

# The EarlyEdU Alliance<sup>®</sup>

Equity-Driven Early Childhood  
Teacher Preparation

## Paper 2: Stories from the Field



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# Introduction

**Good ideas can be simple to articulate and complicated to implement. Professionalizing the early childhood education workforce is one such idea.**

Policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels have, for decades, recognized the value of raising education and training requirements for the more than 2 million early childhood educators nationwide who care for and teach children ages birth to 5. Higher education—in the form of 2- and 4-year degree programs—can supply this instruction.

Unfortunately, connecting early childhood educators with higher education has proven to be an ongoing and arduous challenge. Most potential students already work full-time with young children, and they face myriad barriers—primarily time, money, and distance—to attending colleges and universities. At the same time, early childhood teacher preparation programs at U.S. colleges and universities are of uneven quality and often rely on unstable funding sources.

Since 2015, the EarlyEdU Alliance has been addressing these issues by facilitating pathways to relevant and affordable degrees for the early care and education (ECE) workforce. The keystone of our work is an inventory of 20 competency-based courses—available in-person and online—that have been offered free to institutions of higher education (IHEs). Developed by early care and education experts and incorporating timely research in the science and strategies of early childhood education and development, our courses incorporate field-based learning. They use innovative online teaching technology, including video uploading and annotating, coaching, and opportunities to reflect on and improve practice in a community of learners.



With EarlyEdU courses, students can learn in the higher education setting and early care and education settings. During the course of their study, students can draw from strong conceptual frameworks and early childhood research and apply this knowledge in their everyday early care and education settings.

The EarlyEdU Alliance is a collaboration of IHEs, government agencies, and community organizations, forming a strong nationwide coalition of early care and education stakeholders. In the five years since its inception, the Alliance has conducted an increasingly successful outreach to early childhood education programs and stakeholders across the country and beyond. Alliance members represent all 50 states and eight international members. EarlyEdU has licenses with 144 IHEs, 66 stakeholder agencies, and 804 individuals. As it champions the goal of equity-driven early childhood teacher preparation, EarlyEdU works with state partners to consider how the resources it offers can be used to meet members' unique needs and policies. Our courses have been used by more than 80 colleges and universities, and stakeholders in over 30 states.<sup>1</sup>

In this report, we relate stories from several states and IHEs that are leveraging EarlyEdU resources to increase access to affordable, effective, and relevant coursework and degrees for the ECE workforce.



1. Data are accurate as of July, 2020.



## Background

### EarlyEdU pursues two intersecting missions to enhance the value of early childhood teacher preparation.

First, we endeavor to strengthen professional development for early childhood educators by disseminating evidence-based teaching strategies directly to college and university faculty. This work builds on the foundation established by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, an Office of Head Start-sponsored five-year (2010-2015) program, housed at the University of Washington College of Education, that compiled and shared best practices for Head Start teachers and others working in early childhood environments.

EarlyEdU courses convey current theories and evidence-based practices in early care and education and child development, emphasizing competency-based learning. Course content is closely connected with field experience and incorporates professional development (PD) strategies such as adult coaching and communities of reflection and practice (CORPs) for video-sharing and feedback.

Courses are designed to use our video-sharing and feedback platform, the Coaching Companion, and they are built on an Intentional Teaching Framework that requires teachers to **know** child development theories and effective teaching practices, **see** effective teaching in themselves and others, **do** these practices in the classroom, **reflect** on what works, and **improve** practice. The Intentional Teaching Framework and the Coaching Companion work in concert to transform the course instructor into a job-embedded coach, as the instructor observes student-child interactions on video to identify interactions defined in course assignments, readings, and lectures. This approach is based on current child development research that stresses the value of programs of study that incorporate child development science, subject matter expertise, teaching practices, field-based experiences, and demonstration of competency.



The Intentional Teaching Framework  
used in EarlyEdU

Our second mission is to partner with IHEs and state systems to address barriers to accessing early education teacher preparation programs. Currently, only about 45% of educators serving children ages 3-5 years, and only 19% of those serving children 0-3 years, hold bachelor's degrees.<sup>2</sup> Early childhood educators face numerous obstacles to participating in higher education. EarlyEdU works with local partnerships and state systems to overcome endemic barriers and move toward more equitable learning opportunities. Barriers include:

**Affordability**—Higher education is expensive, especially for workers earning the low wages that are typical of employees of early childhood programs. Students must be prepared to meet tuition costs and expenses for childcare, transportation, and technology.

**Access**—Higher education “deserts” present a significant barrier to earning an ECE degree.<sup>3</sup> About 40% of the early care and education workforce has no degree or credential.<sup>4</sup> There are not enough four-year institutions that offer ECE degrees. The majority of departments designated explicitly as early childhood are found in two-year institutions.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, many early care and education providers seeking new credentials take courses and workshops on a piecemeal basis, and they accumulate training hours that do not always apply as credits toward college degrees.

2. Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), U.S. Office of the Administration of Children and Families, 11 (Washington DC, 2013).

3. Nicholas Hillman and Taylor Weichman, *Education deserts: The continued significance of “place” in the twenty-first century* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2016).

4. National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. *Characteristics of center-based early care and education programs* (Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2014).

