



Memorandum

To: Molly Loomis, Facilitator, Vermont PreK Education Implementation Committee

From: Lori Connors-Tadros, Senior Research Fellow, NIEER

cc: GG Weisenfeld, Senior ECE Policy Specialist, NIEER

Date: May 23, 2024

Re: Alternative Pathways to PreK Teacher Qualifications: Information for Vermont

As Vermont develops a report to the legislature for expanding pre-K, the following information is intended to provide resources and strategies to support alternative pathways for pre-K teacher qualifications. This memo addresses the following:

- For states that have developed an equivalent standard for qualifications for state-funded pre-k teachers in CBOs (we refer to a non-LEAs), what have they come up with?
- What strategies have states invested in to help incumbent pre-k teachers in CBOs attain higher standards, whether a BA and certification or an equivalent standard? (e.g., credit for prior learning/experience)

Question 1: What are some examples of how states have developed equivalent standards for pre-K teachers in non-LEA Settings?

In response to the first question regarding equivalent standards for qualifications of pre-K teachers in non-LEA settings, we looked to a study of lessons learned on implementing mixed delivery PreK in selected states¹, and state produced policy and guidance for pre-K.

NIEER and the Learning Policy Institute conducted a [study of the mixed delivery systems](#) in Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and West Virginia that have taken different approaches to supporting equivalent teacher standards in LEA and non-LEA settings. Relevant findings from this report are excerpted below.

Across LEA and non-LEA settings, all five case study states require a bachelor's degree with early childhood education (ECE) specialization for all lead teachers. In Alabama only lead teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a teaching credential. Similarly, in West Virginia teachers in non-LEA settings

¹ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute. https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/State_Preschool_Mixed_Delivery_System_REPORT.pdf

may be hired with a Community Program Permanent Authorization in lieu of a teaching credential if the provider is unable to find a fully certified teacher. Michigan, New Jersey and New York require the same teacher license or credential for teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings. In Alabama and West Virginia there are differences in the specific type of credentials, licenses, or endorsements required by setting for lead teachers.

Michigan, New Jersey, and New York have requirements for lead teachers that are comparable across settings. Current (FY2022) requirements for preschool teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are:

- **[In Michigan](#)**, the Great Start School Readiness Program (GSRP) lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development (with a specialization in preschool teaching) **or** an elementary teaching certification with an early childhood endorsement. Teachers who have not yet achieved the required credentials must be enrolled in a program and be in compliance within three years. The early childhood specialist is responsible for approving and monitoring compliance plans. As noted in the GSRP program implementation manual, the Intermediate School District is responsible for hiring an early childhood consultant (ECS) for each classroom, and the ECS provides intensive support and additional classroom visits, coaching and consultation that staff members with incomplete credentialing require. Further details on requirements of support for staff that do not have a BA are explained in detail [here](#). It is important to note that GSRP program standards are currently under review given the Governor's proposed expansion of GSRP to universal, and staffing qualifications of lead teachers may change.
- **[In New Jersey](#)**, the Preschool Expansion Program (building on the Abbott Preschool model) teachers in LEA and non-LEAs are required to have a bachelor's degree and specialized training in ECE. (see note below on the historical context of NJ's Abbott program to raise teacher quality).
- **[New York's Universal PreK program](#)** requires LEA teachers (preschool to grade 12) to earn a master's degree to maintain licensure. Since 2004, preschool programs in non-LEA settings have been required to meet the same certification requirements as those in LEAs. All newly hired lead teachers in both LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field and a written plan to earn a New York state teaching license or certificate valid for services in the early childhood grades within 5 years, which includes the completion of a master's degree.

Alabama and West Virginia have different teacher preservice training requirements for lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings, although both sets of requirements meet NIEER's teacher specialized training benchmark because they both include ECE content.

- **[In Alabama](#)**, teachers in all settings are required to have ECE coursework as part of their bachelor's degree, but only lead teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a teaching credential in either preschool, kindergarten, or birth–age 3. Salary parity is required for teachers in both settings, however, compensation parity including health benefits and paid time off are not required in non-LEA settings.
- **[In West Virginia](#)**, a bachelor's degree is required for WV Pre-K teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings. WV Pre-K teachers are also required to have an additional 6 credit hours of preservice specialized training in either ECE, child development, or preschool special education and certification in ECE or elementary education. In LEAs, preschool teachers may apply for a

