



# In Pursuit of Equitable Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce

Profiles & Lessons from the Field

OCTOBER 2022

# Contents

Introduction.....	3
Lessons from the Field.....	4
1. Ensure transparency at every major decision-point.....	4
2. Identify a comprehensive framework that supports the current workforce.....	5
3. Consider multiple mechanisms for implementation.....	5
4. Use short-term solutions while building long-term approaches and infrastructure .....	6
5. Employ an inside-outside approach .....	7
System Profiles.....	8
Oregon.....	8
Rhode Island.....	11
Washington State.....	13
Washington, D.C. ....	16
Acknowledgments .....	19

## Introduction

The workforce shortage gripping the nation is acutely felt in the early childhood field and must be addressed to realize bold, equitable, comprehensive systems reforms in states. While the early childhood workforce crisis began well-before COVID-19, the pandemic further exacerbated systemic inequities. This workforce shortage and the role of inequitable compensation in driving it is evident across the early childhood industry, including in child care, early intervention, and home visiting. For example:

- The [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#) surveyed the child care industry throughout the pandemic to learn about the impact it's had on child care programs. In a February 2022 survey NAEYC found that two-thirds of **respondents reported experiencing a staffing shortage that impacted their ability to serve families**, resulting in fewer children served and longer waiting lists for families to access child care.
- The [Infant Toddler Coordinators Association](#) – a non-profit membership association of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C State Coordinators – found in its 2021 Tipping Points survey that **nearly all states responded that they were experiencing a shortage in qualified providers**, and many states identified that they were working on retention and compensation strategies to address this shortage.
- According to a 2020 [Education Development Center report](#), **home visiting staff cited low salary as one of the main reasons for resigning**, often leaving the early childhood field entirely to find employment opportunities with better compensation and benefits. Low pay was also cited as a reason that recruitment into the home visiting field was challenging.

States and communities across the country are grappling with how to address this crisis and better support the early childhood workforce; building competitive and more equitable compensation systems is an essential strategy. This is particularly crucial for the child care workforce, which is predominantly made up of women of color and is often on the lowest end of the sector's compensation spectrum, especially for those caring for infants and toddlers. At the same time, the early childhood workforce overall continues to be under-valued and inadequately compensated for the critical role they play in both nurturing the health, development, and well-being of young children and in supporting their families.

To support states in addressing these systemic issues, Start Early researched equitable compensation strategies in Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington State and the District of Columbia, with a focus on the development and implementation of wage scales. The report and profiles that follow offer lessons and key insights from these systems leading innovative and effective policy and advocacy efforts in pursuit of equitable compensation for the early childhood workforce.

## Lessons from the Field

To explore promising and effective models for addressing the workforce crisis, Start Early researched how Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington State and the District of Columbia were working to develop and implement more equitable compensation strategies and wage scales. Five key lessons emerged from this policy analysis and interviews with state leaders and advocates. These lessons, though not exhaustive, can inform both the “what” and “how” of states’ pursuit of more equitable compensation for the cross-sector workforce.

### 1. Ensure transparency at every major decision-point

Given the nature of federal and state funding streams to support families with young children across the holistic spectrum of child well-being, decisions to bolster the compensation of the early childhood workforce may cause friction or challenges for some members of this diverse workforce. States should anticipate these and other implementation challenges along the way and avoid being paralyzed with inaction because of them. Implementation challenges might include:

- wage compression concerns including within multi-service agencies, which is when employees in an organization have very similar wages/salaries regardless of differences in their respective skills, experience, or job responsibilities;
- sector-specific compensation issues like across different home visiting models; or
- concerns about passing on costs of higher workforce wages to families through family fees or tuition.

Ensuring full transparency and clear communication at every decision-point and providing inclusive input opportunities for the cross-sector early childhood workforce throughout the design and implementation of a comprehensive compensation strategy will be vital for broad buy-in and long-term success. States can leverage already-existing electronic newsletters and routine live-time community information sessions and tap into community partners to broadly share these communications opportunities. Leveraging these touchpoints for clear and open communication about the state’s compensation work – and leveraging other advocacy and community partners with deep connections into the diverse early childhood workforce – will be important foundations to build from.

