



## Washington Association for the Education of Young Children

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### Public Policy Plan July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2013

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC) is committed to a future in which early childhood professionals are well-qualified and highly compensated and early childhood programs are of high quality. The majority of children in Washington State from birth through five years of age, and many school-age children, spend time in non-parental care on a regular basis. High quality early learning programs give children the foundation and support they need to succeed in school and life. Research shows that when early childhood professionals are well prepared and appropriately compensated, children are likely to experience warm, safe and stimulating environments that lead to healthy development and constructive learning.

WAEYC's roles and responsibilities in supporting this vision ensue from its status as the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)—the nation's premier organization of early childhood professionals. NAEYC, with roots back to the 1920s, has more than 100,000 members, and is focused on setting research-based standards and providing resources to improve early childhood program quality, enhancing the professional development and working conditions of program staff, and helping families learn about and understand the need for high quality early childhood education. As the state NAEYC affiliate, WAEYC's reach is statewide through its support to and connection with 14 local affiliate chapters across the state and a membership of more than 1,600 early childhood professionals.

#### Connection to WAEYC's Business Plan

WAEYC's Business Plan (June 2009), Business Strategy B, *Promoting Program Quality & Professional Qualifications and Compensation*, sets the stage for this three-year public policy plan for achieving WAEYC's vision for early childhood professionals and the businesses for which they work. The specifics of the policy agenda are determined through recommendations of the field as represented by the affiliate council and determined by the governing board.

#### How will this Plan be Used?

This WAEYC Three-Year Public Policy Plan is seen as a living document that will grow with WAEYC and the field of early learning. It will serve multiple purposes including to: 1) build consensus about the public policy strategies that will help move us toward WAEYC's vision for early learning professionals and programs—this includes outreach to affiliates and members to solicit comments and suggestions about the draft plan; 2) guide WAEYC's annual legislative agenda and lobbying priorities; and 3) provide the framework for developing WAEYC's public long-term policy agenda, research and publication agenda, key advocacy messages, and learning and sharing networks.

#### Guiding Principles

The NAEYC publication *Workforce Designs—A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems*, recommends guiding principles for policy making. These principles, adopted by WAEYC and the Washington State Professional Development Consortium, are incorporated throughout this plan and include:

- **Integration:** to avoid duplication and support sustainability, policies should create an integrated system that crosses all early childhood sectors. Integration should be reflected in strategies such as Quality

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*Promoting excellence in early learning*

Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), data systems, early learning councils, and higher education coordinating efforts.

- **Quality Assurance:** mechanisms and processes to ensure accountability must be embedded in strategies to improve professional development and program quality.
- **Diversity, Inclusion and Access:** attention to diversity must permeate our policies and strategies for professional development and program improvement. Policies need to support the recruitment, development and retention of an early childhood workforce (across roles) that reflect the diversity of children and families served.
- **Compensation Parity:** compensation needs to be equal or equivalent to similar fields; this is essential to improving standards about what early childhood professionals know and are able to do.

### **Positions on Broader Issues**

This three-year plan focuses specifically on WAEYC's vision for highly qualified early childhood professionals and high quality early learning programs. Public policy positions on a broader array of issues such as child nutrition, technology and family leave, are available in the NAEYC Public Policy Program (April 5, 2005) and NAEYC Position Statements for public policy guidance.

## **HIGHLY QUALIFIED EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS**

Early childhood professionals need preparation, ongoing development and support to ensure that young children and their families have quality early learning experiences. The importance of a strong professional development system has been referenced in our state by source documents from Washington Learns, Kids Matter, and in policy forums and discussions. NAEYC's policy blueprint, adopted by Washington State's Professional Development Consortium, lays out a comprehensive framework for an integrated, cross-sector professional development system. The following policy recommendations, based on the framework in NAEYC's policy blueprint, are the next steps for building on and supporting a comprehensive early childhood professional development system in Washington State.

### **Career Pathways**

Career pathways support the continuous professional development progress of individuals through clearly defined and **easily recognized pathways** that acknowledge demonstrated competencies and early childhood education and training. State policy should support continuous progress of individuals so that they can develop a sound understanding of child development and early education principles, and plan toward achievement of increased qualifications, understand professional possibilities, and be appropriately compensated. Each person working in early learning should be encouraged to have a plan toward pursuing professional qualifications and ongoing professional development. Policies should institutionalize or embed pathways in all sectors and for all roles (both direct service and non-direct service). Policies should recognize and support individuals entering the system from other fields as well as those moving within the early learning field and among its sectors. WAEYC's role as Washington's early childhood professional association is to guide and support the workforce in navigating these pathways to obtain higher levels of education and development and advance professionally.

