



Lessons from the Bayou State

Three Reforms for Improving Teaching and Caregiving

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Introduction

The state of Louisiana has traditionally had a negative reputation when it comes to policies for educating and caring for children. For instance, Louisiana 4th graders ranked last in reading and 48th in math on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Project ranks Louisiana 49th overall for child well-being. Achievement gaps based on family income, race, disability status, and English proficiency are substantial in the state.

But state policymakers in Louisiana are taking important steps to try to change those rankings, with multiple reforms focused on the state's youngest learners. A large body of research shows that high-quality early education can set children on the path for success in school and in life. And the cornerstone of any strong early care and education (ECE) program is qualified and adequately compensated educators who understand early learning and child development and who can support the needs of young children.

In *Lessons from the Bayou State: Three Reforms for Improving Teaching and Caregiving*, New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy team explores Louisiana's primary efforts to address these challenges and transform its ECE workforce:

1. The implementation of a mandatory quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that rates all ECE programs receiving public funding solely on teacher-child interactions using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool.
2. The new requirement that all lead teachers in center-based ECE programs earn at least an Ancillary Certificate, which is commonly referred to as an "enhanced CDA" or Child

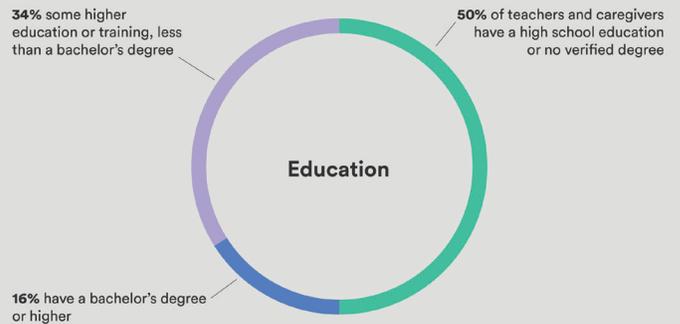
Development Associate credential, within the state. Until now, these teachers have not even needed to have a high school diploma.

3. The supplementing of workforce wages with refundable tax credits of up to \$3,358 for educators who stay in the field or earn higher education and training. Child care workers in the state earn only \$8.95 per hour on average, usually without access to benefits.

Leaders in the Louisiana Department of Education understand the intricacies of this work and have been thoughtful about how to strengthen the ECE workforce and ultimately improve the quality of care and education that children receive. As a result of the 2012 law referred to as Act 3, the Department of Education now oversees child care, Head Start, state-funded pre-K, and the elementary grades. Leaders have been putting reforms in place to better unify the entire early education system and improve the quality of all programs that receive public funding. State officials realize that raising qualifications is important, but that further education and training have to be accessible and must be coupled with higher compensation.

Louisiana's reforms are recent and only time will tell whether they actually achieve their goals. And while Louisiana's efforts may seem like baby steps to some states that are further along in this work, the state has been realistic about where it is starting from, made the most of its available resources, and adapted to its political climate. Below is an overview of what other states can learn from Louisiana's experience and suggestions for Louisiana as it moves forward with this work.

Who Makes Up Louisiana's Early Learning Center Workforce?



These numbers are based on data from the Louisiana Pathways Early Learning Center Career Development System as of 2017. See Louisiana Department of Education, "Louisiana Early Learning Center Emergency Plan," (PowerPoint presentation, Early Childhood Care and Education Advisory Council, Baton Rouge, LA, February 21, 2018), <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/ecce-ac---presentation-slides---2-21-18.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

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Four Lessons for Other States

1. Ensure that further education and training is accessible.

Higher education and professional learning are key to building a knowledgeable and skilled workforce, but states must put supports in place so that this workforce can better access programs or opportunities.

2. Prioritize collecting, using, and sharing data.

A key advantage of having a unified ECE system like Louisiana's is the ability to collect data on all centers participating in the QRIS.

3. Consider using new Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding to improve quality.

Louisiana has devoted federal CCDBG dollars to quality improvements, including scholarships to attend Ancillary Certificate program and start-up grants to assist preparation programs.

4. Be strategic about implementation.

Passing legislation or creating new regulations is often the first step to policy change, but the key to success lies in thoughtful implementation.

Four Policy Considerations for Louisiana

1. Increase state investment in child care.

The state has substantially decreased funding for child care subsidies over the last six years, leading to a decrease in participation. While the recent federal increase in CCDBG dollars will help get thousands

of children off the waiting list for subsidies in Louisiana, federal funds should not supplant state investment.

2. Start thinking more comprehensively about K-3.

While the challenges facing the child care workforce, particularly those working with infants and toddlers, are most acute, the state should also take steps to ensure that kindergarten, through third grade teachers and administrators are prepared to serve young children.

3. Continue to think beyond the Ancillary Certificate.

It is logical for Louisiana to prioritize the Ancillary Certificate based on where the workforce is now, but in the future the state should also provide supports for teachers to pursue further education.

4. Strengthen investments in early education leaders.

Setting low expectations for center directors and elementary school principals can jeopardize the quality of children's learning experiences. Louisiana should ensure that all leaders have a solid understanding of how young children learn.

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