5. Marcy Whitebook et al., *(By default or by design?)* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2012).



**Quality**—Just as in early learning environments, faculty is an essential factor as related to the quality of training programs for early childhood educators. Concerns related to understaffed and under-resourced programs are not unwarranted. Multiple reports have raised issues about the composition of faculty.<sup>6</sup> One challenge is insufficient faculty members in small programs or institutions, such that the breadth and depth needed for a high-quality preparation program are lacking. Early childhood programs also hire a higher percentage of part-time faculty than do their institutions.<sup>7</sup> Expecting primarily adjuncts and part-time faculty to prepare early childhood educators could hinder the students' learning. The practice yields unreliable practices, long work hours, and low salaries, and it offers faculty members little benefit.<sup>8,9</sup> Programs also may find that faculty members lack expertise in specific content areas, including early childhood education.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, ECE degrees are among the least successful if measured exclusively by students' monetary return. The public is supportive of a more highly trained and degreed ECE workforce, but this support does not reach all the way to paying professional-level salaries for those who hope to spend their careers in the field.<sup>11</sup>

**Relevance**—Practicum opportunities that do not emphasize the connection between theory and practice provide few opportunities to bring authentic practice issues from the field directly to coursework. The ideal practicum experience is completed alongside formal coursework so prospective educators can apply what they are learning to their practice.<sup>12</sup> Given that fieldwork often is nonexistent in ECE-related degrees or is conducted after the completion of formal coursework, there are few opportunities to make this connection consistently over the course of many degree programs.<sup>13</sup> In addition, arranging for supervised practicums and completing student teaching requirements frequently pose scheduling and compensation challenges for students who are completing degree programs while working full time.<sup>14</sup>

**Effectiveness**—Higher education for early childhood educators should offer courses and competency-based assignments that impart the knowledge and skills that lead to improved outcomes for children. Courses often lack a link from child development knowledge to pedagogical practice to help prospective educators learn how to apply developmentally appropriate approaches in the classroom. Consequently, as research shows, many educators are unable to identify what factors affect the quality of their teaching.<sup>15</sup>

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6. Laura Bornfreund, *Getting in sync* (New America Foundation, 2011).

7. Diane M. Early and Pamela Winton. Preparing the workforce. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 16, no. 3(2001), 285-306.

8. Early and Winton, Preparing the workforce.

9. James E. Johnson, et al. Policy brief: Penn State study of early childhood teacher education. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2010).

10. Bornfreund, *Getting In sync*. U. S. departments of education and health and human services, High-quality early learning settings depend on high-quality workforce. (2016).

11. U. S. departments of education and health and human services, High-quality early learning settings depend on high-quality workforce. (2016).

12. Marcy Whitebook et al., *Effective teacher preparation in early care and education*: (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 2009).

13. Bornfreund, *Getting In sync*.

14. Whitebook, et al., By default or by design?

15. Whitebook, et al., *Effective teacher preparation*

**Connection**—Students seeking higher credentials in ECE need connections to instructors, peers, institutions, and professionals in the field. Effective professional learning grounds experience in specific curriculum materials and allows educators to learn and reflect on that curriculum, implement it, and discuss its implementation. To that end, effective programming also includes in-classroom coaching and employs peer study groups or networks for collective participation by educators who work together.<sup>16</sup> Through these efforts, programs incorporate sustained and intensive professional learning experiences and networks rather than stand-alone professional learning activities.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the barriers students face to accessing relevant courses through higher education, system-wide barriers abound, including the challenges of articulation and transfer from two-to four-year programs, alignment of course content with state education policies, and coordination across colleges and universities, state agencies, and funding streams.



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16. Michael S. Garet et al, What makes professional development effective? *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, no. 4 (2001), 915-45.

17. Garet, et al, What makes professional development effective?



## Higher Education Implementation

We support Alliance members as they build accessible pathways to affordable and effective higher education opportunities and degrees to meet the need for a growing number of early childhood educators. Our work is dependent on strong partnerships that support innovation. The following accounts from 11 institutes of higher education and state partners illustrate how members were leveraging EarlyEdU resources and Alliance support as of May 2019.

### University of Washington

More than three-fourths of the nation's community colleges offer associate degrees that lead to jobs in the early care and education workforce. Ostensibly, these two-year degrees—along with experience in the field—would apply toward requirements for students seeking bachelor's degrees. But many Alliance members face a common problem: a lack of adequate articulation from the early childhood courses associate degree students complete to four-year degree programs.

In 2010, Gail Joseph and her colleagues at the University of Washington College of Education were preparing what turned out to be a successful proposal to the U.S. Office of Head Start to launch the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. A section of that application captured one of Joseph's long-time dreams to establish an online degree-conferring program in early childhood education that would use original,



competency-based courses and serve the needs of nontraditional students. The online option would respond directly to Head Start's new policy requiring bachelor's degree attainment for the program's caregivers and teachers.

*"The students were doing service-learning, but we never saw them there. It was not really a teacher prep program, and the courses weren't competency-based. We saw an opportunity to test the EarlyEdU approach."*

At the time, Joseph was teaching at the University of Washington's (UW) Early Childhood and Family Studies Program. The program was traditional in that it was taught strictly on campus, during the day, to mostly young undergraduates. "The students were doing service-learning, but we never saw them there," Joseph recalls. "It was not really a teacher prep program, and the courses weren't competency-based. We saw an opportunity to test the EarlyEdU approach."

That approach would be an online degree program, offered at lower tuition than traditional

UW students were paying. Students would be exempt from the UW's increasingly competitive admissions process, and they could enter with a minimum of 70 transferable course credits from any other higher education program. Most importantly, they would use EarlyEdU courses based on an Intentional Teaching Framework that incorporated such tools as the Coaching Companion video-sharing platform.

Implemented in 2014, the UW's online bachelor's degree completion program in Early Care and Education welcomes an annual cohort of 80-100 students from across the country and abroad. More than 80% of students complete the two-year program, earning bachelor's degrees at the cost of about \$17,000 over two years. By the end of the 2018-19 academic year, the program boasted nearly 400 graduates. Many students qualify for federal financial aid or state scholarships from Early Achievers, Washington State's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).



“We have been very intentional about not just starting students out but also completing [the program],” Joseph explains. At first, a full-time retention coach affixed to the program monitored students’ online activity to see if they were fully participating in the courses. Later, faculty took over this task. The first course offered is always the EarlyEdU’s Resilience and Wellness for Educators, “so students learn how to manage stress, plan for their time, find silver linings, and respond to setbacks,” notes Joseph.

