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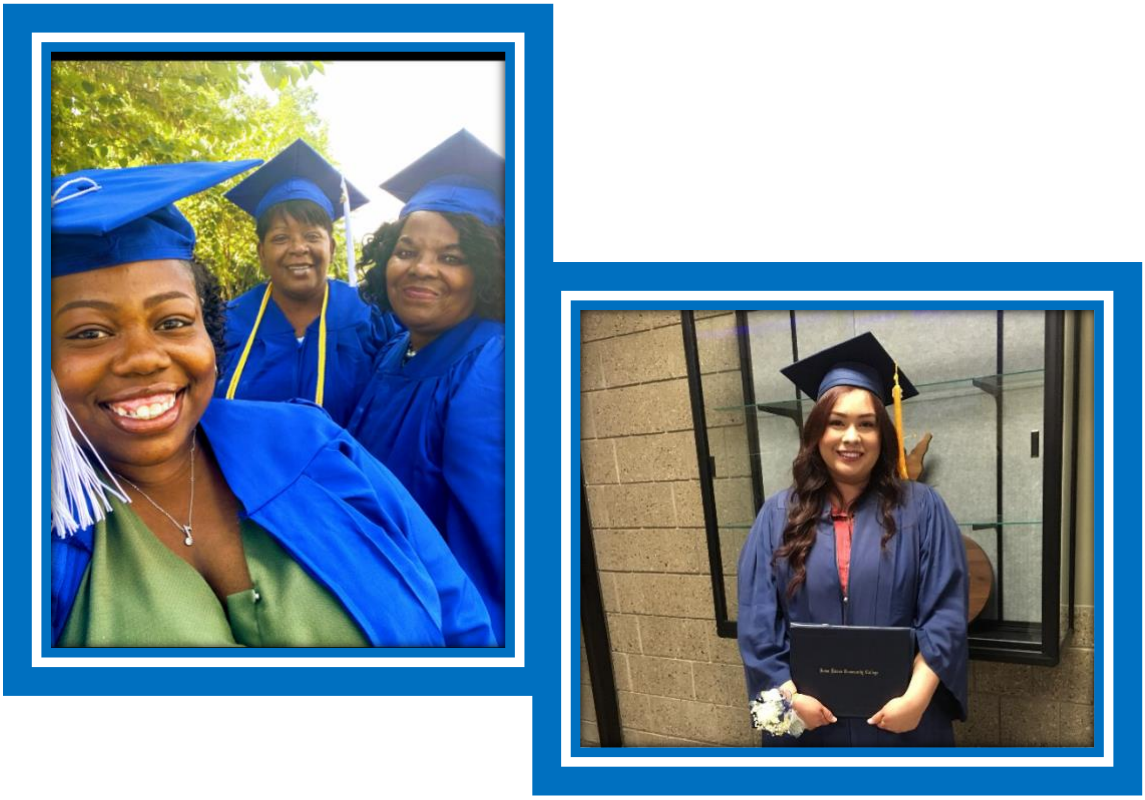
Addressing Barriers in Higher Education
A State Team Approach



Summary of Results - Year Two

September 2019 – December 2020

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Introduction and Background

In March 2020, the National Association for the Education of Young Children published *Power to the Profession and the Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*, which established a vision that, "each and every child—beginning at birth—has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce." The work of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center at Child Care Services Association (the Center) has long been about transforming the workforce in states. Since 2015, with the support of foundation funding, the Center has supported state teams in addressing barriers to higher education and moving the needle on workforce compensation.

This past year, COVID-19 was a challenge no one could anticipate. In spite of it, and in some ways because of it, state teams in Florida, Pennsylvania and South Carolina made significant gains. While the scope of the project did not change as a result of the pandemic, the three states and the Center needed to pivot quickly to address the immediate impact of COVID-19 on early childhood educators and higher education institutions. Given all of this, it is truly remarkable how much progress these teams made.

