



A High-Quality Early Learning Workforce in Alabama Is Necessary for Early Childhood Development

Currently, more than 218,000 children under age 6 in Alabama have working parents.¹

With more than 65% having all parents in the workforce,
many of these children are in some type of child care setting every week.

Decades of research has shown that all children,
and particularly children from low-income families,
benefit from high-quality child care.



The first years
of life set a
foundation
for all future
development.

It's important
to ensure
that not only
pre-k, but also
child care,
has a strong
workforce.

A HIGH-QUALITY WORKFORCE MATTERS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

High-quality child care depends on an early learning workforce with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to promote a child's healthy development.

Studies show that pre-k gains by children build on a child's earlier experiences – because brain development begins at birth rather than age 4 when many state pre-k programs begin² (including Alabama's First Class Pre-K program).

The first years of life set a foundation for all future development, which is why a strong child care workforce is critical to the healthy development and school readiness of children.

ALABAMA'S CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

In Alabama, more than 24,000 individuals work in child care and early education settings, and the industry has a \$1.03 billion impact on the state's economy.³

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the median wage for those working in child care is \$8.93 per hour, about \$18,580 per year⁴ – that's about \$8,000 below the income level that qualifies a family for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps).

The most recent Alabama Child Care Workforce Study shows that the level of education among those in the child care industry is low.⁵

Low pay makes affording the cost of higher levels of education or certifications out of reach for many providers and helps fuel job turnover. When child care providers were asked as part of the workforce study how likely they were to leave their current job within the next 3 years, fully 60% said they were likely to leave their job.⁶

In contrast, the Alabama First Class Pre-K program for 4 year-old children requires lead teachers to have a Bachelor's degree with an early learning credential and offers salary parity comparable to public school teachers to help hire and retain high-quality staff.⁷

Given the neuroscience research which shows that brain development begins at birth and is cumulative (meaning that later child development builds on prior development),⁸ it's important to ensure that not only pre-k, but also child care, has a strong workforce.



High-quality care depends on attracting, retaining and growing a well-trained and educated workforce that is fairly compensated for its skills and expertise.

THE PATHWAY TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE

Alabama has a framework to guide investment toward high-quality child care programs.

- **Alabama Quality STARS** offers a 1 – 5-star system to rate child care programs related to key indicators such as the education level and certifications of staff and participating programs receive higher child care subsidy reimbursement based on star levels achieved.
- **Alabama Pathways -- Professional Development Registry** helps individual providers track their professional development.
- **Alabama Early Learning Guidelines** help both parents and providers better understand what children from birth through age five should know and be able to do.
- **Alabama First Class Pre-K** programs can be administered by child care centers. The program offers pay parity with K-12, extensive coaching, and professional development.

BOOSTING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT WITHIN THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

Three programs are currently offered through the Alabama Departments of Early Childhood Education, Education, and Human Resources, along with private funding to assist those working in child care to attain higher certifications or levels of education.⁹

1. The high school recruitment program through Career Tech offers dual enrollment resulting in a CDA certificate upon high school graduation.¹⁰
2. The Leadership in Child Care Scholarship program covers tuition and related fees for the child care workforce to obtain a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, Short-Term Certificate, or AA in Child Development.
3. The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® ALABAMA scholarship program is a broader program that not only provides assistance with tuition, books, and related fees, but also includes paid release time for providers to attend class and complete homework, support and guidance to assist T.E.A.C.H. recipients to stay on track, and partners with employers to award bonuses or pay increases for those who complete credentials or educational goals.

In 2017, 318 individuals employed in 37 counties in Alabama received T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.¹¹

- 144 Associate's degree scholarships
- 71 Bachelor's degree scholarships
- 131 Child Development Associate (CDA) assessment fee scholarships

Even with T.E.A.C.H. assistance, the average wage for program participants is still low at \$9.43 per hour (\$19,614 per year).¹²

Recommended Solutions to Promote a High-Quality Child Care Workforce

High-quality care depends on attracting, retaining and growing a well-trained and educated workforce that is fairly compensated for its skills and expertise.

Less than 1% of the current child care workforce in Alabama has access to T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.

- Increase the current level of funding for the T.E.A.C.H. program by 300% to ensure that at least 5% of the eligible workforce has access to higher education that can make a difference in a child's healthy development and daily preschool experiences.

In Louisiana, the state tax code offers a refundable tax credit (which acts as a wage supplement) to individuals working in child care based on certifications and higher levels of education that are attained.¹³ This helps attract and retain high-quality staff because

parents can't afford to pay higher child care fees which typically support staff pay.

- Create a refundable tax credit based on the attainment of certifications and higher levels of education to offer a wage supplement to the child care workforce.

Pay parity is in place for Alabama's First Class Pre-K program.

- Continue to expand state funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K program for four year-olds, which is offered through a diverse delivery system including existing early childhood programs.

It's time to invest in the wages of the child care workforce as well to ensure that the profession of early learning across the birth to age 5 continuum is high-quality.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 1 Year Estimates (2016)

² The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects, Brookings Institute, 2017.

³ Deravi, K and Buchanan, B. Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry on the Economy of the State of Alabama. (2013)

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Child Care Workers in Alabama, May 2018

⁵ 2008 Alabama Child Care Workforce Study, Alabama Partnership for Children

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The State of Preschool 2017 Annual Report, Alabama Profile, National Institute of

Early Education Research, 2018

⁸ Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child

⁹ Alabama FY2019-2021 CCDF State Plan, draft as proposed

¹⁰ Alabama Department of Education

¹¹ Alabama Partnership for Children, 2017 T.E.A.C.H. outcomes

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Louisiana Department of Revenue, School Readiness Tax Credit