## 2. Identify a comprehensive framework that supports the current workforce

Equitable compensation must be built upon the current workforce and not leave anyone behind. Compensation strategies must be aligned with credential standards and career pathways that honor experience and expertise of the diverse early childhood workforce, preserve the diversity of the workforce, and do so in ways that elevate a career in early childhood to be competitive with other industries; this includes providing benefits such as paid time off, health insurance, and retirement benefits. Given the elevated awareness of the workforce challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, inclusively defining, redefining and/or reiterating a comprehensive and equitable workforce compensation framework with broad community and early childhood workforce buy-in can be helpful to state efforts.

One thing to note: each of the systems profiled in this report had different approaches to K-12 parity; Rhode Island and D.C. decided it was a useful framework in their work while Oregon and Washington State are considering different methods of determining compensation. States should consider its own compensation “north star” for the early childhood workforce. Like early childhood, the K-12 workforce has inequities within its systems and is experiencing similar retention and recruitment challenges as the early childhood field. But, identifying comparable industries to the early childhood workforce may be challenging given the diversity of early childhood services and programs, and thus the corresponding workforce qualifications and requirements.

Many states are looking at the [living wage index](#) to set a minimum salary requirement for the early childhood workforce. However, understanding the demographics of the early childhood workforce will be important to identify the living wage “floor.” States shouldn’t default to the living wage index for a single child-less adult working 40 hours/week for 52 weeks/year who is paid accordingly for those hours, as this may not be representative and thus not appropriate for the early childhood workforce. States should consider exploring what its minimum and aspirational compensation goals are as part of a workforce framework in collaboration with community and early childhood workforce partners.

## 3. Consider multiple mechanisms for implementation

The identification of how a wage scale will be funded is critical for sustainability and equity. In addition to identifying stable revenue sources, considering multiple mechanisms for bolstering wages may be helpful given the diversity of early childhood programs and services, and thus, the workforce. In addition to legislative action to finance a compensation strategy like a wage scale,

other options are worth exploring to increase compensation across the early childhood workforce. This includes strategies through administrative action, such as:

- child care subsidy regulations with defined compensation requirements for the child care workforce;
- public contracts that stipulate minimum compensation requirements,
- Medicaid rate increases for home visiting and early intervention; or
- ongoing wage supplements from the state directly to the field.

Many states already leverage multiple funding streams to support early childhood programs and services and have made progress to increase compensation through various mechanisms. For example, many states have used COVID-19 federal relief funds to provide wage supplements to child care teachers and providers, or have looked to Medicaid rate increases to address compensation issues in home visiting or early intervention. As states work to identify strategies to increase compensation for the cross-sector early childhood workforce, opportunities like Medicaid billing, compensation requirements in program standards or state contracts, and other mechanisms are worth exploring.

## 4. Use short-term solutions while building long-term approaches and infrastructure

States should consider an approach that allows for implementation in phases. Begin with an intentional on-ramp to allow time for the state to build infrastructure and buy-in for long-term successful execution, while bolstering workforce wages in the short-term. This includes identifying short-term, immediate mechanisms for increasing wages while longer-term approaches are identified and built to support the cross-sector workforce. An intentional on-ramp also allows state agencies to grow their technical assistance capacities to support implementation challenges and needs as providers navigate new compensation requirements. Developing an on-ramp for implementation of sustainable compensation strategies also allows state agencies to closely partner with early childhood service providers and multi-service agencies in an inclusive process to identify long-term compensation approaches that can be mindful of potential implementation challenges like wage compression.

As an example, states could consider bolstering wage supplement programs and expanding it to other professionals employed in early childhood programs as a strategy to lift the wage floor in the short-term. Providing additional bonuses for multilingual early childhood professionals – [as is done in New Mexico](#) – can be one approach to support and maintain the diversity of the workforce. This can be done while simultaneously developing the infrastructure needed – like

strengthening state workforce registries – to implement a sustainable compensation strategy while also exploring other pathways to increase compensation across public contracts or other mechanisms across the multi-sector early childhood workforce.