The original project report, *Addressing Barriers in Higher Education, A State Team Approach*, can be found on the National Center's Initiatives – Higher Education website page. That report includes detailed information on the project background, design and evaluation data and a summary of results from two states (Florida and Pennsylvania) that participated from September 2018 through August 2019. This report includes a brief description of the project background, but the main focus is the summary of results of the three state teams' work from September 2019 until December 2020.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center at Child Care Services Association provides leadership in the early childhood education field to states across the country and to our nation's policymakers on the critical importance and value of an educated, well-paid and stable early childhood workforce to ensure the long-term success of our nation's children in school and in life. For many years, the Center has been developing strategies to address big policy and funding issues to ensure equity of access to higher education, improved compensation, stability and career pathways for the diverse early childhood workforce. Its largest national effort, the ***T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Initiative***, provides the incumbent workforce the opportunity to attend community colleges and universities in their states to take coursework leading to early childhood education degrees. T.E.A.C.H. is also a systemic strategy that serves as a policy driver at the state and local levels, resulting in increased funding for early childhood workforce needs, increased awareness of workforce needs and more responsive workforce support, including a more responsive higher education system. While this effort has not eliminated all barriers to higher education access for the workforce, it has leveraged change to remove obstacles to college completion for the incumbent workforce, allowing them to graduate debt-free.

About the Project

Building on the Center's experiences using a multi-state team approach and with funding from the Alliance for Early Success, the Foundation for Child Development and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the project focused on identifying barriers in each state for early childhood higher education and developing strategies that

leverage the investments of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to facilitate the development and/or replication of solutions to identified barriers.

All states were selected through a Request for Information process based on their capacity to engage in this work, their penetration of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships in higher education in the state and evidence that they leveraged one or more changes in higher education to improve access, affordability, quality and/or success for one or more T.E.A.C.H. scholar. States were required to submit a landscape analysis of their state's early childhood higher education system and identify at least three goals to work on to address one or more of the identified systemic challenges in the areas of policy, strategy development/implementation and/or funding at the local, regional or state level.

Each of the three states initially created policy, funding and strategy development/implementation action plans to guide their work. With the advent of the pandemic, all three states revised their action plans based on the changing realities of higher education, while remaining true to the overall goals of addressing barriers to higher education and leveraging investments to address policy solutions.

As all college coursework moved to online classes practically overnight, new and flexible strategies and policies were implemented to support non-traditional students served by T.E.A.C.H. programs. Many had never taken classes online and did not know how to navigate their new realities of online coursework, and many did not have access to computers and/or reliable internet. Through the remarkably rapid response of these states, higher education was accessible to those who wanted to continue. Examples of strategy and policy changes included using T.E.A.C.H. funding initially earmarked for books to help purchase laptop computers for T.E.A.C.H. scholars, creating webinars and other resources on getting started with online learning and enhanced T.E.A.C.H. counselor training to support online learning needs.

Note: During this project year, a similar project using a state team approach was supported by the T.E.A.C.H. National Center to address the need for improved early childhood education workforce compensation. The two sets of teams received similar support from the Center, created and implemented action plans and reported on their challenges, accomplishments, lessons learned and next steps. You will find some similarities throughout the reports. A report on that project, *Moving the Needle on EC Workforce Compensation*, can be found **here**.

Types of Supports Offered to States

Among all of the tumult during the grant period, the Center was still able to provide policy guidance to address COVID-19-related barriers and ongoing technical assistance, training, monitoring and support to advance their progress and implementation of their policy, strategy and funding action plans to reduce barriers in access to higher education. Staff

- attended virtual meetings with each state,
- reviewed quarterly progress reports,
- conducted webinars and invited state partners to conduct webinars,
- facilitated final state presentations, and
- conducted exit interview with each state.

In addition to these meetings, webinars and progress reports, the Center convened a Higher Education Summit to bring the three teams together for two days of training to support implementation of their action plans. The dates and venue for the *Addressing Barriers in Higher Education Summit* were secured and an agenda developed. Due to COVID-19, staff worked tirelessly over four weeks to pivot to a virtual event held April 21-23, 2020. The Higher Education Summit, embedded in the T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE$ National Professional Development Symposium, offered nine higher education-focused workshops.

Higher Education Summit Evaluation

One-hundred percent of respondents indicated they gained knowledge that will improve their performance in their work with their higher education team.

- "I learned more about what other states are doing, which is always helpful for future planning."
- "Overall I gained some very valuable information. Thank you!"
- "Viewing how research is found and the data provided to show and map out what is needed for the advancement of the early education field was very helpful."

