



Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Recognized Profession

Consensus Document: *Professional Licensure*
April 15, 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

In Phase One (2018-2019), members of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce indicated strong interest in advancing as a recognized profession. In Phase Two (2019-2021), VTAEYC’s Advancing ECE as a Profession Task Force was formed to engage the ECE workforce in answering: *To what extent might Vermont choose to align with NAEYC’s Power to the Profession (P2P) recommendations for a recognized early childhood education profession, as described in the [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#)?* This Consensus Document on Professional Licensure - the fourth in a series (see Table 1) - describes what we have heard from the workforce about this key piece of the framework. For more information on Advancing ECE as a Profession in Vermont, please visit [VTAEYC’s website](#).

Advancing ECE as a Recognized Profession Project Timeline

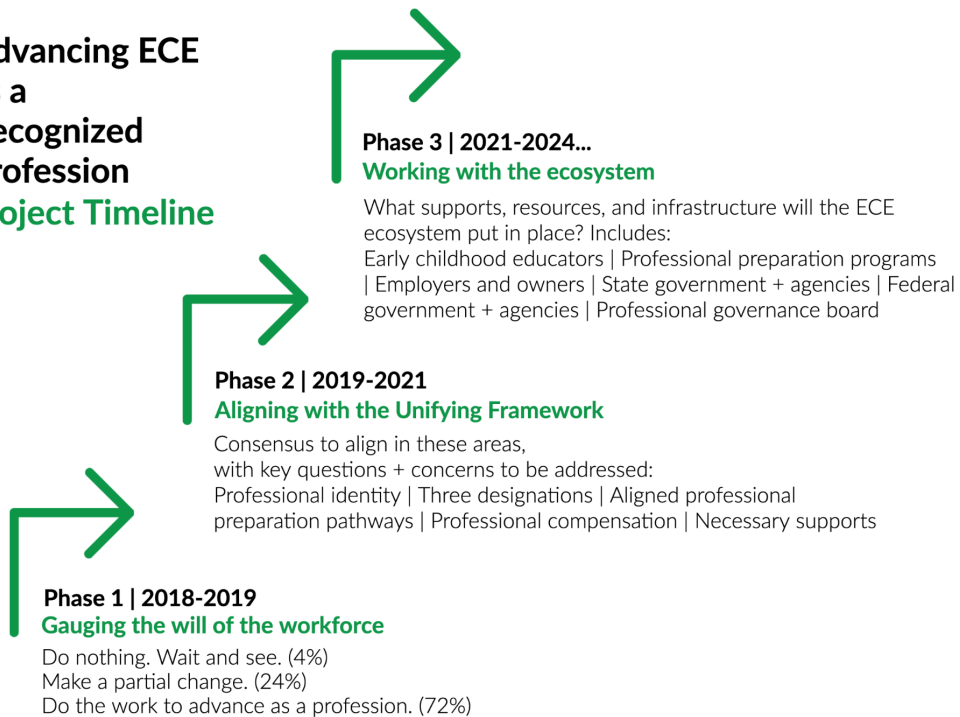


TABLE 1: 2019-2022 ECE Workforce Consensus on Aligning with the *Unifying Framework*

Consensus Document	Workforce Outreach	Survey Results	AGREE
Professional Identity (Link to full consensus document)	October 2019-March 2020 357 session participants 167 surveys (40% response rate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name Role & responsibilities Birth-age 8 ECE Profession w/in EC field 	90% 98% 84% 93%
Three Designations w/ Aligned Preparation Pathways (Link to full consensus document)	October 2020-February 2021 318 session participants 203 surveys (63% response rate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE I, II, and III Min. 120 hours, Assoc, Bach. Scopes of practice Compensation & responsibilities increase as expertise increases <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> Considerations: Ensure phased-in implementation Include short-term exemption policies & flexible pathways for existing workforce to demonstrate competencies The profession should take the lead in identifying necessary supports </div>	98% 91% 96% 96%
Professional Compensation (Link to full consensus document)	March-May 2021 409 session participants 238 surveys (58% response rate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparable across settings Include benefits package Increase w/ prep & competencies Not differentiated based on ages of children served <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> Considerations: Use public schools as a starting place for figuring out fair compensation Develop a process that values experience & expertise in determining designation and compensation Ensure a benefits package that is meaningful & has a positive impact Funding must come from significant public investment </div>	99% 99% 97% 99%
Professional Licensure (Details in this document)	October 2021-February 2022 371 session participants 216 surveys (58% response rate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in becoming licensed Will lead to better compensation & respect Feel included in the path to the profession 	89% 99% 92%

