

# Strengthening the Early Learning Workforce with Apprenticeships

Well-qualified early childhood educators are a vital component to providing high-quality early learning and care opportunities for children from birth through age five. As policymakers have come to recognize the importance of these opportunities, state and federal laws have increased credentialing requirements for educators, which helps to improve overall quality but can also make it more difficult to recruit and retain qualified teachers, particularly in low income and rural communities where qualified educator shortages are already pronounced. To address this issue, some states have instituted early childhood education (ECE) Registered Apprenticeship programs. The apprenticeship model overlays well with the early childhood delivery system, providing on-the-job learning opportunities that feature a lead teacher to mentor and support less experienced staff who could be trained to become lead teachers or more effective support personnel. In this way, ECE apprenticeship programs provide an accessible way for educators to acquire the knowledge and skills they need, along a pathway to the credential or degree needed to advance their career.

## ◆ Overview of Registered Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer “earn as you learn” opportunities to individuals, while also allowing employers to improve the quality and effectiveness of their workforce. Registered Apprenticeships are recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency and provide paid on-the-job training and mentoring, as well as classroom-based education and instruction, culminating in a nationally recognized credential. (In degree apprenticeship models, the apprenticeship concludes with attainment

of an associate or bachelor’s degree.) Registered Apprenticeships typically last 2-3 years; include around 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and a minimum of 144 hours of classroom-based instruction each year; and offer wage increases as participants meet benchmarks for skill attainment.

Long a favored model in industrial and technical fields, apprenticeships are expanding to other industries. According to a September 2018 [report](#), at least eight states currently offer an ECE Registered Apprenticeship program, some of which are degree apprenticeships.





## **ECE Registered Apprenticeship Program Characteristics**

State examples provide guidance on the most important elements of ECE Registered Apprenticeship programs. Generally, apprenticeships include partnerships between states and localities; educational institutions; employers; workforce intermediaries, such as ECE agencies and associations; the public workforce system; and other community and philanthropic organizations to develop a Registered Apprenticeship program. These partnerships greatly impact program design and sustainability, resource identification, and employer and employee recruitment.

Additionally, collaboration between early childhood employers and higher education partners are essential to ensure the educational and training components are compatible and align with the competencies needed to succeed in the workplace. Technical and community colleges often provide classroom-based instruction for traditional industrial or technical Registered Apprenticeship programs. In the ECE context, relationships between these institutions and the early childhood field may still be developing as child care and preschool teaching positions are only now being recognized as highly skilled and technical in nature. It is worthwhile to grow these relationships, however, as ECE Registered Apprenticeships create an opportunity for students to benefit significantly from extensive, related work experience while pursuing an ECE credential or degree. Further, states can work with ECE degree programs at two- and four- year public institutions to develop strong statewide articulation policies that ensure educators who earn college credit or an associate's degree through an ECE apprenticeship can apply those credits if they choose to work towards a two- or four-year degree.

Partnerships are also vital when it comes to addressing the administrative and financial burdens of a Registered Apprenticeship program, which traditionally are the responsibility of the sponsoring employer. This can be particularly difficult for early care and learning providers, who are often small businesses or non-profits and do not have the resources available to traditional businesses. Thus, the success of ECE Registered Apprenticeships often requires some type of intermediary organization—such

as a workforce investment partnership, early childhood technical assistance organization, or state or local government entity—to facilitate partnerships between state or local government, higher education institutions, and multiple early childhood employers. States and localities can also support students and providers by assuming some of the administrative role, offering tuition assistance, or helping students to access financial aid.

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## **Opportunities for Federal Support of ECE Apprenticeships**

States and local communities are increasingly pursuing Registered Apprenticeships as an effective way to confront some of the barriers to ensuring classrooms across the country have well-qualified early childhood educators. To further support state efforts to address critical ECE workforce shortages, federal leaders could fund state-level pilot programs overseen by the Department of Labor to develop, administer, and evaluate innovative ECE Registered Apprenticeship programs that other state and local jurisdictions can later replicate.