- A **career ladder or lattice** should exist with clearly identified professional roles, competencies and career pathways from entry-level to advanced positions. There should be pathway information dissemination and tracking via a practitioner/workforce **registry**, and **professional development advising** to support professional advancement.
- The State should develop, implement and commit to funding an effective system of **incentives and supports** for the workforce to encourage them to obtain higher levels of education and development.
- Opportunities should exist for individuals to participate in **leadership and advocacy activities** for their professional growth and development.

### **Articulation**

Articulation is the transfer of professional development credentials, courses, credits, degrees, and student performance-based competencies from one program or institution to another, ideally without a loss of credits. Developing and implementing policies around articulation assists in creating career pathways and building capacity to meet required professional standards. In a field characterized by low wages, minimal educational

requirements, and high turnover, community based training and strong articulation policies are critical to ensuring a highly-competent workforce. WAEYC can serve as a bridge or connector between providers of community based training and institutions of higher education.

Work should continue on the development and enforcement of articulation agreements and other policies around articulation such as:

- Modularized workshops provided for college credit (e.g. Building Bridges).
- STARS 20-hour Basic Training Articulation Agreement.
- Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Articulation Agreement.
- Institution-to-institution articulation agreements.

### **Professional Standards**

Professional Standards define the “what” or content of professional preparation and continuing education. While allowing for philosophical variations among institutions of higher education, and other organizations that provide education and training, state policies should specify qualifications and ongoing development required for all early learning professionals – from teachers and assistants to trainers and higher education faculty, family child care providers, licensors, resource and referral staff, and program, school, district, and agency administrators. These specifications should address levels and content of education, including child development and early education theory, as well as ongoing development. WAEYC, as the state NAEYC affiliate, has a key role in creating professional standards and supporting the workforce in achieving them.

- **Early Learning Core competencies** - fundamental knowledge, abilities, or expertise in specific subject areas or skill sets should be adopted. Pre-service and continuing education requirements, and credentials and degrees should be linked to the core competencies. Cultural competence is a critical core competency.
- The following **teacher qualifications**, based on NAEYC Accreditation standards, and in line with Head Start and ECEAP standards, should be the goal: 100 percent of all lead teachers should have at least an associates’ degree or equivalent in early childhood education, child or youth development, elementary education, or early childhood special education or relevant degrees for the school-age workforce. Fifty percent of Assistant Teachers should have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent.
- Incentives should be provided for preschool through third grade public school teachers to have an early childhood education **P-3 endorsement** to their teacher certification.
- College and universities’ early childhood education **teacher preparation programs**, including two-, four- and graduate-level programs should be encouraged to pursue accreditation by the NAEYC’s Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation or the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).
- **Community-based training** plays an important part in supporting professional development and, in particular, can encourage entry-level workers to embark on a pathway toward professional qualifications and competencies; however, such training should be of quality equivalent to credit-bearing training.
- Creation of an **individual credentialing system** should be explored. Unlike child care licensing which involves licensure of the child care facility, this might include a process whereby individuals receive a transferable credential that demonstrates their professional qualifications to work as a director, lead teacher, family support worker etc.

### **Advisory Structure**

Advisory structure is the coordinating mechanism for an integrated professional development system. Effective systems are supported by a policy requiring a specific group of people to focus on this work. The **Professional Development Consortium** (PDC) should continue beyond December 2010 when their recommendations are due to the Governor and Legislature. In 2011 and beyond, the PDC would oversee the implementation of recommendations, examine needs, and make professional development policy recommendations to the Department of Early Learning and the Early Learning Advisory Council. WAEYC has been and should continue to be a key member of the PDC providing our own and NAEYC’s expertise and resources for creating and implementing a coordinated, cross-sector professional development system. Annually, WAEYC is the

convener of a cross-sector team from the PDC participating in NAEYC's state professional development leadership day.

### **Compensation (Salaries and Benefits)**

**Compensation** policies should encourage and reward the workforce for additional education and development and increase retention of a qualified and highly-competent workforce. In collaboration with the private sector and philanthropic partners, the state should develop, implement and commit to a stable funding structure that supports the creation and retention of a qualified and highly-competent workforce. Based on the state's wage scale for early childhood public employees and the teacher qualifications detailed above, wage scales for early childhood teachers should equal \$25-38,000 for a CDA credential, \$33-44,000 for an associates' degree, and \$40-52,000 for a baccalaureate degree.

