

DELAWARE OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FINAL REPORT
JANUARY 2023

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

On behalf of the Delaware Early Learning Advisory Committee (DELAC), I am delighted to share our final report, designed to support the State's commitment to our families and young children and all those in the early learning education system. Thank you to the committee members and the many stakeholders and advocates for investing your time as we created a robust framework together to guide the State in strengthening our early childhood efforts.

Throughout our time together from March 2021 through April 2022, the DELAC explored Delaware's significant assets as well as its needs in our early childhood learning system in order to impact the greater economic, social, and physical well-being of our families. Ultimately, through aligning our goals with the state strategic plan, we identified four overarching goals, and concluded that to ensure success of our early childhood system, Delaware must:

01. Promote collaboration and coordination through an aligned governance structure.
02. Increase program access, particularly for marginalized communities.
03. Prioritize meaningful investments in early childhood.
04. Support and uplift the early childhood workforce.

Based on the Committee's discussions, the group outlined 12 associated key actions that, if taken, will provide the Office of Early Learning the strong footing required to continue strengthening Delaware in measures of child well-being and education.

The Delaware early childhood system's success is dependent upon us all. It will require continued collaboration, sustained commitment and most importantly the collection of resources necessary to meaningfully impact the lives of Delaware's youngest residents. As Lt. Governor and the chair of this committee, I assure you the guidance you have provided in the DELAC Final Report will serve as a guide for the Office of Early Learning.

Over the past year, it was evident that there is a shared commitment that the DELAC's work would be used to guide the Office of Early Learning and relevant systems for years to come. I want to reiterate that I intend to support the implementations of the recommendations this committee has created to ensure that we make Delaware a better place for all children and families.

The DELAC is deeply grateful to our former Associate Secretary Sanchez Fuentes and our current Associate Secretary Gleason, and the team at the DE Office of Early Learning as well as The Hunt Institute team, for their invaluable and critical help to develop and guide this process. Most importantly, I am grateful to the Delaware leaders, who carved out time during an unprecedented public health crisis, to support this work as committee members and to the national experts who contributed their time and expertise to this process.

Investing in Delaware's youngest learners is one of our most important tasks as leaders to uplift not only the educational outcomes, but the overall wellbeing of our communities and economy. I am honored to have had the opportunity to play a part in advancing this important conversation and am committed to the long-term success of the State's prenatal to age five early childhood system, the critical 1,825 days.

Sincerely,



Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long
PhD, RN, FAAN

CHAIR

- The Honorable Bethany Hall-Long, Lieutenant Governor

ELECTED MEMBERS

- The Honorable Elizabeth “Tizzy” Lockman, Delaware State Senate
- The Honorable Ernesto Lopez, Delaware State Senate
- The Honorable Michael Smith, Delaware House of Representatives
- The Honorable Laura Sturgeon, Delaware State Senate
- The Honorable Kimberly Williams, Delaware House of Representatives

APPOINTED LEADERS

- Tom Hall, Director, Division of Social Services
- Dr. Kimberly Krzanowski, Executive Director, Office of Early Learning
- Yvette Sanchez, Former Associate Secretary of Early Childhood
- Betty Gail Timm, Administrator, Office of Child Care Licensing

DELAWARE LEADERS

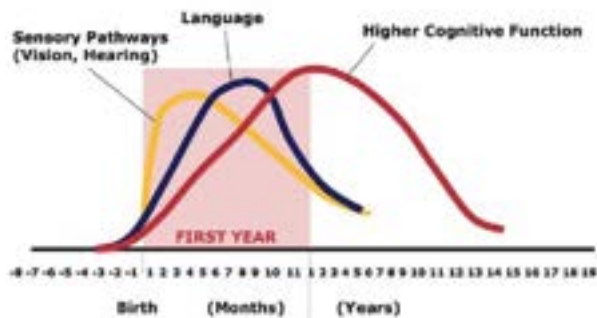
- Raye Jones Avery, Representative of Leadership Team, Wilmington Center for Education Equity and Public Policy
- Madeleine Bayard, Senior Vice President, Rodel Foundation, Chair, Delaware Early Childhood Council
- Heidi Beck, Head Start Director, Association Representative, Delaware Head Start Association
- Beatrice “Bebe” Coker, Delaware Champion of Education and Racial Justice
- Matthew Denn, Attorney, DLA Piper/Redding Consortium for Educational Equity
- Dr. Rena Hallam, Director of Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood, University of Delaware
- Timothy Mello, Early Childhood Department Chair, Delaware Technical Community College
- Quiana Nieves, Child Care Provider, Children First Learning Center
- Michael “Mike” Purzycki, Mayor, City of Wilmington, Delaware
- Michael Quaranta, President, Delaware Technical Community College
- Dr. Shelley Rouser, Associate Professor, Delaware State University
- Jamie Schneider, President, Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children
- Regina Sidney-Brown, Director, Delaware Afterschool Network at United Way of Delaware
- Nancy Smith, Director/Owner, Comprehensive Early Care Consultation
- Jennifer Spinx, Owner/Child Care Provider, GiggleBugs Early Learning Center
- Michelle A. Taylor, President and CEO, United Way of Delaware-Campaign for Grade Level Reading