## 5. Employ an inside-outside approach

States should continue to leverage its strong inside-outside collaborative approach to advance early childhood systems in the workforce compensation space. With a shared goal and north star of more equitable and higher compensation for the cross-sector early childhood workforce, a multi-pronged inside-outside advocacy strategy that includes incremental progress could be advantageous. In some contexts, it may be appropriate for public officials to play a supportive role while advocates and the community lead the development of specific components of the state's compensation approach; this may lead to a more equitable solution with greater buy-in. State agencies and community-based partners should consider how they might strategically lead a workforce taskforce made up of diverse early childhood professionals to help develop an equitable compensation framework and identify short- and long-term compensation strategies and tactics while providing transparency throughout the process.



## System Profiles

Start Early researched equitable compensation strategies in Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington State and the District of Columbia, with a focus on the development and implementation of wage scales. Each of these systems are in various stages of advancing an equitable compensation strategy and have different stories and approaches. As a result, these profiles include perspectives from both advocates and administrators; describes efforts that are not yet implemented, newly instituted, and those that are in the process of being revised; and attempts to illustrate some of the many different components that affect equitable compensation beyond a wage scale (e.g., inclusive practices, benefits, implementation, etc.). The successes, challenges, and innovative policy and advocacy efforts described below offer insights and practical strategies states can apply as they build more equitable compensation systems.

### Oregon

Oregon has a history implementing wage scales in its state-funded Preschool Promise program and is expanding to other programs. As such, states can learn from their process of developing a wage scale but also from the successes and challenges that come with implementation. Start Early interviewed a state administrator with the Oregon Early Learning Division to identify learnings for consideration.

### Establishing a Wage Scale

Oregon's journey towards more equitable compensation for the early learning workforce began in 2015, when the Oregon State Legislature enacted HB 3380, which created a new mixed delivery preschool model called Preschool Promise serving three- and four-year-olds living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. As part of the new program, the [legislature specified](#) that "lead teachers [of Preschool Promise] must...be paid at a minimum salary level to be set by the Early Learning Council, commensurate with local kindergarten teacher salaries." The state's Early Learning Council is charged with coordinating a unified and aligned system of early learning throughout Oregon.

As Oregon's Early Learning Division (ELD) reviewed kindergarten teacher salaries across the state to establish minimum and target salary requirements for Preschool Promise lead teachers, they discovered there was a wide range of entry salaries depending on the specific public school district and the geographic region. As a result, in 2016, the Early Learning Council (ELC) decided to [set target and minimum lead teacher salary scales](#) by region and education level as measured by the Oregon workforce registry. The minimum salary, for a teacher with a CDA, was 50% of the



target salary, with steps at 60% of the target salary for a teacher with an Associate's and 70% for an individual with a Bachelor's degree. The Early Learning Council was concerned about unintended consequences of a higher minimum salary. These could arise when the lead teacher is also the owner of a family child care program, when programs have multiple classrooms but only one Preschool Promise classroom, or when programs have classrooms that also serve tuition-based children in a Preschool Promise classroom. As a result, trust and respect was given to early childhood providers to manage their businesses by giving them discretion and decision-making authority to allow them to account for experience within the salary range for each level. During this time, ELC and ELD conversations focused on salary only and excluded benefits.

The target and minimum salary requirements for lead teachers were [updated in 2020](#) as the Legislature expanded the requirement to include the Oregon Pre-Kindergarten (OPK) program in 2019. In the latest round of revisions, the Early Learning Council no longer had regionalized wage scales but rather, adopted one salary scale for the entire state due to the difficulties of implementing different scales and based on feedback from the field. (For example, while cost of living in urban areas might be higher, rural areas face higher costs in other ways, such as having to travel further to purchase supplies.) Thus, ELD used the highest median wages found in the Portland metropolitan area; the range between minimum and target salaries naturally allow for regional variation. Target and minimum salaries were also adopted for teacher assistants.

## The Role of Credentials and Competencies

Like other states, kindergarten teachers in Oregon are a predominantly white workforce and the state requires teachers to possess a bachelor's degree; the early learning workforce, in comparison, is more diverse and [as of 2013, only approximately a third possessed bachelor's degrees or higher](#). While the initial requirement for Preschool Promise lead teachers was to hold a bachelor's degree, it was later removed when state workforce registry data indicated that the requirement could contribute to further inequities in the early learning workforce. The Early Learning Division recognized that a stronger system needed to be in place for individuals of color to receive their credentials before the requirement of a bachelor's degree would be equitable and therefore eliminated the BA requirement. This highlighted the importance of competencies and the intersection with a career lattice and wage scale; years of experience or increased training didn't always translate into an improvement in quality. As such, ELD took steps to ensure that [progression](#) was based on knowledge and the ability to tie learning to practice. This continues to be a work in progress for Oregon.

