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The Best Teachers for Our Littlest Learners?

Lessons from Head Start's Last Decade



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Introduction

Early childhood education programs are seen as a key strategy to ameliorate the effects of growing up in poverty. The ability of these programs to elevate children's development and prepare them for academic and lifelong success rests on the quality of early childhood teachers. In order to be truly high quality, early childhood education programs must employ teachers who can establish warm relationships with children and foster their development and school readiness.

Research on the importance of teacher-child interactions has sparked increased recognition of the importance of improving the skills, knowledge, and professional status of early childhood workers. Thirty-three state programs now require pre-k teachers to hold at least a bachelor's degree,¹ and 24 states and DC provide scholarships to help early childhood educators earn degrees.² Yet these efforts often ignore a major sector of the early childhood workforce. Many current state-level efforts focus on teachers in state-funded pre-k programs. Others seek to build broader state-level systems to support the skills of workers in child care settings. Head Start programs are often an afterthought for these efforts.

Head Start is a federal program that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to low-income children and their families. Initiated in 1965, it served low-income children long before most states created pre-k programs. Head Start currently serves nearly one million children nationally and employs nearly 44,700 teachers. When teaching assistants, family service workers, home visitors, and other staff are taken into account, the Head Start workforce numbers more than 93,000.³

In other words, Head Start comprises a substantial share of the early childhood workforce. Given this, changes in Head Start workforce policies impact the broader early childhood ecosystem—and changes in the larger ecosystem in turn affect Head Start.

This paper seeks to inform efforts to strengthen the early childhood workforce by documenting the current state of the Head Start workforce and examining the effects of recent efforts to improve the skills of Head Start teachers. The first part traces the evolution of Head Start workforce policy over the last 50 years and identifies how shifts in the broader early childhood landscape, especially state-funded pre-k programs, have influenced these policies. The second part analyzes the impact of the most recent reauthorization of Head Start, which required half of all Head Start teachers to hold bachelor's degrees with training in early childhood education. It reveals that while the bachelor's degree requirement succeeded in raising the credentials of Head Start teachers, it did not alleviate, and may have exacerbated, other challenges related to recruiting, retaining, and compensating a high-quality Head Start workforce.

The third part provides case studies of the evolution of the Head Start workforce in four states, which demonstrate the interconnection between Head Start and the larger early childhood workforce and offer lessons for both state and federal policymakers. The fourth part of this paper details how the broader policy and research context has evolved since the last Head Start reauthorization. Finally, the paper offers policy recommendations to strengthen the Head Start workforce.

History of Innovative and Gradually Increasing Teacher Quality Standards

Head Start workforce policy is a history of compromise, as high aspirations encountered challenging practical and political realities, but also of gradual improvement and innovation in response to those challenges.

Head Start workforce policy has evolved over time. This evolution is a history of compromise, as high aspirations encountered challenging practical and political realities, but also of gradual improvement and innovation in response to those challenges. When Head Start launched in 1965, the majority of lead teachers had no education beyond a high school degree.⁴ Today, 74 percent of Head Start teachers have a bachelor's or advanced degree in early childhood or a related field.⁵

Many members of the committee that planned Head Start's launch in 1965 understood the importance of teacher training. But the short implementation timeline and large scale of the program made it impossible to ensure teachers received proper training. Head Start transitioned from an idea to an actual program in six months, and served 560,000 children in its first summer.⁶ At the time, there were not enough trained preschool teachers in the United States to serve that many children.⁷ Moreover, since Head Start was seen as an anti-poverty program, leaders adopted a two-generation strategy and believed the program needed to hire low-income parents and community members.⁸ For decades, the tension between hiring well-prepared teachers and providing jobs for parents shaped Head Start workforce policies. Today, a quarter of Head Start staff are current or former Head Start parents.⁹

These challenges also spurred innovation, however. In 1972, Head Start officials supported the establishment of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, a nationally recognized, competency-based credential for early childhood workers, as a way to enable Head Start teachers to improve their credentials. At the time, the majority of Head

Start teachers were low income and had children, so the cost and time associated with traditional higher education programs were not viewed as a feasible option. In 1973, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) funded 13 pilot programs to develop the CDA curriculum and methodology, and the first CDAs were awarded in 1975.¹⁰ In 1990, as part of the Head Start Expansion and Quality Improvement Act, Congress for the first time set minimum requirements for teachers—requiring every Head Start pre-k classroom to have one teacher with a CDA. Illustrating the history of gradual change, it took 15 years to require this minimum standard.

To help programs meet new requirements, both the 1990 reauthorization and the Head Start Amendments Act of 1994 also raised compensation for Head Start staff. Between 1990 and 1994, \$470 million was allocated to increase salaries for Head Start personnel.¹¹ In 1998, Congress again raised the minimum qualification standard, requiring at least one teacher in each classroom to have an associate’s degree in early childhood education, and 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide to have an associate’s degree or higher in early childhood education by 2003. At the time, only 34 percent of Head Start teachers held an associate’s or higher degree.¹²

The next Head Start reauthorization, in 2007, again raised the bar for qualifications of Head Start teachers, requiring 50 percent of Head Start teachers to hold a bachelor’s degree by 2013.¹³ It also required all lead teachers to earn their associate’s degree over a four-year period, and required assistant teachers to complete a CDA.

Congress raised requirements for Head Start teachers in response to a large body of early childhood research that identified positive associations between teachers’ educational attainment and observed care quality and child outcomes.¹⁴ For example, the National Child Care Staffing Study found that, compared to teachers with less formal education, teachers with bachelor’s degrees were “more sensitive, less harsh and detached, and more appropriate.”¹⁵ And these behaviors were correlated with improved child learning and development outcomes.¹⁶ A 2000 National Research Council report also noted that teachers with bachelor’s (or higher) degrees in early childhood development appeared to be most effective.¹⁷ A statement by Senator Edward Kennedy reflects the influence of this research: “We know that learning and development of young children require good teachers, and there’s a strong link between educational qualifications and the quality of programs.”¹⁸

This same research also motivated advocacy efforts at the state level to improve state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. By 2001, 40 states had funded 45 pre-k programs serving 700,000 children, mostly four-year-olds.¹⁹ In 2001, the Pew Charitable Trusts committed to advancing a movement for high-quality, publicly funded pre-k for all three- and four-year-olds.²⁰ These efforts focused on both expanding access to state-funded pre-k and increasing the number of pre-k programs that adopted specific quality standards, including requiring teachers to have bachelor’s degrees.

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As advocates succeeded in expanding state pre-k programs and raising requirements for state pre-k teachers, Head Start stakeholders and congressional leaders came to view a bachelor's degree requirement as crucial to maintaining Head Start's relevance in an evolving early childhood landscape. Since neither state pre-k alone nor Head Start alone had enough resources to serve all eligible children, both were seen as crucial parts of a fragmented early childhood landscape. In 2006, for the first time in history, the number of children enrolled in state-funded pre-k programs exceeded the number of children enrolled in Head Start.²¹ Legislators and advocates feared that, if Head Start did not raise educational expectations for teachers, it would come to be seen as offering lower quality than pre-k programs and potentially be superseded by them. The same advocates who supported pre-k programs also pressed Congress to raise credentials for Head Start teachers and called for more collaboration between Head Start and state pre-k programs.²² In 2003, Pew and National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) published papers arguing that "clear and convincing" evidence that teachers with advanced degrees are more effective should inform teacher qualification requirements in the next reauthorization of Head Start.²³ Other early childhood advocacy groups also supported increased credentials for Head Start teachers, including the Children's Defense Fund, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and Fight Crime Invest in Kids.²⁴

The research base, advocacy efforts, and pressure from a changing state pre-k landscape spurred Congress to adopt a bachelor's degree requirement. But practical and political considerations prevented mandating a bachelor's for all Head Start teachers. Instead, the final legislation required all lead teachers to obtain associate's degrees by 2011 and 50 percent of Head Start teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree by 2013.

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Money was a major issue: without higher salaries, Head Start teachers who earned new degrees would likely leave their programs. A representative from the California Head Start Association explained: "The fear is not that [programs] won't meet the new target but that...they won't be able to hold on to their teachers with B.A.s."²⁵ Some members of Congress hoped that new degree requirements would be accompanied by increased funding for teacher salaries. And the final bill reserved funding to improve the compensation and benefits of Head Start staff, although it did not mandate increasing salaries commensurate with education.²⁶ But because funding for Head Start is determined through the annual appropriations process, there was no guarantee that new requirements would lead to increased funding.

Nor was it clear where Head Start teachers would obtain bachelor's degrees. In 2004, a national research survey found that only 30 percent of institutions of higher education offered an early childhood teacher preparation degree program of any type (associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, or master's degrees).²⁷ A large majority of this sample were two-year degree programs. Because most states did not require ECE educators to have

But the reauthorization made no investments in building teacher prep program capacity to meet new demand.

bachelor's degrees, there was little incentive for four-year universities to offer ECE bachelor's degree programs. Access was a particular barrier in rural communities with few nearby higher education institutions. Moreover, few of these existing programs had a primary goal of preparing individuals to become ECE teachers but instead focused on preparing individuals for multiple roles involving young children.²⁸ But the reauthorization made no investments in building teacher prep program capacity to meet new demand.

Simply defining what credential the law should require was also a challenge. There was no nationally recognized bachelor's-level credential for early childhood workers. In K-12 education, most states require teachers to have a bachelor's and certification, and federal policies have historically relied on states to define standards for K-12 teachers. This wasn't possible for ECE because many state certification systems didn't include pre-k teachers. In 2007, 27 state pre-k programs required pre-k teachers to have bachelor's degrees; 22 programs did not.²⁹ And few states required pre-k teachers to have a specific state certification focused on a particular age range. As a result, Congress couldn't simply defer to state teacher credentialing systems to set standards for Head Start teachers. Instead, it needed to establish a standard that teachers in any state could meet. The final legislation requires a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a degree "and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education, with experience teaching preschool-age children."³⁰ Therefore, there was no uniform policy, but instead a number of disparate ways that teachers could meet the requirement.