Workforce Discussion: Professional Licensure

This Consensus Document reports on the ECE workforce consideration of the *Unifying Framework's* recommendations for Professional Licensure. What follows here is a description of the content that was embedded in presentations, in accompanying materials, and in the followup surveys completed by participants from the ECE workforce.

What is Professional Licensure as an Early Childhood Educator?

In our current structure, licensing is about the setting, not the profession. In the *Unifying Framework*, this system is reoriented and realigned to reduce complexity and confusion, focusing trust and investment in the education and compensation of early childhood educators themselves, who make the biggest difference in driving families' access to quality early learning and care for their children. In order to move to this future, where all early childhood educators will hold a professional license to practice at an ECE I, II or III designation, many changes will be needed. - *Unifying Framework + Steps to Licensure*, p. 2

Professional Licensure as an early childhood educator differs from anything we have now. It differs from the licensing system for child care programs, which is overseen by the Child Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Human Services. It differs from a Vermont educator license issued by the Vermont Standards Board in the Vermont Agency of Education, which is required to teach in a public PreK-12 school. Professional Licensure for individual early childhood educators in a mixed-delivery system, with children ages birth through eight and their families - this is a new construct.

Why might Professional Licensure as an Early Childhood Educator matter?

Professional Licensure supports the "audacious vision" in the *Unifying Framework*: "Each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce."

A system for Professional Licensure:

- Validates learning
- Certifies expertise
- Recognizes the specialized skills that early childhood educators possess
- Holds early childhood educators accountable for being well-prepared
- Aims for equity, across program settings and ages of children

What might be the payoff for having a Professional Licensure system?

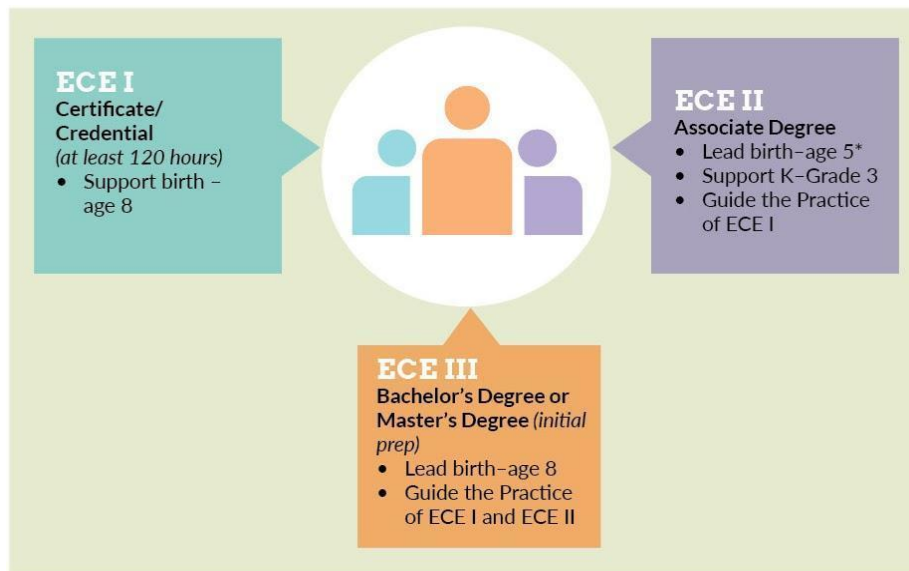
The payoff extends to families and children, early childhood educators, and society at-large, including:

