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Roots of Decline: How Government Policy Has De-Educated Teachers of Young Children

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Contents

Introduction

A report published by the Economic Policy Institute – *Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education: Declining Workforce Qualifications in an Expanding Industry, 1979-2004* (Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005) – gained significant attention upon its release. The authors, a team of labor economists and policy analysts, examined Current Population Survey (CPS) and Census Bureau data from the past 25 years to document what many of us in the early care and education (ECE) field have long suspected, known only anecdotally, or studied on a smaller scale.

In brief, the study identified an interrelated set of trends that show that "the position of ECE in the labor market has changed for the worse since the early 1980s":

- Fewer center-based teachers and administrators now hold a four-year college degree, falling from a high of 43 percent in 1983-85 to 30 percent in 2002-04.
- More teachers and administrators are now working in the field with a high school education or less, up from 25 percent in the early 1980s to 30 percent now. (At the same time, more people in the field – 40 percent in 2004, up from 33 percent in 1983 – have now completed "some college," although short of a four-year degree.)
- This overall decline in educational attainment is most pronounced among younger workers (age 22 to mid-40s), with the most educated cohort now in their late 50s or older.
- While education levels have risen among home-based early care and education providers, they are still lower than those of center-based staff: roughly one in nine home-based providers holds a college degree, and fewer than one-half have completed any education beyond high school.
- Wages and benefits in the field have remained stagnant at very low levels throughout this period.

The team also confirmed these trends in state-level Issue Briefs for California, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

One reason that the study has gained such attention, no doubt, is that its findings fly so directly in the face of current understandings of what is good for young children. These 25 years have brought a vast increase in knowledge about the crucial importance of children's early development for lifelong learning and success, the key role of teachers and other adults in young children's lives (especially teachers who have been trained specifically in early care and education), and widening gaps, based on ethnicity and class, in children's school readiness and achievement (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Despite some concerns about the data cited in this study (see Appendix, "Limitations of Federal Data on the Early Care and Education Workforce"), we clearly recognize in broad outline the troubling trends in the ECE workforce that Herzenberg, Price and Bradley

have identified.[1] But what has caused this "lost ground" in the educational preparation and economic status of the ECE workforce? Is it a matter of normal wear and tear, the natural progression of a labor market over time? Is it a function of changing opportunities for women? Or is it the result of national, state and local policy decisions – of actions and inactions – that, from our perspective, are seriously out of synch with what children, families and educators need?

As the *Losing Ground* authors note, "Consistently low wages and benefits from 1983 to 2004 help explain the low educational attainment of early childhood educators." But while this is no doubt true, it is not so much an answer as the springboard for further questions: Why have wages and benefits in ECE remained consistently so low, during a period when other occupations have evolved quite differently? In particular, why has compensation remained stagnant in such a growth industry – given the huge increase in demand for child care services and a sharply rising need for more child care workers? How can so important a service still be so undervalued?

We are neither economists nor sociologists. But as researchers and policy analysts who have devoted more than 20 years to studying the early care and education workforce, we maintain that this explanation of wage stagnation does not take us quite far enough. We believe it is useful to tease apart the broader set of reasons why this workforce sector remains in such a precarious and untenable position, given its enormous value in the daily lives of young children and their families.

This paper, based on our review of the literature and on interviews with key informants in four of the seven states studied by the *Losing Ground* team (California, New Jersey, New York and Wisconsin), examines the demographic and public policy context of the team's findings.

* * * * *

Although *Losing Ground* documents a serious decline in the educational qualifications of the ECE workforce, this should not be construed to mean that any previous era was a Golden Age of early care and education quality. When the authors state that center-based ECE was "once a provider of high-quality care to a small number of children, [and] attracted an elite, highly qualified workforce," readers may draw the impression that at one time, program quality and teacher qualifications were not significant concerns in this field. But even in the 1970s, and again in the late 1980s, the first major studies of the U.S. child care system (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990) found troubling patterns of mediocre services, high teacher turnover and very low pay. The ECE field was much smaller in the decades preceding the *Losing Ground* study period than it is today, and teachers with college degrees, particularly women,

1 Problems with the data stem largely from limitations in how the federal government collects data about the early care and education workforce, e.g., making no distinctions between licensed and license-exempt providers, failing to clearly distinguish between kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers, and capturing no information about early childhood-specific training and education. In addition, the *Losing Ground* team's decision to combine findings for administrators and teaching staff further complicates the picture they present. For a full discussion, see Appendix.

had fewer alternatives and opportunities elsewhere in the workforce, but the decline that is now so apparent has been long in the making.

What accounts for it? No single factor entirely explains the decline, but several interconnected trends have played a part. First, the rapid expansion of the field, bringing with it a rapid need for more personnel: as the authors indicate, the early care and education field has roughly tripled in size in the U.S. since the late 1970s. With more and more parents of young children entering the out-of-home labor force – many because they have needed or wanted to work, and many because they have been required to, in the wake of major changes to federal and state welfare programs – the United States has undergone an enormous explosion in the number of ECE programs and the number of children served (Hollestelle, 2005a&b).

This rapid expansion set off major crises throughout the country in recruiting and retaining ECE staff, but *without* leading to the significant wage increases that usually accompany a labor shortage. And as opportunities expanded elsewhere in the job market for college-educated women, the available labor pool for ECE programs has shifted steadily from degree holders to relatively untrained and less educated workers, many of them living in poverty, and many of them recent immigrants to this country, whether educated or not.

Federal and state funding of ECE programs has undergone a similar explosion, and yet – despite some hopeful trends to the contrary – this funding has been devoted overwhelmingly to the expansion of child care systems, in order to serve as many children as possible, with considerably less attention to program quality, provider reimbursement, or workforce compensation. The result of choosing quantity over quality, by and large, has been an ever-larger, under-funded ECE system. One interviewee for this paper argued that, hand in hand with this historic expansion, has come an almost equal lowering of expectations: the very explosion of need made this kind of work seem custodial and routine, more oriented to bottom-line health and safety requirements than to meeting the classic nursery school or kindergarten's goals of nurturing young children's eagerness to learn and grow.

Fundamentally, public policy has not created higher expectations for this workforce overall, because policy makers have remained stuck between these two conceptions of the purpose and nature of out-of-home care for young children, with the split apparently growing ever wider instead of being reconciled:

- *An essentially work-and-welfare-related service, oriented to keeping parents on the job*. From this pole of emphasis has flowed a host of policies and programs geared to custodial care that is subject to minimal licensing standards or none at all, often in the name of maximizing parents' freedom of choice. Services funded from this perspective have generally been grounded in the assumption that caregivers need only minimal training, and that limited funds should be stretched to serve as many families as possible. Most recently, the reassignment of the U.S. Child

Care Bureau to the Office of Family Assistance, which oversees the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program created by the 1996 welfare reform law, does not bode well for advocates who have aspired to link child care services with early education.

- *An essentially educational service, oriented to meeting the developmental and learning needs of young children.* From this viewpoint have come the kindergarten and nursery school movements of the early 20th century, the federal Head Start program, a variety of state-level professional development initiatives for the ECE workforce, and rising calls for publicly funded preschool programs geared to improving school readiness and closing the achievement gap between children of diverse backgrounds. While teacher and provider educational standards have fallen or stayed flat elsewhere in the field, Head Start has sharply increased its teacher standards in the past decade, and most state preschool systems are now calling for head teachers to hold a college degree and a credential, comparable to the preparation required for teachers in Grades K-12 (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005).