SUPPORTING THE EARLY YEARS IN DELAWARE

The earliest years of life – and those from prenatal to age three, in particular – represent a unique developmental window during which the fundamental architecture of the brain is wired - largely in response to relationships and interactions with family members and early childhood teachers. With consistent exposure to safe and nurturing environments and loving, supportive adults, young children develop robust networks of neural connectivity that will serve to undergird their academic and life success for decades to come.

HUMAN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially

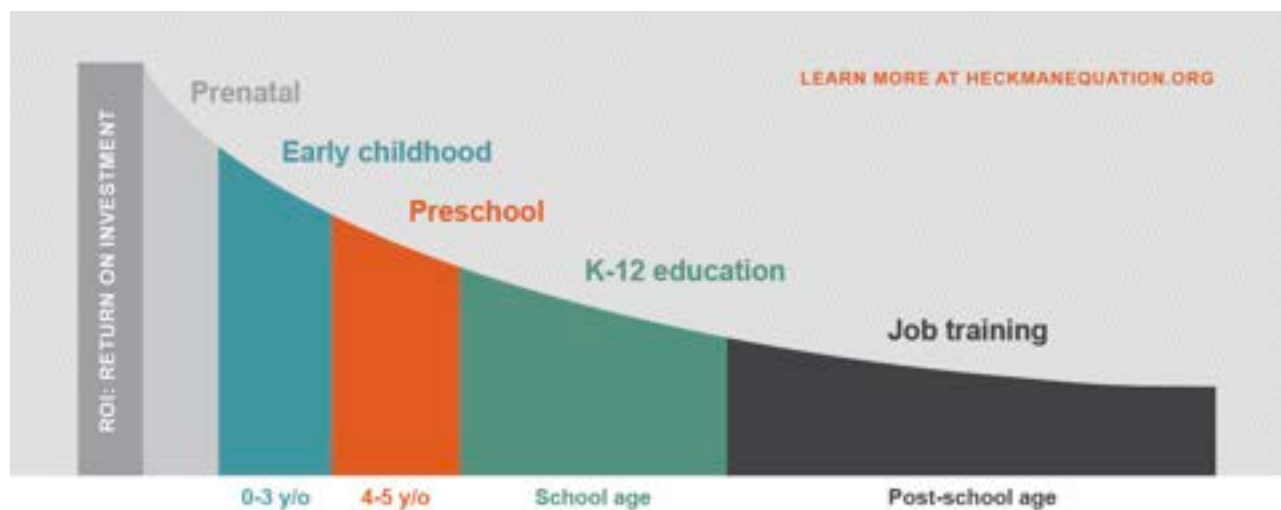


With high-profile longitudinal research suggesting significant long-term returns on investment to taxpayers, there is little wonder that governors and state legislatures across the nation are turning to early childhood as both a powerful incubator of human capital and a lever with which to generate long-term savings and minimize the need for taxpayer funded educational, social service and criminal justice interventions.

With 99,622 children 0-8 years old, it is critical that Delaware leaders use this knowledge to ensure the state’s youngest learners receive high-quality early care and education (ECE) experiences. This population is also increasingly diverse, with Black and Hispanic children accounting for 27 and 14 percent of the population respectively.

