

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION APPRENTICESHIPS: THE WHY, WHAT, AND HOW

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In recognition of the knowledge and abilities needed to be a highly skilled early childhood education (ECE) professional, the ECE field is moving to build a more credentialed workforce. A national dialogue has centered on clearly defining “the complexities.... embedded in the interplay among (1) preparation and education, (2) compensation and status, and (3) diversity and inclusivity.”<sup>1</sup> There is growing agreement on the need for more highly-skilled child care teachers and an increased awareness that teachers with higher credentials must be compensated for their efforts. ECE apprenticeships encourage the attainment of a credential/degree and provide the supports necessary for non-traditional adult learners to be successful.

An apprenticeship is an arrangement between employee and employer that allows the worker to remain employed while they participate in on-the-job learning and pursue related coursework or training. Early childhood educators often face barriers to pursuing credential or college-level coursework including a lack of time and/or financial resources, challenges in navigating the higher education system, access to supports for students who are dual language learners and/or need college preparatory or basic education classes, and a lack of incentives to pursue higher education. ECE apprenticeships address some of these barriers by offering reduced or free tuition, employer-sponsored time off for coursework and mentoring, guidance on entering and succeeding in the higher education arena, and compensation increases tied to levels of skill mastery attained.

This brief provides an overview of ECE apprenticeships and their components. It also offers several state examples to spotlight the different approaches states have taken. State Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Administrators, state Professional Development Leads, Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&Rs), and Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) can use this brief to better understand the requirements of an ECE apprenticeship program and assess the state’s readiness for such a program.

### Apprenticeships can offer:

- Reduced or free tuition
- Employer-sponsored time off for coursework and mentoring
- Guidance on entering and succeeding in the higher education arena
- Compensation increases

## APPRENTICESHIP COMPONENTS

The U.S. Department of Labor defines apprenticeship in this way: “It is an employer-driven, ‘learn-while-you-earn’ model that combines on-the-job training, provided by the employer that hires the apprentice, with job-related instruction in curricula tied to the attainment of national skills standards.”<sup>2</sup> Apprenticeships have five primary components:

- employer involvement,
- structured on-the-job learning,
- related instruction,
- rewards for skill gains, and
- an industry recognized credential.

Each of these components is briefly described below.

**Employer Involvement.** Apprenticeships involve employers in a number of ways. Initially, the employer must be willing to sponsor an employee and complete the apprenticeship registration process. In many ECE apprenticeship programs, a managing partner (industry association, IHE, labor organization, service organization, etc.) will manage the more technical aspects of registering the program with the state Department of Labor. In addition, the employer must be willing to give paid release time for onsite mentoring and/or coaching and ongoing professional development. The employer must agree to salary increases that occur as the apprentice meets certain competency benchmarks.

**Structured On-the-Job Learning.** Apprentices are responsible for learning both on-the-job and through ongoing professional development. The on-the-job learning and coursework must be aligned so that the skills being reinforced through onsite mentoring are paired with the theory and practice studied in the community or higher education course. On-the-job learning is supported and guided by a more experienced peer. Mentoring and coaching are both research-based strategies with demonstrated positive results in improving an ECE teacher's ability to implement knowledge learned in coursework and to develop relationships with the child and parent that result in positive outcomes for children. Ideally, these mentors (or coaches) are trained in the craft of effective mentorship and are employed by the same employer as the apprentice.

**Related Instruction.** The related instruction for an apprenticeship must be aligned with the competency-based on-the-job training. Most apprenticeship programs partner with IHE so that apprentices earn college credit along with their apprenticeship certificate. Some apprenticeships allow participants to earn associate or baccalaureate degrees; other programs focus on industry-specific certifications like a state credential or a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. Apprenticeship programs align related instruction and on-the-job training in such a way that the instructors, whether from an IHE or the community, help design the instruction, and in some cases, are available throughout the apprenticeship to ensure that the on-the-job training is in full alignment with the coursework.

**Rewards for Skill Gains.** Employers are obligated to raise the apprentices' wages as they complete agreed upon competency benchmarks. This typically translates to an increase in wages two or three times during the entirety of the program. Some apprenticeship programs focus more on educational attainment for those increases and others focus more on competency demonstration from on-the-job learning. Either way, whether based on educational attainment or demonstration of competency, the employer is committed to increasing wages.

**Industry Recognized Credential.** Apprenticeships registered with the Department of Labor provide the apprentice with a nationally acknowledged credential affiliated with recognized industry standards. In the case of early childhood, this is a particularly important component. States have responded to the need for a more professional workforce by creating core knowledge and competencies, credentials, and career pathways that meet each state's specific context. An apprenticeship allows early childhood professionals to continue to work and earn a salary while accessing the supports and coursework needed to advance their credentials.