temporary certification. In non-LEA settings, teachers have the option of fulfilling the WV Pre-K certification requirement by obtaining the [Community Program Authorization](#), which enables teachers who are working toward their credentials and certification by the state to continue teaching in a PreK classroom with initial, renewal, or permanent authorization. The [WV Universal PreK Guidebook](#), includes a list of state-approved credentials for teachers in non-LEA settings on page 25. Further details regarding the Community Program Permanent Authorization (CPPA), which is an existing credential that applies only to teachers in non-LEA settings, can be found on pages 26-29 of the guidebook. When non-LEA providers are unable to find a fully certified teacher, they are permitted to employ an individual holding a CPPA. Prior to 2013, non-LEA teachers could obtain a CPPA with an associate degree along with specialized training and teaching experience, but now a bachelor's degree is required. Using a CPPA credential allows non-LEA providers to meet state requirements when the pool of fully certified teachers is low, and it creates a pathway for individuals holding a CPPA to be employed as lead teachers. West Virginia requires salary parity for preschool teachers in LEA settings relative to teachers in K–12 but does not require parity for preschool teachers in non-LEA settings.

Selected additional examples are:

In Georgia, [Bright from the Start](#), requires a BA in early childhood education for teachers in both settings. There are two exceptions to this requirement:

- Programs that are grandfathered with a two-year degree/Montessori diploma as of 2009-2010 and continued employment in the same program. All other teachers must have an approved credential in addition to a bachelor's degree.
- Teachers with a bachelor's degree that is not in early childhood education are required to hold other credentials. A new option to meet this requirement is for teachers to hold a "Valid Preschool Child Development Associate (CDA) credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. Note: The following CDA credentials will not meet the CDA requirement for a lead teacher: Infant/Toddler CDA, Family Childcare CDA, Home Visitors CDA, and Military School-Age CDA. Teachers with an expired CDA or in the process of renewing an expired CDA will not meet the CDA requirement".

Program guidelines also identify base salary requirements commensurate with each level of teacher qualifications and programs are required to pay 100% of the salary indicated for required credentials. Supplemental compensation is also required to be paid to teachers based on a schedule of credible years of experience.²

In Illinois, [Preschool for All](#), requires a bachelor's degree in early childhood education in both LEA and non-LEA settings. As the state is seeking to expand PFA in mixed delivery settings, in 2022, new requirements for licensure were approved for teachers.³ In addition to early childhood education license, an ECE Credential Level of 5 awarded by Department of Human Services under the Gateways to

² See pages 32-38 for information on Bright from the Start Teacher qualifications and salary requirements. <https://www.dec.state.ga.gov/documents/attachments/Guidelines.pdf>

³ Illinois Early Childhood Department Licensure Requirements. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Early-Childhood-Lic-Feb22.pdf>

Opportunity Program while pursuing a professional educator license was approved, initially through 2023-2024 School Year but recently extended indefinitely.

In **Rhode Island PreK Program**, teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to hold a BA in ECE. Teachers in public school settings are required to hold a current appropriate RIDE Early Childhood certificate. However, teachers in non-LEA settings must meet the degree requirements- (e.g.) Bachelor's or master's in early childhood education, Early Childhood Special Education, Human Development, or Child Development from an accredited or approved Institution of Higher Education) but they have a longer timeline to meet the certification requirement, within seven years of employment. (Note there are additional requirements for professional development).⁴

Other examples:

[Oregon](#) has two state-funded preschool programs, Oregon PreK Program and the newer Oregon Preschool Promise established in 2016. OR Preschool Promise is a mixed delivery program serving children in families with incomes up to 200% FPL. OR Preschool promise does not require a BA of lead teachers (requires a CDA) but they do require specialized training.

As noted in the [Preschool Promise Grant Manual](#) on page 12:

Grantees must have preschool lead teachers who have at least a bachelor's degree in:

- Early childhood education or a field related to early childhood education; or
- A field not related to early childhood education but teacher has completed coursework that is equivalent to a major in early childhood education and has sufficient training in early childhood education as determined by the Division.
- An associate degree with additional training or additional certification in early childhood education or a field related to early childhood education, as determined by the Division.
- Child Development Associate (CDA) Preschool Credential or step level 8 as determined by the Oregon Registry Online (ORO).

These states do not meet the NIEER BA benchmark because while they require lead teachers in public school settings to have a BA, they do not require teachers in non-public school settings to have a BA (while they do require teachers in public settings to have a BA).