With states devoting renewed attention to ECE professional development and compensation, and with the research literature generally indicating that ECE-specialized, formal teacher training does make a fundamental difference (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Whitebook, 2003), there is indeed some cause for optimism. But as long as public policy vacillates between the custodial and educational conceptions of this field – which the relatively recent term "early care and education" has been an effort to resolve, placing the two emphases together – we will remain caught in a cycle of debate about the proper standards for teacher preparation in this field. (This specific debate is discussed more fully below, in the section titled, "Teacher Preparation Standards, and Professional Development and Training.")

To understand the decline in teacher qualifications in the early care and education field, it is necessary to examine several interrelated demographic and policy issues. We focus first on three demographic trends: increased job opportunities for women with college degrees; greater participation of women in the workforce, fueling the growth of the early care and education industry; and a major rise in immigration to the U.S., which has expanded the pool of potential early childhood workers.

Next we turn to policy, both historical and current, as it relates to early care and education and to workforce development, and discuss how policy can and does influence the composition and characteristics of the early care and education workforce. Much of our analysis focuses on policy for two reasons. First, policy decisions can moderate – or worsen – the negative consequences of the demographic trends discussed below. Second, it is in this arena that stakeholders can propose regulatory, financing and programmatic changes that carry the potential to reverse the decline in early childhood workers' educational attainment and compensation.

Demographic Trends

Increasing numbers of – and improved job opportunities for – women with college degrees

Since 1970, the percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded to women has increased dramatically, with women earning 43.1 percent of such degrees in 1969-70, and 57.3 percent in 2000-01 (Freeman, 2004). This increase might suggest a larger pool of potential early childhood workers, particularly younger workers, given that women have historically comprised the overwhelming majority of the ECE workforce, and still do. Considering that, in 2000, 30 percent of women aged 25 to 34 had earned four-year college degrees, up from 18 percent in 1975 (DiNatale & Boraas, 2002), one might surmise that the percentage of college-educated women in ECE also would have increased during this period, yet the *Losing Ground* team has documented a *decline* in degree attainment in the ECE workforce, particularly among younger workers.

A partial explanation rests with expanding career options for women. This broadening of choice can be seen in changes in the percentage of women selecting fields of study such as accounting, business management, agriculture and natural resources. Table 1 compares the percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded to women by selected fields of studies in 1969-70 and 2000-01, reflecting a remarkable increase in the percentage of women pursuing non-traditional majors. The percentage of bachelor's degrees conferred to women in the physical sciences and science technologies, for example, increased by 27.6 percent over this period (Freeman, 2004).

A student's major field of study, however, can be misleading in terms of employment. Many college graduates, whether because of changing interests or unforeseen opportunities, do not seek or find employment related to their major field. Yet data on the percentages of women in various occupations confirm that opportunities for women across occupations have increased considerably over the last three decades. The percentages of female lawyers and engineers aged 25 to 34 have doubled since 1983, for example, rising to 30 percent and 10 percent respectively. There has also been a substantial increase in the percentage of young women working in executive, administrative and managerial occupations, from 38 percent in 1983 to 51 percent in 2000. These occupations, as shown in Table 2, offer much higher wages than early care and education.

Nonetheless, younger female college graduates, as well as their older counterparts, do continue to pursue studies in traditionally female-dominated fields, and to find employment in such occupations, such as preschool and elementary school teaching, library science, legal assistance, and nursing (Hecker, 1998). But improved opportunities are not restricted to male-dominated occupations. Some female-dominated fields, such as elementary education, have always paid better than preschool education, and others, such as nursing, now offer relatively better compensation than they have historically. Still, early childhood employment, as

Table 1: Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded to Women, by Selected Fields of Study: 1969-70 and 2000-01.

Field of Study	1969-70	2000-01	Percentage Change
Total *	43.1	57.3	+14.2
Agriculture and natural resources	4.1	45.1	+41.0
Accounting	8.7	60.5	+51.8
Biological sciences/life sciences	29.7	59.5	+29.8
Business management and administrative services	9.0	49.4	+40.4
Computer and information sciences	12.9	27.7	+14.8
Education	75.3	76.7	+1.4
Engineering	0.7	19.9	+19.2
Health professions and related sciences	68.6	83.8	+15.2
Mathematics	37.4	47.7	+10.3
Physical sciences and science technologies	13.6	41.2	+27.6
Psychology	43.4	77.5	+34.1
Social sciences and history	35.9	51.8	+15.9

*Includes other fields of study not shown separately.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred Survey," and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, "Completions Survey" (IPEDS-C:90-01, various years, 1989-90 through 2000-01), as reprinted in Freeman (2004).

Table 2: Mean Hourly Earnings and Minimum Educational Requirements for Selected U.S. Occupations, National Compensation Survey, July 2004, and Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006.

Occupation	Mean hourly earnings	Minimum education requirements
Engineers	$36.59	4-year college degree
Executives, Administrators and Managers	$36.22	Varies, depending on industry
Lawyers	$48.60	4-year college degree plus 3 years of law school
Registered Nurses	$26.87	4-year college degree (Bachelor of Science in Nursing)
Elementary Teachers	$32.46	4-year college degree, plus credential (typically an additional year of preparation)
Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers	$19.45	Kindergarten: same as elementary teachers; Pre-K: depends on state requirements[1]
Child Care Workers	$ 9.19	Depends on state requirements; typically, no higher education required[2]
Librarians	$27.89	Master's degree

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005b, 2006).
1 According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER; Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005), 25 of the 48 state pre-K initiatives require teachers to have obtained a BA or higher degree, and 35 require teachers to have completed some specialized training related to early childhood.
2 According to NIEER, 36 states do not require any college-level education for child care center teachers. Many centers, however, employ teachers and other staff who exceed state requirements. (For California, e.g., see Whitebook et al., 2006.)

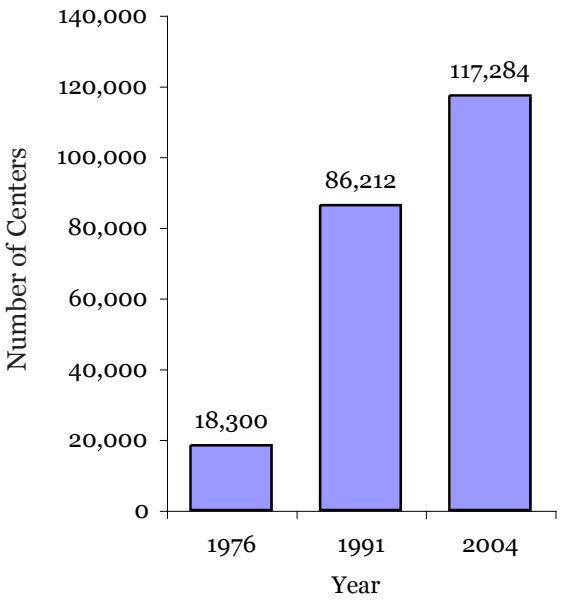
shown in Table 2, continues to pay significantly lower wages than other fields dominated by women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005b). Thus, the dynamic of greater opportunities for women in better-paying occupations from which they were traditionally excluded, as well as relatively better pay in most other female-dominated fields, contributes to the diminishing draw of early childhood careers for college-educated women.

