

~~ Why the Education of Early Childhood Teachers Matters ~~

The economic future of North Carolina is entrusted to the child care industry which lays the foundation for upcoming generations completing school and being prepared to join the workforce.⁴

This foundation includes access to high quality child care. The requirements for early childhood teacher education in North Carolina must continue to be strengthened because high quality early childhood education requires educated and experienced teachers.

Why are higher teacher education levels important?

In a state with over 40% of its families receiving some form of public assistance and over 17% living in desperately poor families, decision makers as well as the child care workforce must be aware of the latest research on the importance of teacher education to address the needs of ALL children.²

Is the child care workforce interested in further education?

- 32% are already enrolled in coursework
- 49% are interested in taking courses
- 69% of family child care providers and 62% of directors were either taking or are interested in taking courses.⁸

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The North Carolina Institute
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➤ Abuse and neglect incidents are linked with low education scores.

North Carolina child care abuse & neglect data compiled for 2001-02 and 2002-03 show that over 90% of substantiated abuse and neglect reports occurred in child care centers with fewer than 3 points in education.³

➤ Language/literacy skills are impacted by teacher education.

An evaluation of NC's More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program showed in year 3 that higher teacher qualifications were associated with greater gains in children's language/literacy skills over the program year.⁴

➤ Low income children benefit from quality child care programs.

Long-term studies show that quality child care programs, particularly for low-income children, decrease the likelihood of special education enrollment, juvenile delinquency, adult incarceration and welfare participation which require government spending to remediate.¹

➤ The quality of the child care environment is linked with teacher education.

Caregivers who have more formal education and more specialized training pertaining to children offer care that is more stimulating, warm and supportive and offer more age-appropriate environments for young children.⁵ Data collected from high quality center-based programs in the state indicate that higher levels of education are associated with higher scores on the environment rating scales.⁶

➤ Education empowers the teaching workforce.

T.E.A.C.H.® Early Childhood recipients report that their scholarships have helped them to:

- become successful first time college students
- strengthen their financial ability to support their families
- provide health insurance for themselves and their dependents
- model the importance of education for their children and grandchildren, breaking the cycle of poverty

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends in its policy statement about quality early education and care, that pediatricians should always emphasize that quality child care programs include parental involvement and strong, socio-emotional and other developmental elements in a safe, healthy environment.⁷

What resources are available?

North Carolina has the opportunity to continue building child care regulations that will support the needs of ALL children through higher teacher education levels. Many resources and strategies are available to support child care programs in reaching for the stars.

Resources & Strategies

The cost of education, retention of the workforce and limited access to education opportunities are the most frequently cited reasons for not supporting higher levels of teacher education.

Cost of Educating the Workforce

North Carolina is fortunate to have resources and a network of technical assistance available to support programs in increasing teacher education levels. State and local service providers and child care administrators must work together to help programs access all the resources to which child care programs are entitled.

By working together our state can continue to formulate a plan and a network of resources to address both the direct and indirect costs of educating the child care workforce including the following:

Tuition Assistance - At least 1 in every 3 of the early childhood community college students enrolled in college courses in NC are supported by tuition assistance through T.E.A.C.H.® Early Childhood Scholarships.⁸ In addition Pell grants and earned income tax credit are also utilized by early childhood students to assist with the cost of education.⁹

Salary Supplements – NC’s largest salary supplement program, the Child Care WAGE\$® Project, serves child care teachers in 59 North Carolina counties. Findings indicate that teachers who receive a WAGE\$® supplement are increasing their education, earning more money and leaving their child care programs at a substantially lower rate than those who do not.¹⁰

Program Support – Thousands of NC’s child care programs tap into quality improvement grants, child care tuition assistance and food programs to stretch limited resources to support teacher education costs.

Retaining an Educated Workforce

Consistent teaching staff is critical for children and their learning. A recent statewide workforce study revealed that through the provision of research-based, no-cost, low-cost

and cost effective employee benefits, workforce turnover rates decrease. Reported benefits include:

1. Paid breaks
2. Job descriptions
3. Personnel policies
4. Paid leave for professional development
5. Financial support for continuing professional development
6. Paid planning time
7. Orientation for new staff member⁸

The provision of health care insurance both attracts and retains child care teachers. 26% of child care centers participating in the T.E.A.C.H.® Early Childhood Health Insurance program in FY 04-05, reported that participating in the initiative helped them attract and retain staff¹¹

Access to College Courses

The number of early childhood students attending NC community college early childhood classes has rapidly increased from 4,000 in 1997 to over 14,000 in 2005. NC’s community college early childhood departments have created a wide array of course offerings to respond to the need for varied education opportunities. Of the 38 colleges reporting:

100% offer credit-bearing classes in the evening hours

- 100% offer developmental courses in reading, writing and math
- 50% offer credit-bearing classes on Saturdays
- 58% offer credit-bearing classes at off-site locations
- 53% offer college course through satellite transmission
- 87% offer credit bearing classes online, requiring no on-campus attendance¹²

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