- [DE](#), [PA](#), and [SC](#) allow lead teachers in non-public school settings to have an AA. (In DE, at least 50 percent of teachers need to have a BA.)
- In [VT](#), pre-k programs are required to have at least one teacher with a BA per center.
- In [VA](#), lead teachers in non-public school settings can have a high school diploma

⁴ RI Comprehensive Regulations on Early Childhood Programs. (pg. 15).
<https://ride.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur806/files/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/early-childhood/CECE-Regulations.pdf>

It is important to consider the impact of the different requirements of teachers in public school and non-public settings on their professional stature and ability to achieve compensation parity. Except for OR Preschool Promise, these states do not have salary parity, or strategies to work toward parity, in all PreK settings.⁵

Question 2: What strategies have states used to support non-LEA providers in meeting higher qualifications to teach in a state-funded pre-K program?

First, it is important for the state to develop a comprehensive plan for building capacity and retaining highly qualified individuals to teach in early childhood programs. A comprehensive plan identifies strategies to build capacity and demand at the system/institution level and reduce barriers at the individual level. The visual below depicts key strategies that should be included in a comprehensive plan.⁶

Key Elements for Developing an Early Educator Workforce

Build Effective Higher Education Pathways:	Support ECE Students in Meeting High Expectations:
Build the capacity of higher education programs and ECE faculty to prepare a diverse workforce	Fund academic supports for ECE students, including specialized advising
Support high-quality clinical practice	Offer financial assistance to educators earning an early childhood permit, degree, or credential
Develop clear pathways to progress from 2- to 4-year colleges	Set clear, high expectations for early childhood educators
<p style="text-align: center;">Foundational Elements:</p> <p>Adequate compensation Ongoing professional development ECE workforce data</p>	

⁵ McClean, C., Dichter, H. & Whitebook, M. (2017). Strategies in Pursuit of Pre-K Teachers Compensation Parity: Lessons from Seven States and Cities. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/strategies-in-pursuit-of-pre-k-teacher-compensation-parity/>

⁶ Gardner, M., Melnick, H., Meloy, B., & Barajas, J. (2019). Promising models for preparing a diverse, high-quality early childhood workforce. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/preparing-diverse-high-quality-early-childhood-workforce-report>

Source: Gardner, M., Melnick, H., Meloy, B., & Barajas, J. (2019). Promising models for preparing a diverse, high-quality early childhood workforce. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/preparing-diverse-high-quality-early-childhood-workforce-report>

Selected examples of these strategies include:

Developing a multi-pronged approach to build capacity and drive demand. The most notable and long-running example is how **New Jersey** supported teachers in non-LEA settings to obtain the required credentials for the Abbott preschool program. New Jersey took a two-pronged approach to build market demand and access by providing scholarships directly to teachers to obtain a bachelor's degree while they worked in the state preschool program and by funding 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education around the state to establish satellite programs around the state to ensure that degree bearing courses were easily accessible and located near communities where potential teachers lived. While this approach was successful, New Jersey addressed two stumbling blocks related to time to achieve degree and compensation parity among LEA and non-LEA⁷. More recently the state has developed a strategic plan for preschool expansion that identifies a number of strategies to increase workforce capacity, including providing scholarships, incentivizing credential completion, and encouraging partnerships between 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education.⁸

In Maryland, all lead teachers in prekindergarten classrooms must hold a state certification in Early Childhood Education or hold a bachelor's degree and be enrolled in a Maryland approved alternative preparation program or Maryland-approved teacher preparation program leading to P-3 certification.⁹ However to address teacher shortages generally, and specifically for Pre-K as it expands to 50% of slots in private programs (as per the [Blueprint](#)), Maryland recently passed legislation, [The Maryland Educator Shortage Reduction Act 2023](#), This act has a number of provisions that will help to recruit and retain highly qualified lead teachers, for Pre-K and other grades/subjects where there is a shortage. The Act does the following:

- Delays – by two years – until 2027-28 requirements for highly qualified prekindergarten teachers and teaching assistants.
- Expands the entities that are considered alternative teacher preparation programs and allows eligible pre-K providers to serve as a partner school for the teacher preparation program.
- Establishes the Teacher Development and Retention Program as a pilot program (in effect for six years until it terminates June 30, 2029) to incentivize a cohort of students to pursue a career in the teaching profession.

