



# The State of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Higher Education Survey

## Executive Summary

*Report prepared for the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education  
September 2002*

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*Universities Children's Policy Collaborative is dedicated to contributing to the health and welfare of children, youth, and families by providing nonpartisan information on public policy issues.*

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# **THE STATE OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA: THE 2002 HIGHER EDUCATION SURVEY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The first five years of a child's life is a period of incredible cognitive, emotional and social growth. Experiences during these early years can set children on pathways that have lifelong emotional, social, and academic consequences.

How can we invest in our children's early development to ensure subsequent academic, social and emotional success? This question has attracted widespread attention from Pennsylvania policy makers. Their goal: to develop a system of early care and education that will meet family's needs today and help prepare a sophisticated, educated workforce of the future.

Toward this goal, Pennsylvania's Governor Mark Schweiker signed Executive Order 2002-2 on April 17, 2002 to create the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force. As part of the work accompanying the task force, the Governor commissioned a series of primary research efforts to be carried out by three major Pennsylvania Universities (Penn State

University, University of Pittsburgh, and Temple University) that have joined together to form the Universities Children's Policy Collaborative (UCPC).

As part of this collaborative effort and under commission from the Governor's Office, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development initiated the 2002 Higher Education Survey, one designed to collect information from early childhood higher education programs regarding training of professionals in child care and early education. This executive summary encapsulates the findings from the larger report on the survey and highlights the policy recommendations that stem from these findings. This executive summary is one of a series that summarizes reports from UCPC. The other reports include the **Benchmarking Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Family Survey**, **A Baseline Report of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Early Care and Education Provider Survey**, and **From Science to Policy: Research on Issues, Programs, and Policies in Early Care and Education**.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SURVEY**

The Early Care and Education Higher Education Study assessed the availability and content of higher education programs and their success in producing qualified professionals to work in this field. Questions that were addressed included:

- What are the level, accessibility, and affordability of education for students?
- What are the demographics of students as well as the ethnicity, training, and academic backgrounds of their faculty?
- What kinds of positions do students take when they graduate and do they take these positions in Pennsylvania?

- What is the cost of higher education preparation of early care and education professionals?
- What is the content of training in early childhood education programs?

### **DESIGN AND METHODS**

The survey instrument was developed to capture information at the educational program level and the degree level. Part 1 of the survey contained program level information (e.g., Early Childhood Education Program, Elementary Education Program), including number, ethnicity, and education of faculty; student, faculty, institution, and community-related issues; and opinions on changes to higher education programs at the State level. Part 2 of the survey contained degree level information (e.g., Associates, Bachelors, etc.), and the questions in Part 2 were repeated for each degree offered in the program. The questions addressed issues such as the content of the curriculum in relation to early childhood education, the cost of obtaining a degree, and job placements of new graduates.

The target population was all higher education programs in the State of Pennsylvania that prepare students to work in the field of early childhood (children birth to eight years of age). The 2002 College Blue Book<sup>2</sup> and a list of Child Development Associate (CDA) programs were used to identify programs in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Elementary Education, and related fields and the degrees offered by those programs. Ninety-seven schools were contacted, and 46% (45 schools) responded. Surveys were sent to 169 programs in those 97 schools and 40% (67 programs) responded.

### **PROGRAM LEVEL SURVEY FINDINGS**

The survey results were based on a total of 67 programs, 42 (63%) were Early Childhood Education programs and 25 (37%) were Elementary Education programs. For comparison

purposes, programs were categorized into two different types of early childhood education programs: Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Elementary Education (EIE).

### **EDUCATION LEVEL AND DISCIPLINE OF FACULTY**

- **There were almost twice as many Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) faculty in the Elementary Education programs as there were in the Early Childhood Education programs.** The Elementary Education programs had slightly more faculty with Doctoral degrees (60%) than Early Childhood Education (50%) programs.
- **Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education programs differed in the backgrounds of their faculty.** Of those faculty in Early Childhood Education programs, 54% had backgrounds in an early childhood field and 25% had traditional elementary education backgrounds, whereas of those faculty in Elementary Education programs, 13% of faculty had backgrounds in an early childhood field and 69% had backgrounds in elementary education.