Vision Roadmaps

Each team submitted a Vision Roadmap, including what they believe are the necessary steps for their Action Plan vision to be realized.

Florida Higher Education Team

***Vision**:* To reduce the barriers, increase diversity and improve the successful completion of higher education certificates and degrees for early childhood educators in Florida.

Roadmap

1. Access for all (including dual language learners);
2. Contextualized math integrated into ECE degree programs;
3. Higher compensation linked to degrees and credentials;
4. Fully integrated publicly funded B-20 system; and
5. Fully articulated higher education system.

Pennsylvania Higher Education Team

***Vision**:* Pennsylvania will have high quality online learning opportunities available for all T.E.A.C.H. recipients, including the resources necessary to support their success in degree completion via distance learning, and will ensure that infant-toddler teachers have access to and benefit from T.E.A.C.H. scholarships in spite of systemic challenges.

Roadmap

A coordinated system of higher education institutions linked via NAEYC accreditation that:

1. Includes all types of higher education institutions, such as community college, public, state-related and private HEIs;

2. Welcomes adult learners into degree programs that offer full credit for prior learning and work experience and that can be completed debt-free;
3. Experiences increased enrollments in ECE degree programs;
4. Maintains and increases flexibility established during COVID-19 related to field experiences and student teaching;
5. Produces more ECE certified teachers in PA; and
6. Affects positive change in the PA Department of Education and Chapter 49 teacher certification requirements.

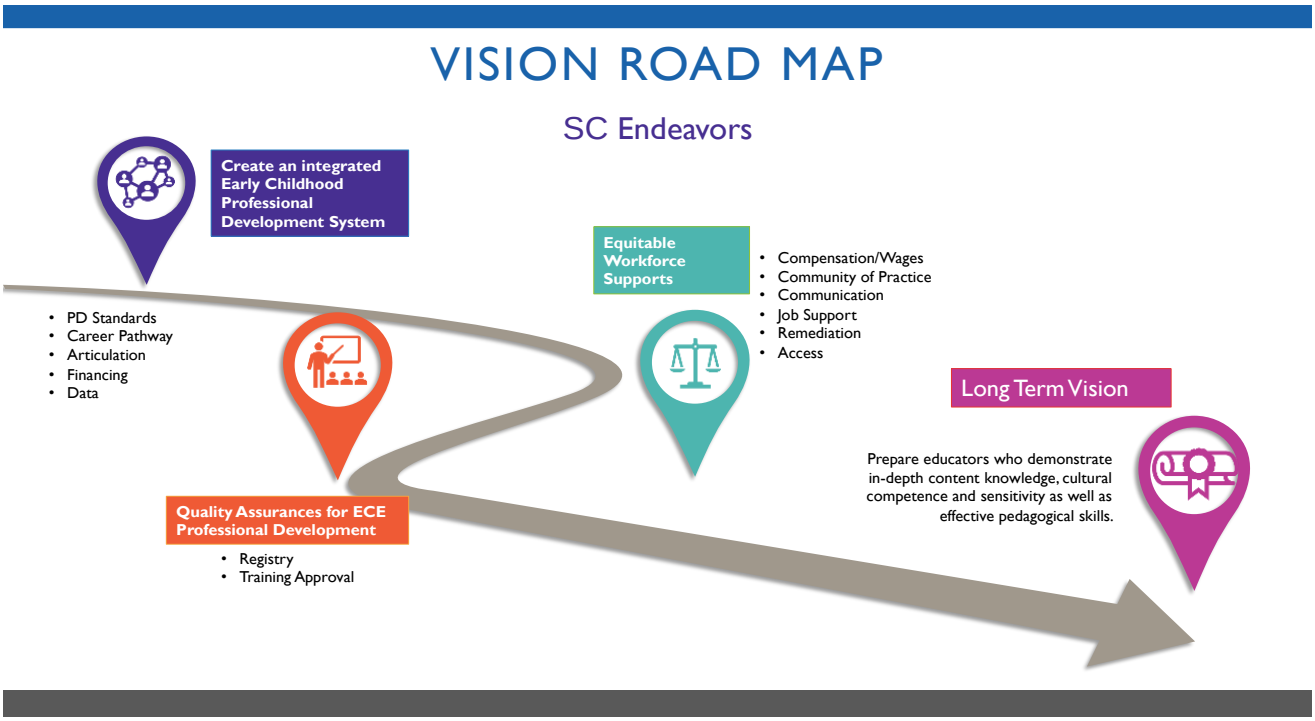
An ECE workforce that:

