Early care and education (ECE) workforce registries are data systems originally conceived to track the child care workforce's training, course work, and formal educational achievement. They were designed to provide states with an understanding of the training and education status and needs of this workforce. Furthermore, registries reflect the national child care policy landscape, holding a strong focus on quality improvement. Research on ECE registries suggests that aggregate registry data have the potential to address questions related to the focus of workforce training. Yet, registries are so much more, as the ongoing pandemic has made clear. Today registries assist state leaders, child care program administrators, and the workforce at-large in various respects, which are detailed below.

**Emergency Broadcast System (Bi-directional Information Distribution)**

A workforce registry allows a state or regional system to provide information to their registered participants, thus it can be utilized as a bi-directional emergency broadcast system to communicate urgent information. For example, the Pennsylvania Key maintains contact information for more than 100,000 early childhood education (ECE) professionals in Pennsylvania’s Professional Development (PD) Registry and distributes pertinent messaging through the [Buzz on Professional Development in Pennsylvania](https://www.ppecd.org/constancontact) and several other e-newsletters via Constant Contact. Special announcements are sent as needed to keep messaging moving as new information becomes available. In 2020, messaging included COVID-related communication that covered announcements and recommendations from both national organizations such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and state agencies from Pennsylvania’s Department of Health. These communications also included instructions around alternative funding opportunities due to ongoing mitigation procedures, resources for both professionals and families impacted by the pandemic, links to both national and state surveys requesting participation from ECE professionals, and reports sharing the results of these surveys once completed.

Registries also exist as a means for child care professionals to enter information into the system in a timely, efficient manner when state and/or local departments are functioning at minimal levels in emergency circumstances. This bi-directional information distribution approach has been extremely helpful during the pandemic.

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The Evolution of the Child Care Workforce Registry

Vaccine Priority/Eligibility Employment Verification

The commitment to vaccinate essential workers necessitates accounting for a state or jurisdiction’s child care workforce and delivering vaccines to eligible individuals expeditiously. A workforce registry provides access to this population, with a platform to document who can access the vaccine and who received the vaccine. For example, Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services’ (OCFS) partnership with Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network provided early childhood and education professionals with a registry certificate. This was the documentation they needed for COVID-19 vaccination registration. Likewise, the Ohio Professional Registry created a certificate of employment for child care professionals to print and provide as proof of eligibility at vaccination sites.

Subsidy/Stipend Verification and Payment Distribution

In support of the essential workers who required child care, some states incentivized program providers to remain open or re-open during the pandemic. Various states offered special funding in the forms of stipends or increased subsidy payments to assist with the increased operational cost due to enhanced health and safety guidelines and social distancing procedures. States’ workforce registries enabled both communication to programs and verification of programs’ operating information. In addition, these systems assisted in distribution of special funding. For example, the Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED) supported early-childhood and school-age professionals working in licensed programs during the COVID-19 pandemic with direct payments of $500. These funds are known as SEED COVID-19 Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers (ROOT) awards. In Illinois, Gateway to Opportunities, the professional development system that administers the state’s registry, participated in the announcement and distribution of the state’s 2020 Child Care Restoration Grants. This allowed Illinois to get $290 million out to nearly 5,000 licensed child care programs. More grants will follow as new federal funds in the amount of $330 million will be distributed in the same manner to both licensed and license-exempt programs throughout Illinois.

Data Collection

At any given time, states should be motivated to collect timely, objective, and comprehensive state-level early childhood education workforce data because policy makers and stakeholders must be able to answer questions about supply, demand, equity, and quality. These questions include: How many professionals are
part of the system? What training and education does the workforce need? What are the salaries of these professionals? Answers to these and many other questions are possible by drawing on data entered into a registry. Additionally, the individuals that are part of the registry can contribute to a specific data collection event organized by the state itself or external researchers.

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System was involved in data collection for an upcoming journal article that will be published in the Early Childhood Education Journal’s Special Issue on the “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Early Childhood Care and Education.” Two surveys were distributed, one in April 2020 and one in November 2020, to ask early childhood administrators/directors, teachers/practitioners, and trainers about how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed their work, what challenges they have faced as a result of the pandemic, and what (if any) positive outcomes they have experienced as a result of the pandemic.

During the early months of the pandemic, Yale collaborated with the NWRA to survey more than 700,000 members of the ECE Workforce, toward assessing the risk of working in child care. Over 50,000 providers in all 50 states responded, representing 71 percent of U.S. counties participating. This overwhelming response demonstrates the reach of registries and their unique ability to access the ECE workforce, in ways no other entity can.

Recruitment of Qualified Professionals

As bi-directional information distributors, workforce registries can communicate early childhood workforce positions for registry participants who are in need of or wish to change employment. Programs may be granted the opportunity to post job openings within the registry, where program administrators/directors know which baseline qualifications should be met by the majority of registry applicants. This was reflected in late March of 2020, when the New York’s Aspire Registry helped to distribute the Existing Childcare Workers Survey on behalf of the New York Office of Children and Family Services. The purpose of this survey was to gather data around child care professionals who were temporarily out of work due to

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The Evolution of the Child Care Workforce Registry

COVID-19 and who would be interested in filling roles at programs providing care to the children of essential workers.

As more state and federal policy makers seek to leverage workforce data to inform scalable cost estimates, pipeline preparations, workforce readiness, and measures with regard to equity accountability, state ECE systems need to closely examine their workforce participation and data saturation levels. Of the 28 states that have made ECE workforce registry participation a requirement for portions of the workforce, just 17 have made it a requirement for all licensed child care providers. To adequately inform priorities and investments toward Public PreK, Minimum Wage, or Equity Accountability states must take design and policy steps to ensure measures of data confidence are sufficiently addressed.

Examples of how early childhood workforce registries were and continue to be vehicles of efficiency and effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic only affirm the need for states to further invest in developing these dynamic systems. Moreover, states that have registries and use them for only one or two of the functions mentioned should consider expanding their registries’ use. As workforce registries evolve, the NWRA will continue to advocate for their expanded adoption and use. Particularly as registries provide meaningful data to support continuous quality improvement for all early childhood workforce members and connected systems of states and local jurisdictions.

Source: Dr. Katari Coleman & Dr. Kimberlee Belcher-Badal, National Workforce Registry Alliance, POPP Committee Brief, April 2021.

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