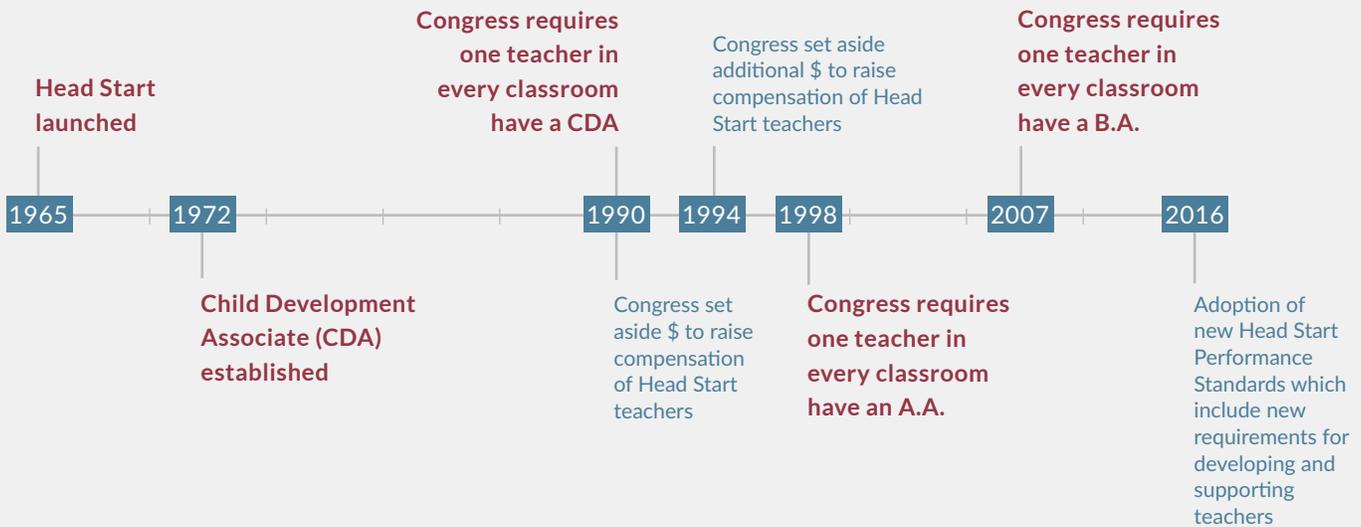
Most of the debate over teacher quality in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization focused on bachelor's degree requirements. But other provisions of the law also had implications for the Head Start workforce. The reauthorization newly required all Head Start teachers to be provided with 15 hours of in-service training every year, and a career advancement plan.³¹ The reauthorization also dedicated funding for supporting professional development and set forth salary requirements for Head Start personnel. It set a salary floor, at the level of the minimum wage, as well as a ceiling, by prohibiting employees from making more than "persons providing substantially comparable services."³² The provision encouraged but did not require Head Start programs to create salary scales based on training and experience.³³ To help Head Start programs meet these requirements, some states have produced Wage and Fringe Benefit Comparability Reports, which examine salaries and benefits across Head Start programs statewide and, in some cases, compare Head Start salaries and benefits to individuals providing similar services.³⁴ But these reports often compare Head Start salaries only with those of other Head Start workers or child care providers—not with certified teachers in K-12 public schools. Florida's Wage and Fringe Benefit Comparability Report, for example, only examined salary and benefit data across Head Start programs.³⁵ And the creation of these reports does not appear to have led to reductions in the large salary disparities between Head Start teachers and certified teachers in K-12 public schools. Another provision required the Office of Head Start (OHS) to establish a system

for measuring the quality of adult-child interactions in Head Start classrooms.³⁶ OHS responded by adopting the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation tool used to evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions across three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. CLASS is now part of federal monitoring reviews for all Head Start programs. Since 2012, programs that fall below minimum thresholds on any of the three CLASS domains are required to compete to retain their funding. This has in turn led programs to focus on building teachers' knowledge and skills related to the adult-child interactions that CLASS measures.

The 2007 reauthorization also redesigned the Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) system, which is the primary source of professional development resources for Head Start staff. It authorized the secretary of Health and Human Services to dedicate up to 3 percent of total Head Start funding “for the purposes of improving program quality” and created a network of six National Centers and a state-based system of T/TA support.³⁷ Half of T/TA resources go to programs to support staff training, professional development, and ongoing program improvement, and the reauthorization defined the purposes for which programs could use this funding, including ensuring that staff met the new qualification requirements.³⁸ As a result, many programs used T/TA funds to help their staff earn bachelor's degrees.

Figure 1

History of Head Start Teacher Quality Standards



Results of the 2007 Reauthorization

Results at the National Level

Despite the challenges detailed in the previous section, Head Start met the bachelor's degree requirement and achieved the 50 percent goal ahead of schedule. By 2011, 52 percent of Head Start lead teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher.³⁹ As of 2015, 74 percent of Head Start lead teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁰ It is rare for a federal law to engender such dramatic change in a short period of time—particularly without additional funding and in a large and diffuse program with more than 1,600 grantees.

But while the bachelor's degree requirement succeeded in ensuring that Head Start teachers obtained higher credentials, it did not alleviate additional problems plaguing the Head Start workforce. Salaries remain incredibly low. In fact, in 20 states, a Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree makes less money today than they would have in 2007, taking into account inflation. In 2016, most Head Start lead teachers continue to earn significantly less than kindergarten teachers and now earn less than state-funded pre-k teachers as well. The average Head Start lead teacher with a bachelor's degree earns \$31,489 and the average lead teacher with an advanced degree earns \$42,128.⁴¹ In comparison, the average pre-k teacher in a public school program earns \$44,521⁴² and the average elementary or secondary teacher in the U.S. earns \$56,383.⁴³

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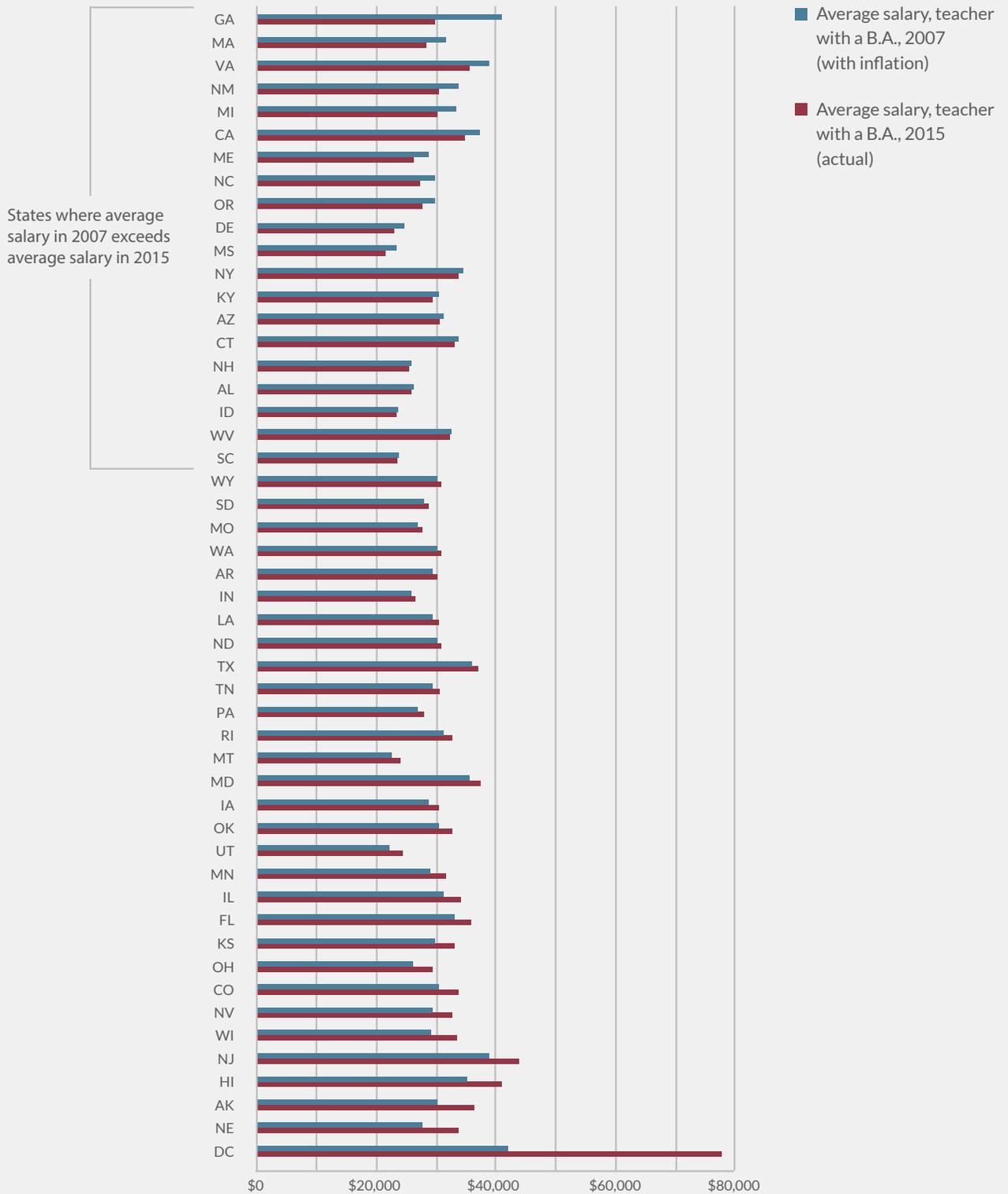
Many advocates who pushed for a bachelor's degree requirement believed increased credentials would lead to higher salaries. The bachelor's requirement was seen as the first step in professionalizing the Head Start workforce and ensuring early childhood educators would receive rewards for higher education. Speaking during the conference committee for the reauthorization, Senator Kennedy stated: "We commit to confronting the persistent challenge of compensating Head Start teachers as the professionals that they are. Head Start teachers earn half the salary of kindergarten teachers, and turnover is about 11 percent per year."⁴⁴ Early education advocates also hoped overall Head Start spending would increase. But overall spending levels actually fell in fiscal year 2008. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), in 2009, provided an infusion of funding for Head Start, including a 4.9 percent cost-of-living increase for Head Start staff.⁴⁵ Subsequent appropriations in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 have provided modest cost-of-living increases (none exceeding 2 percent), but not enough to meaningfully increase Head Start teachers' pay.