Increased participation of women with young children in the labor force, and the expansion of the early care and education industry

Over the last thirty years, the labor force participation of women with young children, across educational levels, has increased five-fold, fueling tremendous growth in the child care industry. Increasingly, American families with young children rely on licensed child care centers or home-based providers, as well as a complex network of family, friends and neighbors, to care for and educate their children while they work. Over one-half of working families with young children pay for all or a portion of their children's care (Lombardi, 2003).

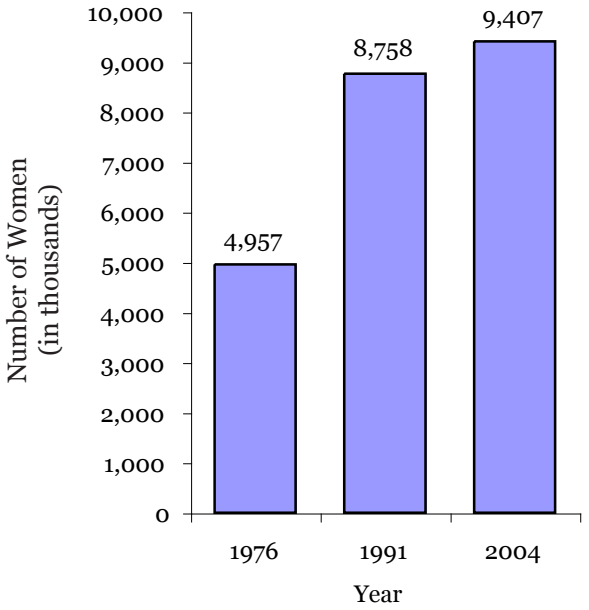
According to the National Day Care Study conducted in 1976-77, approximately 900,000 children were enrolled in 18,300 child care centers across the county at that time (Coelen, Glantz & Calore, 1979). In 2004, the Children's Foundation estimated that there were 117,284 child care centers in operation in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, representing a roughly six-fold increase in the center-based industry

Figure 1: Growth of Licensed Child Care Centers in the U.S., 1976-2004



Sources: Coelen, Glantz & Calore (1979); Hollestelle (2005a).

Figure 2: Number of U.S. Women in the Workforce with Children Under Age 6, 1976-2004



Source: U.S. Census (2005a).

alone (Hollestelle, 2005a). Between 1988 and 2004, regulated home-based care increased by one-third, from 193,044 to 290,530 facilities (Hollestelle, 2005b). (See Figures 1 and 2.)

As a consequence of this growth, opportunities for employment in the field of early care and education have skyrocketed. Based on the Current Population Survey, the number of paid employees more than doubled between 1992 and 1997 alone (Casper & O'Connell, 1998).

In some industries – depending on barriers to entry and the pool of potential workers – an increase in demand leads to better compensation, which in turn helps to attract the labor force that is needed. High demand for registered nurses, for example, has led to dramatic improvements in compensation and benefits. To attract and retain qualified nurses, many employers offer a variety of perks, including signing bonuses, family-friendly work schedules, subsidized training, online bidding to fill open shifts at premium wages, and limits on the amount of mandatory overtime work (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

In contrast, early childhood work, despite heavy demand for workers, has become even less attractive, particularly for those with college degrees, for several reasons: the persistence of poor wages and limited or no benefits, the widespread view of the work as unskilled, and relatively unrestricted entry into the field. Although an increasing body of knowledge points to the complexity of early childhood teaching, the barriers to entry to the field have remained very low, except for in the public preschool sector (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). At the same time, the greater availability of entry-level workers has even further lessened the urgency of raising compensation in order to recruit workers to the ECE field.

Welfare reform and immigration

Two major trends have contributed to this expanding pool of entry-level workers: federal welfare reform legislation in 1996, and a dramatic rise in immigration to the U.S.

In the wake of welfare reform – which sent a large population of women, many of them single parents, from the public assistance rolls into the paid labor force – some 44 percent of employed single parents are concentrated in low-wage service jobs such as child care (Peterson, Song & Jones-DeWeever, 2002; see also Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006). Indeed, at the state level, welfare reform policy has frequently encouraged former welfare recipients to seek employment in child care, often as license-exempt providers who are subject to no education or training requirements whatever (Burton & Whitebook, 1999).

The U.S. foreign-born population has more than tripled over the last three decades, from 9.6 million in 1970 to 35.7 million in 2005, with most recent immigrants coming from Mexico (30.7 percent), China (4.9 percent), the Philippines (4.4 percent), India (4.0 percent) or Vietnam (3.0 percent). Between 1990 and 2000 alone, the foreign-born population increased by 57.4 percent to 11.3 million, and as of 2005, it represented 12.4 percent of the

U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Nearly one-fifth (17.9 percent) of the foreign-born are estimated to live in poverty (Grieco, 2002; Migration Policy Institute, 2006). While the greatest concentrations of immigrants are found in metropolitan areas in California, New York, Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey, few areas of the country have been untouched by this influx, which has occurred simultaneously with the dramatic expansion of the U.S. child care industry.

A labor market study of Mexican immigrants, by far the largest U.S. immigrant group, has shown that 18 percent (compared to about 10 percent of U.S.-born Mexican Americans) are employed in non-private-household service occupations such as janitor, security guard, and child care worker – suggesting that immigrants make up a substantial portion of Latinos in occupations such as child care (Center for Immigration Studies, 2001). Practitioners in the ECE field, too, have abundant anecdotal evidence that the workforce contains many immigrants, some with significant amounts of college-level formal education, and others with little such training or preparation. But while it is reasonable to assume that immigration has had an impact on the ECE workforce, the lack of precise data hampers any definitive assertions on whether it has contributed to the trends in educational qualifications and wages identified in *Losing Ground* – making this topic worthy of further inquiry.

Federal Policy: A Brief Overview

In terms of addressing the professional and economic needs of the ECE workforce, federal policy has been very unsystematic – indeed, it has been as much a matter of inaction as of policy – during the 25-year period studied in the *Losing Ground* report. No federal regulations or educational requirements have been set for the ECE workforce, except within the federally funded Head Start and Military Child Care programs. This overall lack of regulation has largely persisted in the name of promoting maximum "parental choice" of child care options – a disingenuous term at best, given that for many parents, especially in low-income communities of color, unregulated care of questionable quality has become the only available "choice." When it comes to federal funding, there are neither rewards for states that raise the bar on qualifications, nor restricted eligibility for or sanctions against states that do nothing. The net result of this "policy" of inaction has been to lower both the floor and the ceiling of child care employment – keeping entry-level standards minimal, and severely restricting what is possible at the upper end of professional advancement in a direct-service child care career.

The early care and education field has developed within three very different sectors – Head Start, child care, and public school-based programs – and this lack of a central infrastructure has also drastically hindered the development of a common identity, making it hard for consumers and others even to locate where various programs are housed. With the exception of Head Start, most ECE policy has devolved to the state and local

levels, where various programs, subject to differing regulations and funding streams, face regular if not yearly sink-or-swim battles for reapproval, and wax or wane according to budgetary and political trends.