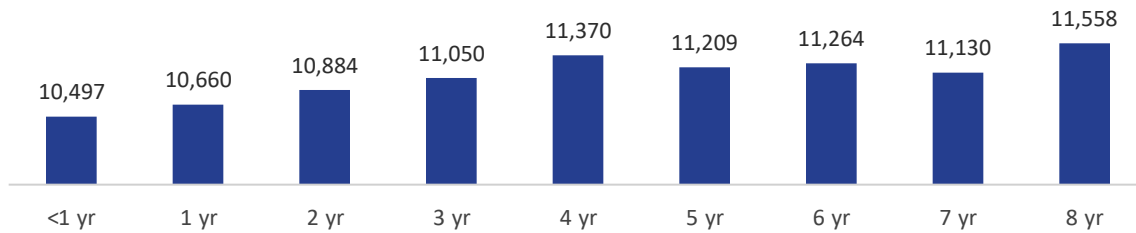
Yet, many families in Delaware face hardships, resulting in fewer supports for the state’s youngest children. Specifically, 15 percent of children live in poverty and 20 percent experience food insecurity. Additionally, almost 1 in 4 Delaware children under eight years old have experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which are likely to negatively impact their growth and development. These data indicate a need for sustained attention to the needs of children and families and the additional resources necessary to ensure better outcomes for Delaware’s children.

RATE OF RETURN TO INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL



The “Heckman Curve” shows that investments have higher rates of return the earlier they are made in a person’s life.

FIGURE 1 | NUMBER OF CHILDREN AGE EIGHT AND YOUNGER, 2020



15% Delaware children age 8 and under living in poverty

20% Delaware children age 8 and under experiencing food insecurity

23% Delaware children age 8 and under experienced 2+ ACES

[View Source](#)

It is evident that the state is aiming to acknowledge the challenges families face and is working to increase access to high-quality child care services and supports, which are critical to address the basic needs of Delaware’s youngest learners and their families.

In 2019, Governor Carney signed [Senate Bill 187](#) to support streamlining early childhood governance in the state by moving the Office of Child Care Licensing to the Department of Education. In 2020, Delaware appointed Ms. Yvette Sanchez Fuentes as the state’s first Associate Secretary of Early Childhood to oversee both the Office of Early Learning and the Office of Child Care Licensing.

Following the appointment of the Associate Secretary, The Hunt Institute convened an Advisory Committee, chaired by Lieutenant Governor Bethany Hall-Long, which met virtually between March 2021 and April 2022. The Committee served as a venue for rich conversation among diverse state leaders and an opportunity to strategize solutions for Delaware’s children and families. During this time Delaware also passed [Senate Bill 136](#), sponsored by Senator Laura Sturgeon, which further consolidated early childhood services by acting to move early intervention services for children ages birth to three (IDEA part C) to the Department of Education.

Delaware is making great strides to create a stronger early childhood infrastructure and address the needs of children and families. In particular, work of this early learning advisory committee demonstrates greater investment in Delaware’s

early care and education system with discussions leading to change in all aspects of early childhood. The recommendations presented by this committee greatly align with Delaware’s Early Childhood Council strategic plan as well as Delaware’s Roadmap for an accessible, high-quality early care and education system that was commissioned by the Office of Early Learning’s former Associate Secretary and written by the Policy Equity Group (see Appendix A).



DELAWARE EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGIC PLAN

Strengthening Early Success: Building Our Future Together

Delaware has established a statewide vision, “Delaware commits to all children and families having access to an integrated early childhood system, from birth-8, which provides high-quality programs and

services and an environment that supports their growth, development, and learning, and prepares them for success in school and in life”.

To achieve this vision, the Delaware Early Childhood Council wrote a [strategic plan](#) that organizes the work and recommendations along a framework of four components: access to holistic services, navigating a simplified system, access to high-quality programs, and partnerships with professionals.

FIGURE 2 | DELAWARE STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK



FIGURE 3 | DELAWARE STRATEGIC PLAN MEASURES OF SUCCESS



DELAWARE'S ROADMAP FOR AN ACCESSIBLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Delaware roadmap provides four overarching goals that reflect the goals of the Delaware Early Childhood Council strategic plan and the recommendations of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee facilitated by the Hunt Institute; address capacity and quality issues defined by the state's

Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five needs assessment; and align with national priorities for state ECE systems. Commissioned by the former Office of Early Learning Associate Secretary and written by the Policy Equity Group, the roadmap builds on a strong foundation of research and planning that has already been conducted and ensures a comprehensive approach that will help Delaware move toward a more aligned, responsive, and impactful ECE system.

