

# Steps for the Workforce

Drawn from:

Transforming the Early Education  
Workforce: A Multimedia Guidebook

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With all this talk about “transforming the workforce,” educators and caregivers might wonder: What about those of us who are already *in* the workforce? Everyone seems to want us to “transform,” but what exactly does that mean? In this section, we summarize and link to information in this guidebook that is most relevant to your job, and we also offer questions to prompt discussion in professional learning communities, grade-level meetings, and any other forums in which you and your coworkers meet to refine skills. We encourage you to use this section in tandem with the **six-page brief** published by the National Academies which also synthesizes the *Transforming the Workforce* report for educators and caregivers.

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

## The Interaction of Biology and Environment

Given that you work with children every day, you already see how much experiences in the early years can affect their development. Exposure to significant stress and hardship can result in changes to the brain that negatively

impact behavior and cognition. Yet science is showing that environmental factors impact each child differently, as brain development is based on a combination of children's experiences and their genetic makeup. Experiencing a traumatic event, such as physical abuse, can have different long-term implications for different children. Understanding more about children's lives outside of the classroom can enable you to tailor your teaching and caregiving to better support their development. Develop strong relationships with families to learn about their needs and connect them to resources that support their wellbeing.

*Questions:*

- What information do you have about the backgrounds of young children in your care? What training have you received on how to protect families' privacy while also becoming more informed about the stresses they may be experiencing?
- Are there professionals in your workplace who have the opportunity to sit down with each family and discuss life stressors family members are facing as well as set goals for their children?
- Is there someone in your program who is responsible for connecting families to wraparound services, such as health clinics or job training centers, that can help mitigate families' stressors?

*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.*

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# Child Development and Early Learning

You want children to learn how to share, make friends, and regulate their emotions. You want to help build their language and literacy skills. You want to develop their understanding of math beyond counting and recognizing simple shapes and to cultivate their interests as young scientists and explorers. To do all of this for the children in your care, you will need to ensure that they have developed a feeling of security and attachment to you and that they experience high-quality interactions with you and the other adults in their lives. Science shows that children, even at very young ages, benefit greatly from back-and-forth interactions with caregivers and learn from dialogue that is contingent on their own responses and questions. In the realm of language development, for example, research shows that these authentic conversations help to develop children's oral language skills and their comprehension of new words. Doing this skillfully will require a deeper understanding of what children are capable of doing and learning in multiple domains at each stage of their development. Understanding these capacities can help you identify potential developmental delays or disabilities and ensure that families receive the supports they need.

*Questions:*

- Are curricula or other structured materials in place at the school or program level to help you build social and emotional skills, literacy and language skills, early math skills, and early science skills in young children?
- Are research-backed techniques for ensuring a secure educator-child attachment, such as primary caregiving and continuity of care, in place for infants and toddlers in early education programs?
- Does your program provide developmental screenings to identify any potential delays and ensure that children have access to the services they need?

*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.*

# The Importance of Continuity for Children B–8

Children need continuity during the early childhood years to ensure that high-quality learning experiences build off each other. From B–8, children are in multiple early education and care settings, usually with varied standards based on the type of setting [i.e., home-based, center-based, or public school] and age of the children served. These inconsistencies stem largely from the fact that programs are responding to different regulations and funding streams.

You can mitigate inconsistencies and help ensure that children’s experiences align from one year to the next by increasing communication and coordination within and across programs. Once you know what learning experiences students have had in the past and what is expected of them the following year, you can better tailor instruction and care. If you can use assessment data that align across the continuum, you will have an easier time making comparisons and being able to discern where children are and how they are progressing.

Questions:

- What information do you have about the children entering your classrooms each year?
- How can you identify and build relationships with the early care and education programs that feed into your elementary school and vice versa?
- How might you share information about curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies to help better align what and how children are learning across years and settings?

*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.*

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# Educational Practices and the Competencies Required of Educators

To foster learning, you will need knowledge of subject-matter content, an understanding of how children learn specific skills and develop background knowledge at various stages of their development, and an ability to select the instructional strategy that will best promote learning at any given time. For example, there are multiple techniques that you can use to support **language** and **literacy** development. One is to facilitate “serve and return” interactions with young children that help build their vocabulary skills. When children have experiences with frequent and elaborate language from an early age, they build vocabulary and background knowledge. This also teaches children how words work together. By listening and then speaking children understand more words, which eventually translates to reading.

Similar techniques are becoming better understood for helping teachers to develop children's early math skills, provide them experiences with scientific practices, and nurture their social and emotional development. Helping children to learn to **regulate their actions and emotions**, for example, requires learning environments that are organized, predictable, and focused on developing warm relationships with you and their peers. For all of these subject areas and domains, *Transforming the Workforce* concludes that teachers need to use research-based curricula and take advantage of opportunities for professional learning.