### **RACIAL-ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY**

- **African-American, Asian, and Hispanic future early childhood educators and faculty are underrepresented in comparison to the diversity of children in care.** While 16% of African-American children in early care and education programs (finding from the *Early Care and Education Provider Survey*), only 9% of teachers in training and 6% of their faculty were African-American. In general, there was little ethnic diversity of faculty and future teachers (students) but more diversity among children in care (see *Provider Survey*).

### **DOES THE PROGRAM GAIN OR LOSE MONEY FOR THE SCHOOL?**

- **Few programs loose money, and more than one-third of ECE programs and two-thirds of the EEd programs gain money for the school.**

### **PARTICIPATION IN TEACH**

- **Almost one-third of the Early Childhood Education programs offer courses for the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program, while only 4% of the Elementary Education programs do.**

### **ISSUES**

- **In general ECE programs seemed to face more significant issues than EEd programs, but the same issues predominated for both programs.** Program chairs and faculty reported that major issues for programs are attracting and retaining ethnically diverse faculty, attracting and retaining students because of poor working conditions and wages, limited scholarships, and competing with work or family responsibilities.

### **SUPPORT FOR CHANGE AT THE STATE LEVEL**

- **The majority of programs felt that more scholarships were needed to attract and retain students and current staff in early childhood education programs.** Eighty percent of the Early Childhood Education programs and 58% of the Elementary Education programs felt that there was a need to make changes in Early Childhood Higher Education at the State level.
- **The *Provider Survey* indicates that staff salaries and benefits are low, and results from this survey demonstrate that students often have difficulty paying back their student loans.** The requested action most generated by faculty for the State government surrounds the area of salaries and benefits (30%) for people working in the field of early

childhood education. Other actions that were requested concerned changing the credentialing requirements and certification structure for early childhood educators (21%), making changes to the structure or regulations in early childhood programming in higher education and in the field (17%), increasing resources and funding to higher education programs or early childhood centers (17%), or other actions (e.g., increase T.E.A.C.H, more faculty support, etc.; 15%).

### **RESULTS SPECIFIC TO DEGREE OF PROGRAM**

Due to the low response rate in the certificate/certification and associates degree category, these two degree programs were recoded into a *Less Than Bachelors Degree* category. *Bachelors Degree* programs had sufficient information to stand alone as a category; however *Masters* and *Doctoral* programs were combined for data analysis purposes. In addition, so few Certificate/Associates and Masters/Doctorate programs in EIED responded, that many of the comparisons could only be made between Bachelors programs in ECE and EIED.

### **ACCREDITING AGENCY**

- **Nearly all the degree programs in both disciplines were accredited, but only three-fourths of the Certificate programs and two-thirds of the graduate programs in Early Childhood Education were accredited.** The disciplines differed in which organization conferred the accreditation. All of the degree programs in EIED were accredited or certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, whereas only 40% of the Certificate/Certification Programs, 79% of the Bachelors programs, and 60% of the Masters/Doctoral programs in ECE were accredited by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. However, a third of the ECE Bachelors degree programs were accredited by NAEYC, whereas only 15% of the EIED Bachelors degree programs were accredited by

NAEYC. These findings demonstrate that ECE programs are less likely to seek Department of Education accreditation. Conversely, it is more appropriate for ECE programs than EIED programs to seek NAEYC accreditation because of their greater emphasis on the early childhood years.

## **REQUIRED PRACTICUM AND HOURS**

- **Nearly all (96%) Early Childhood Education programs regardless of degree required a practicum, but only 60% of Bachelors programs in Elementary Education did so.** Moreover, the average number of practicum hours required to complete the degree is higher for ECE (278 for Certificate/Associates degree programs and 246 for Bachelors degree programs) than in EIED programs (219 and 211, respectively). At the Bachelors level, a higher percentage of ECE students are required to have an out-of-class practicum and for more hours than are students in EIED.

