

Defining High-Quality Early Education: Teacher Education and Training

This policy brief examines the strong positive link between teachers’ education, training and compensation levels and high-quality early education. Research has shown that high-quality early education improves children’s health and well-being and raises academic achievement, leading to gains in language ability and math skills.¹ However, without a sustained commitment to high standards, meaningful learning activities and a well trained and compensated workforce these benefits will not be realized. Therefore, the Early Education for All (EEA) Campaign, a coalition of leaders from business, early childhood, labor, religion, health care, education and philanthropy, supports five high-quality criteria for early education programs:

1. A bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early education for at least one teacher per classroom or family child care setting;
2. A bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early education for at least one leader per program;
3. Adherence to the Massachusetts Department of Education’s *Early Childhood Program Standards for Three- and Four-Year-Olds*, and the *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences*;
4. Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or an equivalent; and
5. The use of a developmentally appropriate assessment tool to measure children’s progress over time.

The Importance of Teacher Education

In Massachusetts, as in most states, there is a need to invest in teacher quality in early education settings. It is estimated that only 30% of center-based teachers and 18% of family child care providers in the Commonwealth hold a bachelor’s degree (BA) or higher.² A large body of research indicates that teacher education and specialized training in early childhood education has a significant effect on children’s early learning and healthy development. For example, an analysis of 32 studies of pre-k programs in classroom-based settings found a significant relationship between teachers who hold a BA and improved student learning.³ Similarly, a study focusing exclusively on family child care in Massachusetts concluded that teachers’ prior years of education were strongly associated with program quality.⁴

Table 1: Quality Components Associated with a BA and Specialized Training in ECE⁵

Source	Description	Findings – Impact of a BA
Whitebook (2003)	<i>Analysis of “Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes” studies examining BA holders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater teacher sensitivity • Higher-quality learning environments
Howes, et al. (2003)	<i>Examined impact of a BA, or mentoring and community engagement, on quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More responsive teacher involvement • Greater engagement in child language development
Early, et al. (2006)	<i>Compared BA holders to teachers with an AA and teachers with no post-secondary education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater gains in children’s math scores during the pre-k year
Pianta, et al. (2005)	<i>Examined impact of BA and specialized training in early childhood education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater child access to learning materials • More positive classroom emotional climate
Kelley & Camilli (2006)	<i>Meta-analysis of studies comparing teachers with BAs to teachers with AAs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More positive teacher-child interactions • More effective instructional activities
Whitebook (2003)	<i>Compared teachers with BAs or higher in Head Start centers to those with less formal education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More knowledge about early childhood education • Greater vocabulary and knowledge of story and print concepts among children
Clarke-Stewart, et al. (2002)	<i>Examined impact of education level and specialized training in family child care settings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater child cognition and language development • Richer home learning environment • Warmer and more sensitive caregiving
Marshall, et al. (2003)	<i>Examined the impact of education level in family child care settings in Massachusetts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More learning activities in the home setting • Greater use of language with children • Warmer interactions, more sensitive to child needs

Teacher Quality Standards

Policymakers and accrediting organizations have established clear standards for early educators. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognizes teachers' formal education, work experience and relevant training and credentials as essential components of a career lattice for determining teacher quality. Programs accredited by NAEYC will be required to fulfill specific BA requirements by 2020. Similarly, the federal law reauthorizing Head Start will require 50% of teachers and all education coordinators in Head Start centers to hold a BA plus specialized training by 2013. In Massachusetts, Early Childhood Program Standards require newly hired preschool teachers to hold a BA that includes 18 credits in early childhood education and a practicum in early childhood education by 2017.

Support for Early Educators in Massachusetts

Establishing benchmarks for teacher quality that include a BA and specialized training in early childhood education not only supports program quality, but also benefits early educators by professionalizing the field and potentially increasing compensation and retention rates.^{6,7} Achieving quality standards requires substantial support from state and local policymakers and institutes of higher education. Early educators working full- or part-time face difficulties returning to school including high-tuition costs, course prerequisites, daytime scheduling and language barriers. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) administers a number of workforce development programs to support early educators.