While successful, the project has experienced challenges. In common with other states, Washington struggles to maintain a smooth pathway from associate-degree level work to bachelor’s completion at four-year universities. Over the past decade, Washington has benefited from an infusion of education-focused resources, beginning with a \$60 million federal Race to the Top grant in 2011 and sustained by the state’s 2015 Early Start Act. Washington’s community and technical colleges have built a coherent ECE system of certificates that are now part of the licensing requirements in the state. These stackable ECE certificates, which build credits in manageable blocks at each certificate level, were conferred more than 3,000 times during 2014-18. But, the match-up between associate degree-level courses and credits and other admission requirements at the state’s four-year schools has not appreciably improved. Juliet Taylor, Director of Strategy and Partnerships at the UW’s Cultivate Learning program, predicts that EarlyEdU might help build a more coherent ECE degree pipeline, noting that, “we’re looking at how we can use EarlyEdU as a platform to solve some of these pathway issues.” (See section on Alignment of State and Higher Education Policies and Practices, page 24.)

Joseph believes that even the relatively low tuition is a significant access barrier for the demographic of students the program was designed to attract and that it can do a better job with outreach. In the meantime, the online degree program is opening higher education opportunities for an historically underrepresented group of early learning caregivers and teachers. Joseph explains that “These are mostly people who started out in the field, maybe took some time off to raise kids. What we’re hearing is that this is their first real opportunity to finish a degree.”

### **Arizona State University and Central Arizona College**

Arizona State University (ASU) faced this issue when it was approached by Phoenix Head Start directors seeking help for their teachers, who are now required by the federal program to obtain four-year bachelor’s degrees. “The community reached out to our institution,” recalls ASU clinical faculty and early childhood education program coordinator Bjorg LeSueur. “We had to ask ourselves how we could respond without removing these teachers from the workforce.”

ASU—a national leader in online education with more than 200 degree programs—joined the Alliance in 2017. At that time, LeSueur began working on a proposal with other ASU faculty to use EarlyEdU content and courses to support the development of a robust early childhood program curriculum.

Soon after this planning was underway, LeSueur attended an EarlyEdU summer Institute and met Melissa Larson Busby, Director of Early Childhood Education at Central Arizona

College (CAC). CAC had offered online AA degree programs for several years. However, Busby was looking specifically for early childhood course content that would align with state curriculum standards and support a pathway for students at the associate degree level to obtain a bachelor's degree.

"I heard there was a state team," Busby recalls, "and when we learned that Head Start was reaching out to ASU, we said, you can't skip over the community colleges! We are in every community. We're in rural areas. We have 16 colleges in Arizona that offer associate pathways in early childhood. The hard part is making that leap to a university." LeSueur and Busby decided to use EarlyEdU courses and content at the associate and bachelor's level to build an articulated pathway for the ECE workforce—to move seamlessly from the associate degree to a bachelor's degree completion at ASU.

LeSueur and Busby grappled with state articulation and transfer policies that change frequently and drastically reduce the number of early childhood courses taken at the associate degree level that qualify for transfer to bachelor programs. Busby chairs a state subcommittee on articulation (LeSueur is a member) that is working to improve these pathways, and the two EarlyEdU courses that CAC is using incorporate features of the early childhood curriculum that would logically transfer from associate to university-level programs.

"We are becoming more intentional about putting relevant and important foundational early childhood content into the associate degree pathway that would apply on transfer and hopefully make the bachelor's degree more attainable," Busby explains. This means that when considering AA credits for transfer, completion programs "would not [have to] look under the hood. You bring us an AA degree and we will consider that the

*"We are becoming more intentional about putting relevant and important foundational early childhood content into the associate degree pathway that would apply on transfer and hopefully make the bachelor's degree more attainable."*

completion of your first two years. There would be no course-by-course counts. Your whole coursework will drop right into the BAS degree. That's a BIG deal in Arizona."

EarlyEdU materials support this policy shift, in Busby's view, by presenting "content teachers already in the field need to know," including curriculum, assessment, and child development.

The first of the two proposed articulated pathways in Early Childhood at ASU

launched in August 2019, and 35 students are already enrolled. The courses in the program underpin a pathway from an associate-level degree to two types of bachelor's degrees—a Bachelor of Arts in Education (BAE) and a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS). LeSueur explains that "the courses draw from the student coursework at the associate level and on the work students perform every day in the field to expand and deepen their knowledge of theory by applying it to their practice." The online delivery system will open access to working professionals as well as students in remote areas of the state.



The Arizona collaboration has grown to include the state Department of Education and the Office of Head Start. LeSueur and Busby have also received invaluable support from First Things First, a children's advocacy organization that allocates resources from the state tobacco tax. ASU is offering two courses with EarlyEdU content during autumn 2019 term and will add two more in the spring. CAC has already implemented three EarlyEdU courses with a combined enrollment of nearly 250, and it plans to work alongside other Arizona community colleges that have joined the Alliance in the past year.

Both ASU and the community college programs are responding to a vast well of need for competency-based early childhood instruction leading to completion degrees. LeSueur's recent analysis of Head Start data reveals that the overall Arizona market alone could include 1,200 people.

### Northwestern College

In Iowa, Northwestern College was considering ways to respond to an approach by Iowa Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) concerning scholarships for early childhood professionals who wanted to complete bachelor's degrees. Joining the Alliance in 2017, the school worked quickly to apply EarlyEdU materials as part of an affordable online BA completion program for early childhood professionals with AA degrees. The college's Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood (BAEC) program welcomed its first students in January 2018; enrollment eventually grew to 40 students and another 40 indicated interest. All students have AA or AS degrees and have worked in the field.