The infrastructure section of this paper outlines other financing components necessary for the effective operation of a coordinated professional development. These include funding to increase workforce access to education and ongoing professional development and to sustain the professional development system infrastructure. Attention to diversity is critical when determining financing policies and budgets. Policies and funding need to support the recruitment, development and retention of an early childhood workforce that reflects the diversity of the children and families served.

## **HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS**

We now know that high quality early learning and school-age programs can influence long-term outcomes for children—especially children growing up under stressful conditions including poverty. We also know what it takes to provide high quality services for children and their families including appropriate workforce compensation, child-centered programming and curriculum, and family supports. And, yet, the chronic gap between available funding and the funding required means that many programs have difficulty providing the quality of services children need and deserve. The following policy recommendations demonstrate WAEYC's commitment to promoting high quality early learning programs and reflect what we see as priority next steps.

### **Child Screening and Assessment**

Ethical, appropriate, valid and reliable child assessment is central to providing high quality early learning for young children. WAEYC, due to its expertise and connections to the workforce cross sector, plays a critical role in kindergarten readiness policy development and implementation including providing child assessment resources and training. Appropriate child assessments are characterized by:

- **Methods** that are research-based, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's activities in natural settings (authentic), supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific beneficial purposes. High stakes testing and assessments that rely on a single one-time test should be avoided.
- Alignment with **early learning benchmarks** that address children's cognitive, social-emotional and physical development domains and take into account cultural differences among children and families. Benchmarks are aligned with academic content standards for K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- Content and methods for child assessment and early learning benchmarks that are in **alignment** with standards for K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- **Correct uses** which include making sound decisions about teaching and learning, early screening to identify concerns about children that may require intervention, and acting to improve programs.

### **Program Standards and Accountability Measures**

Research-based program standards and measures provide the basis for addressing quality and effectiveness in early childhood settings. WAEYC, due to its affiliation with NAEYC, the developer and administrator of the most highly recognized and participated in research-based program accreditation system, has much to contribute to program standard policy development.

- All early learning programs including part-day preschools should be subject to comparable **licensing or certification requirements** to ensure that minimum standards of health, safety and quality are met.

- Instructional practice and professional development should be guided and improved through the use of developmentally appropriate **classroom-based instructional assessments** for each domain of child development and learning.
- Washington's **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)** should be fully implemented and provide a framework for supporting improved program quality and professional development and training. The framework should reflect evidence-based conditions for quality; be grounded in the state's early learning benchmarks; support progressively higher levels of quality from licensing to program accreditation across types of early learning settings; address staff qualifications and professional development; and include financial incentives and supports.
- Phase-in of **universal pre-kindergarten** (pre-k) services for three and four year olds should include non-profit and for-profit community-based centers (both private and public) and family child care homes as eligible pre-k delivery sites. Technical assistance and supports should be offered to assist licensed centers and homes in meeting the requirements to provide comprehensive pre-k services.

### Program Monitoring and Assessment

Program standards and accountability measures are used to fairly assess the extent to which programs meet evidence-based conditions for quality and offer quality experiences for children. These assessments provide a basis for technical assistance, encouraging progressively higher levels of quality, and improving instructional and programmatic practices.

- **Professionals carrying-out licensing and certification** should have background in early childhood development including appropriate education and expertise.
- **Improvements to child care licensing** should be implemented including streamlining of relicensing, giving greater weight to licensing regulations that relate to child health and safety (weighted child care licensing rules), and achieving balance between fairness and flexibility in how regulations are enforced. These improvements should result in appropriate monitoring of child care facilities, improved health and safety for children, and increased retention of highly-qualified early learning providers.
- **QRIS should include objective on-site assessments** linked to program improvement plans and technical assistance. On-site assessments should be completed by professionals who have background in early childhood development and have training specific to the assessment used.

### Quality Incentives and Supports

Continuous improvement should be promoted through technical assistance and financial incentives linked to monitoring and assessment.

- **QRIS should be fully implemented** and provide technical assistance and financial incentives linked to monitoring and assessment. Incentives should exist for early learning programs to participate.
- QRIS and other quality improvement efforts should include **incentives and financial supports for appropriate compensation and benefits** for early learning professionals.
- Early learning programs should have access to **social and emotional/mental health** supports such as mental health consultation to assist them in meeting children's needs.
- **An inclusive approach to expanding pre-k** should be implemented that encourages licensed center and family child care providers to provide pre-k services; this will serve as a powerful incentive for improved child care quality and provide an additional funding stream for child care programs.

