

Preschool Teacher Qualifications:

Bachelor's Degree as a Driver of Early Learning Quality

The skills of those who provide care and education for young children have a profound effect on child outcomes. Research has shown that teacher skills are one of the most significant factors in children's development, and that teacher education and preparation play a critical role in ensuring high quality early learning.

Nationwide, **34 out of 60 state-funded Pre-K programs require lead teachers to have a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. The share of Head Start teachers who have a bachelor's degree has risen from 47 percent a decade ago to 73 percent.** In contrast, California State Preschool teachers are only required to have 24 units in Early Childhood Education or child development coursework plus 16 General Education units.¹

The recently published Getting Down to Facts II report asserts that California's "**requirements for early childhood permits are too low at every level**"², making it crucially important to invest in teacher education. The California Early Learning field has already proven it can do it: Head Start, which serves over 80,000 preschoolers in California, successfully implemented raising the standard to a BA for its existing workforce, while maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity of the teachers.

There is a strong foundation in research to recommend a minimum of a BA degree with specialized training in ECE for lead preschool teachers:

- In a comprehensive review of the literature, Marcy Whitebook from UC Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment concludes that "**the presence of BA-level teachers with specialized training in early childhood education leads to better outcomes for young children**". Remarking on the need for high quality ECE to rectify the school readiness gap, she finds that "**teacher preparation at the four-year college degree level is the best way to achieve such quality**".³
- Based on an extensive analysis of nationwide ECE workforce policies, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council have recommended that states "develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines [...] for **transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement** [...] for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8".⁴
- Studies have found that classrooms with BA-level teachers are more likely to be of high quality, with **richer language and literacy environments and better child-teacher interactions**. Teachers with a BA are also **more sensitive, less punitive and more engaged**.⁵
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that all ECE teachers have a bachelor's degree with specialized training in ECE or child development.⁶

- The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) includes the presence of a **lead teacher with at least a Bachelor’s degree as one of 10 quality benchmarks**. NIEER notes that they “**found no examples of programs that have produced large persistent gains in achievement without well-qualified teachers**”.⁷
- A recent meta-analysis of the available scientific literature concludes that **higher teacher qualifications are significantly correlated with higher quality ECE**.⁸
- All of the ECE programs that have demonstrated robust long-term effects -- including the Chicago Child-Parent Center programs, Perry Preschool, New Jersey Abbott, Boston Public Schools, Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program, and the Oklahoma universal state preschool program -- have lead teachers with at least a BA and specialized ECE training.

¹ NIEER (2017). *The State of Preschool 2017*, Rutgers Graduate School of Education. [<http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/State-of-Preschool-2017-Full-7-16-18.pdf>].

² Stipek, D. (2018). *Research Brief: Early Childhood Education in California*. Stanford University & PACE. ·], p. 9.

³ Whitebook, M. (2003). *Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments—A review of the literature*. [http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2003/01/Early_Ed_Quality.pdf], p. 1 & p. 19.

⁴ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015). *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. [<https://www.nap.edu/read/19401/chapter/1>], p. 513.

⁵ Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (2016). *Early Childhood Teacher Education Policies: Research Review and State Trends*. [http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ceelo_policy_report_ec_teach_education_policies_final_for_web_2016_04.pdf].

⁶ NAEYC (2009). *NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation*. [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/2009%20Professional%20Prep%20stdsRevised%204_12.pdf].

⁷ NIEER, supra, p. 18.

⁸ Manning, M. et. al. (2017). *Teacher Qualifications and Their Impact on the Quality of the Early Childhood Learning Environment: A Systematic Review*. [<https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library/teacher-qualification-and-quality-of-early-childhood-care-and-learning.html>].