## STATE AND LOCAL EXAMPLES

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The following states and counties have developed apprenticeship programs that promote credential/degree attainment and are designed to meet the needs of their specific context. While each program meets the basic components, they take different approaches in the amount of coursework required, the degree/credential earned, the target audience for the program, and how supervision or mentoring happens. All of the programs address the need for highly skilled early childhood teachers and ongoing awareness that these higher credentials must come with wage increases.

## COLORADO CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST APPRENTICESHIP

The Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program in Colorado is administered by Child Care Innovations at Red Rocks Community College. Participants receive competency-based on-the-job skill development, an individualized professional development plan, and—upon completion—a Certificate of Apprenticeship from the U.S. Department of Labor. Participating early learning programs agree to provide wage increases as staff meet professional development goals and to select a teacher to complete the mentor teacher training and then guide the on-the-job learning of the apprentice.

This model offers flexibility and alternative pathways to completion. The program requires 306 hours of competency-based education and 4,000 hours of on-the-job learning. Staff can meet the education requirement by taking courses at an IHE or through training offered by a Colorado Shines (CO's QRIS) approved community trainer. Previous experience and education are also considered and verified with official transcripts and continuing education certificates. High school students (16 years of age and older) who are concurrently enrolled are also eligible to participate. Child care licensing regulations provide for an accelerated model so that teachers enrolled in the apprenticeship program can become qualified to teach in CO in a shorter amount of time.

For more information on Colorado's Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship, see: <https://www.rccc.edu/child-care-innovations/child-care-development-specialist-apprenticeship-program>

CHILD CARE INNOVATIONS, RED ROCKS COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST APPRENTICESHIP	
STATE / LOCALE	COLORADO/Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Cheyenne, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Washington, and Yuma counties
TARGET AUDIENCE	Center-Based Early Childhood Teachers and Directors
STRATEGIC PARTNERS	Child Care Innovations within Red Rocks Community College Triad Early Childhood Council Alliance for Kids Early Milestones Colorado Colorado Office of Early Childhood U.S. Department of Labor
REMEDIAL PREPARATION (IF NEEDED)	Referrals to local workforce centers and/or to community college supports
CREDENTIAL / DEGREE TYPE	Child Care Development Specialist (eligible to obtain a CO Early Childhood Teacher certificate)
COURSEWORK ALIGNMENT	Coursework is aligned with Colorado's Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators

## THE PENNSYLVANIA ECE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Pennsylvania's ECE Apprenticeship Program is a career pathway that combines college coursework, coaching, and on-the-job learning assessments to grant an AA and/or BA degree in Early Childhood Education. Through the apprenticeship program, IHEs award degrees that value the experience and prior learning of ECEs while employers strengthen their dedication to quality improvement. To participate in the program, teachers must be enrolled in a degree program at a college or university that offers this pathway and be employed at a child care program that is willing to support apprenticeship. Recruitment efforts seek to impact child care programs that understand that well-trained, supported, and compensated early educators are the heart of quality improvement but have had limited or no access to the economic resources needed to achieve this level of change.

At the workplace, each apprentice is assigned a peer coach who provides onsite coaching and instructional leadership. The employer shows commitment to the apprentice’s academic success through release time for both the apprentice and peer coach and by committing to incremental wage increases, workplace wellness, and retention strategies. Employer supports include technical assistance and administrative supports and are available through intermediaries. Intermediaries are local community organizations with a strong advocate voice or workforce development experience that allows for unbiased organizing of all the partners including IHE, employers, apprentices, coaches, and mentoring and professional learning organizations. This cross-systems approach to professionalizing the ECE workforce allows for shared services, community-specific supports, and continuous quality improvement at both the child care and IHE level.

For more information on Pennsylvania’s ECE Apprenticeship Program, see:

<https://www.pakeys.org/get-professional-development/credentials-degrees/early-childhood-education-apprenticeship>

PENNSYLVANIA ECE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM	
STATE / LOCALE	PENNSYLVANIA - STATEWIDE
TARGET AUDIENCE	ECE teachers (infant-toddler and preschool) who have earned a CDA Credential™
STRATEGIC PARTNERS	District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund Community, State, and Private Colleges and Universities ECE Professional Learning Organizations and Industry Partners PA’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning
REMEDIAL PREPARATION (IF NEEDED)	College placement assistance/Pre-college coursework Tutoring, child care, transportation, resource navigators, budgeting and scheduling technical assistance
CREDENTIAL / DEGREE TYPE	Associate of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education (Birth-4th grade), with Bachelor programs accepting 2+2 transfer agreements
COURSEWORK ALIGNMENT	Curriculum and On-the-Job Learning competencies are aligned with the National Competencies and Standards for Early Childhood Educators

## THE VERMONT CHILD CARE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship Program allows participants to earn a CDA Credential™ while taking six or seven college courses requires for this registered apprenticeship. The VT Early Childhood Career Ladder includes a level for both the CDA Credential™ and the registered apprentice. In addition to the college courses, this apprenticeship program includes 27 hours of community-based training specific to ECEs. Employers select teachers to be potential apprentices as well as qualified mentors working in the same program. New mentors complete a 7-hour Introduction to Mentoring training course.

