

Rebuilding the Early Care and Education Workforce

“The early childhood workforce is a critical sector of any city’s economy and ensures families can return to work after pandemic restrictions ease. Lack of access to childcare opportunities affects not only the current productivity of employees, but also impacts employers, taxpayers, and the economy.”

(National League of Cities, 2020).

When early childhood works, the community works. The early care and education (ECE) workforce was part of a broken system prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created even more strain on the ECE system. Many educators are leaving the field for higher wages, safer working environments, or to stay home to care for their own family members. As a result, preschools, child care centers, and family child care homes struggle to keep their doors open because they lack the qualified staff they need.

About the ECE Workforce

- **Early childhood educators are undervalued by society.** The importance of their work, intricacy of their skill set and their contribution to society often goes unrecognized.
- **Early childhood educators are poorly compensated.** In Arizona, the poverty rate for early educator is 20.5% compared to 10.8% for Arizona workers in general. In the U.S., preK teachers with academic degrees make half what K-12 teachers with similar degrees earn. Many early childhood educators do not have access health care or retirement benefits in their place of employment.
- **Early childhood educators work in diverse settings.** Early care and education is a “mixed delivery system,” meaning that early childhood educators may work in school district classrooms, child care centers, or home based settings (called family child care).
- **Early childhood educators are leaving the field.** Like K-12 education, turnover in the early care and education sector is higher than ever.

Current Solutions



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

With the generous support from First Things First, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona leads Great Expectations for Teachers, Children, and Families. This innovative system of professional development provides relevant and accessible professional learning for early childhood educators using a Community of Practice model. In this model, educators learn in collaboration with each other for an entire year and can apply the skills and knowledge they gain with the support of job-embedded coaching. Learning opportunities are designed with the unique characteristics of the ECE community in mind and are tailored to the needs of the educators. This allows for a wide range of participants- from school principals to childcare directors, teachers, family child care providers, and educators from both rural and urban areas. The grant reaches over 600 early educators per year. There is also a focus on degree completion and pathways from associates to bachelors degrees. In Spring, 2021, we are expecting 22 Bachelor degree graduates in Early Childhood Education.



CREATING PATHWAYS

Together with partners such as the Department of Economic Security, institutions of higher education and local school districts, United Way of Tucson is helping to strengthen existing systems of career pathways for early education professionals from high school to college and renewing an apprenticeship program for early childhood educators. These pathways provide hands-on experience gained through internships and through paid jobs.



UNITING THE COMMUNITY

Through our First Focus on Kids Coalition, United Way of Tucson has convened an Action Team of community partners who are also working to address the ECE workforce crisis. This group has a shared action plan with strategies to recruit and attract, retain and support, and develop a highly skilled, well-compensated ECE workforce in Pima County. We are also working actively to ensure that all providers have access to the financial resources that are coming through federal Covid relief funds- adequate funding is essential to solving the ECE workforce crisis and making sure that early educators access new financial resources is a critical first step.

How to Get Involved

- Spread the word:
 - **The early years are critical:** 90% of a child's brain develops before kindergarten, and the quality of early experiences shapes how the brain develops.
 - **High quality early education requires specialized skills, knowledge, and experience.** Early childhood educators are brain architects.
- Attend the **ECE Day at the Legislature on Thursday, February 24, 2022.**
To register: <https://bit.ly/AZECA22>.
- Attend the **UW Business Breakfast on Thursday, February 24, 2022**, and bring a colleague.
- Respond to action alerts from the UW Public Policy Committee.