*“Our connection with the Alliance really jump-started our whole program,” recalls its director, Heidi Douma. “We didn’t have to write our own courses. We could take research-based courses, written by highly qualified individuals with wonderful experience, and implement them right away.”*

The college is administering 8—soon to be 11—EarlyEdU courses taught by full-time faculty and adjunct faculty throughout the state. T.E.A.C.H. covers tuition for 18 credits annually.

Before it offered EarlyEdU courses, Northwestern had served all undergraduate students on its campus in Orange City, Iowa. “Our connection with the Alliance really jump-started our whole program,”

recalls its director, Heidi Douma. “We didn’t have to write our own courses. We could take research-based courses, written by highly qualified individuals with wonderful experience, and implement them right away.”

To stay true to the college's faith-based commitment, Northwestern added some context to the EarlyEdU courses to include a faith-based perspective. It added faith integration to EarlyEdU materials—and Douma says the process has worked well. The communities of reflection and practice (CORP) embedded in EarlyEdU courses provide a forum where faith issues can be explored by students who embrace that

focus. For the CORP group in the popular EarlyEdU resiliency course, Northwestern students are invited to use spiritual tools to address the stresses and challenges of teaching young children. At the same time, Northwestern welcomes students who “don’t necessarily identify as Christian,” and Douma believes that the BAEC has “drawn in people who might not have otherwise chosen Northwestern.”

Northwestern is considering further expansion of its BAEC, including a track to teacher licensure. Not all BAEC students are interested in a teaching license, but Douma reports that about a fifth of the program’s students have expressed interest in earning the license to teach in K-12 programs. Currently, Northwestern does not offer licensure opportunities for students studying entirely online.

The program’s first graduate walked in the school’s spring 2019 graduation ceremony. The graduate, a single mother of two, paid her first visit to campus that day, and she credited her success with the flexibility of an online program and the T.E.A.C.H. resources that supported her study. She has since enrolled in a graduate program in early childhood education at Northwestern. Next spring, Douma expects to see at least 10 more students walk at graduation.



## T.E.A.C.H.

EarlyEdU provides college-level courses in early childhood entirely for free, but that does not mean that students who use them receive a free education. Like all college students, they incur expenses related to tuition, credit transcription fees, technology, and transportation. Additionally, students already working in early childhood programs face costs related to transportation and childcare.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center and Child Care WAGE\$—key players in three of the stories we share in this document—help working adults earn college credits, credentials, and degrees. Operating in 22 states and the District of Columbia, T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ have conferred nearly \$45 million in associate and bachelor’s degree scholarships to people who are working full-time in the field.

The center prioritizes equitable access to higher education by supporting a workforce that reflects the racial and ethnic makeup of children served in local and state childcare and preschool programs. It works closely with employer sponsors and local and state stakeholders to leverage both public and private resources for workforce development, based on each state’s unique mix of resources and early education policies.

“We see first whether T.E.A.C.H. is the right mechanism,” explains Executive Director Sue Russell, “and we design the way we do our work according to the workforce.”

To learn more about T.E.A.C.H., visit their [website](http://www.teachechnationalcenter.org): [www.teachechnationalcenter.org](http://www.teachechnationalcenter.org).

## North Seattle College

When the City of Seattle launched its long-awaited universal pre-kindergarten program in 2015, city policymakers were explicit about the baseline requirements of its teachers: they should hold bachelor's degrees. Problem was, most early childhood educators did not have degrees.

The city's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) approached North Seattle College, which had an established early childhood program, to ask that it develop a bachelor's degree that would build off the applied associate degree programs in the region. The goal was to create, over time, a reliable pipeline of teachers with bachelor's degrees to the new Seattle Preschool Program and other local providers.

The result was the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) in Early Childhood Education at North Seattle College, which was launched winter term, 2016. Samantha Dolan, a faculty member in early childhood education at North Seattle College, serves as the program coordinator. Students may pursue the BAS either entirely online (a new option launched in autumn 2019) or via a hybrid option of mixing online coursework with 5 hours a week of in-person classes. In both tracks, students study the EarlyEdU Cognition and General Knowledge course and use its video-sharing platform, Coaching Companion.

*"A lot of our students appreciate the flexibility," Dolan says of the online program. "Childcare providers can't miss work often, and they have family relationships they are not willing to leave behind."*

Just seven miles from downtown Seattle, North Seattle College—a community college until it began granting bachelor's degrees in 2012—remains a commuter school. Many students in the early childhood program continue to travel from considerable distances for classes, which is

a growing challenge as the city's density and traffic increase. Dolan believes this is one of the reasons for the popularity of the online program, which has grown rapidly and currently enrolls about 20% (n=30) of the 150 BA candidates.

"A lot of our students appreciate the flexibility," Dolan says of the online program. "Childcare providers can't miss work often, and they have family relationships they are not willing to leave behind." The mean age of students is about 40, and Dolan says that what keeps students in both the hybrid and online programs is the reward of "their own professional growth and development as a teacher. They enjoy doing their jobs better." As they move through the program, the incentives begin to shift. "In the second year, they start changing jobs, getting promotions, and that feels good, too."

In Washington and other states, students with associate degrees in early childhood education have met with frustration as they have tried to pursue bachelor's degrees at IHEs such as North Seattle College. Early childhood education credits are still likely to



be classified as applied rather than transfer credits. Dolan says, “We’re seeing that most of the applied credits don’t transfer to universities.”

Along with other community and technical colleges in Washington State, North Seattle College offers several “stackable” early childhood certificates leading to various types of employment in the field. But the state’s general education requirements can make it challenging for some full-time working students to graduate in two years; about half of the students take three years to graduate. To support students and help retain them in the program, the college offers extensive orientation sessions and makes peer mentors available. In addition, about 70% of students receive some scholarship support—from ChildCare Aware® of Washington, the Seattle Preschool Program, and the Bainum Family Foundation—to meet the \$2,400-per-quarter tuition.

