

Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Programs



Well-qualified early childhood educators are vital to providing high-quality early learning and care 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 as a means to improve overall quality. However, increasing qualification requirements can make it more difficult to recruit and retain qualified teachers, as this underpaid workforce faces significant barriers to higher education and training. There is already a shortage of qualified educators, particularly in low-income and rural communities. 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.

Bipartisan Support for Boosting the ECE Workforce

Early Educators Apprenticeship Act

Introduced in the Senate by Senator Todd Young (R-IN), Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) and in the House by Congressman Brett Guthrie (R-KY), Congresswoman Susan Wild (D-PA), Congressman Trone (D-MD).

With strong bipartisan support, the bill establishes a three-year grant program through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for states to develop, administer, and evaluate a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program that provides early educators with the knowledge and skills required to deliver high-quality early learning and care to our nation's youngest learners. The proposal goes further by prioritizing these efforts within underserved and rural communities, helping to target expansion efforts in areas that need it most.

National Apprenticeship Act of 2023

This bill would invest more than \$3.8 billion in apprenticeship programs over five years, creating nearly 1 million additional apprenticeship opportunities across many sectors and prioritizing funding for apprenticeships in high-need social services such as child care.



State Spotlight

Colorado's Registered ECE Apprenticeship Program is one example of how apprenticeship programs are a compelling option for states to support their early childhood workforce.

Colorado's Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship is led by Red Rocks Community College and the state's Department of Labor, along with partners at several other community colleges in Colorado. It is administered through the Red Rocks Child Care Innovations program, which provides services to improve and support child care and education for children, families, and educators.

2-Year Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship program:

- Apprentices must be at least 16 years old to apply and should be employed (or ready to be employed) full-time at an early childhood program in the state
- Requires apprentices to complete 4,000 hours of on-the-job training and over 300 hours of course instruction
- Every apprentice is assigned a "mentor teacher" who has completed a training program and has at least three years of early childhood experience

Apprentices Receive:

- Up to \$1500 per semester to cover costs associated with education requirements of the apprenticeship program
- \$500 stipend at the beginning of the program to support upfront costs such as child care, living expenses, and other wraparound supports
- \$500 at the completion of the 6-month probationary period

At a Glance

About Registered ECE 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
- Offer wage increases as participants meet benchmarks for skill attainment

States

16 states have a local or statewide [ECE Registered Apprenticeship program](#).



Employers Receive:

- \$1000 when an apprentice completes the probationary period
- Funds to cover substitute costs to support apprentice training and mentoring time
- Upon completing the program, apprentices receive the title "Child Development Specialist" from the Department of Labor