ROAD MAP GOALS	SUBGOALS
Goal 1: Strengthen the state infrastructure to better align and support the ECE system	1.1 Establish A State Governance Structure That Better Coordinates Federal and State ECE Programs
	1.2 Build Out the State's Workforce and Professional Development Infrastructure
	1.3 Build Out the State's ECE Data System
	1.4 Create A New System for Continuous Quality Improvement
Goal 2: Support providers with the resources they need to provide high-quality ECE	2.1 Establish a New Payment Rate Schedule for Providers
	2.2 Change Payment Policies to Ensure Funding Stability for Providers
	2.3 Establish a Wage Scale that Facilitates Recruitment and Retention of Providers
	2.4 Work with Legislature to Make the Necessary Legislative Changes
Goal 3: Increase access to ECE for Delaware families	3.1 Increase the Number of High-Quality ECE Slots Across the State
	3.2 Significantly Expand the Income Eligibility for the Purchase of Care (POC) Program
	3.3 Create New Ways of Connecting Parents to Their Preferred Form of Care
Goal 4: Ensure all children receive the services they need to thrive	4.1 Create and/or Expand Services for Children and Families
	4.2 Develop a Physical and Virtual Infrastructure to Connect Children and Families to Services
	4.3 Establish A System of Tracking Children and Families and Monitoring Outcomes Over Time



COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS & KEY ACTIONS

Over the course of convening, four priorities emerged from the work of the Delaware Office of Early Learning Advisory Committee, each playing a critical role in shaping the child and family outcomes in Delaware. These are:

01. Promote collaboration and coordination through an **aligned governance** structure.
02. Increase **program access**, particularly for marginalized communities.
03. Prioritize **meaningful investments** in early childhood.
04. Support and uplift the **early childhood workforce**.

Based on the Committee’s discussions, and in alignment with the early childhood strategic plan and early care and education roadmap, this report outlines 12 associated key actions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PRIORITY	KEY ACTIONS
Align Governance	1. Strengthen systems to promote collaboration both across early childhood programs and along the entire education continuum.
	2. Align system-level goals to strengthen advocacy efforts around early childhood.
	3. Evaluate the current system to determine if additional consolidation of programs is necessary.
Increase Program Access	4. Target investments to equitably expand access to quality programs and services for all young children and families.
	5. Embrace a family-driven, comprehensive, and holistic approach to improving the health, development, and well-being of infants, toddlers, and young children.
	6. Adopt a singular point of access for early childhood services to reduce duplication, increase access, and promote partnerships between programs.
Prioritize Meaningful Investments	7. Promote awareness of early childhood as a public good to ensure all families have access to high-quality services.
	8. Coordinate funding to create efficiencies of scale and provide a unified experience for families.
	9. Maximize federal, state, and local investments by actively participating in legislative conversations about opportunities to grow and diversify early childhood funding streams.
Support the Early Childhood Workforce	10. Increase awareness of the value of the early childhood workforce and their social, educational, and economic value to our communities.
	11. Implement realistic pathways for early education and care professionals to obtain higher education credits and credit for years of teaching experiences.
	12. Develop a pay structure that supports tiered, equitable compensation based on credentials, certifications, and lived experiences.

Over the coming pages, we explore each of these priorities and action steps in detail.



Align Governance

Governing early care and education systems is complex, with entities responsible for a variety of programs (e.g., home visiting, child care, state pre-K, individuals with disabilities, preschool development grants and more). These various programs and services all contribute to a child’s early development yet are often housed across multiple agencies. This fragmentation impacts states’ abilities to provide cohesive and high-quality supports for young children and their families.

The governance structures of states’ early care and education systems vary significantly across the nation. States generally fall into one of three categories: creation, consolidation, or coordination.

- **Creation:** The state has created an agency to oversee several early care and education components.
- **Consolidation:** The state has consolidated several agencies or programs into one entity.
- **Coordination:** The state has various agencies that provide programs and services that require coordination.

Delaware has taken steps to consolidate its early childhood programming. Created in 2020, the Early Childhood Support team manages multiple early childhood programs, which improves efficiency and promotes alignment of eligibility, monitoring, and quality improvements. In addition to the Early Childhood Support team the Department of Health and Human Services and other Department of Education offices also house early childhood programs.