As the local market for a degreed early childhood workforce continues to grow in the Seattle area, providers are rearranging staff to meet changing qualifications and requirements. Dolan hopes that North Seattle College can continue to serve all who have expressed an interest in the program. She believes that individual empowerment, rather than market and other outside forces, is fueling interest in the BAS in Early Childhood and accounts for the program’s high (88%) completion rate.





## State System Implementation

The EarlyEdU Alliance provides courses and other professional development resources to colleges and universities that offer relevant degree programs such as early childhood development and family consumer science. Mobilizing these resources in ways that will transform the early education workforce requires supportive partnerships between higher education and state and federal education agencies and non-profit organizations. To that end, EarlyEdU has a stakeholder membership that allows organizations such as the Office of Child Care and Department of Education to join the Alliance and use the resources in partnership with higher education to effectively deliver coursework to the workforce. Through these partnerships, participants earn college credits and move toward degree completion. To support and keep these initiatives at low or no cost, Alliance members have, at times, sought unconventional funding sources such as tobacco tax revenue.

Utah was included in our earliest Institute in 2015, which ultimately led to its innovative pilot. Leaders in Nebraska and Alaska attending later Institutes were inspired by Utah's approach and launched similar pilots. Their stories follow along with inspiration from Mississippi's creative implementation to provide required early childhood endorsements.

### Utah

Utah traditionally has demonstrated little political support for early childhood programs. State financing for preschool is irregular, and even kindergarten is optional. But, for more than 25 years, Utah has maintained a unique, government-supported online resource for educators and education policymakers: the Utah Education Network (UEN). Through UEN, teachers can take online courses, access professional development materials, and benefit from the Preschool Pioneer Online Library, which was established 10 years

ago to address the needs of Utah's young population with early childhood educational opportunities. "We want to help teachers learn about how to use the Internet and online tools more effectively," explains UEN community partnerships manager Lisa Cohne. In 2016, the office of Utah Governor Gary Herbert proposed leveraging UEN online course capabilities and partnerships to increase accessibility for early childhood coursework. That support opened the door to a pilot project—the Utah EarlyEdU Collaboration—with partners UEN, the Utah State Board of Education, the state Office of Child Care, the Utah Head Start Association, T.E.A.C.H., and higher education (Weber State University and Southern Utah University). The pilot provides professional development and higher education opportunities to non-traditional students in early childhood education.

Since its launch in 2017, the project has targeted early care and education professionals who serve children in childcare centers, family childcare programs, Head Start programs, and public schools. With UEN providing the course platform, three EarlyEdU courses are offered: Applied Child Development, Positive Behavior Support for Young Children, and Supporting Language and Literacy Development in Preschool.

***"We're getting a lot of positive feedback about putting lessons into practice. One student came from family childcare and opened her own center while she was taking the courses."***

The first goal of the pilot, according to Heather Thomas of the Utah Office of Child Care, was to help early childhood educators "get professional development they can use in the classroom. We were looking for students just getting their feet wet in higher education. Then maybe they would take more of our courses and then maybe apply for T.E.A.C.H. [scholarships] and work toward a degree."

The state agencies and Utah's Head Start Association fund salaries for instructors and course overseers. The courses are open to childcare and preschool providers across the state at the cost of \$70, including college credit. When the two-year pilot concluded in spring 2019, 56 students had completed EarlyEdU courses. Full implementation of the program begins in autumn 2019.

The initial response from the field has been favorable, Thomas reports. "We're getting a lot of positive feedback about putting lessons into practice. One student came from family childcare and opened her own center while she was taking the courses."

At the end of each course, students are surveyed about their educational goals and given information about early childhood education degree programs in institutions across Utah so they can connect directly with institutions that accept EarlyEdU course credit and consider the possibility of continuing through to a degree. But directing more early education providers into higher education is not the only long-term goal of the Utah collaborative. "We think we're making a difference even when students aren't going for degrees," Thomas says, "because the Utah team is working to promote early childhood best practices across the state."



## Utah Update July 2020

Utah's successful outcomes, a tribute to the significant stakeholder collaboration among relevant agencies in the state, include 100 students passing one or more EarlyEdU courses and 24 participants who took multiple courses. As of autumn 2019, 83% of Office of Child Care participants who passed a course received college credit through Southern Utah University. As Utah moves forward, they are working to refine system infrastructures related to consistency across partners including standardized forms, application windows, templated emails, and a centralized inbox system. Additional next steps include closed training cohorts in which Utah leverages EarlyEdU courses to train state agency coaching staff, two pilot cohorts of Practice-Based Coaching (PBC), and implementing PBC across all QRIS coaching efforts. Utah also plans to work on a follow-up survey to examine the impact of EarlyEdU implementation on employment or education goals of participants.

## Nebraska

When the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) joined the EarlyEdU Alliance in 2018, a key goal was to establish routes to bachelor's degrees for early childhood educators who would be non-traditional college students. Prospective students include those who may come from rural or low-income backgrounds, or lack the confidence to go back to school because they have been in the field for a long time and doubt their ability to succeed, or are just out of high school and do not know if they can handle college-level material.

***"We'll encourage them to use some of the skills they've already learned. We're just enhancing what they're already doing."***

To bring such individuals into the pipeline leading to bachelor's degrees, early childhood policymakers in the state—the Office of Early Childhood, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, the University of Nebraska-Kearney, and the

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood initiative—are engaged in a pilot that will recruit 20-25 early childhood educators to participate, at very low cost, in competency-based coursework using EarlyEdU courses. Students taking the courses, beginning in autumn 2019, can apply credits to their continuing education requirements for early childhood teachers and childcare providers or to degree pathways. Costs for the student will include a \$45 application fee to take all three courses and then a \$100 per course transcription fee for those who want to earn credit for the course. Per course, fees will be reduced to as low as \$10 for students who apply for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.