1. Has flexible and competency based opportunities to earn degrees debt-free;
2. Is appropriately compensated based on experience, role and education;
3. Can be recruited and retained to address the staffing crisis that has been exacerbated by COVID-19, and
4. Is diverse and reflective of the children in their communities.

South Carolina Higher Education Team

Vision: South Carolina's Early Care and Education teacher preparation programs:

1. Prepare educators who demonstrate in-depth content knowledge, cultural competence and sensitivity as well as effective pedagogical skills;
2. Offer rigorous classroom and field-based experiences;
3. Are accessible to diverse learners;
4. Create a seamless transfer experience for students moving from community and technical colleges to four-year institutions; and
5. Offer remediation supports to ensure academic success.



Progress on Achievements

At the end of the year, all three states made progress on achieving their team's goals toward improvements in policy, strategy development/implementation and/or funding to address barriers in higher education for the early childhood workforce, including how change came about. Due to COVID-19, all three teams modified at least one of their goals to address the immediate need for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholars to move completely to online learning. The states worked to support their higher education partners, many of whom had never taught an online course. Each state team's progress toward achieving their goals—including areas of change in each state and relevant data from states—was captured through team presentations.

As mentioned previously, COVID-19 was an unprecedented challenge. The impact of the pandemic on the early childhood profession was, and continues to be, devastating at every level. Child care businesses closed, families lost services and staff jobs were lost or hours reduced. While T.E.A.C.H. states provided strategies to keep the workforce moving toward degree completion despite COVID-19, our higher education partners struggled, too. Faculty that had never taught an online course suddenly had only online options for course delivery. Course delivery became the primary goal, with quality content a hoped for outcome, but not assured. In addition to teaching, online faculty had to provide additional technical and academic support to maintain enrollment.

Scholar access issues existed at every level and included lack of internet and hardware, little or no computer skills and a lack of time as adult students became home teachers for their own children. Scholars who were adept with a phone were lost without the computers and computer support routinely available on campus or at their center to complete assignments.

This project became a mechanism that helped the three participating states focus their efforts on these overwhelming barriers. By April 2020, each of the three states had redesigned their action plan to include at least one goal focused on supporting scholars through the pandemic. In the process, other longtime barriers, such as identifying strategies to complete field experiences, were suddenly acute issues that required and found some promising answers.

In the end, while all three teams faced challenges, they all made significant progress on addressing higher education barriers, learned valuable lessons and identified next steps.

Challenges, Accomplishments, Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Inevitably, at the end of any project, the question arises about whether the effort was worth it. Despite the challenges faced in any project of this nature, and the added bonus of COVID-19, the proof is in the outcomes, and the answer was "yes," on two levels.

One level is the accomplishment of action plan goals, such as:

- A statewide, online infant-toddler credential was developed in Florida.
- More than 1,000 T.E.A.C.H. scholars in South Carolina now have computers as well a as books.

- In Pennsylvania, breakthroughs were made in discussions about how early childhood educators could complete field experiences.

The second level of accomplishments are in the lessons learned and in the conversations in and across state teams. These are the thoughts that help organizations learn to grow through difficult times and to overcome long-term and systemic barriers. The list below is not new, but it reveals how instrumental the ideas and strategies are for creating change.