But the federal government has not always had such a hands-off policy. The Great Depression gave birth to many innovative social programs, including the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Nursery Schools, with the two-fold purpose of providing educational and social services to young children and putting unemployed teachers to work. The federal government leaned heavily on experts from the university-based nursery school movement for these WPA centers, and for the Lanham Act centers created during World War II to accommodate working mothers as men went overseas. As such, the federal government exhibited leadership – short-lived as it proved to be – in promoting the link between care and education, and emphasizing the need for trained teachers. From the onset, the U.S. Department of Education promulgated standards governing the Lanham centers, including their personnel, but Washington dismantled these programs immediately after the war. Only a few states, including New York and California, assumed responsibility for their continued operation (Helburn & Bergmann, 2002; Lombardi, 2003; Morgan, 1972).

When federal involvement in early childhood programs re-emerged in the 1960s, its focus was predominantly welfare-related, providing child care support to low-income working and/or welfare mothers, and to a lesser extent providing comprehensive services to children through Head Start. This expanded federal involvement led to a call for federal child care regulations, and for a time, there was cooperation among all federal agencies involved with the early childhood field regarding issues of staffing ratios, group size, and staff qualifications. But these "Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements" generated considerable controversy, and fell victim to President Nixon's 1970 veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act, only to be permanently eliminated by 1981.

In 1990, the creation of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, now called the *Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)*, ushered in the current era characterized by limited or no expectations from professional or advocacy communities as to federal leadership around standards. The block grant system, however, did lead to moderate progress in meeting workforce needs by mandating that states set aside at least four percent of their block grant funds for quality improvement activities. In the system's earliest years, some states even spent more than four percent on such activities, and yet this mandate have never been tied to educational qualifications, formal training or compensation for the workforce. As a result, much of this funding has been spent on training that is not linked to standards or credits, and that does not transfer or articulate within a formalized career ladder. Federal funds for quality improvement, which states have used for retention and scholarship programs, have been dwindling since the late 1990s, and thus far, nothing has replaced them.

It should be noted, however, that not all of the blame for federal decisions

can be laid at the feet of federal policy makers. The ECE field itself, for various reasons, has not been uniformly in favor either of higher qualifications or of higher pay for the workforce. Some worry that higher qualifications and pay will necessarily lead to higher costs, which, in turn, will price families out of the market, limit supply, and/or limit profits. Others argue that higher educational standards will limit entry into the field and/or be a burden on current members of the workforce. More recently, some have questioned altogether the contribution of higher educational standards to quality (Fuller, Livas & Bridges, 2006). The opposition to higher standards has often been as vocal as, if not more than, those in favor of setting more stringent qualifications.

By contrast with other federal efforts, the *Head Start Program*, which did not begin in 1964 with particularly demanding personnel standards, began devoting significant attention and resources to upgrading teacher compensation in the early 1990s (Whitebook, 1995), and calls for raising Head Start teacher educational qualifications have steadily increased over the past decade. While the most recent Head Start Act, which expired in 2003, calls for 50 percent of all teachers to hold at least an associate degree, current reauthorization proposals in the House and Senate would require some (if not all) Head Start teachers to attain a bachelor's degree over the next several years. Concerns persist, however, that none of these bills contains sufficient funding to make the new requirements feasible.

Apart from Head Start, the relatively resource-rich *Military Child Care* system has been the only sector of federal government to devote serious attention to ECE workforce professional development, training and compensation. By the late 1980s, inconsistent quality, inadequate teacher training, and very high teacher turnover throughout the system – up to 300 percent a year in some centers – led policy makers to recognize that teacher qualifications and compensation needed to be raised hand in hand. As a result, the Military Child Care Act of 1989 created an ongoing program across all branches of the military linking training to better pay for child care personnel. Entry-level staff, for example, receive increased compensation after completing required training and demonstrating developmentally appropriate practices; staff with CDA credentials or associate or bachelor degrees can also increase their pay levels by taking advanced training; and all employees receive a full range of benefits. Within a decade, Military Child Care centers had dramatically raised quality and reduced staff turnover system-wide – notable proof that determined leadership and adequate resources can create effective change through policy in a very short time (Campbell, Appelbaum, Martinson & Martin, 2000).

As noted earlier, federal *Welfare Reform* legislation – the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which created the need for a rapid expansion of publicly supported child care for working parents – has largely widened the divide between custodial and educational definitions of ECE services, leading in many states to the lowering of standards and the rising use of public dollars on license-exempt care (California Department of Education, 2002; NICHD Early Child Care Research

Network, 1997; Phillips & Whitebook, 2006; Whitebook et al., 2004).

Given these disparate federal efforts, and in the absence of any overall federal leadership, the only national presence related to teacher qualifications now resides in such voluntary efforts as the program accreditation standards created by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2006), and health guidelines issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2002). As a result, most ECE advocates have come to expect very little action at the federal level, and are focusing their attention on state-level reforms, especially the creation of publicly funded pre-kindergarten systems.

With regard to the trends identified in *Losing Ground*, it can be argued that, on balance, with the exception of such federally run programs as Head Start and Military Child Care, the federal government's silence on standards and its promotion of informal, unregulated care has created a climate that not only permits but even encourages the decline identified in *Losing Ground*. In terms of resources and influence, the demand created by welfare reform for more child care services, as quickly as possible, has trumped the competing policy impulses shown in Head Start and Military Child Care, which have sought a better-educated and better-compensated early care and education workforce.

Workforce Development Policy

On a separate but related policy track, child care has long been viewed not only as an aid to working parents and/or an educational effort for young children, but as a prime occupation in its own right for women entering or re-entering the labor force. The WPA Nursery Schools were created in large measure to provide work for unemployed teachers and nurses, along with providing services to children and families. As part of the 1960s War on Poverty, Head Start from its inception was also designed to create employment and economic opportunity for parents in low-income communities.

Over the years, many federally funded employment and training programs have included child care not only as a needed service for low-income women, but as a possible job option (Klein, 1992; Michel, 1999). In 1974, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) consolidated various employment and training programs into block grants. Funded until 1982, CETA resources provided many centers with additional staff, and trained many low-income women for child care work – even though the program also served as the first step in the devolution of federal responsibility for workforce development down to the state governments.

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) replaced CETA as the federal employment and training program, but typically was much less generous than CETA in terms of training and child care. With the creation of the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) system under 1996 welfare reform, interest in

training welfare recipients as child care workers again caught the attention of policy makers, with 22 states piloting, establishing or expanding such programs, placing varying degrees of emphasis on formal education (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 1998). While a few of these child care training projects have continued, they all face the heavy challenge of creating viable job opportunities in an underpaid field for women with limited education. Most of these efforts have not been studied, nor have the participants been tracked over time, making it difficult to assess their contribution to an overall decline in ECE workforce qualifications.

Another outgrowth of TANF, however, is likely to be having a major impact on ECE workforce composition, although this, too, is difficult to document: TANF has greatly increased the number of home-based, license-exempt providers who receive public dollars to provide child care. Many of these providers receiving public subsidy are family members of welfare recipients, typically with low levels of educational attainment (Whitebook et al., 2003). Current interest among labor unions in organizing and representing these providers (Brooks, 2005) may lead to greater stability in this segment of the workforce, and may channel more license-exempt providers into the regulated market, but these two trends could also contribute to a further decline of the overall educational composition of the ECE workforce.