Head Start staff salaries are set at the individual program level, not by federal policy, and in theory individual programs can choose to change their budgets to increase teacher salaries. But doing so without increased funding would, in most cases, require serving fewer children—something most programs are not willing to do. In a context where Head Start only serves half of all eligible children, cutting the number of children served to pay teachers higher salaries is hard to justify.

Did the bachelor's degree requirement improve the quality of Head Start teaching? There is some evidence that the quality of teaching in Head Start classrooms has improved since the 2007 reauthorization. The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) observes a sample of Head Start classrooms using two quality measures—the Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scale—Revised (ECERS-R) and the CLASS assessment, described above. Data from both measures suggests that the quality of Head Start teaching has improved since 2006. Average scores on the two ECERS-R domains most associated with quality of instruction—Teaching and Interactions, and Provisions for Learning—increased from 2006 to 2014, and these gains were both statistically significant and substantively meaningful. Moreover, the percentage of Head Start classrooms scoring in the "inadequate" and "minimal" ranges of these measures declined substantially from 2006 to 2014, while the percentage rated "good or excellent" quadrupled. CLASS data show a similar trend of improvement. The 2006 FACES study collected data on only one of three CLASS domains, the Instructional Support domain, which is associated with children's cognitive development in early childhood settings. From 2006 to 2014, the average CLASS Instructional Support score rose from 1.9 to 2.4, a statistically significant increase, and the percentage of Head Start classrooms with low CLASS Instructional Support scores decreased by over 20 percent.⁴⁶ The percentage of Head Start classrooms scoring in the high range of the Emotional Support domain of CLASS also increased from 2009 to 2014.⁴⁷

Figure 2

Head Start Average Teacher Salary, 2007 compared to 2015



Source: Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR)

Table 1 > Head Start Teacher Turnover, 2009–2015

	Number of classroom teachers who left	Percentage of classroom teachers who left
2009	5,079	11.7
2010	4,496	10
2011	5,104	11.5
2012	5,690	12.8
2013	6,325	14.5
2014	6,440	15.5
2015	6,999	16.5

Source: Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR)

While these data suggest that the quality of teaching in Head Start classrooms is improving, however, they do not explain why. It seems likely that the increase in the percentage of teachers with bachelor’s degrees led to improvements in Head Start classroom quality, but it’s also possible that other factors, such as changes in curricula or an increased focus on adult-child interactions as a result of inclusion of CLASS in program monitoring reviews, also contributed to these changes.

Turnover among Head Start teachers has also increased during this time period. At the time of the 2007 reauthorization, Head Start teacher turnover was 11 percent annually. In the last eight years, turnover has increased to 16.5 percent.⁴⁸ Among Head Start teachers who leave, 33 percent report leaving for higher compensation.⁴⁹ For the last three years, Head Start has lost over 6,000 teachers during each school year, and this only reflects teachers who leave during the school year.⁵⁰ As with improvements in quality, increases in turnover cannot necessarily be attributed to the bachelor’s requirement. Turnover in ECE has been high for decades, hovering at 30 percent a year.⁵¹ Head Start’s turnover is notably lower but can likely be explained by similar factors. Teacher turnover creates costs and operational challenges for programs, forcing them to replace a large number of staff each year, and can also undermine the formation of lasting, stable relationships between teachers and children, which research shows support social-emotional development.⁵² Rising turnover rates illustrate the challenge of maintaining program-level teacher continuity without competitive salaries.

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Results at the State and Program Level

National data on Head Start teacher credentials, compensation, and turnover mask broad variation across states and providers. Reviewing this variation can help shed light on the complex relationships between these factors and other state and program-level policies and practices.

Degrees

The percentage of teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher varies considerably by program auspice. Head Start programs can be run by many types of organizations, including school systems, community action agencies, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations,⁵³ tribal governments, and charter schools. As illustrated in Figure 3, in the aggregate, all grantee types—with the exception of tribal governments—report at least 50 percent of teachers with bachelor's degrees (there are still variations at the individual program level). Head Starts run by school systems report the highest percentage of teachers with a bachelor's or higher (86 percent). Many, though not all, school systems offer higher salaries for pre-k teachers, including those teaching in Head Start, and hire only certified teachers. Head Starts run by government agencies also have a high percentage of teachers with bachelor's degrees (78 percent).

Tribal Head Start programs and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs have experienced particular challenges in attracting and retaining teachers with bachelor's degrees. Migrant Head Start has 50 percent of teachers with bachelor's degrees; Tribal Head Start has 39 percent of teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher.

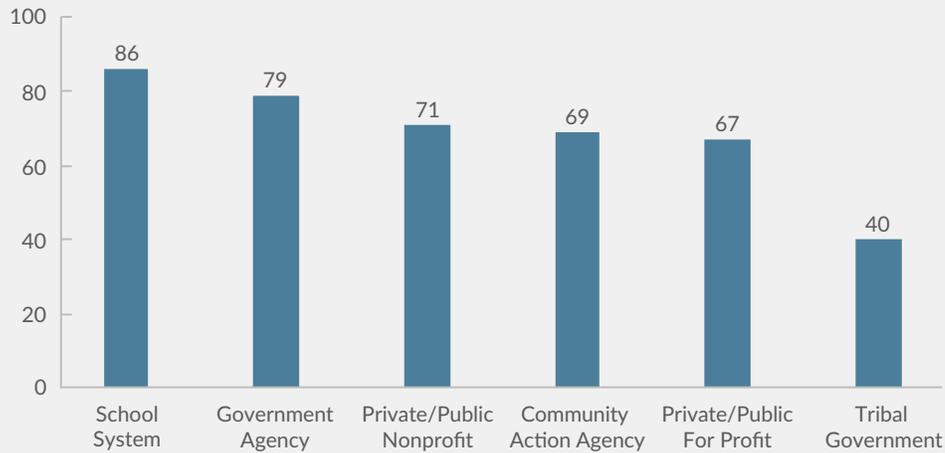
As shown in Figure 5, in 47 states and Washington, D.C., more than 50 percent of Head Start teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher.

There are few clear explanations for differences in degree attainment between states. Most notably, eight of the ten states with the lowest percentage of teachers with bachelor's degrees—and all three states where less than half of teachers hold bachelor's—have high concentrations of Head Starts administered by tribal governments.⁵⁴ But there do not appear to be other correlations between the prevalence of different types of Head Start grantees in a state and the percentage of Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees.

It's possible that the infrastructure that some states have created to help pre-k teachers earn bachelor's degrees may also help Head Start teachers earn increased credentials. The ten states with the highest percentage of Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher all have state-funded pre-k programs.⁵⁵ Six of these ten states require teachers in their public pre-k programs to have bachelor's degrees,⁵⁶ and five have instituted scholarship programs to help pre-k teachers pursuing higher education.⁵⁷ But seven of

Figure 3

Percentage of Lead Teachers with a B.A. Degree or Higher, by Grantee Type



Source: Head Start PIR, 2014–2015

the ten states with the lowest percentage of Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher also have state-funded pre-k programs, although many of these states have very small pre-k programs.⁵⁸ Three of these seven states—Arizona, New Mexico, and Washington—do not require teachers in their pre-k programs to have bachelor's degrees. Arizona and New Mexico are also two of the states, along with Alaska, where fewer than half of Head Start teachers have bachelor's degrees.

Salaries

There are also major salary disparities across states.

Because individual providers set Head Start teacher compensation, looking at variations at the state level may not truly uncover what is going on at the individual program level. Additionally, since data isn't available about full compensation (including benefits and pensions), salary information does not provide a full picture of state-level working conditions. But state-level salary information can help to identify relationships between Head Start teacher compensation and other state ecosystem factors. Early childhood education teachers in general receive very low compensation. Head Start teachers make more money than other ECE workers but less than teachers in K-12, and additionally less than most other college-educated workers. As shown in Figure 6, in 29 states, a Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree makes less than \$31,000 a year.⁵⁹ In five states, a Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree makes less than \$25,000 a year.⁶⁰ Additionally,