In addition to knowing how to teach subject matter and skills, you will need to know how to apply these strategies for specific populations of students, such as dual language learners or children with disabilities. Part of your job entails being able to identify which children need additional supports, which requires understanding the different types of screening and assessment tools, including how to interpret assessment results and make appropriate changes to instruction in response.

In short, being an early educator requires a whole host of competencies and a deep base of knowledge. And while there are meaningful differences in these competencies depending on whether you are working with infants and toddlers, preschoolers, or elementary school students, professionals working across the B–8 continuum should have a shared knowledge base and skills to provide quality practice and ensure continuity for children.

On **pages 328–329** of *Transforming the Workforce*, you can see a full list of the competencies that educators need. The report organizes these competencies into five categories:

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

*Questions:*

- Review the list of competencies on pages 328–329. Which ones do you feel most confident about as an educator? Which ones do you want to develop further?
- Are professional learning opportunities offered by your state, school district, or community to fill the gaps?
- Do you have access to research-based curricula and tools to help support children's learning? Are those tools equally strong in all domains (such as social-emotional development, literacy and language development, math, and science)?
- How are you using assessment in your classroom or program to inform lessons and improve child learning and development?
- Do you need more training in learning how to adjust instruction in response to assessment results?

*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.*

# Factors That Contribute to Quality Professional Learning

To achieve the competencies and skills outlined in the report, you need access to professional learning, whether through preparation programs [pre-service] or ongoing education [in-service]. Researchers have found that professional learning is most effective when it is ongoing, consistent, and directly related to classroom practice. *Transforming the Workforce* describes how difficult and variable access can be in different types of settings; for example, educators in publicly funded settings like Head Start and elementary schools usually have greater access. To whatever extent possible, seek out professional learning that employs these characteristics of quality in the areas that you most need support.

## *Questions:*

- What barriers might be keeping you from advancing your education or taking advantage of professional learning?
- What actions can schools and districts take to foster the development of a professional community of early educators that support each other to improve pedagogical practice?
- Are you afforded opportunities to join professional learning communities? If not, can you advocate for the creation of those communities or start them with the assistance of professional membership organizations in the field?
- Have you talked with leaders about expanding options in your state or locality for augmenting your skills and sharing learnings across programs or grade levels?

*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.*

# Qualification Requirements, Evaluation Systems, and Quality Assurance Systems

If you are an educator of children over the age of 5, you likely have a bachelor's degree. If you are an educator of children younger than 5, your credentials may be quite different. The *Transforming the Workforce* report details these disparities. It shows how divergent qualification requirements for B-5 and elementary school educators have perpetuated misconceptions that working with younger children requires less knowledge and fewer skills. These disparities foster inequities in compensation. The report provides many recommendations for beginning to bridge these gaps. It ends with a big list of to-dos for **policymakers** and **institutions of higher education**, including efforts to help raise the quality and the level of credentials required of educators serving children under age 5.

The report also delves into how educators and programs are evaluated. Existing systems vary considerably in design and intent. Teacher evaluations used in public schools are designed to improve instruction and child outcomes by differentiating effective from ineffective instructional practice. If you are a teacher or principal conducting evaluations in elementary schools, you will need to keep in mind that PreK-third grade students learn in ways that differ from their older peers. Further, in evaluation systems that rely on student outcomes, evaluators should understand that the younger the child, the more difficult it is to obtain reliable and valid assessment data.

States and national organizations have also been refining how program quality is measured. Quality assurance systems in the B–8 field include accreditation systems and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). There is great variation in these systems, but when done well, they have the potential to positively affect educator knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

*Questions:*

- Do you have the financial, logistical, and moral support you need to gain a higher credential if required? If so, do you also have an advisor who can help you find a high-quality, accredited institution?
- Are you aware of the criteria by which you and your peers are evaluated?
- If you work in an elementary school, do your principals or other evaluators of PreK–third grade classrooms understand how to evaluate quality instruction in the early grades?
- Are you involved in evaluating your peers or managers?

*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.*

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## **Status and Well-Being of the Workforce**

You know better than anyone that teaching and caring for young children is a demanding job. And yet studies show that compensation and benefits for early educators, especially for those working outside of the public-school system, are often so low that you may have to take on a second job or rely on public assistance to make ends meet. Consequently, as studies show, you and your peers experience

more stress than those in many other fields. Experiencing depressive symptoms is not uncommon, especially for those working with high-risk populations. Depression and stress can make it difficult to provide high-quality education and care for the children in your classrooms.

*Questions:*

- Are efforts underway to improve compensation in your work setting? Are policymakers aware of disparities?
- What types of support do you or the educators you work with have to improve their well-being? What types of supports do you wish you had?
- Is there a defined career ladder or opportunities for advancement in your program?

*This synopsis was drawn from our **summary of chapter 11** 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.*

# 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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