Major Policy Issues and State Responses

With the devolution of child care policy in the last two decades from federal to state government, the 50 states have developed a widely divergent array of systems and programs, but at least one central fact has united them throughout this period: a federal funding source that has by no means kept pace with the rising need to develop, sustain and improve ECE services for young children and their families.

Yet even limited funds for quality improvement – coupled with severe ECE staffing shortages in some parts of the country, which made it imperative to take action – have led to some promising state and local efforts to maintain a skilled and stable ECE workforce. While such professional development programs and compensation initiatives – often under-funded, and often piecemeal and/or confined to only one "sector" of the ECE field (such as publicly funded preschools) – have not been able to recover entirely the "lost ground" cited in this new report, there are some hopeful signs of improvement, or leveling off of decline, in some states.

We have broadly grouped these state-level responses into two sets of interrelated policy issues: (1) Teacher preparation standards, and professional development and training systems, and (2) Child care subsidy and workforce compensation.

Teacher Preparation Standards, and Professional Development and Training

Few would question that teachers in

Grades K-12 should have college degrees, that community college instructors should have a master's degree or more, or that university instructors should have a doctorate. But when it comes to teachers of children prior to kindergarten, assumptions and expectations are commonly much lower, more often than not reflecting persistent images of a custodial rather than teaching function in this kind of work. As a society, we are far from agreeing that a college degree is an appropriate standard in early care and education, in part because of differing expectations about the kinds of experiences that children ought to have during this period.

Most research evidence emerging from investigations in the 1980s and 1990s suggested that more ECE-specialized, college-level preparation resulted in higher-quality experiences for children. Much of this research found that the highest-quality programs, or the preschool programs showing long-term positive outcomes for children of low-income families, were staffed by teachers with BA degrees, often with an early childhood focus (Whitebook, 2003). These findings contributed to a growing consensus among the states that teachers in publicly funded preschools should obtain such levels of education, and have led some states to invest significantly in ECE professional development efforts focused on attainment of college degrees. (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001).

More recently, a multi-state investigation of publicly funded preschools concluded that the BA degree was only modestly related to child outcomes and classroom quality, lending some support to those who question the added value of a four-year degree over an associate degree or a lesser number of college courses (Early et al., 2006). But it is important to note that this latest study did not distinguish among teachers at different educational levels by whether or not they had participated in a supervised student teaching experience, or by the levels of education and training of their directors, supervisors, or assistant teachers, all of which have been shown to impact teacher quality (Helburn, 1995; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). The field is still in need of research data that allows us to compare AA- and BA-level teachers with ECE-specialized training, and to assess the content and quality of professional preparation at different levels of the higher education system.

Overall, a decline in college graduates in the ECE workforce hardly comes as a surprise. On the contrary, the continued presence of college graduates in this field is somewhat unexpected, given the absence of any such requirement for most ECE positions (with the exception of the public school sector), as well as the almost inevitable low pay. In many ways, the current educational composition of this workforce is consonant with the ECE regulatory environment as it has evolved over the last several decades. Many states have lowered the regulatory barriers to entering the field, emphasizing the acquisition of a certain number of college credits, well short of a degree, for most of the center-based workforce, and setting even lower educational standards, if any, for home-based workers. To some degree, this leveling off or downward trend of state education standards for ECE teachers reflects federal pressures that have

amounted not only to a prohibition against regulating the industry, but proactive support for *deregulation* in the name of parental choice, and the sanctioning of license-exempt care as a legitimate recipient of public dollars.

In such a policy environment, states have been reluctant to jeopardize their federal contributions, and as a result, have done little to upgrade standards directly across their early childhood programs. State efforts to increase workforce qualifications have been further inhibited by the concerns that such steps would worsen the teacher shortage, raise program costs, and in the case of public dollars, limit the number of children who could receive subsidy.

Consider the case of California, whose Department of Education took over the Lanham Act centers at the end of World War II, continuing and in some cases expanding their operation in school districts throughout much of the state. This system of Children's Centers, as they were renamed in 1965, served children of low-income working mothers and were staffed by unionized teachers whose qualifications and pay were comparable to those found in elementary schools. A modest infrastructure was in place to support these programs, with an early childhood teaching credential authorizing teachers for preschool through third grade, and teacher preparation programs focused on early childhood in many institutions of higher education across the state (Bellm, Whitebook, Cohen & Stevenson, 2004).

Yet over the last 25 years, teacher qualifications for these and other publicly contracted programs in California have been downgraded considerably. Since the early 1990s, lead teachers in these programs have been required only to complete 24 college credits in early childhood education and 16 general education credits, for a total that is 20 credits short of an associate degree, with no mandatory supervised student teaching or practicum experience. The California Department of Education now also permits programs that cannot recruit qualified teachers to allow an associate teacher (required to have only 12 ECE credits) to serve as a teacher under the direction of a site supervisor, who in turn is required to have an AA degree and some specialized early childhood-related training. The early childhood credential is no longer issued, having been replaced with a Child Development Permit system codifying these lower standards.

While some Children's Centers continue to employ degreed teachers, pay scales have been whittled down as well, reflecting not only lower standards but reimbursement rates that have failed to keep pace with inflation. In many communities, contracts for these centers have been turned back to the state because of insufficient funding, and the state in turn has reissued the contracts to agencies that hire less-trained and lower-paid teachers. Hand in hand with this downgrading trend, class-size reduction for Grades K-3 throughout the California public school system in the 1990s lured many college-educated ECE teachers to newly available K-3 classroom positions, the only place where their degrees would be compensated equivalently to what was once available in the Children's Centers. And at the same time, reflecting these new realities, many of the state's institutions of higher education refocused their child

development or education departments, dropping or limiting their emphasis on the pre-kindergarten years (Whitebook, Bellm, Lee & Sakai, 2005). Seen in this light, the decline in degreed teachers appears less a function of larger demographic shifts outside the field and more a response to intentional public policy.

The initial impulse for this decline came as early as the 1970s, when certain policy makers, wanting to stretch subsidy dollars to serve more welfare recipients and other low-income families, began to use such phrases as "Cadillac programs" to describe the Children's Center system. Pressures to expand the quantity of child care available, with a lesser emphasis on child outcomes, gradually channeled more subsidy dollars to community-based, non-unionized programs, and soon led down the "slippery slope" of vouchers, a form of subsidy completely unattached to program stability.

The Children's Centers remained relatively protected in the early years of this shift, when public school enrollments were down and public school teachers often sought preschool employment, but the eventual turnaround in school enrollment eliminated even this modest amount of protection. And with ECE teacher shortage of the 1980s and 1990s came further pressure to lower qualifications, due to the worsening difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers for such low-wage jobs. In the early 1990s, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing revamped its certification of ECE programs, eliminating not only the BA requirement for teachers, but no longer issuing the Standard Early Childhood Credential, which certified teachers for preschool (age three) through Grade 3. Finally, hand in hand with these and other developments, such as public school class size reduction in Grades K-3, California's four-year colleges and universities largely abandoned their focus on ECE teacher training in the face of rising pressure to address the K-3 teacher shortage.