Turnover

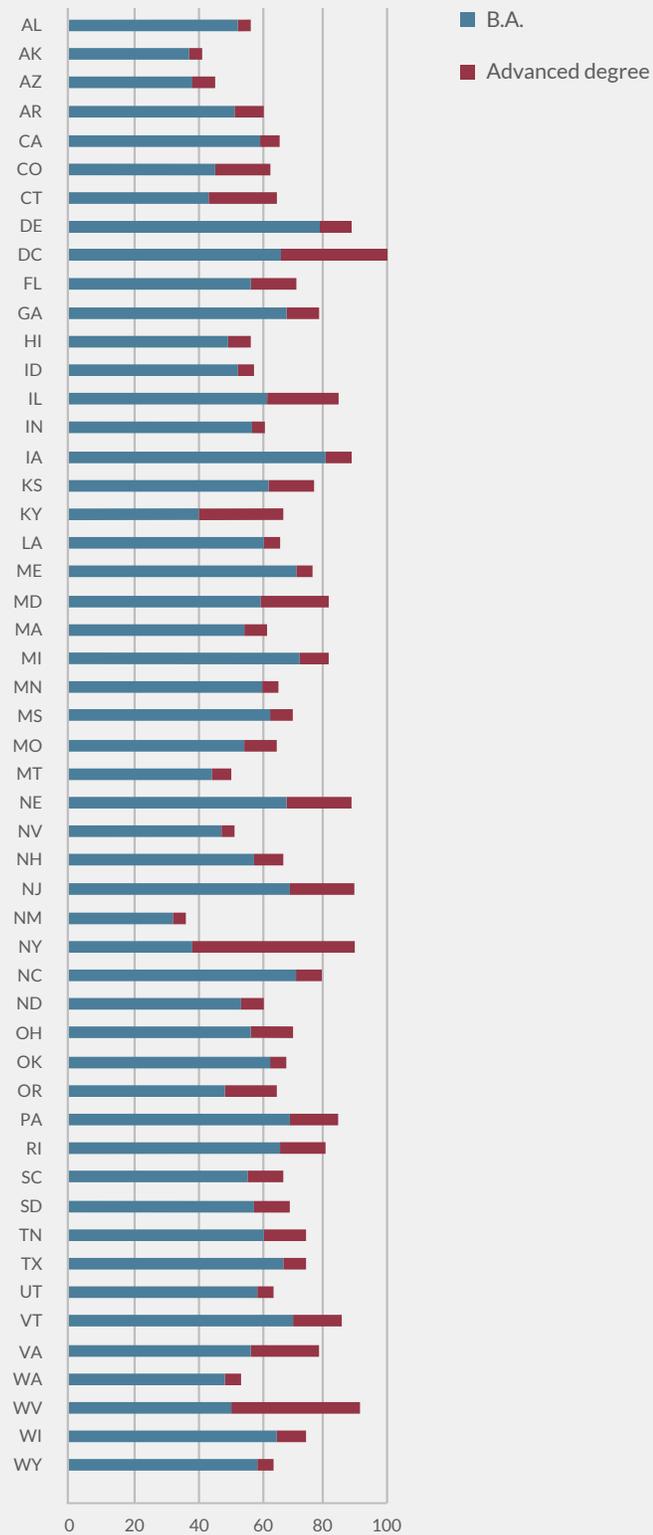
Turnover also varies considerably across the states. Twenty-eight states have teacher turnover greater than 20 percent.⁶²

There are few obvious relationships between turnover and other factors, such as presence of state-funded pre-k or percentage of Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees. As illustrated in Figure 8, there is more turnover in the states with the lowest salaries and less turnover in the states with the highest salaries, but the correlation is not strong.

Turnover among Head Start teachers does appear to be highest, however, in states with large disparities in compensation between Head Start teachers and public elementary school teachers. New York, Connecticut, and Delaware, for example, all have much higher turnover than average. In these states, a Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree could potentially double her salary if she becomes a kindergarten teacher.⁶³ This demonstrates the importance of considering early childhood workforce policies in the context of the larger ecosystem of employment options for early childhood teachers, including those in elementary schools.

Figure 5

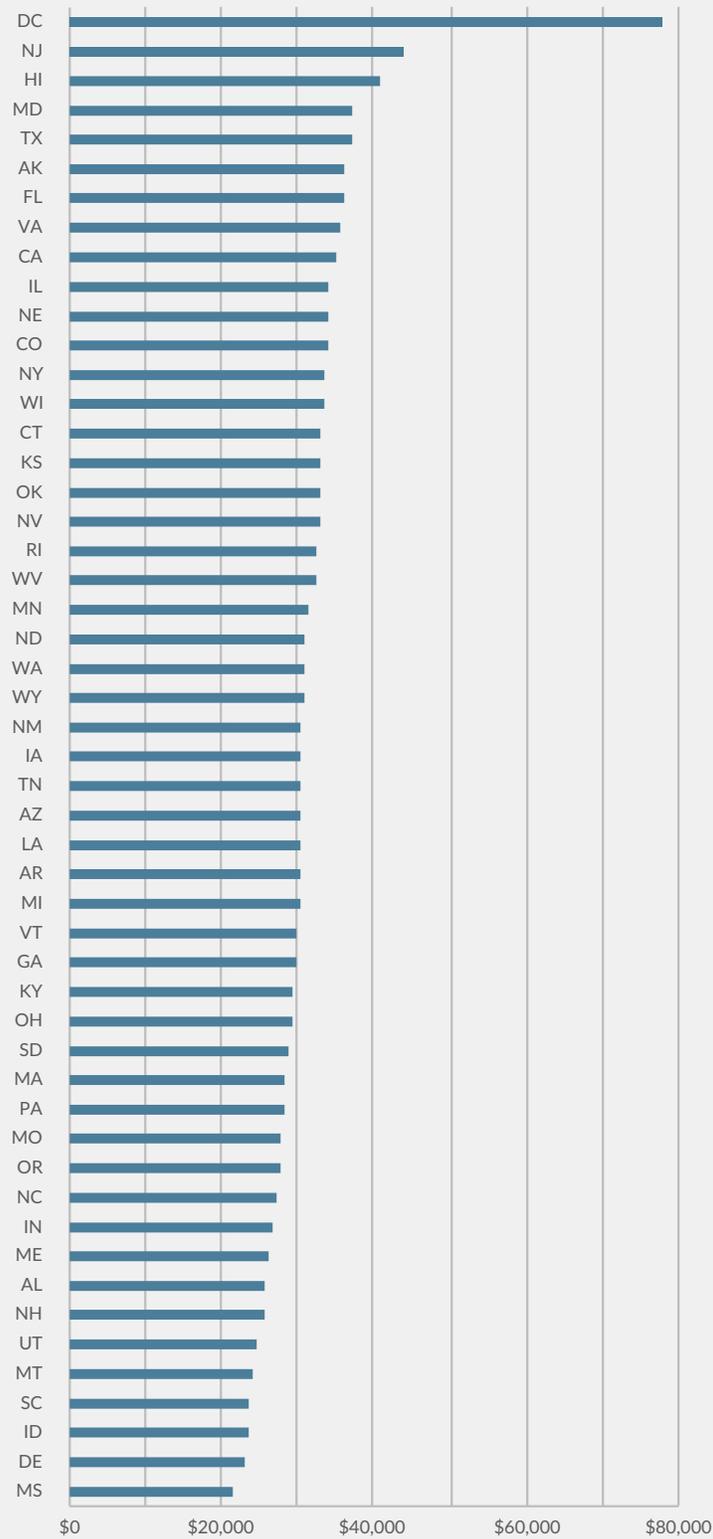
Percentage of Lead Teachers with a B.A. Degree or Higher in 2015, by State



Source: Head Start PIR, 2014–2015

Figure 6

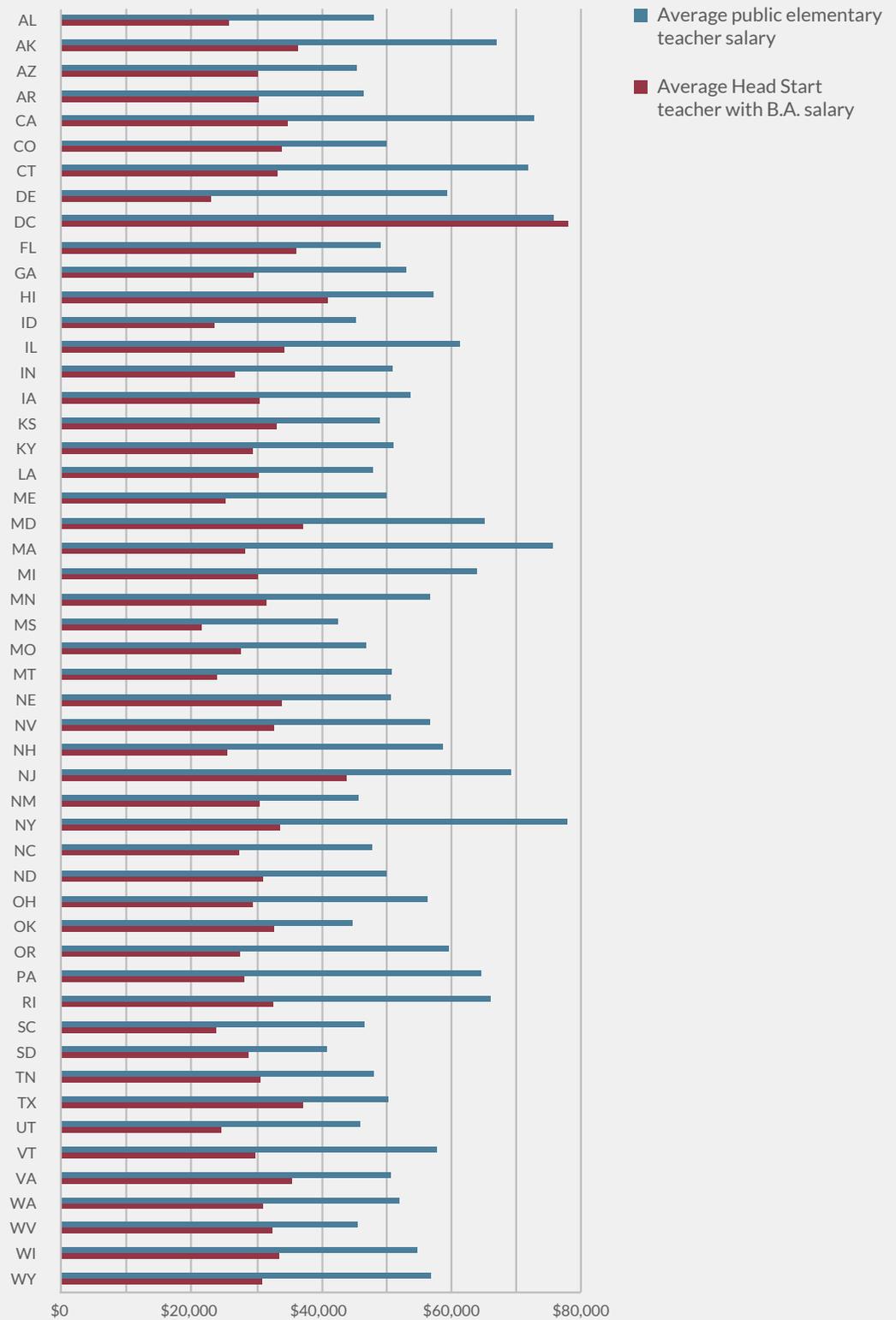
Average Salary of Head Start Teachers with a B.A. Degree in 2015, by State



