

POWER TO THE PROFESSION

Well-prepared, effective, diverse, compensated and supported early childhood educators are the key component of high-quality early learning programs. And early childhood educators, like nurses, lawyers, and doctors before us, must define our own profession in order to ensure that we are able to deliver the best outcomes for children birth through age 8. As part of that effort, we must intentionally and equitably advance a profession that reflects the diversity of the children and families the profession supports.

The collective Power to the Profession initiative, relying on a National Task Force, Stakeholder Groups, and individuals within the field, is structured as a series of eight stackable, iterative “Decision Cycles.” Through this process, we will establish a unifying framework for career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, and compensation for the early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8.

The recommendations that result from this process will lead to the implementation of a thoughtful and robust policy and financing agenda, in which we will honor the existing early childhood workforce by creating exemption policies, pathways, and timeframes that serve as a bridge from our present to our future.

Where are we now?

The first Decision Cycles have laid the groundwork for the future early childhood education profession by making recommendations on the name and the responsibilities of the profession (Decision Cycle 1) and the competencies of early childhood educators (Decision Cycle 2). The current Decision Cycle (combined 3-4-5) conveys the aspirations of the Task Force related to qualifications, specializations, and career pathways, designed to transform the complex and fragmented early childhood field as it exists today into a coherent profession in the future.

What questions does DC 345 ask and answer?

Question #1: How should the designations within the profession be structured?

The early childhood education profession (made up of early childhood educators) is a distinct profession among other professions and occupations in the early childhood field. Most professions have one designation: this structure offers clarity but has often resulted in stratified and highly segmented fields that are more likely to result in the exclusion of educators from communities of color and those without bachelor’s degrees. Prioritizing diversity and equity, the Task Force recommends a structure in which there are three designations within the early childhood profession – Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I), Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II), and Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III).

Question #2: What preparation programs should be endorsed and supported?

Early childhood educators are defined by their mastery of the knowledge, skills and competencies referenced in Decision Cycle 2. The Task Force recommends that the following programs be endorsed and supported to prepare early childhood educators. These programs will serve as the primary preparation pathways:

- Early Childhood Education Professional Training Programs (minimum 120 training hours)
- Early Childhood Education Associate Degree Programs
- Early Childhood Education Bachelor’s Degree Programs
- Early Childhood Education Master’s Degree Programs (initial preparation)

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In addition, the Task Force believes that innovative approaches in professional preparation should be encouraged. Examples include competency- based programs, use of prior learning assessments for awarding credit, work-based supervised practicum/clinical experiences and intensive degree programs with shorter duration. In particular, innovations that are designed to reach non-traditional and diverse students are essential to eliminating the existing barriers to higher education. Decision Cycle 8 will explore in more detail the required supports and infrastructure necessary to access and attain professional preparation.

Question #3: Given the duration of the primary professional preparation programs and the depth and breadth of the professional standards and competencies, what distinguishes preparation programs and their graduates?

Uniform designations (ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III) and levels of preparation should be distinct and meaningful. Clear expectations for early childhood educators and the programs preparing early childhood educators for each designation must be established. As early childhood educators gain deeper mastery of the unifying competencies through increased levels of preparation, the scope of their practice and professional responsibilities will increase, along with their compensation. Note that Decision Cycle 6 will address compensation recommendations for each level.

Question #4: Should the early childhood education profession have specializations? If so, how should specializations within the profession be structured?

Early childhood educators must generalize before they are eligible to specialize. Once the generalist framework is established by the profession and as it becomes reflected in key state and federal policies, the profession can mobilize to create and/or promote specializations. Specializations should help early childhood educators deepen their knowledge and practice and create a professional niche.

How can you engage?

This is your profession, and there is a place for you here. We invite you to contribute your expertise and passion.

- **Sign-up** to inform the decision-making process and to receive updates by emailing p2p@naeyc.org.
- **Review and Discuss** the latest draft and the implications for your work. Access the draft and accompanying study guide at www.NAEYC.org/profession.
- **Share your feedback** with the Task Force, which is taking public comment on the recommendations for Decision Cycle 3-4-5, now through April 30. Visit www.NAEYC.org/profession or email p2p@naeyc.org to share your thoughts.
- **Organize** a Power to the Profession discussion group with your colleagues. It could be a Power to the Profession Potluck, an agenda item at an all-staff meeting...or get creative!
- **Connect** with your local Affiliate or partner organization and **co-host** a Power to the Profession convening in your community. This can include focus group sessions, panels, keynote addresses, and workshops at local, state, and national meetings and conferences. Reach out to p2p@naeyc.org if you would like resources to help you facilitate a conversation!
- **Inform** our efforts by scheduling time to chat with us during our virtual office hours every 2nd and 4th Friday of the month. Reserve your slot at www.NAEYC.org/profession.