

Spotlight on Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program

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Overview

Apprenticeships exist in many sectors to help businesses develop highly skilled employees, reduce turnover rates, diversify the workforce, and lower recruitment costs through a structured process of professional development and internal promotion. In cooperation with states, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) oversees the nation's apprenticeship system. A Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) is a model of apprenticeship that has been validated by the DOL. Pennsylvania's registered Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship program is a grassroots approach to address workforce shortages and advance the qualifications of the existing ECE workforce. The goal of the program is to help employed ECE professionals move beyond the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential to attain an ECE associate (AA) or bachelor's (BA) degree and earn higher wages. Apprentices are offered educational supports and mentoring throughout the process. Relevant work experience counts toward credit release, which expedites the process to complete the degree.

Background

The idea for this program originated with an organization in Philadelphia, the District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund (Training and Upgrading), that specializes in creating practical pathways for career opportunity and advancement. Training and Upgrading offers education, training, and work-based learning across the healthcare and human services fields, including early childhood education. Through their work in providing a CDA training program, Training and Upgrading staff found that many ECE workers already had a CDA or some college credits, but they were not going back to school to obtain higher degrees. Staff learned that many ECE workers faced challenges such as the costs or time involved in returning to school, or difficulty navigating higher education requirements. In response, Training and Upgrading proposed an innovative way to support the ECE workforce to move beyond the CDA through a degree-based apprenticeship model.

In 2016, Training and Upgrading set out to build a registered ECE Apprenticeship Program to address the needs of nontraditional students employed in ECE settings, and to enable them to obtain an AA degree within the shortest possible time frame and with the highest possible grade point average. Specifically, they sought to prepare apprentices with the academic skills needed to succeed in a community college environment, by providing bridge and remedial courses to increase college admissions. Once they have enrolled, apprentices are supported by a system of mentorship, coaching, and academic advising throughout the process of completing their degree. Training and Upgrading designed the apprenticeship program to meet the state and federal requirements of a registered apprenticeship.

Key components of the registered ECE Apprenticeship include:

- Academic supports: counseling and tutoring to assist apprentices to meet admission requirements and successfully navigate college-level course work
- Community College enrollment: an accelerated degree program that offers credits for CDAs that have already been achieved (prior learning) and honors the experiences of working professionals through credit-bearing, on-the-job learning
- On-the-job learning and mentorship: external coaches and on-site mentor teachers who support the apprentice in developing on-the-job competencies
- Compensation increases: incremental wage increases that apprentices receive as they achieve program milestones

Steps in the Pennsylvania ECE Apprenticeship Program

The first apprenticeship cohort began in Philadelphia spring 2017. Training and Upgrading collaborated with the Community College of Philadelphia and other community partners in Philadelphia to design and implement the ECE Apprenticeship program. The program has now grown to include other regions and institutes of higher education across the state, including community colleges and four-year colleges. The following sections provide more detail about the key components of the registered ECE Apprenticeship Program.

Step 1: Academic supports

Apprentice candidates are evaluated on their educational background and readiness for academic coursework by Training and Upgrading and the higher education partner. Those students who might benefit from additional supports are offered a bridge program designed to provide the support needed to make their transition to college easier and increase their confidence as students.

How this works at the program level:

- Training and Upgrading provides college preparation courses and personalized academic counseling to help apprentices meet college admission requirements and improve their scores on placement tests.
- Based on a review of each candidate's credentials and transcripts, bridge coursework is offered, with remedial and contextualized learning support to help them adjust to college and succeed in college-level courses.

Step 2: Community college enrollment

Apprentices enroll in the ECE AA degree program at a local community college and are awarded up to nine credits for prior CDA coursework. Approximately 30 apprentices enter the program at the same time as a cohort. The cohort model is designed to maximize peer and program-level support. Apprentices are assigned an academic advisor from the college and a mentor from Training and Upgrading to provide academic and personal support. General education requirements (e.g., math and writing) are offered in a "contextualized learning" format, where departments tailor required course content to include examples and activities applicable to the ECE context. Apprentices receive academic tutoring and attend study groups facilitated by Training and Upgrading.

Apprentices take up to two courses per semester in the fall, spring, and summer sessions. The apprenticeship program begins with in-person coursework. As students adjust to academic study, hybrid

and online courses are introduced. Apprentices working full time typically earn an AA degree in ECE in about two and a half years, depending on how many prior college credits they started with.

How this works at the program level:

- The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Pennsylvania scholarship program¹ covers the majority of tuition and fees for the apprentices and covers the cost of books and transportation. The apprentice and the apprentice's employer each pay \$500 to cover the remaining portion of tuition and fees for the entire degree.
- Employers also receive T.E.A.C.H. funding to offset the cost of classroom coverage while the apprentice is attending classes and/or tutoring sessions during work hours.