## **STUDENT EMPLOYMENT**

- **It is difficult for students who are employed full-time to obtain a Bachelors degree in either discipline.** A relatively small percentage (18%) of programs believed students who were employed full-time could complete a Bachelors degree program (compared to a certificate [89%] or a Masters/Doctoral program [86%]), and they estimated that only 31% of students in Bachelors' programs were employed full-time. Thus, the current structure and scheduling of Bachelors programs and courses make it difficult for employed individuals to complete the program.

## **CONTENT OF TRAINING**

- **The content and intensity of training in Early Childhood Education programs was more focused on the care and education of children birth to five years than in**



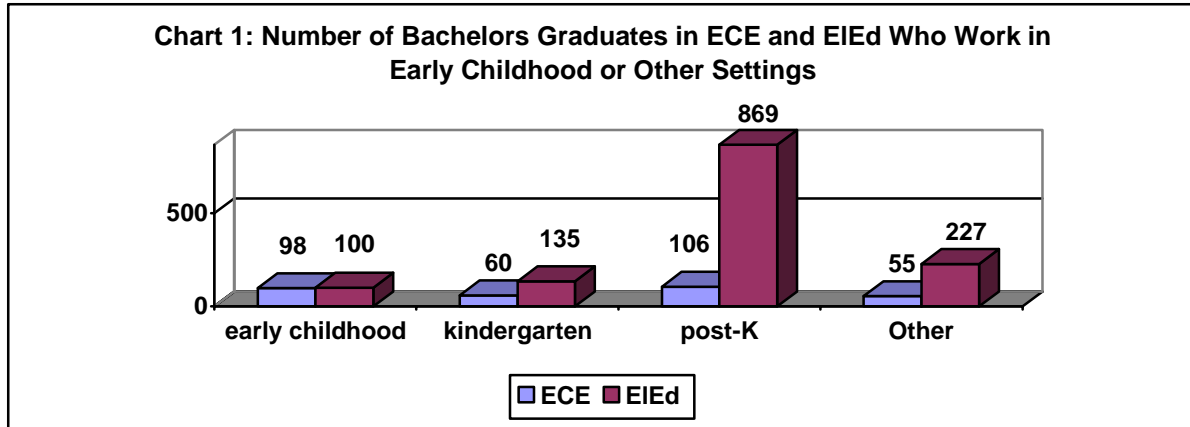
**Elementary Education programs, which prepare students to teach K-3<sup>rd</sup> or K-8<sup>th</sup>**

**grade.** ECE programs gave more curriculum emphasis to very early childhood care and education (ages birth through 5), education and care of young children with disabilities, early number skills, early literacy, early language skills, developmental domains, transitions, and program administration than did EEd programs. Note that although Certificate/Associates programs in ECE required only half the credit hours as ECE Bachelors programs, they covered nearly the same early childhood curricula (although slightly less emphasis on skill development and administration).

- **Only 35% of the Bachelors EEd programs and 58% of ECE programs require one or more entire courses on education and care of children with disabilities; yet nearly all early childhood centers have children with disabilities. In addition, a quarter or fewer of the programs in both disciplines require one or more courses in behavior management or social-emotional development of children.** The *Early Care and Education Provider Survey* indicated that early childhood education and care providers need more training and preparation in working with children with disabilities and children with behavior problems or under-developed social-emotional skills. These needs are mirrored in this survey of higher education programs.
- **ECE students receive more coursework and practical experience working with children ages birth to five.** Bachelors programs in Early Childhood Education are much more likely than are Elementary Education programs to require practica in education and care of infants and toddlers (71% vs. 42% in EEd), education and care of children 3 to 5 years old (91% vs. 64% in EEd), and education and care of children with disabilities (62% vs. 25% in EEd).