1. Intentional focus is key for systems change. It is the starting place for everything.
2. Having good data informs plans and policy decisions. Recognizing data needs and a way to obtain data are key strategies and may be the prelude to many other changes. T.E.A.C.H. states have rich data sources from our own systems to use.
3. Relationships among stakeholders are as essential as intention and focus and may need to exist before change or evolve as part of seeking change. More connection, communication and coordination is needed among higher education institutions, ECE stakeholders and elected officials and policymakers.
4. Seize opportunities when they present themselves and be flexible and adaptable. The identification of the early childhood workforce as essential workers or allowing virtual field experiences for degree students are pandemic results that can lead to sustained change. Don't let a good crisis go to waste.
5. There is a saying that if it is not documented, it did not happen. More importantly, if it is not documented it cannot be reliably shared. Sharing success stories from other states and institutions is extremely valuable. It allows us to learn from each other's successes and avoid similar mistakes.
6. Embrace all things digital. There is no going back. Hardware, learning platforms, meeting places, bandwidth, fluency and ease with using these tools has to be embedded in our work. Beyond the basics, there has to be quality in our distance learning and communications. During the pandemic, the profession managed to respond, but now the profession needs to master everything related to technology.
7. It took a pandemic for early childhood education to be defined as a critical/essential occupation. We must take advantage of this opportunity to move toward adequately compensating and providing education for this essential workforce.
8. Linking project efforts to national level leadership and voices is critical to earning recognition in individual states. Using efforts such as NAEYC's Power to the Profession as a beacon gives states' efforts more credibility. National summits with opportunities to connect with national experts move state system work forward.
9. Never stop questioning. How much of our struggle is due to the devaluation of our workforce, which is primarily female and predominately women of color? How will we change this mindset to ensure early childhood education is seen as a high-demand occupation for those entering college and choosing a major, and gain appropriate respect for our workforce from the public and the electorate?

On the following pages are the challenges, accomplishments, some additional lessons learned and next steps for the three teams that addressed higher education barriers for the early childhood education workforce.

Challenges

Pandemic

- Maintaining the continuity of work through the pandemic. (FL)
- ECE landscape is changing radically and quickly. (PA)
- The pandemic tested assumptions related to students' needs. Centers and colleges/universities closing created a need for T.E.A.C.H. recipients to have access to technology, although that access was probably always needed. (SC)

Policy

- Lack of competency-based pathways to achieve degrees and increase compensation. (PA)
- Quality regression – STARS standards reduced, Career Pathway timeline eliminated and unlicensed programs allowed to operate. (PA)
- Internal system barriers across departments within higher education institutions. (PA)

Strategy

- Navigating the complexities of the higher education system. (FL)
- ECE employment, an anchor of the T.E.A.C.H. model, is precarious for many and likely to remain so until a vaccine for COVID-19 is readily available. (PA)
- Lack of technology, including hardware, software and connectivity. (PA)

Funding

- Public resources anticipated to shrink. (PA)
- Funding and support from administrations to achieve NAEYC Accreditation. (PA)
- Influx of various funding sources creates a drain on time/resources. (PA)
- Need to identify strategies for moving more quickly to address fiscal needs (allocating funding, contracts, procurement, etc.). (SC)

Messaging

- Advocacy messaging and efforts around high quality ECE are extremely difficult during a pandemic. (PA)

Workforce

- Increase in stress and mental health issues related to working in programs during COVID-19. (PA)
- Equity issues for the incumbent workforce. (PA)

Project Implementation

- Changes in team composition. (FL)
- Ambitious goals. (FL)

Accomplishments

Policy

- Successfully tracked nearly 1,000 students from high school programs through their CDA credential as part of the High School CTE Pipeline Study. Their data showed both promising and challenging results. Many students are working in child care settings and continuing their

educations. Low compensation discourages students from seeing an early childhood setting as their ultimate career goal. (FL)

- Reallocated T.E.A.C.H. funds to provide laptops to recipients in need. Created laptop grant of $400 for T.E.A.C.H. recipients - 101 laptops purchased ($40,400.00). The program is on-going. (SC)
- Acquired computers through the same mechanisms previously used for book purchases. Florida allowed up to $500 for 550 scholars for reimbursement for computers. (FL)