Source: Head Start PIR, 2014-2015

Figure 7

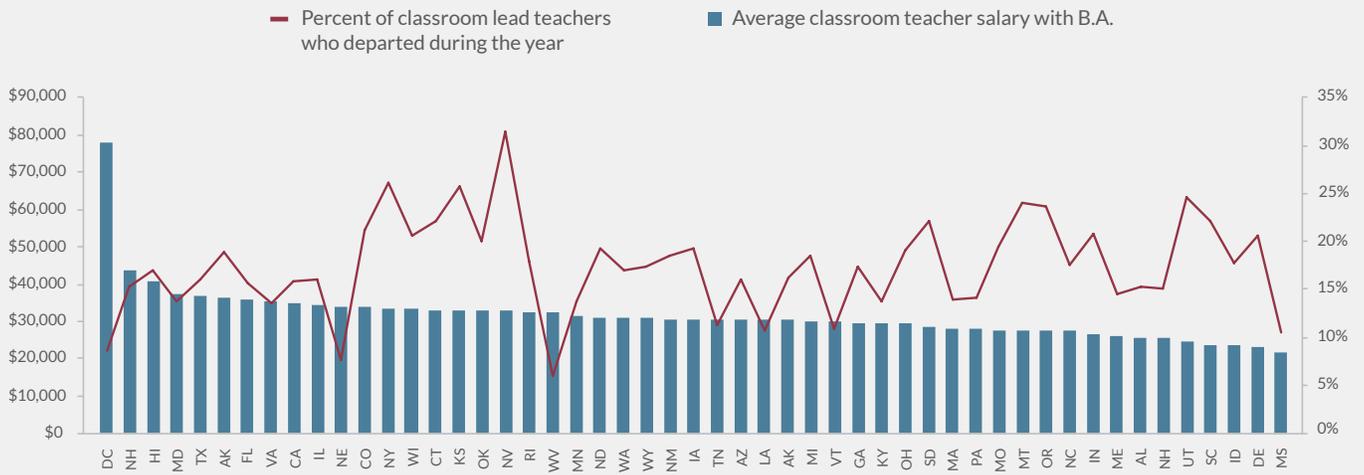
Average Head Start Teacher Salary Compared to Average Public Elementary School Teacher Salary in 2015, by State



Sources: Head Start PIR, 2014–2015; National Education Association, Rankings of the States 2015 and Estimates of School Statistics 2016

Figure 8

Average Head Start Teacher Salary Compared to Teacher Turnover in 2015, by State



Source: Head Start PIR, 2014–2015

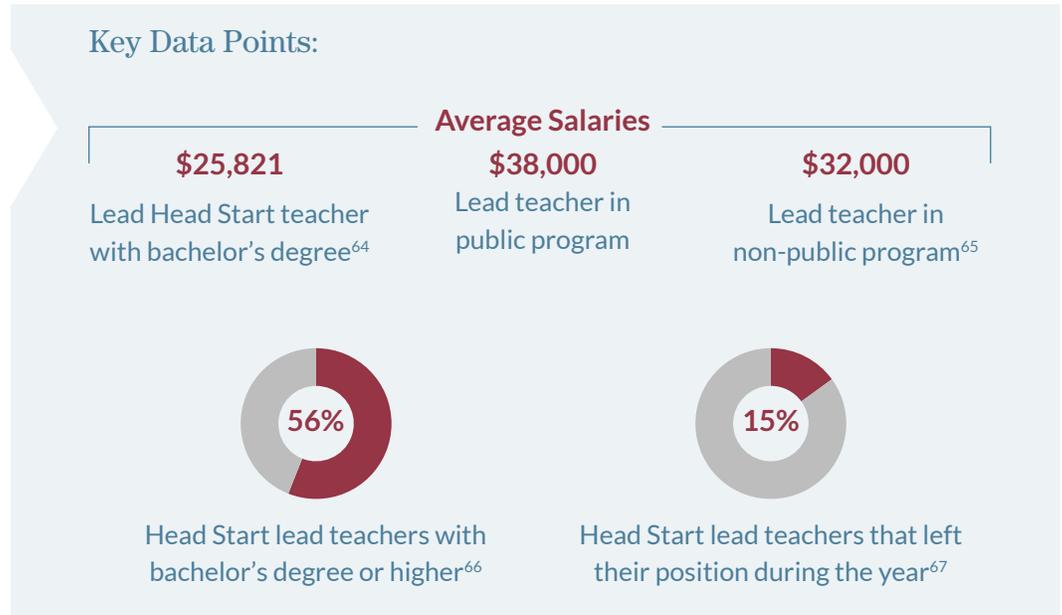
State Case Studies

Alabama | New Jersey | New York | Washington, D.C

Because Head Start is a direct federal to local program, states have no formal role in setting Head Start teacher compensation or education requirements. But data suggest that state context plays a role in shaping the pool of teachers available to local Head Start programs, as well as the alternative employment options available to them. Moreover, as state-funded pre-k and other early childhood programs have expanded, many Head Start programs have combined federal Head Start funds with state resources, in order to serve more children or improve program quality.

Looking more closely at what is happening in individual states can help to illuminate how changes in a state's broader early childhood landscape can impact the Head Start workforce. State pre-k programs and efforts to build early childhood workforce infrastructure can benefit Head Start programs, but competition for talent with state-funded pre-k or public schools can create challenges for Head Start programs. The four state case studies that follow illustrate the unique challenges facing Head Start as it tries to attract, retain, and develop skilled teachers in the context of evolving state early childhood landscapes. Each of these states has state-funded pre-k programs that have changed their ECE ecosystems, and thereby had impacts on Head Start teachers. Their experiences can inform both federal policies regarding the Head Start workforce and the design of state policies for the larger early childhood workforce.

Alabama



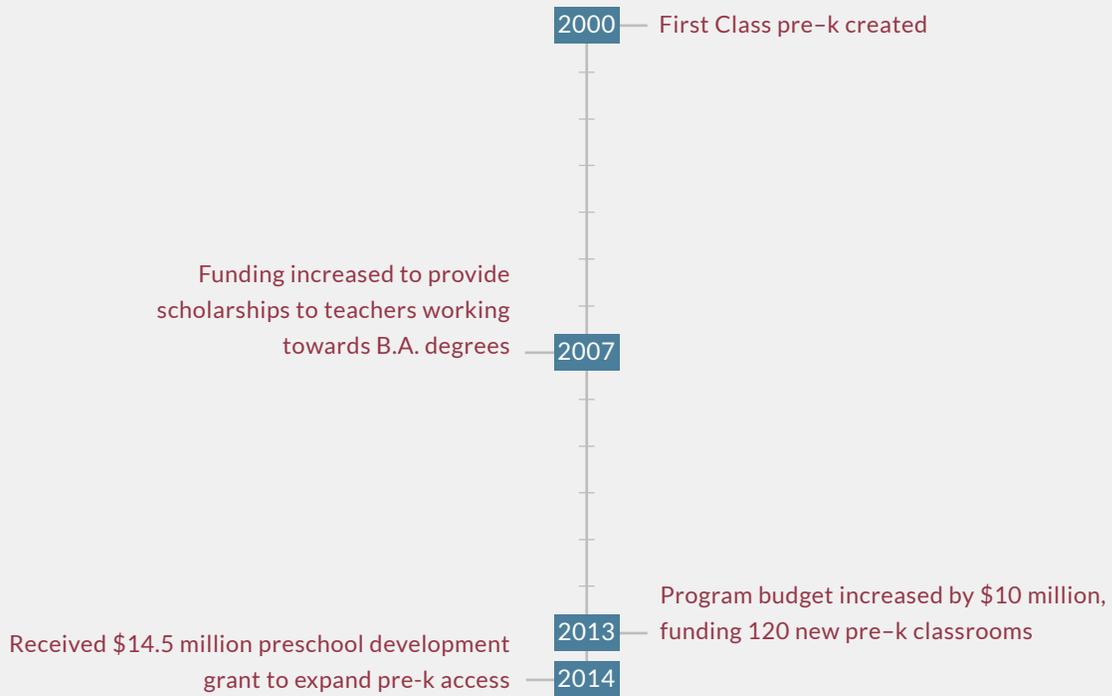
The early childhood education landscape in Alabama has changed dramatically in recent years, impacting Head Start programs operating in the state. First Class, the state pre-k program for four-year-olds, was created in 2000 and has gone through a number of incremental expansions. By 2017, 25 percent of Alabama's four-year-olds will have access to a First Class pre-k classroom.⁶⁸

The expansion of First Class pre-k has forced Head Start programs to compete for qualified staff. Because First Class programs typically pay more than Head Start, many programs are losing teachers to First Class programs. Alabama has made efforts to address Head Start teacher salary disparities, providing Head Start programs that offer First Class pre-k state funding to increase teacher salaries. As a result, Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees who work in centers that offer First Class pre-k make \$36,000 or more, well above the state average for Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree. But the ongoing incremental expansion of First Class has created increasing demand for pre-k teachers without commensurate increases in supply, leading to increased competition for trained pre-k teachers and higher teacher turnover. "We used to talk about braiding resources and funds," comments one veteran Head Start provider. "Now, we often cannibalize each other."⁶⁹

The experience in Alabama also highlights two things: the importance of benefits to attracting and retaining skilled Head Start teachers, and the difficulties that some grantees face in offering them. Head Start programs that are not part of a school district or other government agency often struggle to find affordable health and retirement benefit options for their staff.