- Opportunity to be broadly recognized as professionals
- Expertise and specialized skills valued & recognized
- Basis for professional wage & benefits
- Clarity about how to prepare and advance in the profession
- Clarity for families to make informed choices for their children
- Impetus for building the will for increasing public funding
- Potential for unwinding some regulatory systems
- Empowerment of the profession to lead

What are the *Unifying Framework* recommendations for Professional Licensure?

- 1) Licensure will be based on three Early Childhood Educator designations - ECE I, II, and III.** (Figure 1)
Although these professionals will be prepared to work together in various configurations as part of a teaching team, each designation has its associated scope of practice, expected level of professional preparation, and expected level of mastery of the [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#). (NAEYC, 2020)

FIGURE 1: Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways



* In states with state-funded preK programs provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K-12 public school system, ECE III plays a lead role and ECE II plays a support educator role.

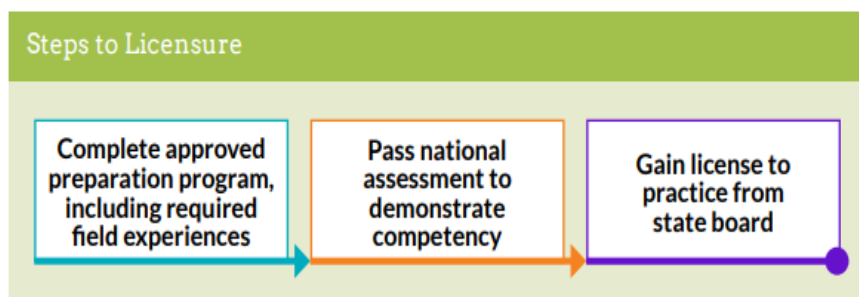
- 2) All Early Childhood Educators hold an individual professional license to practice at their designation.**

Whether at the ECE I, II or III level, this will be based on these **Steps to Licensure** (Figure 2) - completing an accredited/ recognized professional preparation program, completing field experiences, and passing an assessment of competencies.

- 3) There will be careful attention to the nature of licensure assessment(s).**

Licensure assessments must have multiple measures; be affordable; and not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, and linguistic biases. The content of assessments must be aligned to the *Professional Standards & Competencies* and aligned to the appropriate depth and breadth for ECE I, II, and III as indicated in the leveling of the *Professional Standards & Competencies*.

FIGURE 2: Steps to Licensure



4) Professional compensation accompanies professional licensure.

Requiring increasing qualifications without increasing compensation is unfair and inequitable. As every early childhood educator will hold an individual license to practice, based on a shared set of Professional Standards & Competencies, so must every licensed early childhood educator be paid professional compensation, including wages & benefits. This compensation will not be built on the backs of educators or families, but will come from increased public expenditures.

5) The licensure process must honor, recognize and value the expertise of the current workforce.

Advancing this vision must be done in ways that honor, recognize, and value the diversity, dedication, and lived experience of the current workforce. It is crucial to the ultimate establishment of a successful licensure process that results in professional compensation to simultaneously establish a process in which states implement policies that exempt some current educators from the licensure process, for some period of time, as well as policies that offer flexible approaches to demonstrating competence, such as credit for prior learning.

II. WORKFORCE OUTREACH: Recommendations for Professional Compensation

Do we have credible results?

To have confidence in what the Task Force heard from the workforce on these recommendations, there are two key questions:

- Did we engage enough of the workforce in presentations and conversations?
- Did we gather enough workforce responses to the survey?

Conversations about Professional Licensure

From October 2021 to February 2022, there were 16 online, real-time sessions, including one at the VTAEYC Fall Statewide Conference. Sessions began with a presentation including slides and [video](#), followed by structured, small-group conversations.

