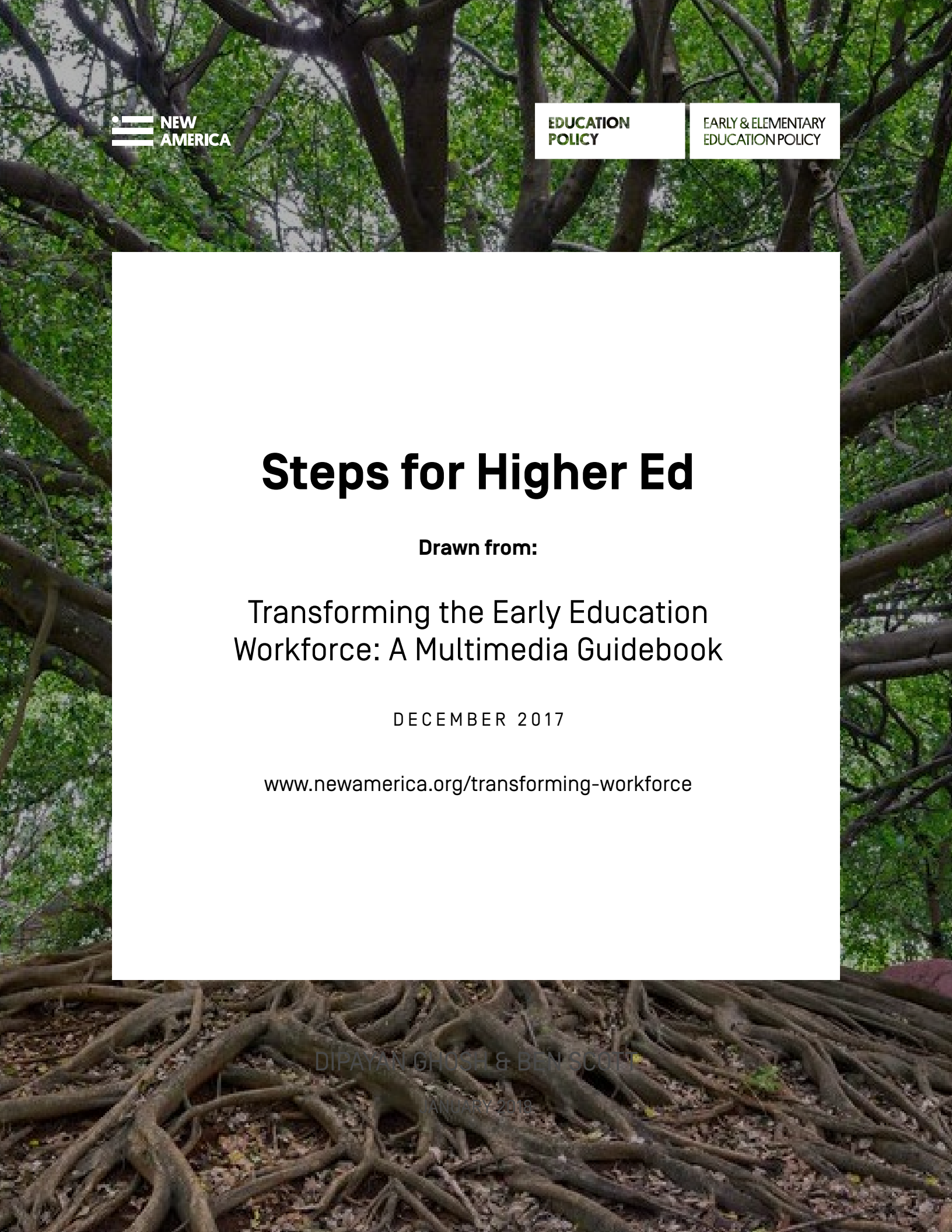

NEW AMERICA

EDUCATION POLICY

EARLY & ELEMENTARY EDUCATION POLICY

Steps for Higher Ed

Drawn from:

Transforming the Early Education Workforce: A Multimedia Guidebook

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Steps for Institutions of Higher Education