TABLE 1 | DELAWARE’S CURRENT ECE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

DEPARTMENT	OFFICE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Department of Health and Social Services	Division of Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Purchase of Care (subsidy) responsibilities of the Child Care Development Fund
	Division of Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting
Department of Education	Office of Early Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quality rating and improvement, and all other responsibilities of the Child Care Development Fund ■ State Funding Pre-Kindergarten (ECAP and Redding) ■ Head Start Collaboration Office ■ DE Educator Data System (DEEDs) ■ Parents as Teachers ■ IDEA Part B (619)
	Office of Child Care Licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child Care Licensing
	Early Childhood Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ IDEA Part C

Key Actions:

01. Strengthen systems to promote collaboration both across early childhood programs and along the entire education continuum.
02. Align system-level goals to strengthen advocacy efforts around early childhood.
03. Evaluate the current system to determine if additional consolidation of programs is necessary.



Increase Program Access

Access to high quality child care, home visiting programs, state-funded pre-K and other early childhood supports is limited. The Preschool Development Grant B-5 Needs Assessment estimated that **over 55 percent** of eligible young children fail to receive the services they need for their healthy growth and development. Lack of access to services affects children and families in a myriad of ways, [including](#):

- Children with disabilities experience up to 3 months of wait time for services.
- Less than 20 percent of early childhood programs employ staff who speak Spanish.
- About 2 percent of families with young children are serviced through home visiting.
- While child care centers offer the majority (86%) of licensed seats, only 3 percent offer extended hours.
- Half of three- and four-year-old children are not in a preschool experience.
- Only 22 percent of eligible children 0-5 are served by publicly funded child care.
- 5 percent of three- and four-year-old children are served by the state pre-K program.
- 2 percent of three-year-old children and 5 percent of four-year-old children are enrolled in Head Start.

For many families, the cost of care also limits access to programming. In Delaware, child care for one child costs approximately [20 percent of the median family income](#), or \$13,000 per year per child. Only 23 percent of eligible children are enrolled in subsidized care. Furthermore, 24 percent of child care programs do not accept subsidies.

With a multitude of early childhood programs operating in Delaware, families often experience differences in eligibility and programmatic requirements. The equitable expansion of high-quality programs and services for all families and young children must be a priority for both the Office of Early Learning and Delaware policymakers. By taking a holistic, family-driven approach to the support and expansion of these services, the state can meaningfully advance the well-being of – and the long term academic and life outcomes achieved by – the state’s young children.

Key Actions:

04. Target investments to equitably expand access to quality programs and services for all young children and families.
05. Embrace a family-driven, comprehensive, and holistic approach to improving the health, development, and well-being of infants, toddlers, and young children.
06. Adopt a singular point of access for early childhood services to reduce duplication, increase access, and promote partnerships between programs.



Prioritize Meaningful Investments

With a growing body of research demonstrating the long-lasting, positive effects produced by high-quality early childhood programs, states have increased funding for these opportunities in recent years. Research suggests that this is smart public policy, with one recent study finding that the United States will see [a net benefit of at least \\$83.3 billion](#) in reduced grade retention, students qualifying for special education, and other factors for each cohort of four-year-old children attending preschool.

The mechanisms through which states collect and fund ECE programs, however, vary widely. And as the National Institute for Early Education Research notes, [strong funding does not always equate to opportunity for all](#). Many states utilize more than one funding stream to support early childhood. While a selection of state funding mechanisms are included below, more information can be found in [Funding Our Future: Generating State and Local Tax Revenue for Quality Early Care and Education](#), a comprehensive resource cataloging states' current and prospective mechanisms for use by states interested in generating new revenue in support of early childhood.

General Fund Appropriations	State general revenue can be allocated to fund any part of the early childhood system. States often use general revenue funds to match federal funding, as is required for the Child Care and Development Fund, or as a required funding base to draw down federal funds. General revenue may also be used to go beyond required matching or maintenance-of-effort requirements in early childhood. States frequently use general revenue for state-only programs as well, such as state-sponsored preschools.
Taxes	A state may use several types of taxes to generate revenue. Several states have dedicated a portion of sales tax income to fund initiatives or programs for early care and education systems while others implement sin taxes on goods considered either physically or morally harmful (such as alcohol, tobacco, and gambling).
Tax Credits	Many types of tax credits exist to support early childhood education such as personal income tax credits , business income tax credits , and investment and incentive tax credits .
Lotteries	States utilize lotteries as a popular way to fund education.
Gambling or Related Fees	States have designated funds from gambling opportunities for early childhood.
Tobacco Settlement Funds	The Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement was entered in November 1998, originally between the four largest United States tobacco companies and the attorneys general of 46 states. Several states use a portion of the state's share of the tobacco settlement to fund early care and education.
Block Grants	Issued as a lump sum to localities as a targeted approach to give additional funding to specific areas or to schools serving students who have high needs.
State Funding Formula	At the K-12 education level, states fund their education system based on a funding formula . In most states, a funding formula is based on a per-student funding level, with additional money allocated to underserved areas and students (for example, English-language learners, at-risk students, students with disabilities, etc.).
State Earned Income Tax Credits	Thirty states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico have enacted a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) . State laws for the EITC are usually based on a percentage of the federal EITC and can range from four percent to 40 percent of the federal law.