A version of the California experience has occurred in other states as well. Class size reduction policies for early elementary classrooms have recruited teachers away from preschool settings in many states, even if their regulations did not drop during the *Losing Ground* study period. New Yorkers whom we interviewed for this report cited a decline in teacher standards during the years covered by *Losing Ground,* but this has subsequently been reversed. New York's State Department of Education eliminated its Nursery through Grade 3 (N-3) certificate, replacing it with a N-6 certificate that can include a voluntary "early childhood annotation." Its recently enacted Birth to Grade 2 certification for public preschool and kindergarten teachers did not go into effect until 2004. Losing Ground covers a period with no specific early childhood certification for degreed teachers in areas of the state outside of New York City, which requires a certified teacher for every classroom in all types of programs serving children ages three to five. If it is correct, as we propose, that the composition of the workforce is sensitive to shifts in public policy, we assume that future research will reflect an upswing in the degreed teacher population throughout the state.

Just as the federal government has established higher standards for certain programs, namely Head Start and Military

Child Care, some states have selectively applied higher teacher qualifications to particular segments of the field – notably publicly funded preschool, which is typically state-supported and not subject to federal child care regulation. (Some states have applied Federal Title 1 funds to their preschool operations, but Title 1 funds do not carry the same proscriptive features as Child Care and Development Fund dollars.) New Jersey stands out in this regard, having established not only a degree and certification requirement for teachers in its court-ordered Abbott preschools, but setting a deadline for compliance and dedicating public funds for student financial support and the expansion of higher education programs (Ryan & Ackerman, 2004). New York also has established degree and certification requirements for preschool teachers, with less compliance than in New Jersey, matching the master's degree requirement for teachers of older children.

The *Losing Ground* authors suggest that had they been able to track school district-based preschool programs, along with community-based preschools, a decline in degreed teachers would still have been evident, although researchers and advocates we interviewed in these states tended to differ with that conclusion, pointing to nearly universal degree attainment among teachers in the fastest expanding sector of early childhood programs.

Interviewees, however, were quick to point out a couple of unintended consequences of this "sectoral" strategy: 1) that degreed teachers employed in other child care programs were leaving them to seek teaching jobs in publicly funded preschools, and 2) that those in community-based publicly funded preschools were eager to leave for school-district preschool jobs because of better pay, benefits and professional prestige. They also cited resistance among administrators and degreed teachers to pursuing a certification that limits teachers' flexibility to work with older children; thus, New Jersey finds many school principals preferring teachers to have a K-5 rather than a P-3 credential. Similarly, the Texas legislature recently changed the state's Pre-K-3 certification to Pre-K-8, largely in response to school principals who sought increased flexibility in assigning teachers.

As selective approaches to raising teacher qualifications in the early childhood field have expanded at the state level, they are also being met with more resistance. The most publicized example comes again from California, where a major source of opposition to the June 2006 Preschool For All ballot initiative centered on its requirement that teachers hold a bachelor's degree and a yet-to-be-created early learning credential within eight years of the law's passage. Instead of a debate about resources or vision, the argument reflected long-held, deep-seated attitudes about the nature of ECE teaching itself, and a lingering culture of low expectations. The heart of the opposition appeared to be a persistent assumption that preschool teaching requires less knowledge and skill than work with older children, and that it is unnecessary to pay the kind of salaries that a more educated workforce would command. Considerable concern was also voiced that raising educational requirements would lead to a loss of ethnic and linguistic diversity in the workforce, despite the substantial sum

of $500 million in the ballot measure that would have provided for the expansion of higher education programs in ECE, as well as scholarships and support services to broaden student access to education.

But given that standards have dropped or remained low in all but the preschool sector, how is it that the "floor" of educational attainment has risen in the early childhood workforce even as the so-called "ceiling" has dropped? Here again, public policies have played a pivotal role. In the absence of regulatory incentives for most of the workforce, many states have pursued a strategy to rewarding college credit-bearing professional development (but not necessarily college degrees) with scholarships, stipends or other incentives. Several of these efforts, including TEACH, CARES and REWARD, are described in the following section. While some participants in these programs eventually reach two-year or four-year degrees, many do not. Incremental in design and practice, these policies, many of which have been supported by federal and state dollars, have contributed to the current ECE workforce profile whereby more teachers and providers overall have had some college experience, but fewer have attained degrees.

As states have increasingly come to use the term "teacher" to describe not only those in the ECE workforce with a college degree and/or credential, but those with little or no college background – perhaps 80 hours of training, or 12 college credits, in minimal fulfillment of licensing standards – it remains doubtful how a strategy based on aspiration toward "professional growth," but lacking clearly delineated benchmarks, will simultaneously raise the ceiling and the floor of educational attainment in the ECE workforce.

Child Care Subsidy and Workforce Compensation

The *Losing Ground* team cites low wages as a root cause of the decline in workforce educational qualifications over the past 25 years; this wage stagnation, in turn, is directly related to the public funding of child care programs. Despite billions of dollars now spent annually on child care subsidy by federal and state government, most consumers receive no financial assistance and continue to bear the bulk of child care costs themselves. And since parent fees cannot cover the full cost of quality services in such a labor-intensive industry, even the high cost of child care – rivaling or exceeding the price of college tuition for many families – cannot guarantee a living wage for the teachers and providers who educate and care for young children.

Public policy has a major role to play in addressing the ECE workforce compensation problem, and a central reason for depressed wages in the ECE field has long been the inadequacy of public funding. Indeed, in the long run, only a major public investment – in recognition that early care and education is a public good that parents cannot afford to cover on their own – is going to solve the problem of low ECE teacher compensation.

Reimbursement rates for publicly subsidized child care programs generally lag far below the level that programs truly need to run high-quality services or pay

their staff a living wage. Further, the continual push in many states toward a voucher system of subsidy, whereby funds "follow" an individual family and child rather than supporting child care centers and agencies through ongoing contracts, has made it much harder for communities to maintain a child care *system*, keeping quality centers and providers reliably in business.

Wisconsin, for example, has seen no decline in ECE teacher educational requirements during the past 25 years, but it *has* seen a decline teachers' educational attainment, which interviewees for this paper linked directly to problems of child care subsidy and program reimbursement. Advocacy efforts to raise compensation have secured significant gains in Wisconsin, including the T.E.A.C.H. and R.E.W.A.R.D. stipend programs, but even these have been limited and supplemental, unable to close the gap between ECE wage levels and what a highly educated teacher can earn by working with older children.

In many states, however, tiered reimbursement rates and quality rating systems have begun to partially address the endemic subsidy problem. As of 2006, 30 states have developed a reimbursement system that pays higher rates to programs meeting higher standards than required by licensing, and 13 states have created quality rating systems (National Child Care Information Center, 2006). Yet even these systems generally do not carry a specific guarantee that better reimbursement will be linked to better staff compensation. In 2005, an unsuccessful attempt in Wisconsin to create a quality rating system, eventually voted down along party lines in the state budget process, contained some notably progressive proposals that other states would do well to consider. In the Wisconsin model, with support from Governor Doyle and broad buy-in the ECE field, teacher qualifications ranked heavily, as well as curriculum, learning environments, and "professional practices" – including a living wage, health insurance, and other workplace standards.