In total, 371 ECE workforce members from all regions of Vermont participated. Following conversations, facilitators summarized group feedback on the recommendations and summaries were analyzed for themes.

In addition to live presentations, a [20-minute presentation recap video](#) on the VTAEYC website, and many social media posts shared information, encouraged participation, and helped to spread the word.

We can have confidence about engaging enough of the workforce because:

- Outreach efforts through newsletters, social media, flyers and personal approach ensured the members of the ECE workforce had the opportunity to participate.
- Some PD sessions were open to participants from around the state, while others were tailored to fit into staff meetings of center-based programs.
- Conversation participants were well-distributed across key roles and settings..
- Facilitator summaries showed consistent results across groups; it is unlikely that larger numbers would have changed the feedback.

Survey about Professional Licensure

The survey was distributed to everyone who participated in professional development sessions. In total, 216 members of the workforce responded to the survey.

We can have confidence that there was enough response to the survey because:

- There was a very robust 58% response rate from PD session participants.
- There was balanced representation across roles, education and experience. (See Appendix A)
- Responses were consistent within and across subgroups.

III. WORKFORCE FEEDBACK: Recommendations for Professional Licensure

Do respondents support the recommendations from the *Unifying Framework*?

Major Themes from Conversations

Excitement about Professional Licensure

- Being recognized & respected
- Our noble purpose & specialized skills being understood
- Having clear pathways into the profession
- Coursework will count!
- Home-based and center-based being on same page
- For directors, hirees already being credentialed professionals
- Improving recruitment of new people entering the profession
- Having supports in place, i.e. scholarships, etc.
- The idea that compensation could increase at the same time professional licensure is being put in place
- Intentionality & duration of this project; thoughtful, not rushed; “rowing in right direction”

Concerns & Questions

- Wanting answers that we don’t have yet
- Confused about “licensure” (ECE) vs. “licensing” (CDD) vs. “license” (AOE)
- Where will funding come from? Will there be enough?
- Not incurring student debt; ensuring money to help with degrees
- Will the assessment be a test? Some struggle with taking tests.
- Fear of change
- Wondering about the length of time it will take and the process to get there
- Will emphasis on formal education take into account experience & expertise
- What if you’re nearing retirement?

Survey Results

Respondents to the survey are members of the existing ECE workforce. First, our analysis looks at the percentage who “agree” or “disagree” with statements about Professional Licensure. Very large percentages are seen as general consensus, with small percentages (typically 1-7 respondents) viewed as “outliers” not representative of respondents as a whole. Second, our analysis looks at written comments from survey respondents to see what concerns are most frequently raised, indicating a consensus on issues that must be acknowledged and addressed moving forward.

There appears to be broad support for the recommendations, based on the following:

- The percentage of respondents who “agree” (strongly or somewhat) with survey items ranges from 89% to 96%.
- The percentage who “disagree” (strongly or somewhat) ranges from 4% to 11%.
- Two subgroup analyses were done: 1) between those working in Family Child Care Home settings and those in Center-Based Child Care settings and 2) between those “Strongly Uninterested” and those “Strongly Interested” in becoming professionally licensed. While worth the time to investigate, these analyses did not show large differences across subgroups. (See Appendix B)
- Many survey respondents added comments elaborating on their answers. For most, the message was “I agree with this direction and...I also have a concern or a question.”

RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE

Q: Are you interested in becoming a licensed member of the Early Childhood Education Profession?

Agree: **89%** Strongly interested 56% + Somewhat interested 33%
Disagree: **11%** Strongly Uninterested 5% + Somewhat Uninterested 6%

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that professional licensure will be a pathway to better compensation, better benefits, and greater respect for the profession?

Agree: **96%** Strongly agree 70% + Somewhat agree 26%
Disagree: **4%** Strongly disagree 3% + Somewhat disagree 1%

Q: In the Unifying Framework there is a commitment that every current educator who wants to be a member of the profession will have the resources, supports, and pathway to be included. To what extent do you feel included in this commitment?