Key Actions:

- 07. Promote awareness of early childhood as a public good to ensure all families have access to high-quality services.
- 08. Coordinate funding to create efficiencies of scale and provide a unified experience for families.
- 09. Maximize federal, state, and local investments by actively participating in legislative conversations about opportunities to grow and diversify early childhood funding streams.



Support and Uplift the Early Childhood Workforce

The years of early childhood are of great consequence in shaping the long-term academic and life outcomes of our nation’s children. Indeed, the period from prenatal to age three is a unique window in human development during which the architecture of the brain is wired in ways that, if properly optimized, will help to undergird the child’s success for decades to come. This early development is facilitated - above all else - by stable, high-quality relationships with adults, whose spoken language, facial expressions, and loving care all serve to support brain development in meaningful ways.

With **80 percent of all Delaware children** residing in households in which all available parents participate in the workforce, Delaware’s early childhood workforce holds the potential to impact the success and prosperity of the state and its citizens in significant ways. As noted in the **Delaware Needs Assessment**, stakeholders have identified critical needs in supporting the early childhood workforce:

- Declining enrollment in early education degrees in Delaware
- Poor compensation and lack of benefits compared to K-12
- Average tenure only two years
- No professional development support system

13% of Workforce has another paid job to supplement income

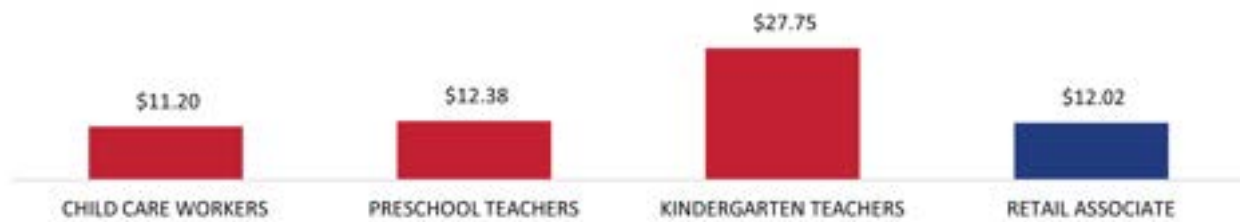
Early childhood higher education and preparation programs **mirror the complexity** of each state’s requirements for teachers working with children birth to age five. As a result, qualification requirements and preparation delivery, oversight, and governance for these educators look very different, and licensure in the B-5 landscape means something very different from the state’s teacher certification and licensure system. In Delaware, lead teachers in pre-K, licensed centers, and licensed homes are not required to attain a bachelor’s degree. While scholarships exist to support the attainment of CDAs, AAs, and BAs, only center directors are required to attain a BA.

Furthermore, while over **10,000 individuals are employed** by child care and early learning settings, a significant portion of this workforce are earning wages considered unlivable. Delaware early educators with a bachelor’s degree are paid **34.6 percent** less than their colleagues in the K-8 system. Furthermore, the poverty rate for early educators in Delaware is 13 percent, much higher than for Delaware workers in general (8.5 percent) and 8.8 times as high as for K-8 teachers at 1.5 percent.

Key Actions:

10. Increase awareness of the value of the early childhood workforce and their social, educational, and economic value to our communities.
11. Implement realistic pathways for early education and care professionals to obtain higher education credits and credit for years of teaching experiences.
12. Develop a pay structure that supports tiered, equitable compensation based on credentials, certifications, and lived experiences.

WORKFORCE WAGES COMPARISON, 2020



Source:



Appendix A: DE Roadmap Goals Aligned

OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Priorities:

01. Promote collaboration and coordination through an aligned and efficient governance structure
02. Increase program access, particularly for marginalized communities
03. Prioritize meaningful investments in early childhood
04. Support and uplift the early childhood workforce

DELAWARE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN

Four- Component Framework:

- Access to holistic services
- Navigating a simplified system
- Access to high-quality programs
- Partnerships with professionals





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