Other attempts to improve compensation have taken root from federal block grant "quality improvement" funds. Since the initial passage in 1990 of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, states have been required to set aside a portion of their grant (a minimum of four percent) for quality improvement activities, which can include efforts to boost the professional development and compensation of the ECE workforce. At least in the earliest years of the Block Grant, some states chose to spend well over the minimum, and these funds have been critical in launching several groundbreaking efforts to link professional development with scholarship aid, stipends and other financial assistance – including the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project, now operating in 22 states, the Child Care WAGE$ Project, operating in four states, and the R.E.W.A.R.D. salary supplement program in Wisconsin and Oklahoma. And since 2000, state and local funds have brought the CARES program to nearly every county in California, offering annual stipends to teachers, directors and providers that are linked to their educational attainment. A similar four-year effort in New York, the Child Care Professional Retention Program, expired in 2005, and advocates are now attempting to reinstate it.

But none of these programs were ever intended to be *solutions* to the ongoing problem of low compensation in the early care and education field. For all their benefits, and the crucial assistance they have offered in helping ECE practitioners advance their professional skills and stay on the job, they have all been conceived as supplementary in nature – recognizing that it is essential to link education and training in this underpaid field with some kind of financial reward. They were never designed as a way to transform ECE jobs into living wage jobs – a feat that is only being achieved in some publicly funded state preschool systems, where teachers are reaching pay equity with K-12 teachers by being linked with public school systems.

Georgia's state prekindergarten program, Bright From the Start, has scored a significant policy success in raising teacher qualifications by way of program payment incentives rather than regulation. Even in the absence of a BA requirement, over 70 percent of Georgia's pre-K teachers now have a BA, largely because of incentives to programs, which receive higher reimbursements based on teacher credentials, and to teachers themselves, who receive support in furthering their education.

While a linkage to public school systems is not necessarily the only solution to low pay and high turnover in the ECE workforce, it will certainly be necessary for the ECE system to receive a similar level of resources. Like K-12 education, early care and education has got to be recognized at last as a public good for which the entire society takes responsibility – whether school-linked or community-based, or delivered in a mixed system as in New Jersey's Abbott school districts and the Los Angeles Universal Preschool model. Without a major infusion of public support to the nation's ECE system, we will remain mired in the game of offering more funding and opportunity to some programs and practitioners, and less to others – standing on a shaky foundation and "losing ground."

Conclusion and Recommendations

In concluding their report, Herzenberg, Price and Bradley warn that, as the most educated cohort of the ECE industry moves into its late 50s and approaches retirement, "the difficulty of achieving a qualified ECE workforce will grow more severe," and they urge the nation to "raise both the qualifications of early childhood educators and the compensation needed to keep educated professionals in the field."

As leaders in calling for improvements in early childhood jobs and professional preparation for the last three decades, we wholeheartedly agree with this recommendation, but know only too well the forces that work against implementing it. Our nation's vision of the skills and competencies it takes to work with children prior to kindergarten remains regrettably constrained by its historical and current approach to providing ECE services. On balance, despite important advances in several states in implementing high-quality publicly funded preschool programs, most ECE services in the United States are inadequately funded, mediocre in quality at best, and as such, work against the goals of upgrading ECE jobs and redefining teacher and provider qualifications.

The movement for publicly funded preschool is promising, in that it has launched a public conversation about the value of good early childhood programs for enhancing children's school and life success, and for closing the achievement gap among children of different economic and ethnic backgrounds. But this new vision for young children has yet to be accompanied by a new vision for their teachers. Too much public policy in ECE is still driven by asking what's the *least* that teachers need to be trained and compensated, rather than what they optimally need to know, and how we might best prepare them, to provide developmentally nourishing and effective early childhood programs. Short of a greater public consensus about needing a highly skilled and stable ECE workforce, there is little likelihood of seeing higher standards or better pay in this field.

Yet even recommending a public conversation and a better-articulated vision begs the question of how to accomplish it. The apparent lack of a single sure-fire approach leads us to advise several interrelated strategies. It is time to assess the limits of our successes and the need for fresh approaches. The following, in our view, are the most important avenues to pursue:

1. *Establish the skills and competencies expected of teachers of young children in early childhood settings, and devote adequate resources to higher education programs and certification systems that are aligned with such standards.*

In order to secure the impetus, resources and overall direction for lasting policy change in the professional preparation of the ECE teaching workforce, we recommend federal support to enable states to develop a comprehensive set of teacher skills and competencies, based on the latest research knowledge about how young children learn and succeed. Such standards should then guide the development and/or modification of college-, university- and

community-based teacher preparation programs, as well as teacher credentialing or certification systems.

2. *Convene a series of strategy discussions focused on upgrading ECE workforce pay and qualifications, with the goal of a well-articulated public education and policy agenda to be implemented over the next decade.*

It has become widely agreed that publicly funded preschool is the most effective way to upgrade the training and compensation of the workforce. While this strategy has been particularly successful in several states, it has not been uniformly effective in establishing parity between teachers of preschool and Grades K-3. Further, there has been little discussion of the impact of preschool programs on other sectors of ECE employment. What is required is an in-depth exploration of how various ECE policies impede or enhance the improvement of ECE jobs, and how concurrent policies may undermine advances in various sectors. These strategy sessions should be informed by efforts in other fields such as nursing, and should lead to a menu of policy and public education approaches that can be implemented together and monitored for their effectiveness. Participants in this effort should include not only key early care and education stakeholders, but sympathetic supporters from other fields with expertise in crafting campaigns to shift public opinion and move agendas.

3. *Initiate public education and recruitment campaigns to promote the importance of highly trained and skilled early care and education teachers.*

Background work should be undertaken to assess how different constituencies (parents, voters, college students interested in social service or teaching careers, and other potential workers) view working with young children, and outreach campaigns should be developed to counter or support these views. This background work could be used to craft a recruitment campaign for ECE teachers and also to bolster support for expanding high-quality early education programs.

4. *Reassess how federal policies could be revamped to improve early care and education professional preparation, and build support for particular policies.*

All of us who are concerned about the ECE workforce must be prepared for any shifts in the federal climate that would permit the creation of new policies related to professional development, and should identify potential proposals should the opportunity become available, including: programs to expand and revamp higher education opportunities in early care and education; programs to support the development of a diverse ECE leadership; and incentives for pursuing ECE careers (such as loan deferments or paid community service) comparable to what is available for teachers of older children.

5. *Reassess how federal policies could be revamped to improve early childhood jobs, and build support for particular policies.*

Short of improvements in compensation, efforts to upgrade the qualifications of the ECE workforce will largely continue to benefit other professions, as well-trained ECE personnel keep leaving the field to teach in public schools or pursue other better-paying opportunities. While full funding for publicly supported preschool is necessary in order to improve compensation, it is not a sufficient strategy in and of itself. Major considerations include: how to ensure that public resources truly reward higher qualifications, how community-based programs can operate on a par with school district programs in terms of benefits as well as pay, and how the entire ECE workforce, not just those who work with four-year-olds, can be rewarded for investing in their education.

6. *Develop a research agenda, and provide resources to support it, to generate clearer guidelines for best practices for ECE professional development that can be integrated into the policy and public education work.*

In debating the optimal *level* of education that teachers should have in order to provide high-quality programs for young children, it is essential to look closely at the *content and quality* of such teacher preparation. Lessons from K-12 education point to the need for initial and ongoing reflective practice and mentoring, as well as targeted early childhood-related training. Many new teachers are not required to have a supervised practicum experience; too many of the most educated ECE teachers have not had early childhood-specific training; and many veteran teachers have few opportunities for meaningful continuing education. In addition, much college- and university-level ECE teacher preparation is provided by instructors with little or no direct ECE experience themselves (Whitebook et al., 2005). Research in this area could not only guide the development of better teacher preparation standards, but promote change in ECE teacher training institutions.