The Nebraska team is actively seeking applicants who are likely to experience the most barriers to accessing higher education and who are working in the field. "We have a rubric that gives more qualifying points if you attended no college, live in a rural or high-poverty area, and meet T.E.A.C.H. [scholarship] qualifications," explains NDE media specialist Meleah Gamvroudis.

Beyond the issue of access, the pilot focuses on implementing competency-based online courses that have the potential to change the lives of young children throughout the state. The three courses chosen for the pilot—Engaging Interactions and Environments, Supporting Language and Literacy for Preschool, and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement—were selected because they are likely to have the most immediate effect on the quality of teacher-child interactions in the classroom.

The project evaluation, which is being conducted by the Omaha-based Buffett Early Childhood Institute, will look closely at these outcomes in determining course impact. It will also monitor whether early childhood educators stay in the field. “Ideally, we’d like to do a pre-post test” of students participating in the pilot, says evaluation lead Susan Sarver. “We’d ask about some of the efficacy issues, where they think they are in meeting Nebraska’s core competencies, their skill level, their confidence in being a student.” Sarver plans to survey all the incoming students involved in the pilot and will conduct exit interviews when students leave the pilot, regardless of whether they completed all three courses. This information will help determine the barriers that remain, and the supports needed for subsequent cohorts.

The Nebraska pilot may reveal productive ways to approach early childhood educators and apprise them of the benefits of college-level courses. As Katie Miller, formerly of the NDE, notes, “We won’t say to them, ‘You have to have a degree to be a good teacher.’ We’ll encourage them to use some of the skills they’ve already learned. We’re just enhancing what they’re already doing.”



## Alaska

Of all the states working with EarlyEdU, Alaska poses the most rigorous test of outreach across substantial geographical distances. “We use the word remote, not rural,” explains Meghan Johnson, director of Learn & Grow, Alaska’s QRIS. Only about a fifth of the state has roads, and Internet access is unreliable in most areas. Still, in spring 2019 Alaska completed an EarlyEdU pilot project using the Positive Behavior Support for Young Children course. The pilot was made possible through partnerships with thread Alaska, the state’s childcare resource and referral network, the Alaska Departments of Health and Social Services and Education, and the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

*“We’re sharing strategies... some of our teachers who are in pre-elementary and Head Start are saying ‘It’s stuff I knew, but it’s never been put together this way for me.’”*

“I saw this course as checking a lot of the boxes that we see are missing when we go into [early childhood] environments,” Johnson explains. Nonetheless, Johnson anticipated a high degree of resistance to a college-level

course in a state with a low share of degreed educators in the early childhood workforce. “We have some excellent teachers who have had bad experiences at universities and say they won’t go back.”

The course was offered at no cost, and those who completed it were given the opportunity to earn university credit or apply training hours. Recruitment across Alaska’s vast landscape posed severe challenges: Of 77 educators who expressed interest in taking the course, 21 eventually participated in the pilot, and only eight completed the course.

The pilot did provide insights into the feasibility of implementing online courses and coaching in the state as well as the approaches needed to accommodate the needs of communities situated across the wide expanse of the state, in terms of distance and culture. Johnson and her colleagues recognized that students brought different skill levels to the course and that more scaffolding of students’ skills and knowledge would be necessary next time.

Among the course non-completers, many have provided encouraging feedback about the value of high-quality professional development that can be implemented quickly. Johnson reports that “We’re sharing strategies,” and even “some of our teachers who are in pre-elementary and Head Start are saying ‘It’s stuff I knew, but it’s never been put together this way for me.’ So, it’s a first step.”

## Mississippi

In Mississippi, where the state has embarked on a broad initiative to improve the quality of pre-K programs, education policymakers are demonstrating that EarlyEdU materials can be used creatively to support state-mandated professional development for licensed teachers and non-licensed assistant teachers.

This work is part of a collaboration of the University of Mississippi Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning and the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Early



Childhood, which teamed up in 2016 to implement the Early Childhood Specialized Training Program (ECSTP). Its goal is to provide a pathway for licensed general and special education teachers, and some pre-K teachers, with free additional training to earn the endorsements they need to keep teaching. Among the early childhood

***“We loved the videos and the explanation of some of the content,” says Gena Puckett, an education and training specialist at the University of Mississippi School of Education.***

programs that have participated are public and private pre-Ks, Head Start providers, licensed childcare centers, and a small number of kindergartens.

The ECSTP joined the EarlyEdU Alliance in 2018, and with help from Alliance staff, began selecting elements of the Supporting Language and Literacy Development in Preschool course that would be appropriate for ECSTP participants to manage in the form of written and video assignments. “We loved the videos and the explanation of some of the content,” says Gena Puckett, an education and training specialist at the University of Mississippi School of Education. To determine which components of the course would best serve the needs of the ECSTP, Puckett herself first “took the class—the whole class except for the tests and quizzes.”

Working with coaches funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and using the Coaching Companion platform to share teaching strategies on video, participants in the ECSTP perform the equivalent of 12 hours of college coursework over the course of a full calendar year. So far, 96 participants have completed the program. The long-term goal is to increase the number of licensed and certified early childhood teachers in Mississippi.

EarlyEdU has “really enhanced what we’re trying to teach” in the state, Puckett says. And the EarlyEdU approach will become more prominent in Mississippi as the state Department of Education mobilizes Coaching Companion to support professional development in Early Learning Collaboratives, a key element of Mississippi’s new focus on improving the quality and accountability of pre-K programs.





# Alignment Of State and Higher Education Policies and Practices

Colleges, universities, and stakeholders that join the EarlyEdU Alliance agree to a membership license that asks them to implement the EarlyEdU course structure as it is—this is to ensure the courses are used with fidelity to the EarlyEdU framework. However, there are instances in which requirements imposed by states and localities may require courses to be modified.

