



Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition | 14 Impactful Solutions

Regional Child Care Plan

“If the region wants to be desirable to young families there has to be a change.”—LEELANAU COUNTY PARENT

Solution 8

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL PLAN HERE](#)

Introduction to the 14 Solutions

The following 14 Solutions arise from more than 100 distinct ideas generated by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition

The following Child Care Solution module is one of 14 Solutions that comprise the Regional Child Care Plan of the Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Planning Coalition. The 49-member Coalition represents regional and community partners in the northwest-lower Michigan counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee and Wexford.

The work of the Coalition is funded by a Regional Child Care Planning grant awarded and supported by Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) Child Care Innovation Fund in order to understand and address the child care crisis and to expand equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care for working families. Grants were issued to 16 regional coalitions covering every part of Michigan.

Regional Child Care Planning grants were issued to ECIC by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Each Solution Module:

Meets several criteria:

- **Impactful** – in the opinion of the Coalition, directly addresses one or more of the Root Causes impacting the regional child care system and will improve access, affordability and/or quality.
- **Vetted** – have proven to be successful regionally or elsewhere
- **Sponsored** – one or more regional entities or groups is presently committed to or leading implementation

Consists of five components::

- **Primary Root Cause** addressed
- **An introductory paragraph** summarizing the solution, why it can be beneficial and how it can be implemented
- **Background and Context** – relates why the solution may be needed or beneficial, along with some historical context where applicable
- **Examples and Priorities** – showcases examples of comparable approaches implemented within the region or elsewhere and then highlights implied priorities for implementation
- **Potential Near-Term Actions** – calls out near term actions that different groups of stakeholders can take in order to move toward implementation

The 14 Solutions are:

1. State Investment
2. Local Public Funding
3. Policy Changes
4. Local Planning & Zoning
5. Provider Incubation
6. Community Facility Investments
7. Micro-Centers
8. Credential Pathways 
9. Substitute Pools
10. Universal Preschool
11. Home-Based Universal Preschool Option
12. Employer Policies & Actions
13. Enhanced Family Navigation
14. Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration

Credential Pathways

Expand pathways and support for educators to earn credentials

SOLUTION

8

The educators who work in the child care system are expected to earn specific credentials in child development or early childhood education, depending on what role they will play in provider organizations. Educational institutions, agencies and funders wishing to attract and retain early learning and care professionals in the child care system should work together to make sure that programs are easy to access and complete at low or no cost.

Background and Context

The educators who work in the child care system are skilled professionals who are expected to have deep knowledge of child development (CD) and/or early childhood education (ECE). Knowledge can come from on-the-job experience, mentorship, formal and informal training programs and many other sources. However, specific credentials—degrees, certificates and courses of study—are required to hold defined roles within the system.

MiRegistry is Michigan's professional development registry for the early childhood and out-of-school time workforce.¹ The registry allows individuals to record their employment, education, and training history and to earn designation of defined credential levels. MiRegistry defines eight basic credential levels for educators in the system with the following requirements² (abbreviated for this report).

An analysis conducted in April, 2024 by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition revealed that there were numerous open and unfilled positions requiring the P1, P2 and P3 professional level credentials across Head Start, Early Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), Strong Beginnings and center-based programs across the region.

Closing workforce gaps³ that are affecting the child care system requires encouraging new child care educators and those who are already established in the field to earn credentials that allow them to achieve Foundational and Professional levels. But there are barriers.

Moving from one credential level to another requires a considerable commitment of time. Whether or not there is direct cost for tuition or training expenses, child care educators often need to forgo wages while they are earning degrees and other credentials. The combination of time commitments, hard costs and/or lost wage revenue often prevent child care educators from earning additional credentials, even if these credentials come with higher wages and benefits or other incentives.

PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE
ADDRESSED:

**Workforce
Gaps**

¹ <https://miregistry.org/>

² <https://miregistry.org/wp-content/uploads/Career-Pathway.pdf>

³ See Root Cause: Workforce Gaps

FOUNDATION LEVELS		
LEVEL	REQUIREMENT	POSSIBLE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
F1	Membership in MiRegistry, the entry point for professionals in the field	Get started as a home-based child care owner or assistant or an Assistant Teacher in a child care center or school age program
F2	60 specialized training hours on providing care to children provided through MiRegistry or other approved source; completed within 3 years after getting started in the field	Home-based child care owner or assistant or an Assistant Teacher in a child care center or school age program
F3	6 semester credit hours in ECE / CD or child related-eld or 90 specialized training hours on providing care to children provided through MiRegistry or other approved source	Program Director for school age program

PROFESSIONAL LEVELS		
LEVEL	REQUIREMENT	POSSIBLE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
P1	Child Development Associate credential or equivalent	Early Head Start or child care center Lead Teacher, Head Start Assistant Teacher, Great Start Readiness Program Associate Teacher
P2	Associate Degree or equivalent with dedicated focus in ECE, CD or child-related field	Head Start Lead Teacher, child care center Program Director, variety of technical roles in the system
P3	Bachelor Degree with dedicated focus in ECE, CD or child-related field	Great Start Readiness Program Lead Teacher, variety of leadership and advanced technical roles in the system
P4	Master Degree in ECE, CD or child-related field	Quality improvement and licensure roles, university or community college teaching role, variety of specialized roles in the system
P5	Ed.D. or PhD in ECE, CD or child-related field	University faculty member in an early childhood field

The tables at left show the initial requirements to achieve a given level; additional requirements for continuing education and credential renewal are not included.

