

A career pathway for early educator/child care providers

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By **Chloe Learey**

Vermont, particularly Windham County, needs more early educators and child care providers. This is one way to increase the number of child care slots and make us more attractive to young professionals. How can someone considering a career as an early educator/child care provider embark on this journey?

Eventually, we will have to find ways to better compensate people who work in early education if we want to keep people in the field.

The Child Development Division develops and oversees the licensing requirements for child care centers and home-based programs; two primary career opportunities in the field. Licensing outlines the qualifications needed to work in either setting, and other resources, such as The Northern Lights Career Development Center, have tools for assessing what

specific individuals may need to do to enter the field or to further their career.

Entry level positions in early childhood require someone to be 18-years old, have a high school diploma or GED, pass a background check and complete an education requirement which could be a 45-hour course called "Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals" or a three-credit college course related to early childhood, such as child development. If someone is looking to open a registered home-based program this education requirement needs to be completed within the first 12 months of opening.

The next levels of the career ladder include further education. In a licensed center, a Teacher Associate is required to be with the children at least 75 percent of the time. This requires someone to be a Vermont Child Care Registered Apprentice, to have completed the CCV Child Care Certificate program, or have 21 college credits in three core early childhood areas. These credentials also allow someone to have a licensed home-based program (vs registered).

These are relatively low barriers to entry to the field, particularly if we can find ways to financially support people to access the education needed. For instance, we can pay for tuition and materials, as well as comp time from work. Given the economic imperative of access to high quality, affordable child care, the return on investment is great.

Eventually, we will have to find ways to better compensate people who work in early education if we want to keep people in the field. Early educators make an average wage of \$10.72 per hour nationally, less than 97 percent of all U.S. occupations. Considering child care is one of the most important foundations of a two-generation economic development approach — making it possible for people to go to work and developing the skills of our future workforce — it is incumbent on us to figure out how to pay for it.

We need to promote this career ladder. For example, the upcoming 6th annual Southern Vermont Career Expo on Oct. 18 in Brattleboro offers an opportunity for potential employees and employers to connect (vermontcareerexpo.com).

For now, let's work on making it easy for people who want to be early educators to get the credentials required to get started in the field.

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