## Future Efforts

The Early Learning Division is hopeful that Oregon will advance of a fuller compensation package that raises base funding for all positions across the multiple early childhood programs overseen by ELD and addresses benefits in the next legislative session. Programs they hope to reach include:

- Preschool Promise,
- Oregon Pre-K (Oregon's preschool program modeled after the federal Head Start program),
- Baby Promise (a pilot program to expand supply and quality of infant and toddler child care),
- Relief Nurseries (which provides emergency child care and intensive wraparound services for OR's most vulnerable families),
- Early Head Start,
- Healthy Families Oregon (Oregon's Healthy Families America home visiting program), and
- the Equity Fund (which provides grants to support culturally specific, kindergarten readiness and family support programming).

One key issue that the Early Learning Division is currently grappling with is looking beyond pay parity with kindergarten. Instead, the Division is working on quantifying the value of early learning to society, using the opportunity to break the cycle of inequities in the system, and looking at other fields for comparison to find the true cost of equitable compensation for the early learning workforce. For Oregon, staff found kindergarten pay to be a problematic benchmark; K-2 teachers are the lowest paid within the K-12 system that is also rife with inequities. In addition, parity with kindergarten teacher pay alone still leaves the preschool teachers at a disadvantage as they do not have access to benefits (e.g., insurance, retirement, etc.) that are offered in the public education system. Oregon also consistently monitors subsidy rates, and the Early Learning Division plans to ask for another increase in the new legislative session.

## Key Takeaways

Oregon's efforts to obtain equitable compensation for the early learning workforce is instructive especially in consideration of how to set a wage scale; pay parity with the K-12 system can be problematic given the inequities that also persist in that system and differences that make comparing compensation between early learning and K-12 difficult. The state's approach to implementing equitable compensation is a lesson learned for future efforts.

## Rhode Island

Because Rhode Island is attempting to implement a target wage scale across child care, early intervention, and home visiting, their story offers insights on how to approach compensation across the multi-sector early childhood system. Since the introduced target wage scale legislation has not yet passed out of the Rhode Island General Assembly, Start Early interviewed a local advocate to gain insights into their cross-sector approach and legislative strategy.

### Advocacy Strategy

Rhode Island's advocacy strategy for advancing equitable compensation entails having a coordinated but differentiated approach across multiple sectors of early childhood programs that demands pay parity with K-12 educators and staff. Despite differences across sectors, early childhood professionals are often from the same job pool in Rhode Island and thus varying wages can undercut and destabilize sectors, at a risk of jeopardizing the development of young children. At the heart of this advocacy approach has been the development of a target wage scale for child care centers, family child care homes, Pre-K, home visiting, and Early Intervention programs. Paired with an effort to create an Office of Early Childhood Development & Learning for more centralized governance and differentiated strategies for each sector (e.g., wage supplements, rate increases, etc.), Rhode Island advocates have continuously pushed for equitable compensation across all sectors of early childhood.

The state of Rhode Island's development of an equitable target wage scale that crossed programs and funding streams was discussed in 2016. The Rhode Island Early Learning Council, an advisory body to the Governor and the Children's Cabinet made up of government staff and community members, identified as priorities to: "develop wage enhancement strategies to improve recruitment and retention of effective early educators" and "development and implement strategies to improve the wages of professionals who work with infants and toddlers." In response, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC) [convened a task force in 2018](#) to develop strategies to improve the compensation of early educators who work with infants and toddlers across child care, home visiting, and Early Intervention. The task force drafted a target wage scale for consideration by state agencies. In 2019, the Early Learning Council endorsed the task force's recommendations, including a recommendation to establish a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators that was tied to compensation of similarly qualified K-12 educators.