⁷ Sources: Abbott v. Burke, 153 N.J. 480 (1998); Abbott v. Burke, 163 N.J. 95 (2000); Abbott v. Burke, 180 N.J. 444 (June 2004); Lobman, C., Ryan, S., & McLaughlin, J. (2005). Reconstructing teacher education to prepare qualified preschool teachers: Lessons from New Jersey. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 7(2). See also: Getting Qualified: A report on the efforts of preschools teachers in NJ Abbott Districts to improve their qualifications. <https://nieer.org/research-report/getting-qualified-report-efforts-preschool-teachers-new-jerseys-abbott-districts-improve-qualifications>

⁸ Garver, K. A., Frede, E., Barnett, W. S., Gardiner, B. A., Hodges, K. S., Sandelier, N. (2022). New Jersey Strategic Plan for Preschool Expansion Phase I: The Foundation. National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/docs/NewJerseyStrategicPlanforPreschoolExpansionPhase1-TheFoundation.pdf>

⁹ See page 8 of the Grant Guide for PreK Expansion- https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/3/2023_pre-k_expansion_gig.pdf

The bill states that “MSDE, in collaboration with institutions of higher education, must establish standards for and criteria to evaluate the knowledge and skills from prior learning relating to early childhood education, including from a registered apprenticeship.” The state has provided grants to various Institutions of Higher Education and community partners in the state to develop recommendations for the standards and criteria for prior learning and registered apprenticeship. It is expected that recommendations may be available in June/early summer 2024.

A report prepared for Maryland’s Accountability and Implementation Board for the [Blueprint for Maryland’s Future](#), provides an update and key strategies on Maryland’s efforts to develop alternative pathways and address structural elements to increase participation of private providers in publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs. (report is attached) The report summarizes findings from an assessment of the current system to identify areas to reduce barriers for private providers to achieve credentials required of the Maryland PreK program, and identifies a number of strategies, including apprenticeship models, stackable credentials and credit for prior learning. Though specific to Maryland the report offers a number of recommendations that may be instructive to other states. implementation

Credit for Prior Learning. Giving credit for prior learning to individuals pursuing degrees can save them time and money, and recognizes important skills and knowledge that can contribute to higher qualifications. A number of states’ institutes of higher education (more commonly community colleges) have developed credit for prior learning specifically for early childhood educators. Credit for prior learning programs may be particularly helpful in recruiting a more diverse workforce, who often have taken many trainings that did not articulate to a degree.¹⁰ From my limited review of prior learning programs, most credit for prior learning programs articulate to an associate’s (two year degree). However, [Western Michigan University’s](#) prior learning assessment can help students gain credit for prior learning towards an undergraduate or graduate degree.

Selected examples of Community College programs focused on Early Childhood Education:

RI’s [Community College of Rhode Island](#), which is a Hispanic Serving Institution, provides prior learning credit to early childhood students for trainings, (up to 6 credits), a CDA counts for up to 6 credits towards a two-year degree, and they have a portfolio assessment option that can be used to demonstrate prior learning for some student learning objectives related to specific courses. [Central Oregon Community College](#) offers credit for prior learning toward an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree for other early childhood credentials. In [Wisconsin](#), credit for prior learning may be earned depending on the technical college, and TEACH Scholarships can be used to help pay for credits earned through a credit for prior learning program. The [Community College of Vermont](#) offers a scholarship to 10 students for a portfolio course to document learning while on the job or an assessment of prior learning course towards earning an Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Education.

Providing scholarships or financial incentives to increase access and drive demand to additional qualifications that lead to certification. Many states participate in [T.E.A.C.H. and WAGES](#) model of providing financial incentives to low-paid teachers seeking further education, originally developed in North Carolina and expanded nation-wide. [Teach Nevada Scholarship](#) program, established in legislation,

¹⁰ For more information and analysis see the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, <https://www.cael.org>. A study on racial equity impact of prior learning assessments, see <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07377363.2015.1085949?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

provides provide grants to universities, colleges and providers of alternative licensure programs to award scholarships to teachers in non-LEA settings to get their BA. Similarly, **New Mexico** provides [scholarships](#) plus scholarship coaches and an individualized professional development plan for those seeking to earn a degree.

Using data to target recruitment. The **Alabama** Department of Early Childhood Education identifies areas where program access is low and deploys the regional director to create an individualized outreach strategy to recruit more providers to apply for FCPK funding. The state ECE department also participates in the [Bold Goals Coalition](#), a group of over 200 organizations that come together to strategize on large public policy issues. One of the coalition’s “Bold Goals” is to work toward [universal FCPK access](#) in central Alabama. The coalition provides resources to individual providers interested in applying for FCPK funding and helps them prepare to meet the quality standards required to participate in the program.

Implementing apprenticeship models sometimes referred to as Grow Your Own, or registered teacher residencies are an emerging strategy to recruit teachers into the profession and provide support for achieving higher qualifications. Simply, apprenticeship programs allow prospective teachers to work and go to school, while receiving financial support for tuition and often mentoring from an experienced teacher.¹¹ Many states are developing these models though many/some are not available for Pre-K teachers, or teachers in community-based settings. Some districts PreK programs also are developing apprenticeship models, such as the [Durham NC PreK Apprenticeship program](#).