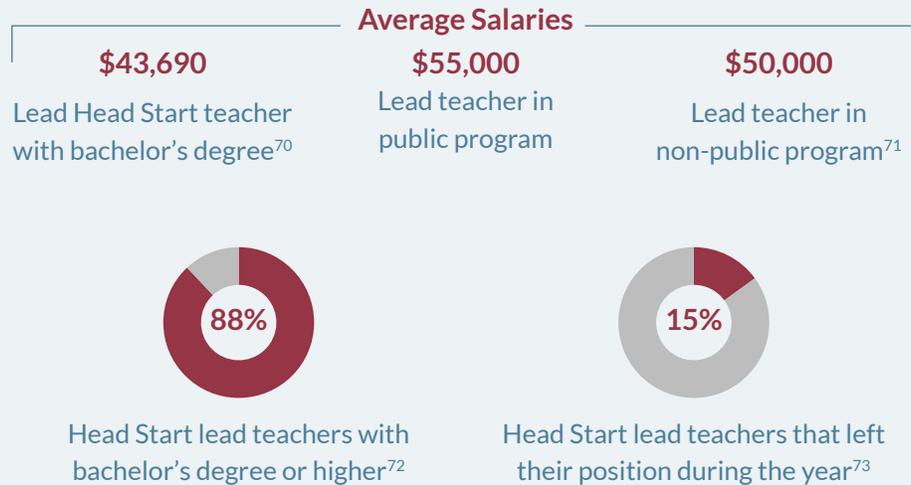
Examining the effects of growing First Class pre-k on Head Start programs demonstrates the need for state policymakers to think strategically about how to minimize turnover and offset salary disparities by using state pre-k funding to increase Head Start teacher salaries. At the same time, it highlights the challenges of cultivating a skilled workforce for growing pre-k programs, and the potential negative effect on other early childhood options if policymakers do not have a concerted strategy to grow the supply of skilled teachers.

Figure 9 > Timeline of First Class Pre-k Expansion in Alabama



New Jersey

Key Data Points:



Head Start in New Jersey has benefited from the state's well-developed Abbott pre-k system and focus on professional development for early childhood educators. In 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered the state to provide universal pre-k in 31 of the state's poorest districts. The Abbott districts (named after the school finance litigation that led to the court's ruling) receive additional state funding to provide full-day pre-k for three- and four-year-olds. New Jersey provides pre-k through a diverse delivery model, serving students in private child care centers and Head Start agencies as well as public schools.

The court required Abbott-funded pre-k programs to employ teachers with a bachelor's degree and state certification to teach grades pre-k through 3rd. At the time, such a credential did not exist in New Jersey. The state provides grants to higher education institutions to incentivize them to grow programs focused on early childhood education.⁷⁴ New Jersey also provides scholarships of up to \$5,000 per year to help preschool teachers cover tuition and fees, release time for teachers to take classes during the workday, and a limited pool of funds to help centers cover the cost of substitutes.⁷⁵ Head Start programs also benefit from the state's program incentivizing early childhood educators to obtain degrees. New Jersey's investments in preschool teacher preparation capacity and scholarships may partly explain why it has a higher percentage of Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher than all but two states.

New Jersey policy also requires districts to provide equal compensation to teachers at community-based providers and Head Starts providing Abbott pre-k. Thirteen of the 23 Head Start grantees in New Jersey are located in Abbott districts.⁷⁶ As a result of this policy, the average Head Start teacher in New Jersey who receives a bachelor's degree receives a \$20,000 jump in salary.

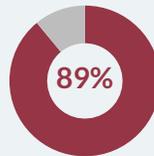
Even with comparable salaries, New Jersey still has relatively high teacher turnover, reaching 15 percent a year. Leaders in New Jersey attribute this turnover to a lack of comparable benefits. Head Start teachers in community-based organizations do not receive the same pension benefits or health insurance as district teachers. Therefore, many teachers who obtain a bachelor's degree while working at Head Start leave to teach in district pre-k.

New Jersey's experience illustrates that equitable compensation and state efforts to help pre-k teachers obtain degrees can have a major impact on Head Start degree attainment. It also shows how a blended funding model can help ensure resources for comparable salaries. Ensuring Head Start teachers receive comparable salaries reduces turnover in New Jersey, but comparable salaries are not always enough to keep teachers in Head Start programs when pre-k offers better benefits.

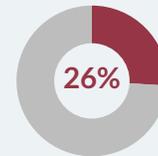
New York

Key Data Points:

Average Salary
\$33,604
Head Start teacher with bachelor's degree⁷⁷



Head Start lead teachers with bachelor's degree or higher⁷⁸



Head Start lead teachers that left their position during the year⁷⁹

Note: There is no public data on the average salary of a lead teacher in public pre-k⁸⁰

New York has historically used a diverse delivery model for publicly funded preschool. While this approach has allowed a variety of providers—including Head Start grantees, community-based organizations (CBOs), and public schools—to offer preschool, it has also resulted in disparate qualification requirements across programs and significant salary disparities.

New York Universal Pre-k Program (UPK), created in 1998 to provide half-day services to four-year-olds, required school districts to subcontract a minimum of 10 percent of funds to CBOs.⁸¹ Per state law, teachers in CBOs were held to different education standards than those in public school settings and compensated at lower rates. A 2006 survey of some NYC early childhood programs revealed that CBOs experienced significant retention and turnover challenges. According to this survey, teachers generally were compensated at significantly lower rates—as much as 60% less than their school-based colleagues.⁸² Additionally 23% of NYC CBOs in the survey reported losing teachers to pre-k programs in district schools.⁸³ Some directors perceived that their programs became training grounds where teachers worked until they earned state early childhood teaching credentials and could move onto higher-paying jobs in public schools.⁸⁴

The 2014 introduction of the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program and adoption of Pre-K for All in New York City created both new opportunities and challenges in this landscape. New York City made addressing workforce issues a top priority from the beginning of expansion. As a result, New York City has made progress in improving compensation for certified teachers in community-based Pre-K for All programs.

Between 2013 and 2015, NYC reached full-scale in its full-day pre-k program through a combination of converting thousands of pre-k seats from half-day to full-day seats and adding thousands of brand new seats.⁸⁵ These seats are delivered in a variety of settings, including district schools; Pre-K Centers, a model that the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) created to meet demand in all communities during the expansion; community-based providers known as New York City Early Education Centers (NYCEECs); and charter schools. NYCEECs include programs that only offer pre-k as well as programs that offer pre-K and other publicly funded programs including Head Start, and/or child care. During the Pre-K for All expansion, the NYC DOE took several steps to ensure quality across all settings, including requiring programs to meet one set of citywide program quality standards and providing all programs with professional learning and on-site coaching support tailored to their needs.⁸⁶ In the area of compensation, the NYC DOE sought to offer more competitive salaries for certified teachers in contracted programs to attract and retain top talent. The NYC DOE also took steps to address the salary disparities built into the diverse delivery model. At the time of Pre-K for All rollout, teachers in district-run programs were compensated based on the unionized pay scale for NYC DOE K-12 teachers,⁸⁷ while teachers at community-based organizations received salaries set by individual programs, which remain significantly lower than NYC DOE salaries. In 2014, pre-k teachers in CBOs earned starting salaries of \$36,000, whereas teachers in public schools earned starting salaries of \$49,908.⁸⁸

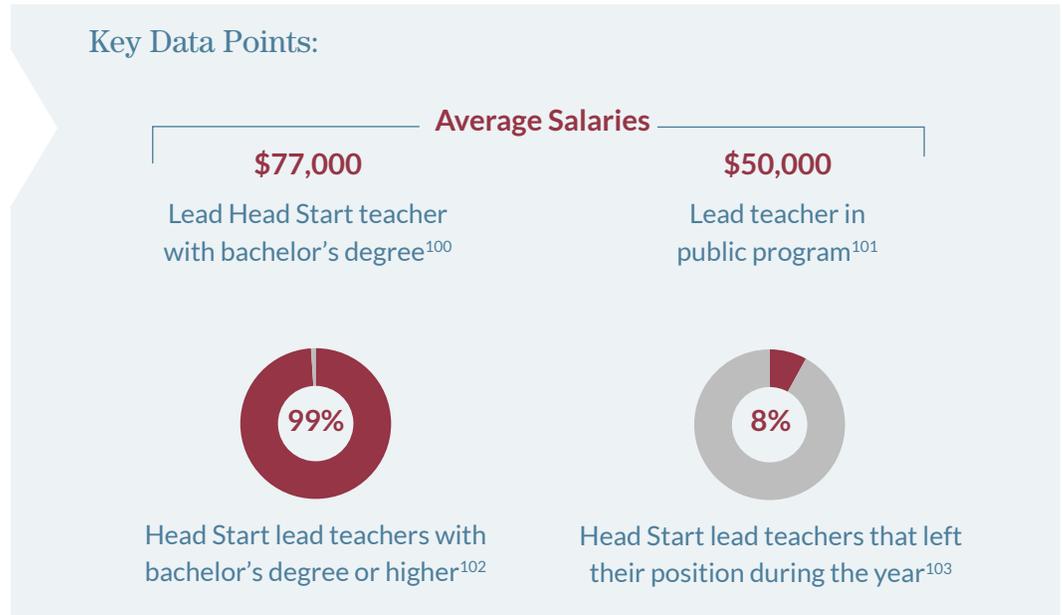
In April of 2014, the NYC DOE adopted a program to provide funding to CBOs that wanted to increase salaries for certified pre-k teachers with bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.⁸⁹ Certified teachers working at participating CBOs were eligible to make \$44,000 with a BA and \$50,000 with a MA degree.⁹⁰ In spring of 2015, the NYC DOE introduced a second mechanism to address existing funding disparities.⁹¹ Through the Lead Teacher Incentive Program, new teachers earned a \$2,500 signing bonus for choosing employment at CBOs and returning teachers received a \$3,500 incentive for returning to their CBO program.⁹² The NYC DOE also provides NYCEEC programs with teacher recruitment assistance. Finally, in the spring of 2016, a new union contract increased salaries for some additional CBO teachers to the same \$44,000 or \$50,000 salary schedule.⁹³

These efforts represent progress on a complex issue even though they have not fully alleviated the funding disparities between teachers in CBO programs and in school district-operated programs. While CBO teachers with a master's can earn \$50,000, a teacher with a bachelor's and initial certificate in a district-run program earns \$51,649 and a teacher with a master's and certification earns \$58,060.⁹⁴ These teachers can earn up to \$97,130 with a master's degree and 20 years of experience.⁹⁵

New York is somewhat unique in that all school-based pre-k teachers and many of those in CBOs are represented by unions. But the experience in New York illustrates that union representation is not in itself a guarantee of equitable compensation and benefits for early childhood teachers. NYC DOE teachers are represented by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), but CBO teachers belong to either District Council 1707's Local 205, which represents day care employees, or the union's Local 95, which represents Head Start employees.⁹⁶ For over ten years, Local 95 workers did not receive any salary raises.⁹⁷ NYC DOE teachers represented by UFT receive high-quality health insurance through their union. Teachers in CBO-run programs can also receive insurance through their unions, but many opt out due to the high cost and lower quality of insurance offered.⁹⁸ Local 205 successfully advocated for a more affordable plan in the new contract.⁹⁹

The expansion of publicly funded pre-k in New York City has benefited early childhood teachers by providing a wider range of employment options. This has allowed some teachers to improve their compensation by moving to public schools, or to find jobs that are closer to their homes. While this increased competition is good for early educators, however, it has reinforced inequities across employment settings, and may make it more difficult for some types of providers to hire and retain staff. New York City's experience following the roll-out of Pre-K for All reveals that in a market with a plethora of teaching options, Head Start—along with other CBO-operated early childhood programs—must offer competitive salaries and comparable benefits to retain qualified teachers. New York City's experience also reveals that grantees and districts can make important strides in this area with available resources, even if they cannot completely address the problem.