As someone who leads or works in an institution of higher education (IHE), your role in the improvement of early education may not be obvious. But in fact, IHEs have a significant role to play in helping to transform the early education workforce. Teacher preparation programs in particular have a responsibility to respond and reform as new insights emerge from the science of learning and reveal more effective ways to help educators support children's growth and development. This section of our guidebook draws out the information from *Transforming the Workforce* most relevant to IHEs. It is intended for college presidents, state boards of higher education, preparation program administrators, deans, teacher educators, and other faculty members. The summaries and questions below should help higher education leaders think through ways to reform and restructure their programs.

For additional guidance, we urge you to check out our **resources section** with relevant materials from the National Academy of Medicine, New America, and other leading organizations, as well as our **glossary** of key terms from the report.

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The Interaction of Biology and Environment

From birth through age 8 (B–8), children's brains are developing rapidly and are highly responsive to experience and stimulation. Physical, social, and environmental exposures during these years change brain circuitry, influencing children's long-term developmental and academic trajectories. Disruptions in brain development, such as those caused by adverse experiences, can manifest as academic and social problems when children enter early childhood programs or school. But just as development is susceptible to negative factors, children can also benefit from positive environments and relationships, such as those with educators.

As a leader or faculty member in an IHE, you will need to ensure that prospective B–8 caregivers and educators have a strong understanding of how children's brains are developing during these years. Well-prepared educators will know how to take into account experiences both inside and outside of the classroom as they track children's learning and development. Understanding the relationship between environmental and genetic factors in relation to individual differences in brain development allows educators to tailor instruction to each child and to effectively design early interventions.

Questions:

- Do your teacher preparation programs include coursework about the impacts of adversity on young children?
- Do teacher preparation programs adequately teach the science of brain development to future educators, those who will work with young children as well as those teaching older children?

This synopsis was drawn from our ***summary of chapter 3*** *of* Transforming the Workforce; *we encourage you to go to that summary for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

Child Development and Early Learning

To support their growth and learning, early educators need to understand how children develop at various ages and stages across multiple domains. Children are actively learning from the moment they are born and the quality of their interactions with adults is paramount to their success. Forming **secure attachments** with supportive caregivers during the first years of life helps children to develop socially and emotionally. They also begin developing the background knowledge that will enable them to understand concepts in specific subject areas, such as math and literacy, from a very early age.

You can help educators effectively distinguish such nuances in instruction and practice in language and literacy development, early mathematics, early science, social and emotional skills, and physical health and development. Educators should be trained to recognize the effects of **chronic stress** and assist children in developing the skills, such as persistence and emotional awareness, necessary for coping with adverse experiences.

Questions:

- Does your institution provide incentives for faculty to stay abreast of the science of early learning? Are there opportunities for faculty to collaborate and make connections across departments like developmental science, education, sociology, and other fields that are fostering insights into human development?
- What kind of training on early literacy, math, and science is offered in your institution's early childhood and elementary preparation programs? Do faculty teach across these programs and/or collaborate on content?

*This synopsis was drawn from our **summary of chapter 4** of* Transforming the Workforce; *we encourage you to go to that summary for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

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The Importance of Continuity for Children Birth Through Age 8

Studies show that young children learn best when they experience continuity in their learning experiences from one year to the next, starting at birth and extending up through age 8 (when middle childhood begins). Ideally, their caregivers and teachers will be building upon the skills and development set forth in the prior year. But this continuity is difficult to achieve when children experience a variety of early care and education settings that adhere to different standards and regulations. To begin to change this, B–8 educators will need a shared knowledge base on how children learn and develop. Their current lack of shared knowledge derives in part from how IHEs and teacher licensing programs have been designed, which has led to different expectations for educators working in early childhood programs and elementary schools.

As a leader in an IHE, you have an opportunity to restructure programs to ensure that B–8 educators, regardless of which setting or age group they work with, share the same foundation of knowledge and competencies. B–8 educators should have aligned expectations for children and know what developmentally appropriate instruction looks like at different ages and stages. High-quality child assessments that are aligned across the continuum can provide educators with data about how

a child is progressing. You should equip educators to interpret and use assessment data, which can inform instructional paths, including decisions about intervention services.