- The **Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)** program awards grants to early education providers to enhance quality, which includes investing in teacher education, training and compensation. The FY08 UPK evaluation conducted by Abt Associates found that 34% of 2007 grant funds and 48% of 2008 grant funds were spent on staff development.
- The **Early Childhood Educators Scholarship** program provides tuition assistance to currently employed early educators to pursue an AA or BA in exchange for continued employment in the field. In FY07, 744 applicants were awarded a scholarship; in FY08, 894 applicants received a scholarship.
- **Building Careers** is a cohort-model program that funds college courses and advisement for non-traditional students to obtain college degrees. In FY09, 21 colleges and universities received grants ranging from \$48,000 to \$68,000. The average cohort size is 34 and there are currently 717 students being served.
- EEC is required by legislation to provide **professional development (PD)** offerings with proven, replicable results that demonstrate best practices for the field. EEC has established an online PD database to inform early educators about training sessions. Roughly one fifth of the 379 PD opportunities in the database are available to be taken for continuing education units (CEUs) or college credit.⁸

¹ Barnett, W. S. (2006). *NIEER Working Paper – A Review of the Reason Foundation's Report of Preschool and Kindergarten*. Retrieved November 5, 2008, from <http://nieer.org/docs/?DocID=150>; Witte, J. F. (2007). A proposal for state, income-target, preschool vouchers. *The Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(4): 617-644.

² Marshall, N. L., Dennehy, J., Johnson-Staub, C., & Wagner Robeson, W. (2005). *Massachusetts Capacity Study: Characteristics of the Current Early Education and Care Workforce Serving 3-5 Year-olds*. Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.; Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network, Inc. (January, 2009) Data Report 2008.

³ This study examined various child and classroom outcomes including cognitive development, social/emotional development, instructional activities, and global classroom quality. The estimated effect size of the BA on these outcomes was 0.16 standard deviations ($p < .05$). Kelley, P. & Camilli, G. (2007). The impact of teacher education on outcomes in center-based education programs: A meta-analysis. *NIEER Working Papers*.

⁴ Marshall, N. L., Creps, C. L., Burstein, N. R., Cahill, K. E., Robeson, W. W., Wang, S. Y., Schimmenti, J., & Glantz, F. B. (2003). *Family Child Care Today: A Report of the Findings of the Massachusetts Cost/Quality Study: Family Child Care Homes*. Wellesley Centers for Women and Abt Associates, Inc.

⁵ Whitebook, M. (2003). Early Education Quality: Higher Teacher Qualifications for Better Learning Environments: A Review of the Literature. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.; Howes, C., James, J., & Ritchie, S. (2003). Pathways to effective teaching. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 104-120.; Early, D. M., Bryant, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Clifford, R. M., Burchinal, M. R., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., Barbarin, O. (2006). Are teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 174-195.; Pianta, R., Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Bryant, D., Clifford, R., Early, D., & Barbarin, O. (2005). Features of pre-kindergarten programs, classrooms, and teachers: Do they predict observed classroom quality and child-teacher interactions? *Applied Developmental Science*, 9, 3, 144-159.; Kelley, P. & Camilli, G. (2007). The impact of teacher education on outcomes in center-based education programs: A meta-analysis. *NIEER Working Papers*.; Clarke-Stewart, K.A., Vandell, D. L., Burchinal, M. R., O'Brien, M., & McCartney, K. (2002). Do regulable features of child care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17, 52-86.; Marshall, N.L., Creps, C.L., Burstein, N.R., Cahill, K. E., Robeson, W. W., Wang, S. Y., Schimmenti, J., & Glantz, F. B. (2003). *Family Child Care Today: A Report of the Findings of the Massachusetts Cost/Quality Study: Family Child Care Homes*. Wellesley Centers for Women and Abt Associates, Inc.

⁶ Early, D. M., Maxwell, K. L., Clifford, R. M., Pianta, R. C., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., Bryant, D. M., Burchinal, M., & Barbarin, O. (2008) Teacher Education and Child Outcomes: A Reply to the Commentary. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 1, pp. 7-9.

⁷ Whitebook, M., Sakai, L., Gerber, E., & Howes, C. (2001). Then and Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing (1994-2000), Technical Report. *Center for the Child Care Workforce*.

⁸ Based on an October, 2008 search of EEC's professional development database, available at <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/WebFindTraining.aspx> [Updated August 2009]