## Efforts to Pass the Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act

The Early Learning Council's endorsement of the task force's recommendations spurred further action and legislation to establish a target wage scale, on par with K-12, for early educators in child care centers, family child care homes, Pre-K classrooms, home visiting programs and Early Intervention. The Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act was introduced in the Rhode Island General Assembly in 2020 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no progress after an early hearing. Since then, the [bill](#) has been re-introduced each legislative session and successfully passed the full Senate in both 2021 and 2022 before stalling in the House. Advocates suspect the wage scale has been held each year due to future state budget implications.

## Other Policy Strategies

Despite the continued challenges in passing the Early Educator Investment Act and establishing an official target wage scale, Rhode Island has made progress through other mechanisms. In 2022, legislation passed requiring the state to develop a plan to prepare, recruit, and retain a highly qualified early childhood workforce. The legislation included language specifying "adequate wages for early childhood educators regardless of setting." 2022 Legislation also provides two years of staff retention bonuses for child care educators. And Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) saw a 45% Medicaid rate increase to address the staff compensation crisis. This was the first Early Intervention Medicaid rate increase in 20 years, and the General Assembly also allocated two years of ARPA funding for Early Intervention Recovery at \$5.5 million per year. In addition, the Department of Health increased the funding amount per slot for evidence-based family home visiting programs and released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Evidence Based Home Visiting Agencies. The RFP included a minimum wage requirement for vendors. Specifically, starting October 1, 2022, "HFA and PAT family visitors must be paid a minimum of \$22.00 per hour and supervisors be paid a minimum of \$27.00 per hour. NFP family visitors must be paid a minimum of \$35 per hour and supervisors be paid a minimum of \$40.00 per hour."

## Key Takeaways

While Rhode Island has not yet established a statewide target wage scale for early educators, progress has been achieved through a variety of avenues, and advocates are continuing to push to establish cross-departmental goals to increase compensation for early childhood professionals and provide parity with similarly qualified K-12 educators and staff. Lessons learned from Rhode Island include bringing together all early childhood sectors to avoid siloes and competition within the industry, pushing for K-12 parity, and advocating on all fronts – not just in legislation but also through regulatory actions, including through state contracts.

## Washington State

Because Washington State has been working on equitable compensation for many years, Start Early interviewed a state administrator with the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to learn more about these efforts. In addition, given that Washington developed a wage scale but stopped short of implementation, state efforts can be informed by Washington's equity-focused approach to continue to try to advance a wage scale strategy – an approach designed to intentionally share power with the community. To follow-up on this effort, Start Early interviewed the local advocate currently leading the provider-focused working group charged with designing and recommending an equitable wage scale to DCYF.

### Compensation History

Conversations in Washington State about equitable compensation for the early learning workforce have been in progress for decades and the ongoing work and learnings over time have led to significant shifts in approach and strategy. Washington has evolved their thinking along the way about what constitutes equitable compensation as well as how to achieve it; “how” equitable compensation is implemented has shown to be just as important as “what” it is. For Washington, equity for the early childhood workforce encompasses compensation, benefits, a supportive professional learning system but also a structure that promotes co-creation and design.

In 2005, [HB 1636](#) was passed by the [Washington State Legislature](#), which directed the Division of Child Care and Early Learning in the Department of Social and Health Services (now the Department of Children, Youth and Families [DCYF]), to “establish a child care career and wage ladder in licensed child care centers” subject to the availability of funds. Due to a variety of reasons, including the Great Recession, implementation was paused and eventually defunded. However, ongoing conversations continued in Washington about how to achieve equitable compensation; and through intersections with national initiatives, including those led by the Institute of Medicine and the National Governor’s Association, the state continuously improved their approach and gained new learnings.

### Efforts to Develop a Wage Scale

In the 2017-2019 operating budget, the Washington Legislature appropriated funds to create a [child care workforce workgroup](#), comprised of government staff and community members, “to develop recommendations to support increased child care workforce wages, reduce turnover, enable child care providers to recruit more qualified educators and maintain the diversity of the current workforce.” The [Workgroup delivered a set of a recommendations](#) that included a proposed salary scale that considered role/position, education, years of experience, longevity and