Washington, D.C.



Washington, D.C., public schools have offered preschool since the 1960s, and the district has provided universal pre-k to all three- and four-year-olds since 2008.¹⁰⁴ D.C. offers pre-k through a mixed delivery model that includes D.C. public schools, charter schools, and community-based providers.¹⁰⁵

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is one of three Head Start grantees in the district, but serves 94 percent of all Head Start preschoolers. Head Start programs run by DCPS enroll more than 5,000 preschool-age children, or about 40 percent of all children enrolled in publicly funded preschool in D.C.¹⁰⁶ In 2010, DCPS fully merged its Head Start and pre-k programs into a single school-wide model.¹⁰⁷ This means that Head Start programs in D.C. public schools receive both D.C. per-pupil funding for pre-k and Head Start funding. Head Start teacher salaries are paid for with the local D.C. funding, and Head Start funding provides comprehensive supports. The relatively high level of funding in D.C. allows DCPS to set competitive salaries for Head Start teachers—comparable to those paid to other K-12 teachers in DCPS—which attracts teachers with higher education levels. Almost 100 percent of Head Start teachers in D.C. have a bachelor's degree or higher. D.C. also has one of the lowest turnover rates for Head Start teachers.

D.C.'s example illustrates that competitive salaries and benefits can increase the pool of qualified pre-k teachers and help ensure teachers who are interested in early childhood education and highly skilled are not lured away by higher-paying elementary school jobs. It also demonstrates the benefits of blended funding in ensuring competitive salaries and maintaining workforce stability.

Head Start Workforce in an Evolving Landscape

The ECE workforce landscape has changed dramatically since Head Start was last reauthorized in 2007.

The ECE workforce landscape has changed dramatically since Head Start was last reauthorized in 2007. A number of states have adopted new pre-k programs, including Alaska, Washington, D.C., Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, and Rhode Island, while other states have greatly expanded their pre-k offerings, including Alabama, Iowa, Nebraska, New York, and North Carolina.¹⁰⁸ But program cuts in other states have largely counterbalanced this growth. Since 2010, state pre-k programs have consistently served about 29 percent of four-year-olds nationally. (Head Start, by comparison, serves roughly 9 percent of four-year-olds and 8 percent of three-year-olds, and Early Head Start serves 1.7 percent of infants and toddlers.)¹⁰⁹ In addition, a number of cities and municipalities have adopted pre-k programs including Boston, San Antonio, Denver, Seattle, and New York City.

Spurred on by President Obama's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), states have also invested in building early childhood infrastructure and systems to integrate fragmented early childhood programs. Many of these efforts have addressed the early childhood workforce. Forty-one states and the District of Columbia now have Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).¹¹⁰ A QRIS is a methodical approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early childhood education programs,¹¹¹ by defining multiple levels of quality between basic licensing quality and high quality. Many of these systems tie higher star or rating levels to higher levels of teacher credentials, creating incentives for programs to increase teachers' education levels.¹¹² While the development of QRIS systems is a crucial first step in trying to improve the ECE workforce, few states have made true headway in integrating critical aspects of the ECE work environment into their QRIS systems, such as paid time in professional development, paid planning time, or salary schedule and benefits.¹¹³

States have also created ECE workforce registries and professional development systems, which track data on educational attainment, professional certification, licensure, employment history, and professional development for early childhood educators across multiple settings. As of 2016, at least 42 states were implementing or building early childhood workforce registries.¹¹⁴ Currently, only 14 of these registries are truly comprehensive, including all licensed programs in the state.¹¹⁵ Although these systems vary, many allow teachers and employers to identify professional development opportunities, document completion of professional development and training, plan for career growth, and access scholarships and other supports to pursue higher education.¹¹⁶ These resources can also help Head Start teachers improve their education and skills.

Head Start programs have often been left out of state systems-building efforts.

Yet Head Start programs have often been left out of these state systems-building efforts. Currently, 28 states allow Head Start programs to participate in their workforce registries,¹¹⁷ but only nine states require Head Start programs to participate.¹¹⁸ Thirty-seven states include Head Start programs in their QRIS systems but in most of these states, Head Start participation is voluntary and there are few incentives for Head Start programs to participate.¹¹⁹ Head Start state collaboration directors and QRIS administrators detail a variety of reasons that Head Start programs don't participate, including: programs undergo a significant level of monitoring through the HHS triennial review and see QRIS monitoring as redundant, and programs perceive few benefits for participating.¹²⁰ Some states have also chosen to focus limited QRIS resources on child care providers that have fewer resources and are subject to less oversight than Head Start programs.

Developments in the Knowledge Base

The research base on early childhood teacher quality has also evolved in the last nine years. New research has challenged the previous understanding that bachelor's degrees and higher education are associated with improved teaching quality and child outcomes in early childhood settings. One influential study of pre-k programs across six states found little evidence of a relationship between children's education outcomes and their teachers' educational attainment.¹²¹

This research does not outweigh the larger body of evidence showing that early childhood educators need specialized knowledge and skills to support children's learning, or that higher levels of education and training are associated with better quality and child outcomes. But it does raise questions about the quality of preparation in existing early childhood teacher training programs¹²² and the relative roles of pre-service training and on-the-job professional development for supporting teachers' knowledge and skills.

Figure 10

Professional Development Models that Have Been Proven to Improve Teacher-Child Interactions

Head Start REDI Program

Utilizes manualized preschool curriculum, formal workshops, coaching, and in-class support.

Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI)

Utilizes face-to-face cohort training focused on learning to identify effective teacher-child interactions.

MyTeachingPartner (MTM)

Utilizes web-based one-to-one remote coaching.

Texas Early Education Model (TEEM)

Utilizes web-based training, progress monitoring and direct mentoring.

There are valid reasons to be concerned about the quality of training in early educator preparation programs.

There are valid reasons to be concerned about the quality of training in early educator preparation programs. Many were designed primarily to prepare students for research or other social service careers—not to teach.¹²³ Further, many pre-k teachers in school-based programs hold broad elementary credentials that authorize them to teach pre-k but don't provide specific training to work with young children. A recent study found that most preparation programs' courses of study failed to cover important knowledge and skills that teachers of young children need. For example, only 40 percent of preschool prep programs require a course in teaching preschool math.¹²⁴

At the same time, researchers and practitioners have recognized that ensuring quality teaching requires ongoing professional development and support, regardless of teachers' prior preparation. Studies have found that coaching and targeted professional development programs that allow teachers to see and label effective interactions can improve teachers' teacher-child interactions.¹²⁵

Recent research has also drawn attention to the persistent low pay and working conditions of early childhood workers.¹²⁶ The median hourly wage for child care workers is \$9.77,¹²⁷ and many don't receive health and retirement benefits or professional supports such as paid time for planning and professional development.¹²⁸ Teachers in Head Start are paid more than the typical child care worker, but, as noted above, their compensation levels remain far below the average for college-educator workers, or of teachers in K-12 public schools.

In light of this evidence, a recent National Academy of Medicine report recommends all early childhood educators have at least a bachelor's degree with specialized training and receive ongoing, job-embedded training and professional development supports.¹²⁹ This recommendation is based on the understanding that the work of teachers for young children requires knowledge and competencies as sophisticated as that of teachers in K-12 education. But recent research also suggests that requiring teachers to hold a bachelor's degree is, in itself, not sufficient to ensure the quality of teaching in Head Start or other early childhood classrooms. Improving the quality of early childhood teaching also requires attention to the quality of pre-service preparation for early childhood educators, ongoing support and professional development, and strategies for improving compensation.

Implications of New Head Start Performance Standards

In 2016, the Office of Head Start revised the Head Start Performance Standards, the regulations governing operation of Head Start programs. Numerous provisions throughout the standards have implications for the Head Start workforce. The revised performance standards incorporate the teacher qualification requirements in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, but do not otherwise increase or change requirements for Head Start teachers and assistant teachers. They do, however, establish new educational requirements for a number of other Head Start workers, including requirements for home visitor staff in home-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs, child development specialists for programs delivered in family child care settings, and Head Start directors.

The new performance standards also include new requirements for how programs develop and support teachers. Programs must establish systematic approaches to staff training and professional development that include strategies to provide coaching for education staff. At a minimum, these systems must assess strengths and needs for support for all education staff, provide intensive coaching to staff who would benefit from it, and provide research-based professional development for all other staff. This emphasis on coaching reflects research showing that ongoing, job-embedded professional development is far more effective than traditional "one shot" workshops in improving the quality of teaching practice. But consistently delivering this kind of coaching and support to staff in a way that leads to better teaching will require significant increases in program capacity.

