre-kindergarten programs, and licensed or regulated family child care homes (Brandon et al., 2002).

Based on available data from a few states, it is likely that most members of this workforce will need additional educational preparation in order to meet higher requirements associated with high-quality programs, and that all members of the workforce need ongoing access to professional development opportunities (Fowler et al., 2008; Whitebook et al., 2006a&b). But because no uniform national or state data systems track this workforce in a standardized, ongoing, and inclusive way, policy makers and program planners are seriously hampered in their efforts to forecast needs, develop appropriate services, and assess progress—often relying on educated guesswork at best.

Thus, as President-elect Obama's vision of lifelong success through education for all children takes shape, a comprehensive data system is an essential part of achieving an efficient and targeted retooling of our workforce for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century early care and education system.



### ***Status of ECE Workforce Data***

There is no national database that currently provides comprehensive and reliable data about the demographic and educational characteristics of the early care and education (ECE) workforce as a whole, or that tracks this workforce over time. Although a number of state and federal efforts could serve as models for a broader, more extensive national data collection system, currently none of these systems allows for aggregated national data, comparable state data, or data that are inclusive of the entire ECE workforce.

- ❖ Individual states and local communities have conducted workforce surveys that gather educational, demographic, and programmatic information. These studies are not comparable across the states, however, and none has been funded to track the workforce over an extended period of time. Thus, for example, we currently have very little information about whether members of the ECE workforce who participate in training or education—often funded with public dollars—actually remain in the ECE field, where estimates of annual personnel turnover often exceed 30 percent (Fowler, et al., 2008; Whitebook, et al., 2006a; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).
- ❖ In the absence of national surveys that assess teacher preparation and teacher qualifications in a single year or over time, such as those that are conducted in K-12 education, the ECE field relies on smaller-scale studies, local experiments in single programs, or specially commissioned studies on a group of programs that are not necessarily representative of a state or of the nation.
- ❖ Twenty-three states have established ECE workforce registries, which include databases that track individuals through their professional development trajectory. Nearly all registries are voluntary, however, and therefore they do



not provide inclusive data on all members of the workforce. Further, despite some attempts by the National Registry Alliance to make registries somewhat consistent with each other across states, they do not collect data in a standardized format.

- ❖ Some states have established data systems that track specific sectors of the ECE workforce, such as teachers in publicly funded preschools, but again, these databases are not consistent across states or necessarily inclusive of their entire sector.
- ❖ The Head Start Bureau collects data exclusively on the Head Start workforce.
- ❖ Existing federal data categories are antiquated, relying on individuals to self-select between the job titles of “preschool teacher” or “child care worker,” and inadequately capturing teaching and administrative personnel in school district-based preschool programs (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006; Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). The appendix of the Bellm and Whitebook (2006) document is attached to the end of this memo, giving a detailed description of the current limitations of federal data collection on the early care and education workforce.

### ***An ECE Workforce Data Collection System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Federal leadership and investment is urgently needed in developing and implementing a national, web-based early care and education workforce data system.

This web-based data system, which all states would access, would provide aggregated national data and comparable statewide data, while being flexible and useful for states and local jurisdictions. It would provide both point-in-time and longitudinal data on the ECE workforce, making it possible to plan for,



and track the impact of, national and statewide professional development initiatives, and to forecast programs for the future.

This data system would provide standardized information on such characteristics of the ECE workforce as: early childhood-specific training and education; levels of formal education; certification; wages and benefits; tenure and turnover; ethnicity; languages spoken; age; gender; and types and characteristics of employment settings, including the setting's public subsidy status.

The system would provide standardized, ongoing data reports, permit users to design customized reports, and allow researchers and policy makers to access and disaggregate the data.

The development and implementation of the data system would include intensive user training along with high-level quality controls to ensure the ongoing accuracy and security of the data.

### ***Building the ECE Data Collection System***

The success of a data system is based on solid planning and development, support and buy-in from all users, and comprehensive user training and quality control. To accomplish this, we propose that the Obama Administration convene and support a national task force, led by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California. This task force would be composed of national ECE workforce policy experts and researchers, and federal and state ECE administrators, practitioners, and technical experts. The task force would oversee the following tasks:

1. Gathering broad input and agreement from the ECE field on the standard data elements for the new database;



2. Gathering broad input and agreement from the ECE field on the database structure, including standard data fields, local data fields, data input, data analysis, and state reporting functions;
3. Gathering broad input and agreement from the ECE field on which federal and state entities would house, administer, and govern the database;
4. Working with technical experts to design a pilot version of the database;
5. Developing an extensive training and quality control plan;
6. Selecting six representative states to pilot the database;
7. Reviewing the pilot and making necessary changes to the database and training plan; and
8. Developing a plan for types and frequency of national reports on the early care and education workforce.

Once the pilot stage is complete and the data system is fully operational, federal resources and guidelines would be available to states for implementing and maintaining the system. All states would be required to participate, and sufficient resources would be made available for ongoing monitoring of the database within the designated federal department.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these recommendations to the President-elect's Transition Team, and would be glad to provide further information or clarification. Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or need additional information:

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**Limitations of Federal Data on the Early Care and Education Workforce**  
**—from *Roots of Decline*:**  
***How Government Policy Has De-Educated Teachers of Young Children***

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With *Losing Ground*, Herzenberg, Price and Bradley (2005) have produced a useful study of the ECE workforce from existing household and census data, one that broadly confirms the findings of previous studies (Saluja, Clifford & Early, 2002; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes, 2001; Burton, Whitebook & Lawrence, 1998) and extends our knowledge into new areas. But the study also confirms longstanding problems with federal data collection on the ECE workforce, and the urgent need for a clearer picture.