Questions:

- Are preparation programs designed to build competencies in educators across the B–8 spectrum or do they focus on only one part of this spectrum? How might programs be reformed to ensure that educators of, say, 6-year-olds can gain understanding of the stages of development that those children have passed through before they reached age 6 and so that educators working with 2-year-olds can better understand how to develop a foundation that will help children develop skills when they are in elementary school?
- Are field experiences for prospective teachers designed to introduce them to expectations and developmentally informed practices starting in the early years and across different grade levels?

This synopsis was drawn from our ***summary of chapter 5*** *of* Transforming the Workforce*; we encourage you to go to that summary for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

Educational Practices and the Competencies Required of Educators

Transforming the Workforce summarizes insights from various new studies on the effectiveness of various practices with young children that lead to the development of social and emotional skills, literacy and language skills, early math and early science skills, and the use of technology, as well as how to tailor methods to support dual language learners and other diverse populations of young children. It then presents these competencies on **pages 328–329** and organizes them into five categories:

- Core knowledge of the science of child development and early learning
- Practices to help children learn and develop based on this science
- Knowledge and skills for working with diverse populations of children
- Development of partnerships with families and support services to bolster child learning and development
- Ability and motivation to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of one's practices

Faculty members' own skills and knowledge may vary dramatically across these competencies, depending on their backgrounds. For example, some faculty may focus on teaching the theories of child development but are not as strong in understanding how to apply them, nor do they know the new science of learning trajectories in, say, mathematics. Some programs may be good at teaching how to design a classroom to encourage guided play but are not as strong in teaching how to engage and partner with diverse families (including dual language learners and children with disabilities) or how to develop **assessment literacy**, including how to interpret assessment results and make appropriate changes to instruction in light of those results. Faculty may not be up-to-date on how to use **tiered intervention approaches** to identify which children might benefit from additional instruction and support.

Questions:

- Are your teacher preparation programs incorporating all competencies for B–8 educators into their coursework and field experiences for prospective teachers?
- Do faculty members have any incentive to update their knowledge base to align with the current science on what B–8 educators need to know and be able to do? What institutional policies might encourage them to do so?
- How might your programs more effectively increase the math and science knowledge of early educators so they are more confident when teaching these subjects?
- What coursework and field experiences are provided by your teacher preparation programs to effectively prepare educators for teaching dual language learners and students with disabilities?
- Are you training prospective teachers to effectively conduct assessments and use their results to improve teaching and student learning?

*This synopsis was drawn from our **summary of chapter 6** and **summary of chapter 7** of* Transforming the Workforce*; we encourage you to go to those summaries for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

Steps for Institutions of Higher Education

How IHEs Can Support Current and Aspiring B–8 Educators

A big hurdle to transforming the workforce is the significant variation in how educators are prepared depending on the setting and age group with which they work. While elementary school educators must have formal preparation before

employment, usually a bachelor's degree and state certification, educators of children prior to kindergarten (with the exception of pre-K teachers in public schools) are often in less regulated programs and may not be required to have any formal higher education. Indeed, these early educators often work in the field before pursuing formal higher education or training. Disparities also exist for programs that prepare leaders. Elementary school principals usually need a master's degree, but preparation programs often do not focus on child development or what instruction should look like for young children. Preparation programs for center directors emphasize the business side of their job instead of their role as instructional leaders.

To overcome this bifurcated system and do a much better job of supporting children's learning, *Transforming the Workforce* recommends what many B–5 programs are already doing: increasing the qualification requirements for educators they hire. This development will have big implications for IHEs. The current fragmentation within IHEs can be difficult for students to navigate. "It is common," the authors write, "to have multiple programs focused on professions related to early childhood that are operating on the same campus but are scattered across the same institution, housed in separate departments with different expectations and requirements." IHEs are often running on limited resources and can have difficulty finding and retaining high-quality faculty to prepare educators.