Step 3: On-the-job learning and mentorship

Once apprentices are enrolled in the AA degree program, their coursework is augmented with on-the-job learning (OJL). Apprentices are awarded nine credits after they complete 4,000 hours of OJL, which is about two years of full-time work. On-site coaches use online tools to document coaching meetings with the apprentices, progress toward goals, and fulfillment of workforce competencies. Program milestones include satisfactory progress in competencies, number of hours worked, number of course credits earned, and associate degree attainment. Apprentices are awarded up to four wage increases from their employer over the course of two years as they reach these program milestones.

How this works at the program level:

- First Up, an early childhood training and technical assistance organization, provides training and ongoing support to onsite coaches and mentors. This support includes planning calls, on-site visits, and facilitated community of practice meetings to discuss how coaches can work with apprentices to help them meet competencies and complete OJL requirements.
- Training and Upgrading consults with apprentices' employers to establish the guidelines for the wage increases during OJL. They also provide technical assistance to employers to help them identify and achieve goals for supporting apprentices.
- Each participating employer or union representative determines the amount of each wage increase. Wage increases are awarded in increments to ensure that apprentices are awarded as they gain competencies, skills, and knowledge. Typical increases have been \$2 to \$3 per hour.

Successes and Challenges

Successes

The ECE Apprenticeship Program represents an innovative way to support the ECE workforce. By recognizing that work experience, formal education, and prior credentials can all be valuable parts of obtaining higher educational attainment, the program connects theory to practice for members of the ECE workforce. Specific successes of the apprenticeship program include:

- In addition to earning a degree, apprentices who complete the program also earn wage increases at their place of employment.

¹ Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood (T.E.A.C.H.) is a nationwide professional development program that provides continuing education and tuition scholarships to early care and education providers. For more information, visit the Pennsylvania Childcare Association website at <https://www.pacca.org/teach.php>.

- This unique approach to preparing apprentices for college—including by providing access to bridge coursework, mentors, and a cohort model—addresses many of the barriers that have made it difficult to increase the ECE workforce’s level of education. Local implementers say that this support network has also made the program more appealing to other potential candidates.
- Program staff notice that by earning credit for on-the-job learning, apprentices feel validated in their work experience and do not have to take courses that repeat content they have already learned.

Challenges

Challenges so far include the lack of a single, centralized funding stream. Existing funding sources, including state, federal, or private foundation grants, are helpful; however, more funds are needed as the program looks to expand. Additional funding would allow the program to have more staff dedicated to doing the work. Another challenge facing the ECE Apprenticeship Program is the continuing need to build capacity among four-year colleges, which are less aware than community colleges of the benefits of developing a degree-based apprenticeship, and currently less equipped to support the unique needs of apprenticeship students. For example, many four-year colleges do not yet have a system in place to award credit for on-the-job learning, or are less familiar with competency-based learning.

Next Steps

Training and Upgrading received a state grant to begin funding regional pilot programs, known as hubs, throughout Pennsylvania. The apprenticeship program has also expanded the number of interested institutes of higher education (IHEs) and intermediaries across the state. Currently 18 IHE partners are working to adapt the apprenticeship model to meet their regional needs. Training and Upgrading will remain the state sponsor for the apprenticeship in order to reduce the burden on each employer and to serve as an ambassador in helping to establish this model in other regions.

A new funding structure for using Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) dollars for credit-bearing professional development allows for further expansion of the apprenticeship model. As this work is developed, Pennsylvania hopes to expand the program to no less than six IHEs, including offering a new apprenticeship program targeting the infant/toddler ECE workforce in 2020. The goal is to serve 80 apprentices in the first year, and another 80 in the following year.

Additional funding sources, including philanthropic contributions, Title II funds, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, and state labor dollars are also being explored. Implementers at the state and local levels are considering how to streamline and support funding in the most efficient way, while ensuring that additional costs are not passed along to the apprentices. Stable funding would allow regular, predictable support packages for employers, coaches, apprentices, and higher education partners.

Additional Information

For more information on the ECE Apprenticeship Program, please visit the District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund website: <https://1199ctraining.org/ECEapprentice>.

For more information on how to replicate this apprenticeship model, including a program toolkit, *CDA to Associates Degree Early Childhood Education Registered Apprenticeship*, please visit the District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund website: <https://1199ctraining.org/ECereplication>.

Project Overview

This project aims to understand how state policies, funding, and practices support the strengthening of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce.

The purpose of this series of “Spotlights” is to highlight strategies and initiatives being implemented by state and local agencies designed to support the development of the ECE workforce.

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