In addition, a number of states require lead teachers to have a BA but allow for an extended timeframe to meet the requirement. The pathway could start with an [apprenticeship model](#) which would afford teachers the opportunity for field base credit while working in a preschool classroom, providing for support, coaching and observation and allowing credit for previously acquired training and education. The apprenticeship model should lead to transferable credits toward higher education degrees and could lead to teacher certification. An example of a current apprenticeship model in selected counties in **California** is the [Early Care & Education Pathway to Success \(ECEPTS\)](#).

Creating alternative pathways to certification. **Louisiana** requires a BA degree in 2 of the 3-state funded Pre-K programs. They implemented an [Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate](#) (ECAC) in 2014 as a strategy to help child care providers gain additional credentials. The ECAC is designed to be stackable, and the Department of Education is working with the Board of Regents to develop articulation agreements. The ECAC was open to all childcare teachers and thus could be a strategy to lead to degrees for Pre-K teachers. However, a study of the implementation of the certificate found that many participants did not complete all the requirements. Based on this research and the barriers experienced by Louisiana teachers, they recommend that states consider strategies to decrease administrative hurdles, use data to track completion and target supports, ensure teachers understand the processes and remind them of next steps, rely on programs that have relationships and regular contact with teachers to shepherd them

¹¹ Garcia, A. (October 2023) How Teacher Apprenticeship is Changing Teacher Training. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/how-teacher-apprenticeship-is-changing-teacher-preparation/>

through the process, and embed financial supports.¹² Michigan’s Office of Great Start worked with other partners to develop alternative pathways for high school students to achieve a CDA or certification to work with Youth, gaining college credit and becoming immediately employable. The [Future Proud Michigan Educator \(FPME\) LAUNCH](#) program is intended to provide alternative pathways and supports for those interested in teaching young children or working with youth. Both credentials lead to a teaching pathway as well as immediate employment; both credentials complement “grow their own” programs; and require practical field/clinical experiences, a portfolio, and a verification visit.

Offering targeted support for credential completion. North Carolina’s [Early Educator Support Unit](#) (EES) provides supports to NC Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Lead Teachers, and Developmental Day Preschool Lead Teachers in non-public sites to achieve the birth-kindergarten licensure. NC Pre-K Lead Teachers and Developmental Day Preschool Lead Teachers employed in non-public sites are required to enroll with the EES Unit; and they are provided coaching and support throughout the process to become eligible for licensure, achieve the license, and access mentoring and professional development.

Concluding Thoughts: Considerations to Ensure Teachers are Well-Qualified

Teacher quality is a critical, necessary, component of high quality preschool and essential to achieving positive outcomes for children that are sustained in early elementary school.¹³ Raising quality by increasing teacher requirements in the midst of nation-wide teacher shortages is challenging, however, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to recruit, retain, and adequately compensate highly qualified teachers is what young children deserve and is needed to ensure the promise of UPK is realized.¹⁴

Additional Resources:

Weisenfeld, GG. & Connors-Tadros, L. (2020). Guide to PreK Expansion: Creating and Supporting a Highly Qualified Workforce during PreK Expansion. [https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guide to Support Pre-K Expansion Creating and Supporting a Highly Qualified Workforce during Pre-K Expansion.pdf](https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guide_to_Support_Pre-K_Expansion_Creating_and_Supporting_a_Highly_Qualified_Workforce_during_Pre-K_Expansion.pdf)

Whitebook, M. & Ryan, S. (2011) Degrees in Context: Asking the Right Questions about Preparing Skilled and Effective Teachers of Young Children. <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/23-2.pdf>

¹² Bellows, L., Miller-Bains, K., & Bassok, D. (2022, June). Professionalizing the childcare workforce: Understanding the low rates ... https://files.elfsightcdn.com/022b8cb9-839c-4bc2-992e-cefccb8e877e/eea67e02-1659-4afd-9bc9-0fdd7d708be9/SEELA_ECAC-Barriers-3_Final.pdf

¹³ New Jersey Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study through Grade 10 (APPLES-10). Available at <https://nieer.org/policy-issue/fact-sheet-new-jersey-abbott-preschool-program-longitudinal-effects-study-through-grade-10-apples-10>

¹⁴ Felix, A. (June 2022) Even incremental support for early ed teachers can help ease the childcare crisis. Available at <https://edsource.org/2022/even-incremental-support-for-early-ed-teachers-can-help-ease-the-child-care-crisis/674698> and Gold, E. et al (July 2019) Breaking the silence on early child care and education costs. Available at <https://csce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/breaking-the-silence-on-costs/>