Strategy

- Created an Infant/Toddler bilingual online 12-credit certificate. This certificate offered by Miami Dade College has the potential to be a statewide model once finalized. (FL)
- Created an Infant/Toddler Certificate Scholarship Model. Infant-toddler coursework was an original focus of the Florida team fueled by an observation of needs and reinforced with data from their Faculty Inventory. As a result of prior efforts and the pandemic, this scholarship was augmented with bonuses to encourage participation. (FL)
- Created Addressing Higher Education Barriers for Early Childhood Educators Communique to highlight higher education barriers, identify issues, goals, responses, outcomes and next steps to continue addressing these barriers. (FL)
- Provided a webinar and two statewide presentations solely for family child care providers in an attempt to encourage more family child care providers to use T.E.A.C.H. and pursue a degree. Resulted in a 33% increase in family provider enrollment from FY 18-19. (PA)
- Provided a “Getting Started with Online Learning” webinar with a companion resource guide to support the move to online learning for T.E.A.C.H. recipients. Resulted in 117 attendees and 238 website hits to online learning resource webpage. (PA)
- Surveyed HEIs regarding online course options, learning management systems, tech supports and other resources related to online instruction and the impact on T.E.A.C.H. recipients in order to best support studying in an online environment. (PA)
- Enhanced T.E.A.C.H. counselor training to support distance learning needs and supports and increased communications (bi-weekly) with recipients and employers. (PA)
- Added fields to T.E.A.C.H. National Center-required online Higher Education Directory profiles to include questions around learning management systems and tech support/resources available to students, along with questions around field placements in order to be more systematic in gathering this information at one time. (PA)
- Collected data around HEI best practices for innovative field experiences with initial findings including Early EdU Coaching Companion, PA ECE apprenticeship model, PA Alternate Certification model and Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ACCESS) resources. (PA)
- Developed partnerships with new Professional Development Organizations (PDOs) to align efforts around higher education barriers and provide T.E.A.C.H. wrap-around scholarships for more than 60 students in PDO funded courses. (PA)
- Coordinated with PA PD Registry to request and secure workforce data to embed in landscape analysis and inform future efforts. PA still needs an ECE workforce study to ensure data is readily available and easily accessible. *(*PA)
- Surveyed programs with high-quality, infant-toddler slots to collect data related to their infant-toddler teachers, including education levels, wages, benefits and challenges to degree

attainment to better make the case to funders to recruit scholarship recipients and support quality infant-toddler classrooms. (PA)
- Enhanced communications and recruitment during COVID-19. (SC)
- Created Communities of Practice for early childhood education students to support online learning. (SC)
- Created learning resources, including one-page tip sheets to support online learning. (SC)
- Worked with a focus on articulation toward new higher education messaging, inventory of current articulation agreements and recommendations for rolling out enhancements. (SC)

Funding
- Used combined work and team efforts to apply for funding through the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC). After the completion of a lengthy preliminary application, the lead agency for HEB was invited to complete a full application. This was the only applicant from the state of Florida to be invited. (FL)
- Repurposed and designated more than $250,000 to provide additional support to participants in summer 2020 by waiving tuition assessments and issuing an additional $250 access stipend to assist recipients with software, hardware and connectivity expenses. Resulted in a 14% increase in summer 2020 enrollments. (PA)

Lessons Learned

Policy
- There is an ongoing need for accessible, high quality, online options for all course work. Higher education needs support to make this happen and the workforce needs help improving their computer skills. (SC)
- Having good data informs plans and policy decisions. (FL)

Strategy
- There is still a lot of work to do to create long-term solutions and not just quick fixes. (SC)
- In terms of technology, there is likely to be an ongoing need for computers. (SC)
- ECE workforce data on key issues such as degree and credential attainment needs to be readily available. It currently is not, causing planning and funding gaps. (PA)
- ECE workforce initiative best practices (i.e., ECE apprenticeship and Alternate Certification) are not well documented or widely shared, hampering scaling and replication. (PA)
- Higher education has the ability to adapt and provide flexibility to students in terms of field experiences. High quality virtual field experiences are possible and there are resources to support expansion of these options. (PA)
- Intentional focus is key for systems change. (FL)
- Seize opportunities when they present themselves and be flexible and adaptable. (FL)

Funding
- Additional higher education institutes are interested in providing bilingual course instruction, but lack the resources to do so. (FL)

Collaboration/Partnerships

- More connection, communication and coordination among higher education institutions and ECE stakeholders is needed. Institutional policies are not consistent across AS degree and BS degree levels and among and between states' systems, creating roadblocks around articulation and field experiences. COVID-19 seems to require we get on the same page. (PA)
- Relationships among stakeholders are important and help drive change. (FL)
- Building a strong team to do this work is essential. (FL)

Engaging the Workforce

- The increased interest from the field in pursuing a degree and/or completing coursework during the pandemic will serve as our inspiration to push for positive change. (PA)

Next Steps

Florida

- Distribution of the Communique, a report that is specific to this project and other higher education work. It is a tool to talk about this work.
- Presentations at relevant meetings (FCCECEN, One Goal Summer Conference, FCAN)
- Continue to build on the foundation of this work should we be fortunate to receive grant funding (EEIC).
- Pursue opportunities to strengthen math education for early childhood educators.

