

# DRAFT

## Executive Summary of forthcoming landscape analysis of ECE workforce supports in Contra Costa County

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Contra Costa County's early childhood education (ECE) workforce is essential to children's development, family economic stability, and the region's overall economic health. Approximately 4,000 early childhood educators support thousands of children across the county's variety of child care programs (Powell et al., 2024). Despite a highly experienced and diverse workforce, persistent challenges—including low wages, limited benefits, and high stress—threaten the stability of the early childhood education field (McLean et al., 2024).

A strong body of research shows that no single intervention can stabilize the early childhood education workforce. The most effective strategies align four key elements: competitive compensation, sustained professional supports, accessible career pathways, and coordinated systems supported by data (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015; McLean et al., 2024; Bernardi et al., 2024). Compensation attracts educators, while coaching and supportive leadership retain them (Morrissey & Bowman, 2024; Cavadel et al., 2022). Career pathways and apprenticeships strengthen recruitment and advancement when tied to wage progression (Abenavoli, 2025; Spaulding et al., 2019).

In Contra Costa County there is an array of early childhood education workforce supports with a variety of intended outcomes, varying levels of intensity for the participant (from one-time to sustained engagement over years), different size of reach, and mix of funding sources.

*The existing early childhood education workforce supports in Contra Costa County can be categorized by the following three primary goals:*

### Recruitment:

there are existing supports that engage either high school students or adults

### On-the-Job Supports:

this is the main focus of most existing supports in the county

### Retention:

only a handful of existing efforts expressly work toward this goal

Based on the landscape analysis and existing research on what supports stability in the early childhood education field, **this report identifies three priority opportunities for Contra Costa County:**

### 1 Improve Compensation and Benefits Across the ECE Workforce

Compensation is the strongest predictor of recruitment and retention in the early care and education workforce (McLean et al., 2024; Morrissey & Bowman, 2024; Whitebook et al., 2014). Scaling wage supplements, expanding benefits, and improving working conditions are essential to stabilizing the early childhood education workforce (Child Care Aware of America, 2025; Bernardi et al., 2024). Pay parity strategies between transitional kindergarten and community programs can reduce workforce attrition and strengthen the overall child care field (Lee & Muñoz, 2026).

### 2 Prioritize On-the-Job Supports That Emphasize Retention

On-the-job professional supports—especially coaching, mentoring, and leadership development—are among the strongest predictors of retention in the early childhood education field (Cavadel et al., 2022; Grogan et al., 2018; Bloom et al., 2015). These supports improve job satisfaction, instructional quality, and professional belonging while reducing burnout (Harding et al., 2019; Downey et al., 2024). Sustained, job-embedded coaching is significantly more effective than one-time training (National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, 2020; Glazerman et al., 2010; National Institute for Early Education Research, 2017).

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### 3 Expand Credentials and Credit-Bearing Advancement Pathways

Strengthening credit-bearing pathways and apprenticeships is essential for recruitment and long-term workforce stability. Limited advancement opportunities contribute to turnover in the early childhood education field (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015; Whitebook et al., 2018). Well-designed, funded career pathways for early childhood educators improve recruitment, credential attainment, and retention (Abenavoli, 2025; Spaulding et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Apprenticeship models reduce barriers by linking education, wages, and advancement (Abenavoli, 2025).

#### Next Steps:

Contra Costa County has a strong foundation of early childhood education programs, partnerships, and workforce supports that can be leveraged to address ongoing workforce challenges. The following next steps could be used to strengthen and broaden collaborations and build support for future investments to address early childhood education workforce short-term and long-term needs.

- **Leverage Existing Early Childhood Education Structures and Partnerships:**  
Build on existing state-mandated and active partnerships across early childhood education stakeholders to advance discussions about next steps in each of the opportunity areas identified. Use these existing partnerships that understand the local early childhood education players, history and context to develop a coordinated countywide action plan that includes timelines, roles for systems partners, and measurable outcomes for each opportunity.
- **Engage Business and Workforce Development as Key Partners:**  
Share findings with employers, chambers of commerce, economic development networks, the Contra Costa County Workforce Development Board and its partners to strengthen recognition of early childhood education as essential economic infrastructure and expand cross-sector collaboration and investment.
- **Build Support for Funding To Address Early Childhood Education Needs with:**  
Strengthen stakeholder alignment for dedicating local, state, federal, and philanthropic funding to support these identified early childhood education workforce priorities, including compensation, coaching and mentoring, career pathways, apprenticeships, and other workforce supports.

#### Conclusion:

Stabilizing the early childhood education workforce requires a comprehensive and aligned approach. Compensation drives recruitment, while retention additionally depends on professional supports, workplace conditions, leadership, and career pathways (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015; McLean et al., 2024; Morrissey & Bowman, 2024). When implemented together, these strategies drive entry into the field, improve workforce stability, and support advancement. (Bernardi et al., 2024; Spaulding et al., 2019). Ultimately a more stable early childhood education workforce brings stability to the field and to the families that depend on child care to go to work and support their own families.

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#### Learn more about how First 5 Contra Costa is strengthening early care and education:

First 5 Contra Costa partners with providers, educators, and communities to ensure young children enter school healthy, supported, and ready to thrive. To explore partnerships and opportunities, contact Stephanie Shieh, Early Childhood Program Officer, at [sshieh@first5coco.org](mailto:sshieh@first5coco.org) or call 925-655-0360.