This apprenticeship provides competency-based on-the-job learning. It uses VCCICC’s own Daily Activities Assessment Tool which is aligned with Vermont’s Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies, Vermont Child Care Licensing Regulations, CDA Functional Areas, and NAEYC best practices to assess learning. The VT Child Development Division provides funding for the Apprenticeship Program using funds from the CCDBG. Funding for the college courses is directed through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® VERMONT program.

For more information on Vermont’s Child Care Apprenticeship Program, see:

<https://www.vtchildcareindustry.org/apprenticeship>

## THE VERMONT CHILD CARE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

STATE / LOCALE	VERMONT - STATEWIDE
TARGET AUDIENCE	Early Childhood Teachers (infant-toddler, preschool, and mixed-age)
STRATEGIC PARTNERS	VT Child Care Industry and Career Council, Inc. (VCCICC) VT Department of Labor VT Department for Children and Families Community College of Vermont (CCV) T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® VTAEYC
REMEDIATION PREPARATION (IF NEEDED)	Dimensions of Self and Society (preparatory class for those new to higher ed)
CREDENTIAL / DEGREE TYPE	Two Credential Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CDA Credential™</li> <li>▪ Registered Apprentice</li> </ul>
COURSEWORK ALIGNMENT	Curriculum is aligned with Vermont's Core Knowledge and Competencies and Licensing Regulations, and with CCV's AA in ECE

## WEST VIRGINIA REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST (ACDS)

The first class of West Virginia's Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist (ACDS) began in 1989, making this the longest-running ECE apprenticeship program in the nation. ACDS includes 300 hours of instruction and between 3,200 and 4,000 on-the-job training hours. It is a four-semester program that uses a curriculum specifically developed for ACDS. Each semester targets an age range (infant, toddler, preschool and school-age) and teaches best practices and WV regulations regarding developmentally appropriate practices for young children. Certified instructors who meet specific guidelines outlined by the program, including a minimum of a BA in Early Childhood or a related field and direct experience working with young children, teach the ACDS Curriculum. Instructors renew their credential to teach ACDS every two years.

As part of their coursework, apprentices must develop and maintain a portfolio beginning in the first semester and add to it each subsequent semester. Graduates can apply the ACDS program coursework toward college credit at most WV community colleges. Employers sign an agreement stating the raise they will give their employees upon completion; the amount varies from program to program.

For more information on West Virginia's Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist, see: <http://www.wvacds.org>.

## WEST VIRGINIA REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST (ACDS)

STATE / LOCALE	WEST VIRGINIA - STATEWIDE
TARGET AUDIENCE	ECE teachers (infant-toddler, preschool, or school-age) working a minimum of 20 hours/week
STRATEGIC PARTNERS	WV Department of Labor WV Department of Health and Human Services River Valley Child Development Services (RVCDS) U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship WV Office of the Bureau of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education West Virginia Department of Education
REMEDIAL PREPARATION (IF NEEDED)	N/A
CREDENTIAL / DEGREE TYPE	Child Development Specialist Journeyperson
COURSEWORK ALIGNMENT	Aligned with WV Core Knowledge and Competencies, NAEYC, WV Child Care Licensing Regulations, WV Early Learning Standards Framework Infant and Toddler, WV Afterschool Program Standards and WV Early Learning Standards Framework (Preschool)

## APPRENTICESHIP RESOURCES

For general information about starting an ECE apprenticeship program in your area, see the resources below.

1. Bipartisan Policy Center, Registered Apprenticeships: A Viable Career Path for the Early Childhood Workforce: [https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BPC\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Issue\\_Brief\\_RV4.pdf](https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BPC_Early_Childhood_Issue_Brief_RV4.pdf)
2. U.S. Department of Labor (DoL), Apprenticeship.gov: <https://www.apprenticeship.gov>
3. U.S. DoL, Apprenticeship Toolkit: <https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/toolkit/toolkitfaq.htm>
4. U.S. DoL, Employment and Training Administration, A Quick Start Toolkit: Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs: [https://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf)
5. Workforce GPS, Introduction to Apprenticeship: <https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/01/16/20/01/Introduction-to-Apprenticeship>
6. The Urban Institute, Starting a Registered Apprenticeship Program: [http://innovativeapprenticeship.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Employer-Guide\\_June-2017.pdf](http://innovativeapprenticeship.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Employer-Guide_June-2017.pdf)
7. National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, Economic Mobility Toolkit for Head Start and Early Head Start: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/bfem-toolkit-hs-ehs.pdf>

## REFERENCES

1. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/moving-beyond-false-choices-early-childhood-educators/>. Accessed November 17, 2018.
2. United States Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Toolkit. <https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/toolkit/toolkitfaq.htm>. Accessed November 22, 2018.