As a leader or faculty member in an IHE, you should be aware that an increasing number of prospective educators are also pursuing alternative pathways. Some are for people who have already received a bachelor's degree and are switching into the education field. Some are for bilingual paraprofessionals who hope to become certified teachers. Others, such as Teach for America, put candidates on a fast track and often assist with employment. You may see these alternatives as competitors, but they are potential collaborators with which to forge partnerships to support the preparation of B–8 educators coming from many different backgrounds.

Questions:

- In preparation programs, are educators who are planning to work in elementary schools leaving with a strong foundation in child development and the science of early learning?
- Are educators who are planning to work with children prior to kindergarten gaining a foundation in how to foster learning in developmentally informed ways across multiple domains, including social-emotional development, literacy, and math?
- How can preparation programs incorporate additional high-quality field experiences to give prospective teachers more opportunities to practice and demonstrate competencies?
- Is there a track for administrators of non-public school early education programs that includes both operational or managerial knowledge and instructional knowledge?

*This synopsis was drawn from our **summary of chapter 8** and **summary of chapter 9** of* Transforming the Workforce*; we encourage you to go to those summaries for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

Steps for Institutions of Higher Education

Status and Well-Being of the Workforce

For those who are already working in early education, gaining access to higher education to obtain a higher degree can be exceedingly difficult, especially for the B–5 workforce. Early educators working outside of the public school system are often paid debilitatingly low wages. Over the past 25 years, there has been **no meaningful change** in the wages of those caring for and educating our youngest

children. Many professionals in this field, especially those working with younger children, continue to earn poverty-level wages. **Large disparities persist** even when education levels are comparable.

It is not surprising, then, that the cost of higher education can be an additional source of stress. Grants and scholarships that take into account the full cost of pursuing higher education (tuition, books, lost income, etc.) can increase accessibility. T.E.A.C.H. scholarships have been a means of increasing access to higher education in many states and recipients are guaranteed small pay increases. Unfortunately, higher education requirements are not always coupled with meaningful increases in pay so it is important that students do not take on significant debt to pay for higher education.

Early educators also work long hours. Early educators working full-time may need to attend programs at night or on weekends. Online courses, when high-quality, can be a good option, especially for students who do not live close to IHEs offering early learning programs. Access to counselors and cohort models can provide students with the supports they need to succeed. Offering programs at community colleges and making it easier for students to transfer between schools, such as through articulation agreements, can also help educators overcome barriers to further education.

Questions:

- Are your preparation programs designed to meet the needs of early childhood educators already in the workforce who wish to pursue higher education?
- What is your IHE doing to make higher education more accessible? Are there efforts underway to provide courses at alternate times to accommodate working students, to provide tuition breaks, and to take advantage of the fact that many early educators are already working with young children every day?

*This synopsis was drawn from our **summary of chapter 10** of* Transforming the Workforce*; we encourage you to go to that summary for key takeaways, examples, graphics, important quotations from the National Academies' volume, and more.*

Recommendations: Transforming the Workforce's Blueprint for Action

The committee behind *Transforming the Workforce* offers a "Blueprint for Action" that puts forward 13 recommendations along with a discussion of necessary considerations to better connect the research with policy and practice and ultimately improve outcomes for children. While many of the recommendations will impact IHEs, the report includes two recommendations specifically targeted towards higher education programs:

- **Recommendation 4: Build an interdisciplinary foundation in higher education for child development.**
- **Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.**

Our overview of these recommendations, including key takeaways for implementation, is available **here.**

In Depth

Transforming the Early Education Workforce

About this Project

This is a multimedia guidebook inspired by and drawn from the *Transforming the Workforce for Children From Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (National Academies Press, 2015). This guidebook adds to that volume with key takeaways, videos, interactive tools, a glossary, and more. We have designed it with three doorways for three different but overlapping audiences: **educators who work directly with children**, **educators in higher education who prepare those educators**, and **policymakers** interested in improving early learning settings for children from B–8.

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