Agree: **91%** A great deal 39% + A lot 30% + A moderate amount 22%
Disagree: **9%** Not at all 2% + A little 7%

Q: "Bridge" - Here is a list of possible supports for the current workforce to transition to the licensed profession. Please check all that YOU might want/ need and add anything you think is missing.

	Percentage	Responses
• Scholarships	63%	137
• Increased compensation early in the process	61%	132
• Credit for experience & expertise	53%	115
• A licensure assessment - doable, affordable, equitable, & efficient	47%	102
• Phase-in time period; continue current role while meeting requirements	44%	94
• Mentor/ advisor/ coach	31%	68
• Grace period for current workforce members close to retirement	27%	58
• Equivalency process for degree in another field, experience & PD	27%	58
• Subsidized substitute pool	26%	57

SAMPLING OF COMMENTS ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE

- They pay more at the local bagel shop than I make and I have education and take workshops.
- I have been in the field for 41 years. It's pretty amazing to see how we have evolved over time. It doesn't mean we still don't have a long way to go.
- I think it is wonderful for the profession and will ensure we have individuals that are dedicated to the work they are doing. Many individuals are in the profession for the right reason; unfortunately, some are not. I have worked in this field for many years and know some of both.
- The responsibility to work with children should be taken seriously. Before I started college classes about child development, I thought I knew how I should work with children. I was good with children, however, I had no idea about the important stuff. The first five years are so important in a child's development, we should be educating all teachers at every level. This is a step in the right direction for educators and for our children!
- I don't believe that regulating child care will solve any of the problems we currently face, especially lack of staff, because the requirements are already demanding enough.
- I think it will be important to remember that change, even a good change, is difficult for people, so patience and understanding will be very important as we move forward.
- I have to retire, because I don't have my GED. They don't look at the years I've been doing this job.
- I want the proper recognition and compensation for the work I love doing.
- I am very supportive of my colleagues seeking licensure!
- I am hoping this happens before I retire or jump ship and become a...??
- I think this could be a pathway to better compensation, benefits and respect for the profession. I am unclear about how it will benefit family child care providers.
- Being a licensed professional is interesting to me.
- I agree for the top tier of teachers, but would like to see more respect and better compensation for associate teachers, as well.
- I agree that having a national standard for licensure will earn greater respect for the profession. I would like to see what that path to licensure really looks like before committing my full agreement!
- I do feel that this career is typically undervalued and underpaid. I think being seen as teachers will help bridge that gap.
- Being on the tail end of my career, I am a little concerned about fitting into the new structure. Still, I am thrilled to see it's all happening!
- I look forward to this for upcoming teachers in the next generations!
- I would like to be considered a professional by others, not just early childhood educators.

What questions and concerns were raised most often about these recommendations?

The top three concerns, with a sampling of comments, are these:

1. As a professional licensure process is established, how will the **EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE OF THE CURRENT WORKFORCE** be valued, in addition to educational credentials?

- While I want to advance my career, I'm not interested in "starting over" with my education. It is expensive and time-consuming. I completed my Bachelor's degree during a chapter in my life when I had time and energy. I now have two children under 2 years of age and very little time or money to spare.
- I'm so close to retirement that I'm not sure it would be practical for me to pursue this.
- I think it's important to make sure to provide support for those who have been in the field for a long time to be included in the licensure with dignity.

Response from the Task Force: Rather than waiting for others to tell us what's going to happen, the Task Force is beginning the work to design a "bridge" that honors experience and expertise, as well as education. This work involves a pilot with 95 volunteers from the early childhood education workforce providing data about their education, experience, and professional development. These volunteers are from all regions, settings and roles. They vary in educational background and years of experience. The goal of the pilot is to figure out how to value that diversity AND what pathways will be needed so that everyone in the existing workforce who wishes to be a part of the recognized profession can do so.