At left, acronyms ECE / CD: Early Childhood Education / Child Development; and CDA: Child Development Associate



“Apprenticeship programs are one example of a proven tool available for child care workers seeking career advancement opportunities...35 states currently have active regional or statewide child care apprenticeship programs.”

By working together, educational institutions, agencies and funders wishing to attract and retain educators in the child care system should bring down barriers and make sure that programs are easy to begin and complete at low or no cost. This will improve the ability of the field to both attract and retain the workforce needed to provide high quality care to children and their families.

Examples & Priorities

There are a number of proven tools that have been used to reduce barriers associated with earning early learning and care credentials. The following examples are offered both as specific solutions that can be replicated and expanded as well as general examples of community partners working together to improve access to early learning and care credentials.

At the highest level, these approaches:

- Provide degree and credential programs at times and locations that work well for early learning and care educators
- Reduce or eliminate direct costs for early learning and care educators
- Provide stipends to replace lost wages, pay for transportation or child care or otherwise reduce or eliminate indirect costs

- Provide mentorship to participants so they can make the most of their professional development time and chart their next career steps
- Provide support to child care providers so their employees can participate in skill-building, training and credential-seeking

Fully Utilize Registered Apprenticeship Programs

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.⁴ 35 states currently have active regional or statewide child care apprenticeship programs.⁵ The Michigan Registered Apprenticeship program is offered through Michigan Works! offices and can be used to support early learning and care workers in both direct care and administrative roles across the mixed-delivery child care system.

Child care providers who initiate apprenticeships agree to pay apprentices while they complete on-the-job learning and to provide a mentor within their organization who can help guide and support the apprentice. In recent years, they have been able to take advantage of funding to be able to defray incurred costs associated with the program.

⁴ “Early Childhood Education Apprenticeships: The Why, What and How”, National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

⁵ “Apprenticeships: The Fastest Growing Strategy for Child Care Workforce Development”, Linda K. Smith, July 21, 2023, <https://bi-partisanpolicy.org/blog/apprenticeships-child-care-workforce-development/>



As of the time of this writing, Northwest Michigan Works! is supporting multiple early learning and care apprenticeships in partnership with NMCAA (Head Start) and a number of other center-based child care providers. Those providers who have participated in the program report strong satisfaction with the support they have received. However, the program has additional capacity to support more apprenticeships within the region.

Many home-based and center-based providers may never have sponsored an apprentice before and may believe they are too stretched to take advantage

“Child Development Associate programs—another example of career pathway opportunities for child care workers...The CDA is a nationally recognized credential for early learning and care professionals.”

of this program. Learning about success stories from peer providers may help some of them to step forward.

Local education institutions, workforce development professionals, agencies and funders should work together to promote and fully utilize the Registered Apprenticeship program across the mixed-delivery child care system.

Potential approaches to fully utilize the Registered Apprenticeship program across the mixed-deliver child care system include:

- Continue to promote the program and its potential benefits through all forums that reach child care providers, including Family Child Care Networks, child care incubator programs, continuing education events, Resource Center communications, GSRP and other Northwest Education Services communications, etc.
- Develop case studies featuring successful apprenticeships within the region, including the positive benefits for both the apprentice and the child care provider

Provide and Support Flexible Child Development Associate (CDA) Programs

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is a nationally recognized professional credential for early learning and care professionals.⁶ As detailed



above, earning a CDA is necessary to earn the P1 professional level credential in MiRegistry and is often a starting point that participants use before advancing to complete an associate or bachelor degree in child development (CD), early childhood education (ECE) or other child-development field.

There are multiple components to earning the credential:

1. 120 hours of instruction in early childhood education in a variety of subject areas
2. 480 hours of practical experience working directly with young children over the span of three years
3. Completion of written and in-person assessments, along with other requirements demonstrating competence in ECE

CDA training programs to meet the hours of instruc-

tion requirement are offered in both virtual and in-person settings. Online training for earning the CDA is provided by ProSolutions Training, a vendor approved by the Great Start to Quality.⁷ In-person CDA training is provided by both of the community colleges located in the region—Northwestern Michigan College and North Central Michigan College. In-person courses are typically offered on Saturdays and require several months to complete. Virtual options are self-paced.

Both online and in person options require direct tuition – several hundred dollars or more. This tuition can be covered by the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Michigan scholarship if learners work 20+ hours per week for a licensed child care provider that is willing to sponsor participation in the program. T.E.A.C.H. scholarships therefore help those who already work within the child care system but are not applicable to those who are considering this career path and not yet employed.

