



Bridging Gaps to Advance the Early Childhood Workforce of Today, and the Future

PAPER 1 of 3

The importance of the early years is widely understood, and how to recruit, retain and support the best and most qualified caregivers and teachers is of critical importance. Despite the clarity of urgency, “those who provide for the care and education of children birth through age 8 are not acknowledged as a cohesive workforce, unified by the shared knowledge and competencies needed to do their jobs well.”⁶

Opportunities and Challenges

Initial qualifications and ongoing requirements for training and professional development vary by state, by type of setting, funding stream, regulatory agency, and employer in the early education field. The quality, availability and content of professional development also varies widely. Some states are taking action to integrate professional development or workforce systems, and federal policy opportunities could drive this further too, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act. The Child Care and Development Block Grant reauthorization of 2014 also seeks to raise the bar, while maintaining state discretion on many details. Thanks to the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grants, more states are building and integrating their early childhood systems overall, especially through Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Unfortunately, the advances in expectations and investments in early childhood education still occur in the context of a fragmented workforce earning poverty wages with high turnover.

The Institute of Medicine/National Research Council recently released recommendations for “phased, multiyear pathways to transition to a minimum bachelor’s degree requirement with specialized knowledge and competencies for all lead educators.”⁷ This is a tremendous long-term goal – one that will require significant policy change and significant funding.

The National Workforce Registry Alliance (Alliance) truly appreciates the pursuit of higher education, its value in the workplace, and the importance of supporting practitioners who are on that pathway. But, working with the early childhood workforce currently in place and in the pipeline, it is clear that knowledge and skills are needed that can be used in their practice now. The workforce needs to be acknowledged for the competencies gained and the skills and experience applied. They are required to document, demonstrate and prove these things to employers, funders and regulatory agencies at the local, state, and federal level. Recognition

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of practitioners’ current knowledge and expertise not only validates the work they are doing every day and the ongoing quality services being provided to young children and their families, but also starts the practitioner on the path to further professional validation.

Advancing the ECE Workforce by Meeting Them Where They Are

The early care and education field needs documentation that allows for data sharing, portability, validation and reciprocity, connected to strategies to quantify and document existing workforce competencies in high-quality care and education. These needs apply across ECE settings, sectors, roles, and individual practitioner pathways—whether the practitioner is on a path to a CDA or a formal credential or degree, or a pathway of intentional, sequential training. Current systems fall short.

The Alliance seeks to promote a framework that improves training, education, and ultimately the competency of early childhood professionals. Together with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Council for Professional Recognition, and a work group of expert advisors, the Alliance is exploring the role of badging and its potential to contribute to career development.

What is Badging?

The Alliance uses the MacArthur Foundation definition of badging: an assessment and credentialing mechanism that is housed and managed online. *Badges are designed to make visible and validate learning in both formal and informal settings, and hold the potential to transform where and how learning is valued.*

The early childhood field does not need more layers and more disconnects; the field needs cohesive solutions. This idea of badging is not instead of a degree, or instead of other credentials like the CDA. It is a tool for documentation and for data points that are electronic and visual. The badge would not be merely a graphic demonstration for show; it would have embedded shareable, portable data points regarding participation in training and education and verification of achievements and qualifications of the learner.

Badges can act as a bridge between learning contexts, beneficial in a field with disconnected requirements and opportunities for education and training. Badges can be used to “assess a much broader and deeper set of skills or competencies and capture each competency in a badge so that the learning path, or more subtle yet critical skills or experiences are not glossed over or lost.”ⁱⁱⁱ

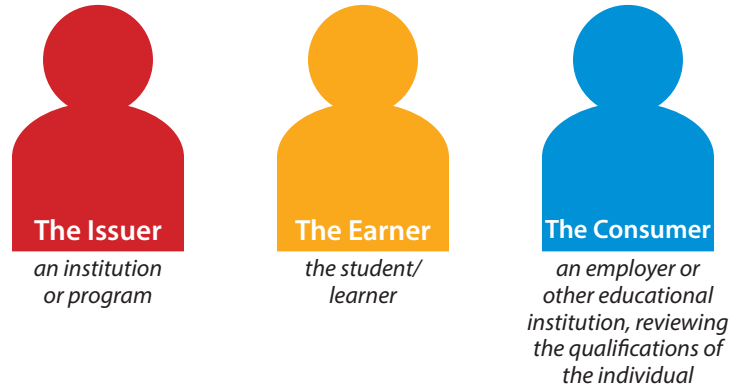
According to the Mozilla Foundation, “badges provide a flexible and usable credential that conveys learning of all kinds, including out-of-school experiences and on-the-job-training. This allows learners to build more comprehensive portfolios of their skills and accomplishments that they can carry with them to job interviews, include on higher education applications, and bring to other areas of their lives. Badges connect experiences along career and learning pathways because they reveal granular steps toward mastering specific competencies that employers and educational institutions demand.”^{iv}

According to the Mozilla Foundation, anyone can create and

issue a badge: the Open Badges standard provides technical and conceptual guidance to issuers to ensure meaningful criteria for badge creation. But that does not mean “anything goes.” Processes for verification, quality assurance and endorsement are also critical, and the Alliance and the work group identified these as crucial pieces for badges to have value and meaning in the early childhood workforce in particular.

The Alliance and the work group explored these roles and the application to the early childhood field.

Three Main Roles in the Process of Badging^{iv}



Potential Value for the Early Childhood Workforce

The inconsistent alignment across early childhood systems is both the reason badging is needed and also a concern for practical implementation.

