

Early Childhood Equity Collaborative

Presentation to House Early Childhood re:
Key Structural Problems related to Workforce

June 2022



**Oregon has made important gains
in equitably expanding culturally
specific early childhood services &
investing in our childcare
workforce**

Examples

Early Childhood Equity Fund

**PD to support ending of
suspension/expulsion**

Enhancements to ERDC rates

We know that making sure early childhood services are culturally relevant is critical to making services accessible for all kids and families

Culturally specific services foster belonging & acceptance

“What brings me joy is that I help kids who might be at a disadvantage. Specifically, in this area where there are not a lot of Hispanic kids.

**To see them happy, sing songs and learn together in their own language.
They feel accepted.”**

- Parent educator at a culturally specific organization,
Central OR

Culturally specific services use strengths-based approaches that build parent leadership

“Before parents volunteer in the program, they have to [be participants in the program] for 1 year. Popular education is the methodology. It’s embedded in the classrooms and the work we do. Staff prep the agenda and the volunteers prep the materials to [run] the program. Every week there is a different activity and [parent educators] let us know ahead of time that we’ll teach this number or color.

**We’re well prepared. We’re like a family.
We want the same for our community.”**

- Parent educator @ culturally specific organization

Culturally specific services can draw on sustained, meaningful relationships with families that ultimately support the health and well-being of young children.

“The cultural axiology (value-system) of Africans and African Americans...their highest value is relationships. This should not be confused with rapport. **Many organizations serving these communities are able to build effective rapport, yet they are unable to sustain engagement or participation because they fail to establish a meaningful relationship. An African-Centered worldview is not ‘I think, therefore I am,’ but rather, ‘I am because we are.’** We use this community-centered worldview to inform our initiatives and programs. Our culturally representative staff have faced many of the same obstacles as those we serve, and offer clients a deep and shared understanding of how it feels to live in Black skin. **Our lived experience and expertise have helped us create an environment where we focus on the strengths and abilities of our children and families because we have the greatest confidence in their beauty, promise, and capacity.”**

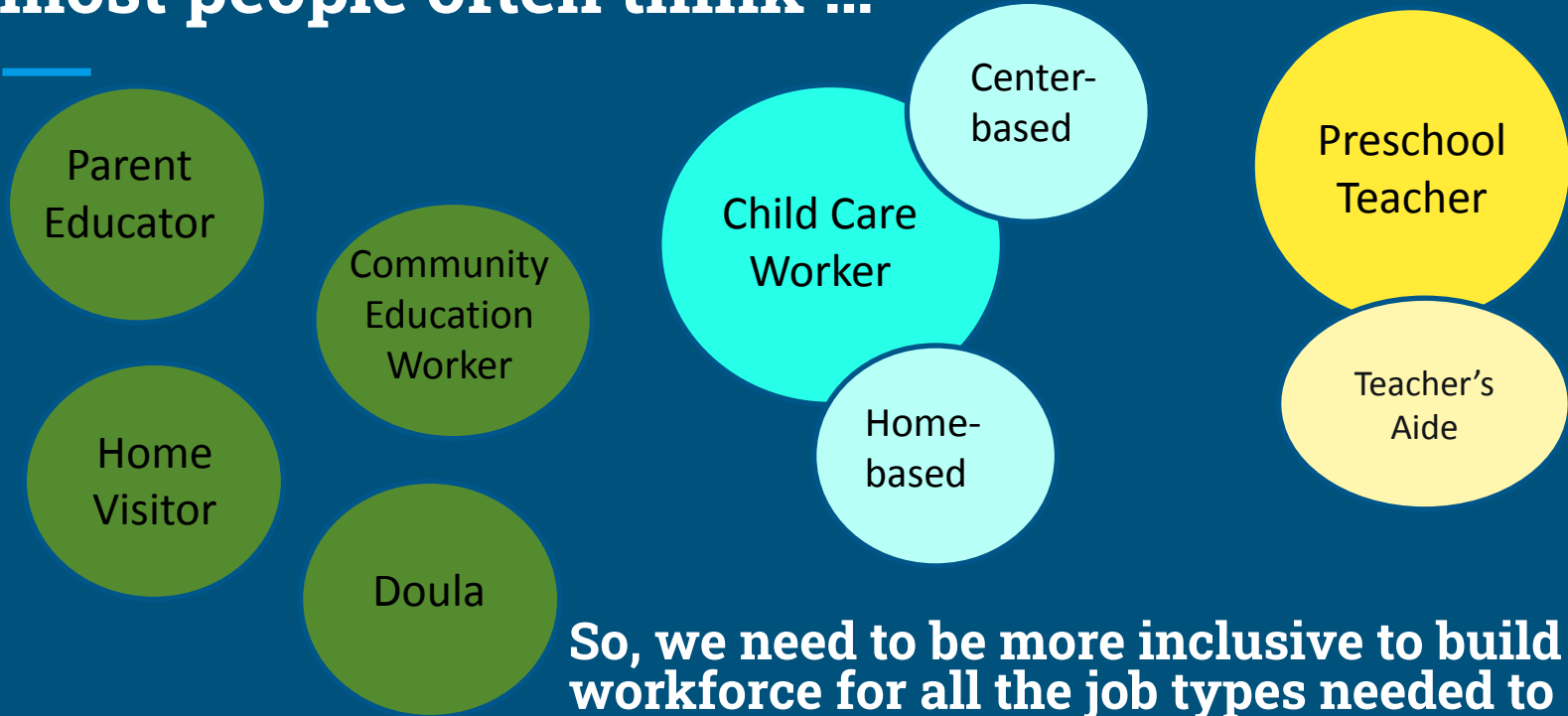
- Staff at a culturally specific organization