## STUDENTS

- **The graduation rate indicates that slightly less than half of the students enrolling in either program are not graduating from these programs.** The graduation rate for Bachelor's programs in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education is about the same (61% and 54%, respectively).
- **It takes approximately the same number of months (49 months) to complete a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education as it does in Elementary Education,** and a little more than half this time (27 months) to complete a Certificate/Associates program.
- **Graduates of all programs and degrees** (with the exception of the Early Childhood Education Certificate/Associates degree) **are more likely to work in public or private post-kindergarten environments than any other** according to program chair/faculty estimates (see Chart 1). More than half of the numbers of new Bachelors graduates going into the early childhood field (birth to five) and nearly two-thirds of those who teach kindergarten come from Elementary Education programs, despite the fact that Early Childhood Education programs provide more direct training in early childhood care and education. Program chairs/faculty report that slightly more than half (51%) of the 198 Bachelors degree graduates who work in early childhood birth to five years settings came from EIEd programs, rather than from ECE programs. More than half (60%) of the 393 Bachelors graduates who went into early childhood and kindergarten settings came from EIEd programs, rather than from ECE programs.



- **Not all graduates who work with children birth to five years remain in Pennsylvania.** According to program chair/faculty estimates, almost all of the graduates in ECE Certificate/Associates and graduate programs who go on to work with children birth to five years stay in Pennsylvania (95% in both degree programs). But almost a quarter of the ECE Bachelors graduates and one-third of the EIEd Bachelors level graduates who go on to work with children birth-to-five-years leave PA to find jobs. Since only 32% of the ECE Bachelors graduates go on to work in birth to five year settings and only 72% of those take jobs in Pennsylvania, then less than a quarter of the most comprehensively trained early childhood graduates take early childhood (birth to five years) jobs in Pennsylvania. Additionally, 50% of child care center providers (from *Early Care and Education Provider Survey*) stated that it is a big challenge finding qualified people.

## FINANCES

- **The cost of obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education is nearly \$10,000 more than the cost of obtaining the same degree in Elementary Education.**
- **A full tuition waiver with or without some living expenses is very rarely available for students in either discipline at any level of degree; however, some programs do**

offer a partial tuition reduction in the form of a scholarship or fellowship but there are still many who do not receive any scholarships or fellowships at all.

- **Many Bachelors students in Early Childhood Education have difficulty paying back student loans (43%)** according to program chair/faculty estimates. There were not enough data to compare this finding with EIED programs.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from the data presented.

- **Standards of training specifically for those entering the field of early childhood care and education, including kindergarten should be reviewed.** Programs in Early Childhood Education (ECE) provide more comprehensive training in early childhood development and services than do programs in Elementary Education (EIED). Yet more than half of new Bachelors graduates going into the early childhood field (birth to 5 years) and two-thirds of those who will teach kindergarten come from Elementary Education programs rather than Early Childhood Education programs. Specifically, ECE Bachelors programs a) have more faculty with backgrounds in early education areas; b) are twice as likely to be accredited by NAEYC; c) are more likely to require a practicum in early childhood for 3-5-year-olds (vs. only 64% in Elementary Education); and d) place more curricular emphasis on early childhood education topics (i.e., early number, literacy, and language skills, developmental domains, disabilities, and early childhood program administration). In contrast, EIED programs train students to teach K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade or K-8<sup>th</sup> grades, with less emphasis on early childhood development. Consequently, standards and “certification,” specifically to teach early childhood and kindergarten, should be reviewed for both types of programs.
- **Personnel need training and preparation to work with children with disabilities, especially in providing inclusive settings for children with disabilities.** The provider survey shows that 96% of centers, preschools, and Head Start have at least one child with a disability enrolled, and providers said they needed more training on children with disabilities. But only 58% of the ECE and 35% of the EIED Bachelors programs require an entire course or more focused on working with children with disabilities. *Every* teacher needs more substantial training in caring for and educating young children with the entire range of disabling conditions.
- **More training is needed in handling children’s social-emotional development and behavioral problems.** In the survey of providers, 71% of centers and preschools expelled or threatened to expel a child for aggressive behavior in the last two years, and two-thirds requested more training in behavior management. However, less than 25% of Bachelors level ECE and EIED programs required an entire course or more in either social-emotional development or behavior management.