Researchers and advocates have long called for a major overhaul of how federal agencies, notably the Department of Labor and the Census Bureau, categorize the early care and education industry and its various occupations. Issues have included a lack of consistency in definitions across agencies, and outmoded definitions that fail to capture the reality of ECE jobs or differentiate among important sectors of this fast-expanding industry (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). Some adjustments to these definitions have been made over the years, notably in 1992 and 2000, but problems remain that limit the data's usefulness for understanding the ECE field, measuring improvement, and planning policy.

The *Losing Ground* authors cite the Current Population Survey and U.S. Census data sets as the best currently available sources for national and comparable state information about the ECE workforce, while acknowledging many of the limitations of these federal data. They discuss at length how they approached building a consistent time series of the industry in light of modifications to both the industry and occupation codes initiated by federal



agencies over the 25-year period of interest. They also provide explanations for their decisions to group certain occupational categories, such as teachers and administrators.

But while *Losing Ground* confirms many of the findings of local studies that have been based on more refined definitions and categories of ECE employment, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the data on which the report is based, particularly as its findings are used to frame recommended policy interventions and future research. In particular, we draw readers' attention to the following issues:

1) *Limited definition of early childhood workforce preparation.*

The ECE personnel under consideration are grouped according to whether they have completed some college work, an associate (AA/AS) degree, or a four-year (BA/BS) degree or more, but the data do not distinguish how much, if any, of this education is ECE-related. While there is undoubtedly benefit in college-level education of any kind, teacher performance as it relates to program quality and child outcomes is also linked to college-level coursework directly related to early childhood development (Whitebook, 2003; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2005). Thus, these data are useful in understanding how the ECE workforces compares to other fields or the general public in terms of formal educational attainment, but they shed no light on the proportion of the workforce overall – or at different levels of formal education – who have completed specialized early childhood training. This question becomes particularly important in determining the professional preparation of the ECE field, and in understanding differences in performance and career stability among those who have different combinations of formal education and specialized training.

2) *Mingling or omission of industry sectors.*

Licensed and license-exempt home-based providers. The study found much lower educational levels among home-based providers in recent years than among center-based teachers, but since federal data do not distinguish between licensed and license-exempt providers—the latter group being subject to no training or education requirements at all—we are left with a distorted view of the



home-based sector of the workforce. A forthcoming study of California licensed family child care providers suggest that the gap in educational levels between licensed home-based providers and center teachers is not as extreme as that suggested in *Losing Ground*. Herzenberg, Price and Bradley report, for example, that over 56 percent of California's home-based providers (licensed, unlicensed or exempt) report high school or less as their highest level of educational attainment, compared to 28.5 percent of *licensed* providers as documented in the new statewide study (Whitebook et al., 2006b). This discrepancy suggests that it is highly unreliable to combine the licensed and unlicensed sectors of the home-based ECE workforce when discussing educational attainment.

School district-based preschool personnel. Additionally, as the authors note, federal data inadequately capture teaching and administrative personnel in school district-based preschool programs. In part, this is due to the longstanding failure of federal data collection to differentiate between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, despite their historically different pay and qualifications (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). Although Herzenberg, Price and Bradley suggest that the school-based sector is relatively small and would contribute less than a five-percent increase in the total of ECE teaching and administrative workforce with four-year college degrees, this sector is the focus of many states' policy innovations and investment, and its omission underscores the limitations of the federal data (Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005).

Of the seven states in the *Losing Ground* study, the workforce portrait of at least two – New Jersey and New York – could be significantly different, given their recent expansion of school-based preschool programs and increased requirements for teacher preparation (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005). California, too, has long operated a substantial number of school-based, full-day child development and preschool programs with more stringent staff qualifications and somewhat higher pay levels; the absence of this sector therefore leads to an incomplete portrait of the state's center-based industry.

A recent report notes that preschool teachers in school-based settings have, on average, "annual earnings 58 percent higher than the combined



average of their non-school-based counterparts. The differential between school settings and predominantly private child day care services is more than \$15,000 a year” (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2006).

### 3) *Mingling of employee categories.*

Teachers and administrators. The authors note that “the report groups teachers with administrators to increase sample size, and because education trends within the two categories are similar” – but this approach is not equally valid across all the states in the study. In New Jersey, even in state-funded preschools in the Abbott school districts, directors (unlike teachers) are not required to hold a bachelor’s degree (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005). In California, by contrast, recent data reveal that directors are more than twice as likely as teachers to hold a four-year or higher degree (Whitebook et al., 2006). Further, because administrative jobs are often sought by teachers who wish to stay in the field but are disaffected by teacher pay (Whitebook & Sakai, 2004), it is questionable whether the same decline in education has occurred among directors as among teaching personnel.

Early childhood educators. The U.S. Census data cited in the study’s seven state-level Issue Briefs use the category of “early childhood educators,” which includes all occupations with primary responsibility for children, such as teachers, assistant teachers and teacher aides, and combines personnel working with different ages groups of children. Unfortunately, this collapsing of occupational titles and age groups blurs the picture in an increasingly important area of public policy. While there are rising calls for higher educational standards for head teachers and assistant teachers in publicly-funded preschool programs – typically, a bachelor’s degree and credential for teachers, and an associate degree and certification for assistants – there has been no equivalent call for teacher aides or for personnel in infant/toddler or school-age child care. From the federal data presented, we are unable to tell whether educational levels have held steadier among certain staff or have fallen equally throughout the ECE workforce.



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