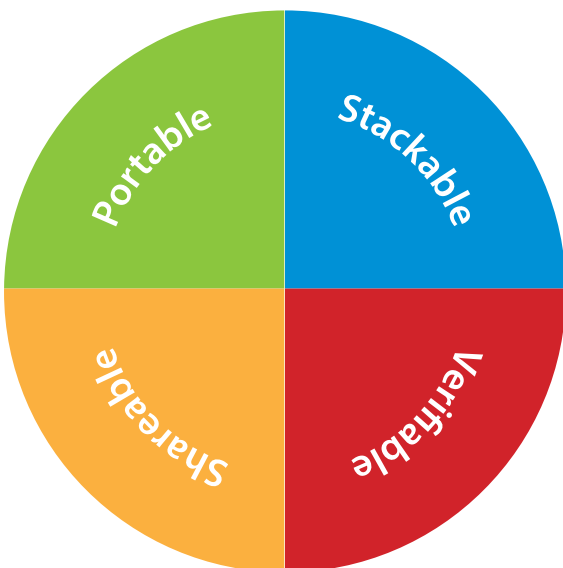
Badging has the potential to weave together the disparate threads of education and training that currently texture professional preparation in the field. Through this work, the intent of the Alliance is to add value to states and their systems, to employers, and to practitioners, which ultimately benefits children and families.

Current training, education and professional efforts have multiple threads that frequently do not connect or support each other. Badging has the potential to bridge some of the gaps and provide recognition of training and skill acquisition that is otherwise not recognized. Badging could serve as a method to link professional development plans and activities to a larger state and/or national framework, and also to the practitioner’s short and long-term career goals.

The system needs to be executable in order to have value. There must be infrastructure to both capture and access/use the data of participation in training/education.

The work group considered the different roles of and values of competency-based, competency-demonstrated, and participation documentation via badging.

Four Shared Characteristics of Badges^v



The work group considered these scenarios:

- Training in parent engagement, with a particular competency in multilingual families: a badge would identify a strength beyond the verification of participation in training hours
- A BA degree obtained before “pre-math” was emphasized in curriculum: a badge earned through additional training or coursework in practical application of math in early childhood education would demonstrate the professional development pathway and knowledge gained
- A sixth grade teacher moving to a preK classroom: badges could document the competencies of working with young children
- New federal requirements for health and safety, first aid and CPR will increase the need to access such training: a badge from a recognized entity would demonstrate achievement and simplify the monitoring of compliance.
- A practitioner investing time, effort and resources to obtain a CDA: badges could document the pathway toward a CDA without replacing the need or aspiration for a CDA.

The work group considered these questions:

- Who would issue badges?
- How would they be validated?
- What standards/criteria would issuers and badges need to meet?
- In the absence of an authoritative body, what “best practice” standards should be met?
- What would motivate a practitioner to participate in badging?
- What would bring in the employers and the state agencies?
- What’s the role of the registries?
- How could badging advance compensation?
- What would it take to link to existing state systems, and what would be needed (for infrastructure and for badge value) in states without such systems?

A Case Study: Child Care Policy Opportunity

The work group grappled with these questions and then proposed a case study. By using a practical example, the work group could test ideas, reveal pitfalls, answer questions and ask yet more questions. A discrete example allowed the group to articulate how badging could play out for the field.

The group identified the health and safety training requirements in the Child Care and Development Block Grant

(CCDBG) law passed by Congress in 2014. At the time of this publication, states are preparing for implementation of the requirements of the law.

This particular example gives states and a significant portion of the early childhood workforce something in common. The CCDBG law calls for health and safety requirements on ten topics, and training on those ten topics. Federal law doesn’t call for a number of hours for those trainings but states will have to articulate the amount of pre-service and ongoing training in their CCDF State Plans.

In this case, a badge from a recognized entity would demonstrate achievement and simplify the monitoring of compliance. And, with badges as stackable, portable blocks, could build a pathway for the practitioner. Paper 2 explores this further, and Paper 3 looks at the opportunities ahead.

Looking Ahead

The early childhood workforce experiences many gaps: the patchwork of training and education; the need to make efforts count across systems and experiences; portability across systems, employers and states; career advisement; and compensation which were ongoing themes in this project.

There is value to both the practitioner and the employer in bridging gaps in professional development pathways. The work group sought to determine whether badging could bridge those gaps in a meaningful way. The desire is to be able to provide multiple data points for field analysis of professional development resulting in value to systems, reduction in duplication, and overall improvement to the experience of the early care and education workforce.

The Alliance, NAEYC and the Council for Professional Recognition entered this project with great enthusiasm. As the work group began to unpack the details in the context of the fractured early childhood field, it was clear this needed to be explored and managed carefully to truly add value to the practitioner (and in turn, to children in program settings). The work group maintained the touchstone that badging needed to have currency in the early childhood world. The enthusiasm continues, but the details matter to the success of this new endeavor.



The National
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Supporting the nation's early childhood and afterschool workforce

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ⁱInstitute of Medicine and National Research Council. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015.

ⁱⁱ*Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱThe Mozilla Foundation and Peer 2 Peer University in Collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation. “Open Badges for Lifelong Learning.” 2012. Accessed from https://wiki.mozilla.org/File:OpenBadges-Working-Paper_012312.pdf

^{iv}Policy Principles to Expand, Support and Expand Badges, 2014

^vMDR. *Digital Open Badges in Education*. Shelton, CT: MDR, 2014.

^{vi}*Ibid.*