- **More scholarships and loan forgiveness programs are needed for students seeking a Bachelors degree in early childhood care and education.** More than 82% of ECE and EIEd programs said they need more student scholarships. Specifically, programs estimated that 39% of Early Childhood Education Bachelors students get no financial help at all, and 44% of them had difficulty paying back student loans.
- **Bachelors degree classes should be offered at times students who are employed full-time can take them.** Only 21% of ECE programs and 15% of EIEd programs are structured so that students could obtain a Bachelors degree while working full-time.
- **Salaries and working conditions in early childhood services need to be improved to attract students and graduates into this field.** Programs estimated that nearly half of those graduating from ECE programs do not take jobs in the early childhood field (specifically, with children in kindergarten or younger), and more than half of the early childhood providers said low salaries or benefits were a big challenge to hiring staff. Further, faculty report that it is difficult to attract and retain students in the early childhood field because of the prospect of low salaries and poor working conditions upon graduation. Although scholarships would help, it will be difficult to attain the National Academy of Science's recommendation of having a Bachelors degree teacher in every early childhood care and education group setting unless the salaries are sufficient to encourage graduates to adopt early childhood as a career.
- **Colleges and universities need to train and hire more faculty in early childhood care and education, especially more ethnically diverse faculty.** Forty-two percent of programs said enrollments were increasing, 63% said they needed more funding to increase the number of faculty, but only half of the programs said they were profitable. In addition, there are more African-American students (9%) than faculty (6%), and there are even more African-American children (16%) estimated by providers to be in early childhood programs. Forty-three percent of higher education programs said that attracting and retaining ethnically-diverse faculty was a large problem.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH AND ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were many areas of higher education programming that the research team would have liked to explore; however, given the timeframe of the Task Force, many items were not included in this study. Therefore, this section presents research on professional development that would be worthy of future exploration.

- **There is a need to utilize a survey model every two years to assess change and guide future improvements in early childhood higher education.** The data from this survey provide a baseline of professional preparation for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education programs. For example, some changes were identified between this survey and a similar study on higher education completed in 1989.<sup>3</sup> The current study, however, could be

more deliberately used as a baseline to measure future improvements and identify new challenges in the field. More thorough comparisons would help describe growth and challenges in this system.

- **There is a need to study higher education and in-service curricula and curricula changes.** One way that this could be accomplished is through the coordination of a professional preparation consortium to examine pre-service and in-service training models and develop resource and referral information for students and early childhood providers. Examination of the content of higher education programs and in-service training is needed to identify general and specific content training programs. A coordinated system for resource and referral would identify where there might be duplication in training programs and where replication across the State should exist. For example, Pennsylvania State University has a training program on infant development that could be introduced in Western Pennsylvania. In addition, in-service training program models could collaborate with various higher education institutions in their areas of expertise (e.g., University of Pittsburgh for early intervention, Penn State University for infant development, etc.) and vice versa. This kind of collaboration would improve training in needed areas like infant mental health, behavioral health, etc. Further, the needs and challenges of providers for areas of further training should be recognized and implemented into both pre-service and in-service training programs. Anecdotally, when deans and chairs of departments in higher education institutions were contacted, many were passionate about the changes that need to be made to adequately prepare students for a career in the field and to develop a clear and integrated system of preparation and in-service training opportunities.
- **There is a need to study what happens to graduates in early childhood education programs.** The challenges in professional development in the field of early childhood education have been well-documented in this survey from the perspective of higher education programs. However, there has been no study that follows prospective teachers after they complete their education to examine what factors influence their professional choices over the first few years of their career. Based on the results of the current UCPC surveys, there is strong professional consensus that too few teachers remain in the field. It would be particularly important to understand how wages, benefits, working conditions, and other factors influence early childhood teacher retention in Pennsylvania.

## **REFERENCES**

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<sup>2</sup> The College Blue Book. (29<sup>th</sup> ed.) (2002). New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

<sup>3</sup> McCall, R.B., Groark, C., Isler, M., Manners, S.D., Scott-Jones, R., Shair, El., Smith, B.J., Tittnich, E. (1989). The State of Early Childhood Services in Pennsylvania: A Report to The State Board of Education of The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development: Pittsburgh, PA.