### Curriculum

Research indicates that quality in early learning programs and positive outcomes for children are associated with the use of a curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, and culturally and linguistically responsive. WAEYC's role is to disseminate resources and information about and engage early learning professionals in the use of curriculum.

- The state's professional development system, as well as training and education opportunities for the early learning workforce, must provide a solid foundation in **child development and developmentally appropriate curriculum**.
- Early learning programs should be encouraged through QRIS and other quality initiatives to include a thoughtfully planned, challenging **curriculum** that is developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically relevant, and individualized to the needs of each child. Such curricula should acknowledge the important role of play in children's learning and development.

- **Early learning benchmarks** should be integrated into curriculum and instructional practices

### **Outreach to Parents, Families, Communities and Schools**

Outreach should be provided to parents, families, communities and schools to promote understanding of early development and learning, QRIS, and the importance of coordination across programs that support early learning. As the cross-sector early childhood professional association, WAEYC can facilitate cross-program and cross-sector coordination.

- QRIS should include strategies to **promote understanding** by parents, families and communities about the importance of early development as well as how QRIS program levels can help parents choose high quality early learning programs for their children.
- **Coordination and integration of services** at state and local levels should be encouraged and supported through local coalitions such as those envisioned through the 2007 Head Start Act and those supported by the Foundation for Early Learning.
- **Coordination among early learning programs** including but not limited to child care, Head Start/ECEAP, and early intervention services (ITEIP) should occur and ensure the availability of comprehensive services for all children participating in early learning programs. Services should include screening, referrals, and provision of services related to physical and dental health, developmental delay, mental health, disability, and family supports.
- **Transitions should be supported** among programs including between early learning birth to five programs and K-12 schools.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS A HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM: DATA, RESEARCH AND FINANCE**

A paradigm shift is required to achieve WAEYC's vision for early childhood professionals and the businesses for which they work. Making sustained progress toward this vision requires a sound foundation or infrastructure that includes data and research that describes and demonstrates outcomes as well as financing that is stable and sufficient.

#### **Data and Research**

Data related to professional development and program improvement is required to gauge impacts and systems change and to inform planning, evaluation, quality assurance and accountability. It is also necessary to respond to federal initiatives. Specifically, the proposed federal Early Learning Challenge Grants would require a coordinated data infrastructure characterized by uniform data collection and alignment among data systems.

- **Uniform data collection** is needed to provide accurate information about the quality and availability of early learning programs and the children and families participating in such programs.
- The **STARS Registry** should be replaced with a comprehensive, integrated registry system that would track practitioner/workforce data (e.g. education and training, compensation and turnover) across sectors and trainer/training data. The development and implementation of a new registry system should be **well-integrated with supports** provided to workers and efforts to improve the quality of training and education available to the early learning workforce.
- The data system for early learning should be **aligned** with data systems for elementary and secondary education.

#### **Financing**

Lack of stable, adequate funding is an ongoing problem in early learning, and, over the years, funding targeted toward quality efforts including workforce compensation has been the first to go in times of budget crisis. Policies are needed to support and institutionalize financing through mechanisms such as inclusion of early learning in the state definition of basic education and/or the creation of entitlements for early learning. Four specific areas that need to be addressed include:

- Financial support for education and ongoing professional development including provider **scholarships**.
- Financial support for programs/workplaces including funding to implement the incentives and supports available through **QRIS**.

- Explicit rewards and compensation parity including the **Career and Wage Ladder**.
- Financing of the **professional development infrastructure** including ongoing funding for the Professional Development Consortium and support to both community-based and credit-based education and training.

#### **Key Communicators and Collaborators**

- **WAEYC local affiliates**—to get input about the plan from affiliate members and to promote buy-in and engagement in supporting the plan.
- Others
  - Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council
  - Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network
  - Department of Early Learning
  - Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
  - Thrive by Five Washington
  - Economic Opportunity Institute
  - Washington State Family Child Care Association
  - Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP
  - Children's Alliance/Early Learning Action Alliance
  - League of Women Voters Washington
  - School's Out Washington
  - Foundation for Early Learning
  - United Ways
  - Service Employees International Union Local 925
  - Washington Educators in Early Learning/AFT
  - Local and regional early learning coalitions