

ECE Workforce Needs: Local Solutions from Preschool Planning

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In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the importance of early learning for young children’s future success in school and life. This has led to a steady expansion of preschool access and increased scrutiny of program quality. This growing demand has also prompted governmental action for improving the early childhood education (ECE) workforce. Massachusetts has taken steps to address each of these challenges: access, quality, and workforce. The best policies address all three factors simultaneously.

Since 2016, 15 communities across Massachusetts have been awarded Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative grants by the state Department of Early Education and Care to “conduct needs assessments, identify needed and available resources, and develop plans for implementing expanded access to preschool in their community.”¹ These plans for expanding access to high-quality preschool, focused on family engagement, curriculum alignment, professional development, and project sustainability. Part of each community plan highlighted the need for a strong ECE workforce. Several workforce-support themes emerged from across the plans as well as innovative solutions to meeting those needs.

Shared Challenges, Customized Solutions

The 15 communities have identified similar needs for supporting and developing their ECE workforce. However, each one has created community-generated approaches to meeting their individual needs. This collaborative approach reflects the uniqueness of each community, the resources available, and the whole community’s commitment to improving early education.

Identified Workforce Needs

Upon review of the 15 preschool expansion plans,³ five common workforce needs were identified: teachers with degrees, pay equity, recruitment and retention, accessible professional development, and professional development for working with specific populations.

Highly qualified early education workforce with AA’s and BA’s

More ECE programs are seeking teachers with 4-year bachelor’s degrees (BA). As defined in the planning grant guidelines, high-quality preschools must include at least one educator with a BA degree per classroom. The MA QRIS also has degree requirements at specific quality levels making it necessary for teachers to complete degrees. While some grantees such as Cape Cod believed that they had a strong supply of teachers with BA degrees to draw from, others like Springfield did not have the proper supply of qualified teachers. The Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program helps support individuals pursuing associate degrees (AA’s) and BA’s in Massachusetts. However, some cities have restricted access to 4-year universities due to their location, thus creating a geographic barrier for teachers pursuing degrees. **Need identified by: Holyoke, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Salem, Somerville, Springfield, Worcester.**

Number of Teachers with a BA ² Needed in Identified Communities	
Athol	1
Brockton	3
Cape Cod	5
Fall River	3
Holyoke	37
Lawrence	N/A
Lowell	7
New Bedford	5
North Adams	4
Pittsfield	2
Somerville	2
Springfield	54
Worcester	4

Pay equity between preschool teachers in public and private programs

Teacher pay is one factor contributing to turnover—high-quality teachers at community-based programs leave for higher paying positions in public schools. In Massachusetts, the average salary for a public school Kindergarten teacher is \$67,000 compared to the average annual preschool teacher wage of \$25,000.⁴ This compensation is not enough to support cost of living. Differences in funding streams for public and private programs are the main contributor of this pay gap. Public schools receive dedicated education dollars and are required to provide free preschool for young children with special education needs. Private, community-based programs however rely on parent fees and federal child care funds tied to parents' work status.⁵ Low wages were identified in the preschool plans as the number one reason ECE teachers either switch to working at a public school or leave the profession entirely. **Need identified by: Athol, Cape Cod, Fall River, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield.**

Teacher recruitment and retention

Compensation is a significant factor contributing to high teacher turnover, but several communities also identified ECE teacher recruitment as a need. Across the state the turnover rate for teachers hovers at 30% year-to-year.⁶ However, some cities such as Worcester report upwards of 50% turnover annually. **Need identified by: Athol, Holyoke, Lowell, New Bedford, Salem, Somerville, Springfield, Worcester.**

Accessible Professional Development

Schedule, location, transportation, and cost are all barriers to teachers accessing professional development. Some cities like New Bedford have limited public transportation and some teachers do not have access to a car in order to attend professional development (PD) training. Additionally, PD scheduling was identified as not compatible with teacher work hours. **Need identified by: Athol, Cape Cod, Holyoke, North Adams, Somerville.**

Professional Development that supports a particular community's needs

Some communities identified specific PD needs, including trauma-informed care and cultural competency. This PD is not yet offered through the QRIS Improvement Grant, thus, requires either private funding from teachers or programs, or availability through the Educator and Provider Support grant. **Need identified by: Athol, Fall River, New Bedford.**

Community-Generated Solutions/Approaches

As part of the preschool plans, local communities created individualized approaches to how they could meet their needs through collaboration with private providers and the public school district as well as with other nonprofit entities. Five approaches were identified across the communities for meeting the workforce needs addressed above.

- College Degrees** Several plans identified local area colleges as partners in meeting various workforce challenges including degree completion. The Cape Cod plan identified current collaboration with the local community college and nearest state university to offer courses at a variety of times and through a variety of mediums (in-person, online, hybrid). Springfield suggested stackable credentials and a more flexible career path that would allow teachers to progress to higher positions in ways other than degrees. This aligns with EEC's proposed Career Lattice and multiple pathways to career advancement. Similarly, Worcester developed an educator professional development and leadership pipeline that Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) support through articulation agreements. Salem plans to collaborate with local colleges to recruit and pipeline highly qualified teachers into the city's workforce. Additionally, Salem believes partnering with the local IHE will help recruit bilingual staff. Encouraging similar agreements in other parts of the state may increase the number of successful educators obtaining their BA.