7. *Assess progress in improving ECE employment every three to five years over the next decade, and revise strategies as necessary.*

As with any major shift in attitude and policy, there will be advances and setbacks. In order to learn from our efforts, we will need to continually monitor and reflect upon them. All of us who undertake this work must necessarily embrace it as a long-term project that requires a major commitment of leadership and resources.

When we began our careers as early care and education teachers in the 1970s, we were captivated by the challenges and delights of working with young children, and appalled by the low pay and status in this field and the high turnover it fueled. As was typical of our generation, we thought we could rectify the situation fairly quickly. We sought through research to establish a clear link between the adult work environment and the quality of care that children receive, pointing to the need for additional public resources beyond what parents could afford to pay for ECE

services. We thought that change was just around the corner.

Over the years, we have wrestled with resistance within and beyond our field to changing the conditions of early childhood jobs and upgrading the professional preparation of teachers and providers. There has been progress, but in many ways, we have indeed lost ground over these 30 years. A tough job remains – one that is likely to extend beyond our active careers. But the time is upon us all to plot a course not only to regain territory, but to improve the terrain upon which we are nurturing our youngest children.

Appendix: Limitations of Federal Data on the Early Care and Education Workforce

Herzenberg, Price and Bradley have produced a useful study of the ECE workforce from existing household and census data, one that broadly confirms the findings of previous studies (Saluja, Clifford & Early, 2002; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes, 2001; Burton, Whitebook & Lawrence, 1998) and extends our knowledge into new areas. But the study also confirms longstanding problems with federal data collection on the ECE workforce, and the urgent need for a clearer picture.

Researchers and advocates have long called for a major overhaul of how federal agencies, notably the Department of Labor and the Census Bureau, categorize the early care and education industry and its various occupations. Issues have included a lack of consistency in definitions across agencies, and outmoded definitions that fail to capture the reality of ECE jobs or differentiate among important sectors of this fast-expanding industry (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). Some adjustments to these definitions have been made over the years, notably in 1992 and 2000, but problems remain that limit the data's usefulness for understanding the ECE field, measuring improvement, and planning policy.

The *Losing Ground* authors cite the Current Population Survey and U.S. Census data sets as the best currently available sources for national and comparable state information about the ECE workforce, while acknowledging many of the limitations of these federal

data. They discuss at length how they approached building a consistent time series of the industry in light of modifications to both the industry and occupation codes initiated by federal agencies over the 25-year period of interest. They also provide explanations for their decisions to group certain occupational categories, such as teachers and administrators.

But while *Losing Ground* confirms many of the findings of local studies that have been based on more refined definitions and categories of ECE employment, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the data on which the report is based, particularly as its findings are used to frame recommended policy interventions and future research. In particular, we draw readers' attention to the following issues:

1) *Limited definition of early childhood workforce preparation.*

The ECE personnel under consideration are grouped according to whether they have completed some college work, an associate (AA/AS) degree, or a four-year (BA/BS) degree or more, but the data do not distinguish how much, if any, of this education is ECE-related. While there is undoubtedly benefit in college-level education of any kind, teacher performance as it relates to program quality and child outcomes is also linked to college-level coursework directly related to early childhood development (Whitebook, 2003; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2005). Thus, these data are useful in understanding how the ECE workforces compares to other fields or the general public in terms of formal educational attainment, but they shed no light on the proportion of the workforce overall – or at different levels of formal education – who have completed specialized early childhood training. This question becomes particularly important in determining the professional preparation of the ECE field, and in understanding differences in performance and career stability among those who have different combinations of formal education and specialized training.

2) *Mingling or omission of industry sectors.*

Licensed and license-exempt home-based providers. The study found much lower educational levels among home-based providers in recent years[2] than among center-based teachers, but since federal data do not distinguish between licensed and license-exempt providers—the latter group being subject to no training or education requirements at all—we are left with a distorted view of the home-based sector of the workforce. A forthcoming study of California licensed family child care providers suggest that the gap in educational levels between licensed home-based providers and center teachers is not as extreme as that suggested in *Losing Ground*. Herzenberg, Price and Bradley report, for example, that over 56 percent of California's home-based providers (licensed, unlicensed or exempt) report high school or less as their highest level of educational attainment, compared to 28.5 percent of *licensed* providers as documented in the new statewide study (Whitebook et al., 2006). This discrepancy suggests that it is highly unreliable to

2 Family child care workforce data were available only for 2000-2004, not for the entire 25-year period of the overall study.

combine the licensed and unlicensed sectors of the home-based ECE workforce when discussing educational attainment.

School district-based preschool personnel. Additionally, as the authors note, federal data inadequately capture teaching and administrative personnel in school district-based preschool programs. In part, this is due to the longstanding failure of federal data collection to differentiate between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, despite their historically different pay and qualifications (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). Although Herzenberg, Price and Bradley suggest that the school-based sector is relatively small and would contribute less than a five-percent increase in the total of ECE teaching and administrative workforce with four-year college degrees, this sector is the focus of many states' policy innovations and investment, and its omission underscores the limitations of the federal data (Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005).

Of the seven states in the *Losing Ground* study, the workforce portrait of at least two – New Jersey and New York – could be significantly different, given their recent expansion of school-based preschool programs and increased requirements for teacher preparation (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005). California, too, has long operated a substantial number of school-based, full-day child development and preschool programs with more stringent staff qualifications and somewhat higher pay levels; the absence of this sector therefore leads to an incomplete portrait of the state's center-based industry.

A recent report notes that preschool teachers in school-based settings have, on average, "annual earnings 58 percent higher than the combined average of their non-school-based counterparts. The differential between school settings and predominantly private child day care services is more than $15,000 a year" (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2006).

3) Mingling of employee categories.

Teachers and administrators. The authors note that "the report groups teachers with administrators to increase sample size, and because education trends within the two categories are similar" – but this approach is not equally valid across all the states in the study. In New Jersey, even in state-funded preschools in the Abbott school districts, directors (unlike teachers) are not required to hold a bachelor's degree (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005). In California, by contrast, recent data reveal that directors are more than twice as likely as teachers to hold a four-year or higher degree (Whitebook et al., 2006). Further, because administrative jobs are often sought by teachers who wish to stay in the field but are disaffected by teacher pay (Whitebook & Sakai, 2004), it is questionable whether the same decline in education has occurred among directors as among teaching personnel.

Early childhood educators. The U.S. Census data cited in the study's seven state-level Issue Briefs use the category of "early childhood educators," which includes all occupations with primary responsibility for children, such as teachers, assistant teachers and

teacher aides, and combines personnel working with different ages groups of children. Unfortunately, this collapsing of occupational titles and age groups blurs the picture in an increasingly important area of public policy. While there are rising calls for higher educational standards for head teachers and assistant teachers in publicly-funded preschool programs – typically, a bachelor's degree and credential for teachers, and an associate degree and certification for assistants – there has been no equivalent call for teacher aides or for personnel in infant/toddler or school-age child care. From the federal data presented, we are unable to tell whether educational levels have held steadier among certain staff or have fallen equally throughout the ECE workforce.

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