Despite the gains in more access to culturally responsive services, we have a long way to go to dismantling barriers to grow the workforce to provide a range of early childhood services.

Workforce and service inequities persist across the board, not just in child care.

To address the child care crisis, we need to think holistically about the entire range of early childhood workers who can help alleviate the crisis in myriad ways.

The early childhood workforce is broader than most people often think ...



So, we need to be more inclusive to build up the workforce for all the job types needed to support young children and their families.

Key Structural Problems:

What are the barriers that get in the way of Oregon's ability to create and sustain an early childhood workforce that reflects this state

1. **Culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, diverse trainers, and resources for people to access training resources across state are limited (for parents and for staff to train parents).** There's a particular limitation around addressing intersectional needs (culture/language + disability; culture/language + mental health)
2. **Lack of clear career pathways** is barrier to representation in early childhood workforce
3. **Pay across the industry is an impediment to recruitment and retention**

1. Culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, diverse trainers, and resources for people to access training across state are limited for parents and for staff to train parents. There's a particular limitation around addressing intersectional needs (culture/language + disability; culture/language + mental health)

"Language is a barrier...There are people interested in getting their certificates and there's not enough staff to teach those courses, so a certificate that could take 6 months to a year is taking 2 years."

"I've offered to help translate and teach but I'm told I need a Master's. A Master's might take 5 years and we need this workforce now and people who want to grow their careers now."

"[My colleague] is working with the Early Intervention training to help with children with autism and training. Everything is in English."

"Having a course on supporting children with special needs and how to help parents identify special needs. We miss children with autism because we think it's simply a behavioral issue. How can we fix it now?"

Policy and procedures to certify “Master Trainers” have created numerous institutional barriers

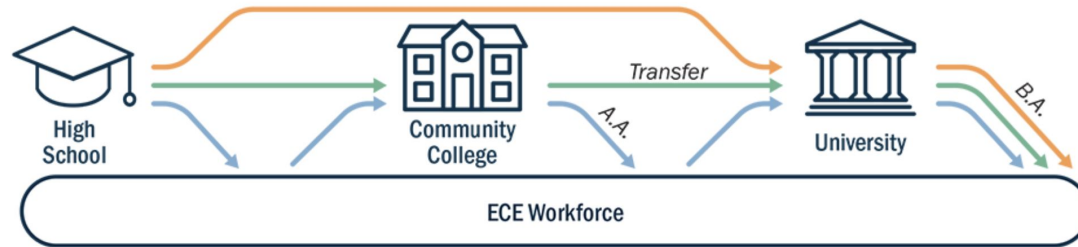
- “Overly-long...arbitrary process”
- “No support for organizations, trainers, and trainings in languages other than English”
- “Lack of transparency and/or consistency regarding the criteria for evaluating training proposals”
- “Overemphasis on higher education; life experience undervalued”
- “Lack of access to required Adult Education training hours”

Source: Mitchell, L. (2021). Sustaining the Growing Master Trainers Pilot Project: The importance of meaningful, long-term investment in culturally-specific and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led community organizations in Oregon. Portland, OR: Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services, Portland State University, p. 4.

2. Lack of clear, accessible career pathways is barrier to representation in early childhood workforce, and for adjacent positions in health

Because there is no single permit or credential to work in ECE programs, there is no “typical” path to a permit or degree. Instead, early educators enter the field with a range of education and experiences and pursue credits, permits, or degrees at various points throughout their careers. Many early educators return to school while working in the field to gain knowledge and advance their careers. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
There Is No Traditional Route to an Early Education Career



Even people who work with young kids and their families everyday don't know what's possible for them to grow their career in early childhood. The pathways are not clear, which will limit our ability to grow the workforce.