allowed step increases for dual language teaching and serving specific populations (infant/toddler, children with special needs, low income communities). There were mixed reactions and concerns about implementation, such as how to implement when programs leveraged multiple revenue sources for programs, the role of QRIS and how it impacted compensation, and how to operationalize staff qualification components. As a result, the Department of Commerce was directed to take the workgroup recommendations and create an implementation plan. However, this effort stalled when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Recently, another working group was convened to continue the conversations on equitable compensation in pre-K and child care – this time led by Child Care Aware of Washington instead of DCYF. This working group resulted from one of DCYF’s main learnings to let go of power and allow advocates and the community to lead. For the agency, an important consideration is not only that policies themselves be equitable but that the approaches to developing the solutions be as well. In fact, DCYF’s strategic plan specifically mentions using [liberatory design](#) with the community to “design-out racism”. While allowing communities to lead required learning along the way and shifting ways of working at DCYF, it was necessary to challenge the status quo and implement equitable change. This has been an important value to both DCYF and Child Care Aware of Washington.

The current working group’s charge is to look at stabilizing and supporting the workforce overall. While compensation is a component of this, they are also looking at how to streamline professional development pathways, reduce entry barriers for the workforce, and workforce well-being. The working group consists of 30 individuals from varying parts of the workforce, including tribes, Head Start, school district pre-K, family child care, etc. There was great care involved in ensuring that all roles within a program are represented (directors, lead teachers, assistants, administrators, etc.) and that there is diversity in race and language so that the working group is representative of the field. In facilitating the working group, Child Care Aware of WA has been actively supporting participants understanding that the work is difficult. In addition to providing a stipend and meal gift cards, translated materials are provided ahead of time, simultaneous translations and interpretations occur during meetings, and mental health consulting is available for work group members recognizing the strain and burden engaging in this work can bring up. Child Care Aware of WA’s intent has also been to create a coalition across the field and eliminate siloes in order to address issues systematically, and they see this working group as an opportunity for this. The working group hopes to have a completed advocacy proposal by October 2022 so they are prepared for the next legislative session.

## Workforce Supports and the Career Lattice

In 2014, the state retired its career lattice while maintaining its workforce registry. WA’s career ladder previously used a scoring mechanism which they found to be perceived as “requirements”

for the workforce, rather than a pathway for an individual's professional goals. With the retirement of the career ladder, DCYF more clearly articulated the various roles in early childhood programs, pathways forward, and shaped monitoring and performance standards to mirror the career ladder in a way that made it less about “growth in a lattice” and more focused on various entry points into the profession.

Since retiring the frame, DCYF has deepened their partnership with Institutes of Higher Education to focus on supporting equitable career pathway opportunities by increasing accessibility on how people complete the competencies of their work and offering professional development opportunities in multiple languages. And, the state has added professional development supports like career navigators, points of contact at colleges, and [guidance on pathways](#) to assist the workforce in growing their career. Providing supports for the early learning workforce to tie their professional learning to their own professional goals while navigating the field has proved to be more beneficial than simply relying on a frame to help professionals “move up a ladder.”

## Fair Start for Kids Act

The [Fair Start for Kids Act](#), passed in 2021, provided additional funding for the workforce by providing rate enhancements to support compensation in the areas of trauma-informed care, dual language, and infant care. In terms of how funds are used to enhance compensation, the distribution mechanism for how funds are used to enhance compensation has been left up to providers to decide how they flow to the workforce. Another outcome of Washington's work on equitable compensation has been the clear statement from the community that compensation should incorporate both wages and benefits (i.e., insurance, retirement, paid time-off, etc.) rather than salary alone. In alignment with that, the Fair Start for Kids Act provided child care workers access to the Washington Health Benefit Exchange. While it is not funded in perpetuity, the current goal is to ensure access to as many individuals as possible (according to DCYF, roughly 300 new members are eligible to sign up each week). Prior to this, only individuals connected to the family child care union were able to access health care benefits through their union's collective bargaining agreement.

## Key Takeaways

In Washington, while there is currently no adopted wage scale, the state has continued to lead in equitable workforce supports through implementation of other strategies – community involvement and a co-design approach, an increase in benefits, and more equitable supports for professional growth. A lesson learned is that a multi-pronged strategy can be helpful; and looking holistically at the system beyond compensation is also essential to creating a more equitable system for the workforce.

## Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.'s work on equitable compensation for the early learning workforce is a prime example of how positive systems change is often incremental and relies on building blocks and strong foundations. Given D.C.'s long-term advocacy coalitions around compensation, Start Early interviewed a District advocate to gain insights into the multi-year effort around compensation. The District's leadership in the last few decades in this area have illustrated how a comprehensive advocacy strategy and a united coalition can progressively achieve equitable change over time. Additionally, with D.C.'s new compensation initiative beginning, states can gain insight regarding the design process, implementation plan and recommendations for future execution.

### Foundational Legislation

In the late 2000's, D.C. advocates pushed to improve access to publicly funded preschool for three- and four-year-olds in traditional public schools, charter schools, and community based settings. Under-enrollment in public schools at the time provided an advocacy opportunity to increase the number of students enrolled in the public school system by expanding public school to begin in pre-K and better integrating early learning. This effort culminated in the passing of the "Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008." Through the legislation, the D.C. public pre-K program (PKEEP) was expanded ["to provide quality, universally accessible pre-K via a mixed-delivery system in D.C. Public Schools, public charter schools and community-based organizations."](#) Given the strong political will in D.C. at the time to expand three- and four-year-old pre-K (versus expanding early care and education across the birth-to-five age spectrum, where advocates initially focused), the funding was tied to the K-12 student funding formula and didn't require a standalone financing strategy for public education. A \$10 million fund was established to cover the cost of community-based pre-K. And, the legislation required comparable pre-K teacher salaries for all three sectors. However, the significant majority of the pre-K slots ended up in D.C. public schools and public charter schools, which helped enrollment in the public K-12 system, but negatively impacted the child care industry and particularly in the birth-to-three space.

In 2015, D.C. advocates again organized a collective advocacy campaign focused on infants and toddlers. This culminated in the ["Birth to Three for All DC Act"](#) in 2018, which, among other things, required the District to ["develop a competitive salary scale for early childhood educators, to increase salaries for early educators and provide more support for teachers to achieve higher credentials and degrees."](#) Separately, in 2016, state regulations included new, specific requirements for teacher credentialing, including that all lead teachers – even in infant toddler classrooms – are required to have a Bachelor's degree by 2025. However, the Birth to Three Act was an unfunded mandate which meant that advocates had to develop annual budget priorities and ensure that legislators included these in the District's final budget each year. It wasn't until



2021 when a [revenue source was secured](#) for the compensation portion of the law – a wealth tax on high-income residents – that advocates successfully lobbied the D.C. Council to move on the language in the Birth to Three Act by establishing the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund. As a result, as part of the District’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget, an [Early Childhood Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force](#) was established to recommend a salary scale for educators (teachers and assistant teachers) and determine a mechanism for distribution.

## Task Force Recommendations

In January and April of 2022, the Task Force released recommendations proposing a structure of pay supplements made directly to educators in FY2022 and FY2023, with a longer-term mechanism implemented beginning in FY2024 that would distribute funds to facilities for direct salary increases. The [“direct-to-educator” delivery method](#) was implemented as a way to “get dollars out to eligible educators relatively quickly and easily, with relatively low burden on providers.” The [future mechanism](#), which would be developed with the community, would require facilities to opt-in to receive “program-level operating funds in return for a commitment to meet the new salary scale for all eligible educators.” Eligible staff include professionals in centers and homes whose primary focus is direct work with children in the classroom, in line with NAYEC’s Power to the Profession definition of “early childhood educators,” regardless of immigration status or full-time/part-time status. While PKEEP lead teachers are not eligible for the supplement given the parity established previously through Pre-K for All D.C., assistant teachers in PKEEP are eligible since PKEEP does not promise nor provide salaries equivalent to D.C. Public Schools to assistant teachers. Information on the supplemental payments were also made available in languages other than English, to be as inclusive as possible.

Implementation of the salary scale, especially in FY2024 and beyond, will continue to require coordination and alignment – wage compression, especially for administrators in early learning programs, multilingualism, barriers for teachers to credential attainment, barriers to converting foreign credentials, and immigration status are a sampling of possible challenges that might arise. In their recommendations, the Task Force has highlighted the need for the Office of State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to plan for the time and administrative cost of technical assistance to facilities; many operate as businesses and will need support navigating the system.