Numerous other provisions of the performance standards, including new requirements for curriculum and use of data for ongoing continuous improvement, also have implications for the types of skills and knowledge that Head Start teachers need or the kind of supports that programs need to provide them. Programs that enroll dual language learner students will also need to hire staff who are fluent in children's home languages and build all teachers' knowledge and skills to support learning and development for dual language

learner students. Meeting these requirements will likely require building the supply of qualified teachers who are proficient in the range of languages that Head Start students speak. In the meantime, many programs will likely face difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified bilingual staff.

Other provisions have workforce implications that are significant, but hard to predict. Starting in 2019, at least half of Head Start pre-k programs must offer 1,020 hours of instruction—more than double the current minimum. By 2021, all Head Start pre-k programs must offer full-day programs. This requirement has implications for the demand for Head Start teachers, as well as for efforts to increase teacher compensation. The final rule estimates that transitioning all programs to full-day without reducing the number of children served would require hiring an additional 3,906 teachers. Given the difficulties that many Head Start grantees currently report in hiring and retaining qualified staff, finding sufficient qualified teachers to meet this need could prove challenging. If the new requirements are not fully funded, the Secretary of Education may choose to delay their implementation, or programs will need to reduce the number of children served, which could lead to lower demand for Head Start teachers. The new requirements also mean that, for the near future, incremental increases in Head Start funding will likely prioritize covering costs for a longer day, rather than increasing compensation. While these requirements reflect research showing that more time spent in early childhood programs is associated with greater learning gains for children, in the near term they may make it more difficult to raise compensation for Head Start teachers.

The new requirements also mean that, for the near future, incremental increases in Head Start funding will likely prioritize covering costs for a longer day, rather than increasing compensation.

Recommendations

Since the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, Head Start programs have dramatically increased the percentage of teachers with bachelor's degrees, but one in four Head Start teachers still holds less than a bachelor's degree. And Head Start teachers continue to earn less than state-funded pre-k and other public school teachers with similar credentials. Moreover, teacher qualifications, compensation, and turnover vary widely across individual grantees, types of grantees, and states, creating inequities in access to qualified teachers for some of our nation's most vulnerable youngsters. Experience over the past decade shows that Head Start programs are capable of increasing teacher qualifications in response to new requirements, but that these requirements alone may not be sufficient to ensure consistent, high-quality teaching across all Head Start programs; increase teacher compensation; or ensure equity for Head Start students and teachers.

Federal policymakers and local grantees should continue working to increase the qualifications and skills of Head Start teachers. But they must also consider the broader context in which Head Start teachers work, including compensation levels, quality of early childhood educator preparation programs, and how the broader early childhood landscape and K-12 teacher workforce trends affect the employment market for Head Start teachers. The following recommendations provide guidance on how state and federal policymakers and other stakeholders should navigate these competing factors to strengthen the Head Start workforce and improve quality and outcomes for Head Start students.

1 Provide equitable compensation and benefits to Head Start teachers.

- Compensate Head Start teachers on par with K-12 public school teachers
- Consider Head Start teachers' entire compensation package, including benefits in addition to salary
- Reduce barriers to blending funds
- Encourage programs to prioritize teacher compensation in budgeting decisions
- Prioritize compensation as much as other goals in future appropriations

If the goal is to truly raise the quality of Head Start teaching, compensation has to be increased to be commensurate with credentials. Competitive salaries that are commensurate with credentials reduce teacher turnover and attract more qualified teaching candidates. The case studies of New Jersey, New York, and Alabama demonstrate that benefits, along with salary, have a major impact on the stability of the workforce. Even with high salaries, relatively weaker benefits increase turnover.

Because Head Start teacher salaries are set by individual grantees, and not in federal or state policy, providing commensurate compensation and comparable benefits will require program-level action. Federal policymakers should not mandate specific compensation levels, but can issue guidance encouraging grantees to prioritize compensating their teachers on par with comparably qualified public school teachers, and ensure that regional offices apply consistent standards in reviewing how grantees budget for teacher compensation.

State examples show that blended funding offers a promising way to improve compensation for some Head Start teachers. The new performance standards make it easier for grantees to blend funding, which can provide additional resources that can increase teacher compensation. But some states continue to obstruct grantees from attempting to blend funding. States should remove policy and bureaucratic barriers that prevent grantees from blending funds.

Finally, future Head Start appropriations and reauthorization must prioritize compensation as much as other goals. The authors of the 2007 reauthorization recognized the importance of salaries, but funding to increase salaries was contingent on increasing appropriations. In most appropriation cycles since 2007, Congress and the administrations have chosen either not to increase Head Start funding, or to prioritize other goals, such as Early Head Start expansion and longer days. Future administration budgets and appropriations bills should prioritize funding for compensation at least as much as for other goals.

2 Include Head Start in state initiatives to build the early childhood workforce.

- Encourage collaboration between Head Start and other early childhood programs
- Integrate Head Start into state early childhood workforce systems

As advocates recognized in 2007, Head Start policy cannot ignore the changes in the broader field. Other early childhood initiatives, both state and locally driven, also impact the Head Start workforce.

Rather than setting up pre-k and Head Start programs to compete for children and teachers, state policies should support these programs to complement one another. Only a handful of states have pre-k programs that serve all four-year-olds, or even all low-income four-year-olds, and even fewer have programs that serve significant populations of three-year-olds. This means that, for the foreseeable future, Head Start and state pre-k must work together to meet the needs of children and families. When it comes to workforce, this means that, rather than focusing on the pre-k or child care workforce in isolation, states should establish policies and infrastructure that build the entire early childhood workforce, including Head Start teachers. States must also consider how pre-k expansion impacts Head Start programs, and take advantage of opportunities to allow Head Start grantees to combine pre-k and Head Start funds to raise teacher compensation, improve quality, or lengthen the school day and year.

As states build systems for tracking data on early childhood programs and the early childhood education workforce, they should ensure that Head Start programs and teachers are included in these systems, without placing undue or duplicative burdens on them. Head Start teachers should also be integrated into state workforce registries and scholarship programs.

3 Develop systemic approaches to improve preparation for early childhood teachers.

- Invest in cultivating the supply of ECE teacher preparation programs, including developing high-quality online and hybrid programs
- Develop coherent state systems and policies to monitor and ensure quality of ECE teacher preparation

Even as federal policymakers have increased credential requirements for Head Start workers, there has never been a coherent, national strategy to cultivate the teacher preparation infrastructure needed to enable teachers to meet those requirements. Although the evidence base on early childhood teacher preparation is very limited, the data and evidence we do have suggests that the quality of preparation offered by existing programs is at best highly varied. Many programs do not reflect current research

on children’s learning and development or ensure teachers have the competencies to effectively teach young children. Some regions, particularly rural areas, also continue to lack degree programs for early childhood educators.

The Departments of Health and Human Services and Education should jointly develop a coherent federal strategy for leveraging the resources of both agencies to cultivate the supply of high-quality early childhood teacher preparation programs—including high-quality hybrid and online programs to meet the needs of early educators in rural and other underserved areas. A future Higher Education Act or Head Start reauthorization could authorize a grant program, similar to the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant program authorized in Title II of the Higher Education Act, to support the development of high-quality early childhood teacher preparation programs. Head Start T/TA funds have also supported the development of model curricula and training resources that can be adopted by early childhood preparation programs, and federal policies should continue to support such efforts, as well as their adoption by states and higher education institutions. Congress and the administration should also make research on early childhood teacher preparation a priority for Head Start research funds, to build the base of knowledge for the field and identify effective practices.

State policymakers should also review the supply and quality of teacher preparation programs in their states, and, as they expand pre-k programs or increase requirements for pre-k teachers, take systematic actions to ensure that public higher education institutions offer sufficient quality preparation options to help teachers meet new requirements. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) outlined new ways State Education Agencies (SEAs) may use Title II, Part A funds to support the creation of outcomes-based training programs for early childhood educators.¹³⁰ As states craft ESSA plans, they should make sure to include programs for ECE educators in these efforts. Moreover, federal policies that support state systems-building and coordination efforts should allow states to use funds to adopt systematic approaches to cultivating the supply of qualified teachers for all programs.

4 Continue to support high-quality, ongoing, job-embedded professional development for Head Start teachers.

- Support research to further build understanding of what works in coaching and job-embedded professional development
- Support Head Start grantees to implement effective systems of coaching and professional development

The new performance standards, which require Head Start grantees to implement systems of coaching and professional development, provide an opportunity to improve the quality of professional development and ongoing support for Head Start staff—but only if programs implement these systems well. Federal officials should ensure that T/TA networks provide

support for programs to identify and implement effective coaching strategies, and should partner with philanthropic funders and states to help Head Start grantees access funds to build their capacity to deliver high-quality coaching models. In states that have already implemented systems of coaching for pre-k and child care providers, Head Start grantees and state leaders should work together to identify opportunities to leverage coaching resources across programs and avoid duplication of services. Federal officials should carefully monitor how programs are implementing coaching and partner with researchers to assess the impact of new coaching requirements and learn from Head Start grantees' experiences implementing them. These lessons can then help to inform not only other Head Start grantees, but also the larger early childhood field.

5 Make Head Start a vehicle for promoting innovation in early childhood teacher preparation, support, and development.

Due to its size and national reach, Head Start is an ideal vehicle for piloting innovative programs with the power to change the broader early childhood landscape. Dating back to the creation of the CDA, Head Start has a history of fostering innovations in early childhood educator training and support. Moving forward, Congress and the administration should continue to prioritize innovation to meet Head Start's workforce needs. Strategies could include dedicated funding for innovative pilots, similar to the Invest in Innovation (i3) programs in the Department of Education, or providing additional flexibility for high-performing Head Start grantees to partner with researchers to pilot and evaluate new strategies for teacher preparation, support, compensation, and professional development. Federal and state policymakers should also seek to learn from innovative strategies that Head Start grantees have already implemented in these areas, and support opportunities to share those strategies with other Head Start grantees and early childhood providers.

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