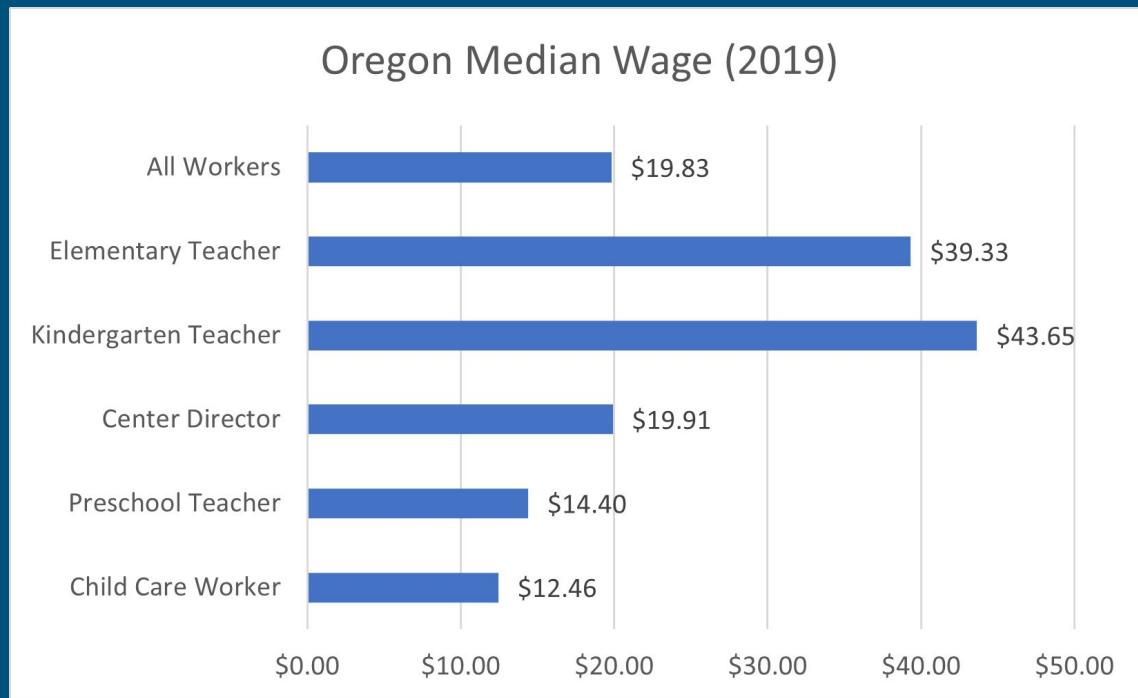
“I want to feel oriented to my career options. What's the path?” – Home Visiting Manager @ culturally specific org.

“I had a family who went to a special education instructor for their child's speech development problem. That [instructor] gave them some exercises. The family came to me and said, ‘We don't understand the problem that is trying to be solved [with the exercises]’. The rationale wasn't explained. Families feel misinformed.” -Home Visitor/Parent Educator @ culturally specific org.

“We need more representation from the Latinx community in positions who work with children with special needs and doctor positions.” -Home Visitor/Parent Educator @ culturally specific org.

“We provide support for parenting but when they need special referrals for mental health issues, it's almost impossible to find a culturally specific provider for those kind of needs.”

3. Pay across the industry is an impediment to recruitment and retention



And we don't have good data on other types of jobs in early childhood from the Bureau of Labor Stats

“Higher compensation and supportive work environments play a critical role in determining the quality of services children receive and the ability of programs to recruit and retain highly skilled teachers, yet wages and benefits for early educators remain among the lowest of any occupation in the country, creating challenges to attracting new teachers and fueling turnover and teacher shortages.”

- [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at University of California Berkeley website](#)

Nationally, Black early educators are paid on average **\$0.78 less per hour** than their White peers

“While wages paid to early educators overall are low, additional disparities within the workforce itself cause greater harm to certain populations. As we have previously documented, across different types of settings and job roles in the sector, wage disparities are linked to funding source, age of children, and racial discrimination... Importantly, we also identified a racial wage gap in which Black early educators are paid on average \$0.78 less per hour than their White peers. The pay gap is more than doubled for Black educators who work with preschool-age children (\$1.71 less per hour compared with their White peers) compared with the pay gap for Black educators who work with infants and toddlers (\$0.77 less per hour compared with their White peers).”

These conditions reflect the status of the workforce coming into the pandemic and stand in stark contrast to the narrative of early educators as essential to children, families, and the economic system in the United States. Given what we are learning about the financial devastation and health risks the ECE sector and its workforce are experiencing in the midst of the pandemic, we can expect that these conditions will only worsen going forward, barring substantial federal and state intervention.”

We are exploring these issues more deeply in the coming months and will be working with other culturally specific organizations, agency leaders, coalition partners, and policymakers to propose solutions.