## Advocacy Strategy

Looking back, critical to the District’s success was having a coordinated advocacy strategy across the entire advocacy community working on family well-being issues. This ensured that equitable compensation wasn’t seen as a separate issue, but a critical component of how the system operated. With multi-year support from the Bainum Family Foundation, these advocates were

able to champion their platforms across multiple years and create a vision for a holistic system so that supports like family leave, TANF, WIC, housing, etc., were seen as an integrated part of early childhood versus a standalone program. Advocates in D.C. also pushed for foundational studies – reports on early learning supply and demand, the population flow in the D.C. metropolitan area, and cost models of specific early learning models – which were resources the community used to make the case for a stronger system. Parallel to these efforts was a group working to elect strong allies and advocates for early childhood to the D.C. Council.

Further building upon the holistic systems work, the advocacy community will be working to address equitable compensation for those in early learning that do not work directly with children in classrooms (e.g., center administrators, home visitors, nurse-practitioners, etc.). D.C. will look to other systems and fields for models recognizing that while complex, it is critical to strengthen compensation for the diverse early childhood workforce. Additionally, addressing benefits is another important piece of equitable compensation. D.C. advocates' most recent victory has focused on this: all early childhood educators and early care support staff will be able to access free health care through the District of Columbia Health Benefits Exchange starting in 2023.

## Key Takeaways

Advocates in D.C. have realized remarkable successes in equitable compensation, from building an understanding of D.C.'s economy and the intersection with the workforce to creating and maintaining a united coalition. The advocacy community has established on-ramps for current compensation wins that can be sustained for years to come. Incremental but substantive changes over time was a winning strategy for D.C. and can be considered for future system change efforts. In some instances, consistently building on previous wins versus striving for momentous change all at once may be a successful path forward.

In addition, Washington, D.C. has approached their advocacy strategy in the spirit of inclusivity. From disregarding documentation status for supplemental pay to ensuring that communications about the Early Childhood Pay Equity Fund were available in multiple languages, D.C., has embraced the notion that not only should the resulting policy be equitable but the approach should be as well.

## Acknowledgments

Start Early is incredibly grateful to the state leaders and advocates who offered their time, expertise, and experience to inform this report. They include:

- Angela Abrams, Professional Development Administrator, Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, interviewed on July 21, 2022.
- Gwyn Bachtle, Director of Early Learning Programs, Oregon Early Learning Division, interviewed on August 8, 2022.
- Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, interviewed on June 30, 2022.
- BB Otero, President, Otero Strategy Group, interviewed on August 18, 2022.
- Ryan Pricco, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Child Care Aware® of Washington, interviewed on September 8, 2022.
- The teams at Growing Up New Mexico and the Cradle to Career Policy Institute at the University of New Mexico, who inspired the creation of this report.



**Suggested Citation:** Hong, M. & J. Teng. (2022). In Pursuit of Equitable Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce: Considerations for States. Chicago, IL: Start Early

## About Start Early

[Start Early](#) (formerly known as the Ounce of Prevention) is a nonprofit public-private partnership advancing quality early learning and care for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to help close the opportunity gap. Bringing expertise in program delivery, research and evaluation, professional development and policy and advocacy, Start Early works in partnership with communities and other experts to drive systemic change so that millions more children, families and educators can thrive.

[Start Early Consulting](#) is a deeply experienced, mission-driven team with a long history of driving change within the early childhood field. The pursuit of high-quality, equitable early childhood systems is the heart of our consulting practice. We help systems evolve with highly customizable support, inviting leaders to leverage our consultants as strategic advisors or to develop and execute implementation plans. We expand the bench wherever support is needed, bringing seasoned, practical experience to leaders, advocates, and their teams.

When you partner with Start Early, you can count on a consulting team as committed to ambitious systems change as you are. For more information or support on your systems issues, please visit [www.startearly.org/consulting](http://www.startearly.org/consulting) or email [consulting@startearly.org](mailto:consulting@startearly.org).



[f/startearlyorg](https://www.facebook.com/startearlyorg)

[@startearlyorg](https://twitter.com/startearlyorg)

[in /startearlyorg](https://www.linkedin.com/company/startearlyorg)

[ig /startearlyorg](https://www.instagram.com/startearlyorg)