## California

Instructors at California community colleges who were engaged in the first pilot of EarlyEdU coursework in 2015 ran into this bind. The state's Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) establishes statewide curriculum consistency in teacher preparation and degree completion pathways. Course outlines are aligned consistently across the state, with the same content and course objectives, so that students can move easily across the state's community colleges while maintaining course credits.

But the content of EarlyEdU materials and CAP-aligned courses are organized differently. June Millovich, a professor of child development and education at California's Saddleback College, explains that this misalignment required community college instructors to “pick courses apart...or choose from as many as 12 EarlyEdU courses to fully cover the content of one of the California courses.”

California is attempting to address this challenge with the CAP/EarlyEdU Crosswalk Project. The crosswalks align California CAP course content with resources from multiple EarlyEdU courses. These resources include course modules, practice-based activities, videos, research, assignments, and PowerPoint presentations.

The Crosswalk Project has the potential to facilitate use of EarlyEdU materials across California's 114 community colleges, nearly all of which are CAP-aligned.

The CAP team reviewed all versions of the EarlyEdU courses, in-person and online, to identify resources to support CAP content. The work resulted in crosswalks aligning EarlyEdU course content with six of the CAP courses: Child Growth and Development; Principles and Practices for Teaching Young Children; Health, Safety, and Nutrition; Observation and Assessment; Introduction to Curriculum; and Practicum.

The project has been funded by First5 California, a non-profit child advocacy organization financed by tobacco taxes. The CAP/EarlyEdU crosswalks were vetted with a representative sample of community college faculty and were introduced statewide in July 2019 at a summer Institute that was open to all community college faculty. The work aligns with the state's initiative to achieve "zero textbook cost" in early childhood courses.

## **Massachusetts**

Three state agencies in Massachusetts—the departments of Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Higher Education (DHE)—formulate and implement education policy. So, while Massachusetts benefits from a generously funded network of secondary education institutions—including elite private colleges and universities, 15 community colleges, six state universities, and five University of Massachusetts campuses--facilitating change across them can present a logistical challenge.

Funding support includes the legislature's recently authorized funds for Career Pathways Grants to expand professional development and advancement opportunities for an early educator workforce of about 75,000. Since 2006, the legislature has also provided that the DHE administer scholarships to early educators who enroll, as matriculated students, in full- or part-time undergraduate degree programs in early childhood education, child development, family studies, childcare administration, or related fields.

Despite this intense activity, state efforts to facilitate an efficient route to degree attainment for the ECE workforce require intentional coordination across agencies and attention to the ever-present issue of low compensation, according to Winifred Hagan, DHE's senior associate commissioner for strategic planning and public program approval. "Each agency works within its statutory authority and its priorities to respond to funding opportunities and to meet the professional needs of the ECE workforce, despite its poverty-level wages," Hagan explains.

Hagan and her colleagues across the three education agencies work to implement the state's varied approaches to expand access to professional development opportunities in ECE. One DHE effort is including ECE in the MassTransfer Pathways, a collaboration of Massachusetts's public institutions of higher education. Foundational courses have been identified in more than 25 academic disciplines to facilitate credit transfer across state institutions to earn bachelor's degrees. ECE has been included as one of the transfer pathways since 2015.



EarlyEdU may expand educators' access to courses in the pathway—but first, DHE must map course content to MassTransfer content. Northern Essex, Holyoke, and Massachusetts Bay community colleges are working with other ECE community college faculty to develop crosswalks of EarlyEdU content with MassTransfer core competency requirements for early educators and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards for early educator preparation programs.

During 2016-17, faculty at three state university campuses (Bridgewater State University, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Worcester State University) piloted EarlyEdU courses and the Coaching Companion video-sharing platform to explore how they could be used as foundational content courses in the MassTransfer ECE pathway. (The colleges are still working with EarlyEdU content.) A 2019 evaluation of the match-up of five EarlyEdU courses with community college associate degree and certificate programs through the ECE pathway concluded that there was not direct alignment with the pathway, and based on EEC regulations, there were some technological challenges. ECE faculty who reviewed the courses found the materials to generally be of very high quality and showing significant promise as a zero-textbook cost opportunity.

*“...EarlyEdU provides an opportunity to expand access to more educators. There’s lot of research that says the more knowledge and education early educators have in true ECE pedagogies and practices, the better for children.”*

Faculty involvement is a critical step in applying EarlyEdU materials because curriculum decisions are typically made by disciplinary experts and exerted at the campus level. “My role has been to cultivate awareness and invite the

campuses to look at this resource,” Hagan reports. “In Massachusetts, and in higher education writ large, faculty buy-in is essential for success.” Hagan asserts that the pilot showed, “We’re doing quality work in Massachusetts, and EarlyEdU provides an opportunity to expand access to more educators. There’s a lot of research that says the more knowledge and education early educators have in true ECE pedagogies and practices, the better for children.” She adds that “EarlyEdU has expanded the ways we think about competency-based, online education, and it’s forcing greater collaboration.” Participation in the EarlyEdU Alliance—seven of Massachusetts’s community colleges and two of its four-year schools are currently members—is a boost to competency-based, online learning in the state.

## **Pennsylvania**

Many states would envy the political and financial support that Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and other advocates have bestowed on early childhood education programs in the Commonwealth. These resources, along with consistent federal support, have facilitated creative approaches to professional development for early childhood educators. EarlyEdU engages in this work by providing course content to expand opportunities for competency-based learning.

“Our basic approach is to help teachers become more empowered, better educated, and more confident in working with children every day,” explains Jennifer Pyles, assistant professor of teacher education at Shippensburg University, a four-year public institution in the state’s south central region. Shippensburg has well-established bachelor’s and master’s degree programs in early childhood, and it recently won a \$340,000 Race to the Top grant—a partnership among the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Human Services and its offices of Child Development and Early Learning and Postsecondary and Higher Education. Pyles saw the award, in part, as a new opportunity to expand access to credit-bearing courses for nontraditional students. A goal of the grant has been to provide multiple hours of coursework aligned with field-based experiences, which is an ideal fit with the EarlyEdU approach.