College & Community Partnerships

Cape Cod: Cape Cod Community College

Salem: Salem State University

Springfield: Unspecified

Worcester: Quinsigamond

Community College, Worcester State University, Becker College

- **Compensation** Springfield proposed tiered financial incentives and compensation to reduce pay disparities and help incentivize teachers to remain in the field. However, the communities recognized that increasing teacher compensation is not sustainable without the assurance of greater funding from the state or other local entities.
- **Recruitment & Retention** Somerville suggested continued partnership with local universities in order to place student teachers directly into the community classrooms and develop new teachers entering the field. Similarly, Holyoke proposed working with UMass Amherst and other nearby colleges to bring student teachers into Pre-K classrooms. In addition Holyoke proposed developing a pathway to education careers for high school students in order for them to gain experience in the classroom and encourage continued pursuit of education careers. Also, Salem suggested collaborating with the local university to create a recruitment strategy and pipeline for students on track for BA obtainment to eventually enter the local ECE classrooms.
- **Professional Development** Numerous community plans suggested offering PD at a variety of times and locations as well as through webinars and online to accommodate varying schedules. Cape Cod, Holyoke, and Somerville proposed joint public school and private provider PD. This would align the entire community's ECE workforce training.
- **Shared Substitutes** Several communities recommended sharing substitutes between both public preschools and private ECE programs. This shared system could help alleviate the deficiency of teachers caused by turnover. This solution may help incentivize new teachers into entering the ECE profession and be an additional recruitment tool.

Ongoing Massachusetts Policies & Programs

- Rate reserve: \$45 million wage increase in FY18 budget to address pay parity for early educators.
- House Speaker Robert DeLeo's 2017 report "The Business Imperative for Early Education" proposed considerations for credentials and degrees, compensation, professional development, career ladder, and workforce pipeline. The recommendations aim to address stability and quality in the ECE workforce.
- ECE Scholarship Program provides scholarship funds for students pursuing degrees in early education.
- QRIS Improvement Grant offers funding for professional development.
- IHE Mapping Project identified colleges and universities with ECE degree programs and facilitate transfer of credits between IHEs.
- Educator Provider Support grant provides funding for degree attainment and professional development
- EEC proposed Career Lattice promotes multiple pathways for professional growth

Need	Locally-Identified Solution
Highly Qualified Teachers with Degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between community college, local universities, and ECE providers to offer a variety of courses in-person, online, and hybrid version at variety of times and dates • Create stackable credentials to promote multiple ways to career advancement
Pay Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiered financial incentives to adequately reflect a teacher's advancement and position <p><i>*increasing teacher compensation is not sustainable at a local level without a new funding source</i></p>
Recruitment & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with local institutions of higher education and high schools to place students in community ECE classrooms to offer in-class experience and promote recruitment of promising high-quality teachers • Develop pathway to education careers for high school students to provide experience and encourage them continuing in the field • Share substitute teachers between public preschools and private providers which could be a new entry point for teachers to enter the field
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer PD at a variety of times and locations to account for varying work schedules • Joint public school and private provider PD • Webinars and online courses which allow flexibility in the time for completion

Needs Across the State

This brief highlights a sample of local Massachusetts communities' needs in regard to workforce development. There are varying levels of needs between the communities that ranged beyond workforce and included family engagement, creation of more ECE programs, progressing programs in QRIS and strengthening local leadership. Strategies for Children acknowledges that while communities have plans for improving access to and quality of early education programs, they cannot do it alone. State and federal funding offer invaluable resources for communities to utilize when generating these plans. A larger partnership between local, state, and federal governments will help strengthen progress.

Identified Community Workforce Needs				
	Highly-Qualified Teachers with Degrees	Pay Equity	Recruitment & Retention	Professional Development
Athol	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boston				
Cape Cod		✓	✓	✓
Brockton				
Fall River		✓		✓
Holyoke	✓		✓	
Lawrence				
Lowell		✓	✓	
New Bedford	✓	✓		✓
North Adams			✓	
Pittsfield	✓			
Salem	✓		✓	
Somerville	✓			
Springfield	✓	✓	✓	
Worcester	✓			

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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¹ Early Education and Care. Preschool Expansion and Partnership Initiative. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/provider-and-program-administration/preschool-expansion-and-partnership-initiative.html>

² This table reflects the needs of the first 13 communities to receive the Preschool Partnership Initiative Planning Grant in FY16. Federal PEG guidelines requiring at least one teacher hold a BA may account for why Holyoke and Springfield's plans require a higher number of BA teachers.

³ All plans are available on EEC's website: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/provider-and-program-administration/preschool-expansion-and-partnership-initiative.html>.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics. (2015); Head Start Program Information Report. (2015). Data in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce. Massachusetts Wage Profile*. Retrieved from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/massachusetts_wage_profile.pdf

⁵ For further information on pay parity policies see Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2016). *Early Childhood Workforce Index*.

⁶ The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children. (January 2015). *About Early Ed in Massachusetts*. Retrieved from: <http://www.btwic.org/resources/about-early-ed-in-ma>