In summer of 2022, 2023 and 2024 Northwestern Michigan College partnered with Northwest Education Services and other community partners to offer an “Accelerated CDA” course, taught over three weeks to a learning cohort that included educators working in Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), Head Start, center-based and other settings, as well as aspiring educators who had not yet worked in the field. The overall initiative was funded by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation’s Child Care Innovation Fund.

⁶ Council for Professional Recognition <https://www.cdacouncil.org/en/about/learn-about-the-cda/>

⁷ <https://www.prosolutionstraining.com/content/?id=85%2FMichigan%2F>

“Both CDAs and Associate Degree opportunities are available for child care workers and can be supported by T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to help defray the costs.”



Additional features and benefits of the Accelerated CDA program included:

- No tuition cost for participants, regardless of whether they were new to the field or already working in the system
- Mentorship for program participants that included both professional support as well as career planning
- Income replacement stipends provided through funding made available by the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation so that participants did not need to forgo three weeks of wages to participate in the program

Preliminary results from the 2022 and 2023 cohorts seem very positive. Dozens of educators have been able to complete their CDA coursework, allowing many more educators to work across the mixed-delivery child care system. Cohort learning and mentorship ensured that program participants were able to build connections with each other and with those who are further along the early learning and care career pathway.

However, funding for the project may come to an end after summer 2024.

Potential approaches to remove barriers for those seeking to earn their CDA credential include:

- Secure funding to pay for CDA coursework for those who are new to the field
- Replicate and extend the Accelerated CDA program throughout the 10-county region, including income replacement stipends

Generate Scholarships for Community College Degree Programs

Both community colleges located in the region—Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) and North Central Michigan College (NCMC)—offer associate degree programs in early childhood education (ECE). Both colleges also offer the opportunity to earn a bachelor degree in ECE through University Center

partnerships (NMC through Lake Superior State University and NMC through Ferris State University).

Students who have already earned the Child Development Associate credential typically earn 6 to 9 credit hours toward completion of an associate or bachelor degree in ECE.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Michigan scholarships are available to cover a significant portion of the cost for tuition and books for students earning associate or bachelor programs.⁸ Depending on eligibility, this scholarship may also provide a travel stipend, income replacement for release time and a bonus upon successful completion.

To qualify for these scholarships, applicants need to meet multiple criteria:

- Work a minimum of 20 hours per week in a licensed child care setting
- Earn \$29.90 or less per hour⁹
- Are eligible to receive Michigan in-state student tuition rate
- Provide evidence that you have applied for financial aid

Scholarship recipients typically have an obligation to work at least one year in the field after they complete their course of study.

⁸ <https://miaeyc.org/t-e-a-c-h-scholarships/>

⁹ Source: MIAEYC (Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children)

“Ultimately, there are considerable resources already available to support those who want to earn credentials and work within the regional child care system.”



In summary, the T.E.A.C.H. scholarships for the Child Development Associate (CDA) program require that a licensed child care provider is willing to sponsor participation in the program. Scholarships therefore help those who already work within the child care system to advance along the career pathway and take on new roles.

While these and other programs may cover a significant portion of the costs of earning an associate or bachelor degree in ECE, they often come with requirements, limits and caps that lead students to pay some costs.

Therefore, expanding scholarship funds available through the community colleges to support students working to earn degrees in Early Childhood Education or Child Development will create additional flexibility and opportunities for those moving through the professional credentials in the system.

Expand State Investment in Professional Development

Illinois' ExceleRate Pilot program¹⁰ uses a combination of wage supports and targeted funding to cover release time for early childhood educators to plan, reflect and work on advanced credentials, leading to higher retention rates and greater participation rates in college courses.

Promote Opportunities in Early Learning and Care

Ultimately, there are considerable resources already available to support those who want to earn credentials and work within the regional child care system. Some of the strongest selling points for this work and career include the ability to do meaningful work and earn a degree at low cost and with considerable support.

Therefore, intermediate school district Career Tech Centers, community colleges, NW Michigan Works! programs and all other programs that provide information resources to prospective learners and career seekers should have the access to information that promotes these opportunities in early childhood education.

¹⁰ See Center for Early Learning <https://celfe.org/resources/how-the-excele-rate-pilot-is-strategically-funding-quality-improvement-in-early-learning-in-illinois/>

Potential Near-Term Actions

Michigan policy makers should continue to provide pathways and support for educators to earn credentials and should provide funding for accelerated CDA programs. They can also expand direct investment in credentialing and professional development.

Local funders should provide income replacement stipends for educators working to earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and generate scholarship funds at local community colleges to support students working to earn degrees in Early Childhood Education or Child Development.

Local agencies, educational institutions and child care advocates should work together to ensure that prospective learners and career seekers know about opportunities to advance their education and career development by working in child care and moving along the child care career pathway.

Networks Northwest Coalition

Regional Child Care Plan 2024