One innovative method that Pyles and her colleagues are pursuing to meet this goal is an apprenticeship program in early childhood, through which “people can earn and learn at the same time.” Since 2017, education policymakers in Pennsylvania have been scaling up apprentice programs across the Commonwealth and have built a consortium of 17 public and private colleges and universities to apply the program to a degreed pathway in early childhood education. The apprenticeship program is a joint effort of childcare providers and colleges and universities to promote on-the-job learning for college credit, using NAEYC competencies as a general guide. Pyles works directly with ten apprentices. “We’re trying to standardize now, and make the work consistent,” Pyles reports, adding that EarlyEdU course content may help sustain the program in the long-term.



***“We are planning to use EarlyEdU as part of our outreach to our community, to build that learning environment across the state.”***

Pyles has been using EarlyEdU courses since the day she conducted a Google search for free online coursework she could use with her Race to the Top grantees. Starting in the fall of 2019,

she launched an online apprenticeship CDA worth nine college credits using three of the EarlyEdU courses: Child Development Brain Building, Engaging Interactions and Environments, and Becoming a Teacher Leader. At the same time, Pyles is encouraging other consortium members to use EarlyEdU courses in the apprenticeship program, along with the Coaching Companion “as a supplemental tool to our coursework.”

This is part of a broader, organized effort in Pennsylvania “to scale credit-bearing work to the birth-to-5 field” through a regional professional development organization (PDO) focused on helping early childhood educators “increase their career and earning potential and be better prepared to work with young kids,” Pyles explains. Through the PDO, Pyles and her colleagues are gathering research about the most pressing needs in the early childhood field, conducting focus groups, and exploring ways to expand the PDO concept to other regions.

“We are planning to use EarlyEdU as part of our outreach to our community, to build that learning environment across the state,” Pyles says. New Alliance members in Pennsylvania include three public universities (Edinboro, Lock Haven, and East Stroudsburg), all of which, Pyles says, have been impressed by the quality of EarlyEdU content and its alignment with NAEYC competencies. Pyles predicts that the schools will appreciate being part of the Alliance’s community of teacher preparation programs. “They’ll always have that support of a nice community of professionals working together.”

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Since May 2019, Shippensburg has continued efforts to scale the use of EarlyEdU across the Commonwealth. The state of Pennsylvania supported efforts to develop the Customized Coaching Companion, and multiple institutions of higher education, led by Dr. Jean Allison at Delaware County Community College, joined in that work. Pilot projects will begin in autumn 2020. The Customized Coaching Companion will supplement coaching in the ECE Apprenticeship Programs that award work-based learning credits and it will be piloted in certification programs. Shippensburg, through Dr. Pyles’ grant submission, was awarded the Professional Development Organization through the state and is scaling the use of EarlyEdU in partnership with community colleges and universities. During the Covid-19 context, EarlyEdU helped support the shift to remote learning in higher education and allowed for innovative practices by partners while supporting the context of the 0-8 age continuum. EarlyEdU is invaluable to the field of higher education in Pennsylvania as it provides high-quality, relevant, and meaningful curriculum.





# Implementation Lessons Learned

Barely five years into its work, the EarlyEdU Alliance has made a significant impact in supporting state efforts to professionalize the early childhood workforce and improve the quality of early childhood teacher preparation programs across the country. Each state that has applied EarlyEdU materials and strategies has a unique story to tell about helping students overcome barriers and building effective pathways to higher education opportunities. The states are also sharing common key lessons from their experiences using EarlyEdU materials.

Key takeaways include:

1. **Outreach**—Programs should be prepared to invest time and other resources in getting the word out to early childhood faculty about the availability of EarlyEdU courses and to prospective students about financial aid opportunities and other supports offered to those already working full-time in the field.
2. **Retention**—Some states and IHEs have struggled with student attrition, the result of challenges related to accessibility, technology, and the needs of non-traditional students. Increasingly, programs are asking students to share the reasons they cannot complete courses and considering strategies to address them. We know students need broader support beyond offering courses. Strategies within the courses and surrounding the courses, that support relevance and student connection, seem especially important.
3. **Level of rigor**—Students who are encouraged to return to college to pursue degrees in early childhood should be prepared to work hard and be open to new, challenging methods of learning. As one program director explained, “We have to be very clear to students that free doesn’t mean easy.”

4. **State political and cultural norms**—States differ widely in their embrace of state-supported early childhood programs. Proponents of the EarlyEdU approach must be prepared to promote its value within a broad range of political and cultural environments and understand the flexibility imbued in EarlyEdU materials so they can be used across a range of communities.
5. **Alignment with state policies**—Faculty who use EarlyEdU courses must accommodate explicit state content requirements for courses taught in two- and four-year public colleges and universities. Some states have invested considerable time and effort in disassembling and reassembling courses to make them work within such guidelines and to accommodate state articulation policies that govern pathways from associate degree to four-year programs.
6. **Student confidence**—States report that bringing early childhood educators into higher education can be a tough sell, especially for prospective students who have been out of school for many years and have never taken an online college course. To persuade this target audience to take the risk of returning to school, programs must emphasize the value of and provide easy access to competency-based professional development that students can use directly in their classrooms.
7. **Alignment challenges**—States increasingly report the complications they face in aligning content and credits across two- and four-year programs. With this understanding, EarlyEdU will continually review and revise coursework to ensure courses meet state or college requirements relevant to the communities that are using them.

Through these early years of EarlyEdU we are learning, with our partners, about how to create high-quality, accessible, and relevant early care and education degree programs. Together with the EarlyEdU Alliance membership, we remain committed to equitable early childhood teacher preparation.



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