Pennsylvania

- Use infant-toddler (I/T) slots/program survey to plan for challenges and supports for degree attainment.
- Develop scholarship models to specifically address needs and challenges for infant-toddler teachers.
- Highlight NAEYC accreditation success stories to encourage replication.
- Identify and share program to program articulation models for replication.
- Focus on alternate certification and apprenticeship concepts (coaching companion) to modify student teaching requirements.
- Partner with higher education institutions and other ECE organizations to strategize ways to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce and use Professional Development Registry data to inform our efforts.
- PACCA will continue our HEB work will through the T.E.A.C.H. Advisory Committee. This committee will provide oversight on the HEB Action Plan items scheduled for future months and/or those that are ongoing. Connect our committee's work to other stakeholder groups (such as PDO advisory boards); identify best practices and share out.
- Continue advocacy efforts for funding to support high quality ECE programs with educated/degreed staff.
- Continue connecting with the workforce, deepening those connections and sharing their voices in our work.

South Carolina

- Keep up the momentum and focus on:
  - Remediation
  - Connections with students
  - Access to technology
  - Articulation
  - Communication

Return on Investment

Each team was encouraged to increase funding for the workforce, and some states were able to do that. We learned once again that the return on investment for a project like this is significant. States collectively leveraged $67,000 to support teamwork and $260,985 to support the workforce. In addition, all three states reported funding that had been applied for and/or was expected by the end of the project in the amount of $1,027,021. Finally, states identified pandemic relief funds received by their state to support the workforce in the amount of $664 million.

Conclusions

We continue to learn from this work. Great things can happen with multi-state teams when provided a combination of *requirements* (to convene a team of diverse partners and create and implement an action plan) and *support* (webinars and summit workshops featuring state and national content experts, newsletters, team leader meetings and staff time to attend team meetings and track down resources specific to team needs). We also continue to see progress with policymakers, legislation drafted, reports compiled and released and video testimonials created and shared on social media. We hear from team members that they took the information they learned from the work on a given topic like barriers to higher education access for the diverse workforce, which spreads out back at their tables.

It may come as a surprise that COVID-19 was actually instrumental in pushing states involved in the project to positive actions that seemed impossible before the pandemic. States scrambled, reacted, refined and ultimately pursued goals that were a blend of original goals and responses to COVID-19.

As the world shut down but the needs of the workforce became ever more urgent, we learned, or perhaps were reminded of some things we may have taken for granted in an ordinary year. One thing is certain. Since the pandemic began, these state team leaders and their organizations were, and continue to be, on the front lines in their states, responding to the needs of the early childhood industry and the workforce. They significantly affected and shifted their work. In addition to the crisis drawing time and resources away from the compensation work, team members also found themselves engaged in efforts to provide grants to the workforce, support provider and program sustainability and lead advocacy efforts to ensure adequate stimulus funding was directed to child care. We heard often that this crisis provided a chance to take advantage of the realization of the critical nature of child care, which was shown

by the $39 billion for child care relief funding in the America Rescue Plan Act. There has also been an increased focus on equity. Many public schools remained virtual, while child care was expected to be open. How much of this is related to the devaluation of this child care workforce, primarily women, often women of color and always poorly compensated?

The resolve of the team leaders and members to double down on their support of the EC industry in general and the workforce specifically was evident. We were reminded of the flexibility that is needed in the work we do. The ability of these folks to pivot, as the pandemic unfolded and the only thing that was certain was uncertainty, demonstrated a tenacious commitment to the workforce and the systems that serve them. It should come as no surprise that this is how the work unfolded. We are certain it will continue to unfold in promising ways.