2. What consideration will be given to the circumstances and concerns of early childhood educators working in **FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES** in the establishment of a professional licensure process?

- I'm not sure how this applies to home child care. Under my system, I am a lead for children infant to 12 years with 16 years of experience and no college degree.
- I am still unsure of exactly what this entails. It is unclear how a registered family child care provider would be well-compensated without raising my rates, which would make it difficult for my families to afford.
- I am not interested in the new system based on three designations under consideration, because I would make SO much less money.
- With the hours I spend with the children in my program, the time it takes to handle all program administration and meet the regulations, and time that's left for my own family, I don't see how I can manage anything else that I might have to do to become professionally licensed as an ECE.

Response from the Task Force: Some of us on the Task Force work in family child care home settings. All of us believe that early childhood educators in home-based settings deserve consideration. These educators bring unique gifts, deep knowledge and expertise and they have unique challenges and barriers. The standards will be the same, but the approach to get there may differ. This is about taking down barriers and placing supports. We see this commitment reflected in the *Unifying Framework* and believe that the new system will lead to a lasting change -- for a new, respected, valued, stable profession, not a change every three years.

3. What will the **APPROVED ASSESSMENT** be? Will it be a test?

- I don't like tests. If it was just test-based, I might not try to get it.
- Taking the Praxis is not doable.
- Some people are highly-skilled in their work with young children, but have trouble showing that on a written test.

Response from the Task Force: The *Unifying Framework* states: "Licensure assessments must have multiple measures; be affordable; and not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, and linguistic biases." (p. 22) There is no indication here that assessment will be test-based. This reads as a commitment to equity and accessibility.

IV. SUMMARY

Based on feedback from members of the Vermont ECE workforce who engaged with this topic, the consensus regarding Professional Licensure is as follows:

Support for the *Unifying Framework* recommendations for Professional Licensure

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Interested in becoming professionally licensed as an early childhood educator | 89% |
| 2. Believe professional licensure will be a pathway to better compensation, better benefits, and greater respect for the profession | 96% |
| 3. Feel included in the commitment that anyone in the current workforce who wishes to be a part of the profession will have the resources, supports and pathways to do so | 91% |

Interest in a range of supports and resources to function as a "bridge" for the current workforce

	Percentage	Responses
● Scholarships	63%	137
● Increased compensation early in the process	61%	132
● Credit for experience & expertise	53%	115
● A licensure assessment - doable, affordable, equitable, & efficient	47%	102
● Phased-in time period; continue current role while meeting requirements	44%	94
● Mentor/ advisor/ coach	31%	68
● Grace period for current workforce members close to retirement	27%	58
● Equivalency process for degree in another field, experience & PD	27%	58
● Subsidized substitute pool	26%	57

Key questions and concerns from the workforce that must be addressed:

1. For the current workforce, how will their experience and expertise be valued, along with educational credentials, in the professional licensure process?
2. For those working in family child care home programs, how will their circumstances and concerns be addressed in the creation of a professional licensure process?
3. What will the approved assessment for professional licensure entail and what form it will have?

VTAEYC Advancing as a Profession Task Force Members

We unanimously support this Consensus Document.

1. Alyson Gryzb Director, Bennington Early Childhood Center
2. April Zajko Early Childhood Consultant, St. Johnsbury
3. Christina Goodwin Director, Pine Forest Children’s Center, Burlington
4. Jen Olson Preschool Teacher, Wren’s Nest Forest Preschool, Bristol
5. Kelly Hayes Owner/Director, Learning Garden, Moretown
6. Kim Freeman Early Childhood Education Instructor, Windham Regional Career Center
7. Laura Butler Owner, Imagination Island Child Care, Milton
8. Meghan Meszkat Interim Director, Early Education, Southwestern VT SU, Bennington
9. Staci Otis Owner, Little Allstars Child Care & Preschool, Springfield
10. Stacie Curtis Director of Early Education, Burlington School District
11. Su White Teacher Director, Quarry Hill School, Middlebury
12. Susan Torncello Faculty, Early Childhood Education, UVM, Burlington
13. Tammie Hazlett Family Child Care Provider, Thetford

APPENDIX A – SUBGROUPS

ROLES

Teacher/ licensed teacher/lead teacher	28%
Assistant/ associate teacher	21%
Program director/ administrator	12%
Family child care provider/ teacher/ owner	21%
Other roles	18%

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

less than 4	21%
5-10	18%
11-16	15%
17-22	15%
23-28	14%
29-34	8%
more than 34	9%

SETTINGS

Center-based program (not public school)	58%
Family childcare home-based program	24%
Head Start program	8%
*Public school-based program	4%
Other	6%

*Public school-based workforce are under-represented in the survey. Additional outreach strategies are planned, including a recent presentation and survey at the Kindergarten Conference on April 1, 2022.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

High school or GED	11%
Fundamentals	9%
CDA	7%
Apprenticeship	4%
Child care certificate	2%
Associate degree	10%
Bachelor's degree - ECE	11%
Bachelor's - related	17%
Bachelor's - unrelated	7%
Master's degree - ECE	2%
Master's - other field	9%
Beyond Master's degree	1%
Other	10%

APPENDIX B – Subgroup analysis

Family Child Care Home Program & Center-Based Child Care Program - % “Agree”

QUESTION	FCCH (51)	CBCCP (125)	All respondents (216 total)
Interested in becoming licensed ECE professional	78%	90%	89%
Believe licensure is a pathway to better compensation & benefits and greater respect for the profession	88%	99%	96%
Feel included in the <i>Unifying Foundation</i> commitment that every current educator who wants to be a member of the profession will have resources, supports & pathway to do so	80%	94%	91%

Demographics of 10 respondents who chose “strongly uninterested” in professional licensure

- Setting: FCCH (6) and Center-based (4)
- Years experience: Majority (6) have 23-28 years
- Education completed: Diverse - HS/GED (2), Fundamentals (3), CDA (1), Bachelor’s unrelated (1), Master’s unrelated (2)
- Other education: Many PD hours not in a program (7); None of the above (2)
- Career Ladder: None/ not on Career Ladder (6)
- Career stage: Majority (6) near retirement
- Lead to respect, compensation: Agree (6), Disagree (4)
- Feel included: Agree (5), Disagree (5)

All comments:

- (FCCH) I am not interested in a new system of qualified teachers based on the tiers you are considering because it would mean I would make SO much less money.
- (FCCH) I am 62; I have no time nor energy other than what I need here every day focusing on my children, along with what the state requires and my personal life.
- (CBCCP) I am not in support of some having a license to be “qualified” when in fact, there are so many more important qualifications to be with YOUNG children.
- (CBCCP) I am already licensed!

Demographics of 107 respondents who chose “strongly interested” in professional licensure

- Setting: FCCH (21), Center-based (66), Public school (8), Head Start (7), other (5)
- Years experience: Wide-range spread from 1-4 years to 23-28 years; a few with more
- Education completed: Diverse across all response choices, most have Bachelor’s (48)
- Other education: Many PD hours not in a program (23); None of the above (23)

- Career Ladder: None/ not on Career Ladder (31)
- Career stage: Just starting out (21), well-underway (32), midstream (37), nearing retirement (14)
- Lead to respect, compensation: Agree (all 107)
- Feel included: Agree (102)

Sampling of comments:

- (FCCH) I actually enjoy the classes and further professional development.
- (FCCH) Wondering what it involves.
- I want the proper recognition and compensation for the work I love doing.
- I am already in the process of becoming a licensed member.
- I love teaching kids
- I am very interested in everyone finally being recognized.
- I'm currently working on my Licensure Portfolio.
- I'm wondering what that involves.
- I would like to be considered a professional by others, not just by ECE.