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STUDY OF EARLY EDUCATION: LOUISIANA

Professionalizing the Child Care Workforce: Understanding the Low Rates of Credential Completion among Early Educators

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Summary:

- In 2014, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) introduced the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC), a credential for all lead teachers working in publicly funded child care centers across the state. This report uses administrative data to track the experiences of over 1000 child care teachers who began working towards the ECAC between 2016 and 2018.

- ECAC tuition is free for teachers, and teachers who hold an ECAC are eligible for an annual tax credit. Still, completion rates are low. **Less than a third of teachers (31%) who started working towards the credential completed the process.**

- Even among teachers who completed all ECAC training requirements (e.g., coursework, credentialing exam, etc.), 16% failed to submit required paperwork and were therefore ineligible for a large tax credit.

- Completion rates differed considerably across the ECAC training programs. ECAC programs may vary in their ability to support teachers throughout the ECAC process.

Teaching and caring for young children is challenging and important work. Despite the complexity of their jobs, teachers in child care programs often have little training. Until recently, working in a child care setting in Louisiana did not require any pre-service education or training. In contrast, teachers working with preschoolers or kindergarteners in the public schools must hold a Bachelor's degree (BA) as well as a teaching certification.[1]

There is growing acknowledgement, however, that early educators—irrespective of where they are teaching—benefit from more training both before and after they enter the classroom. Towards this goal, some states have increased minimum requirements for early educators. Heightened requirements for early education aim to support teachers, professionalize the early childhood education (ECE) workforce, and, in turn, improve the quality of early learning experiences children receive. However, these new requirements may also create unintended hurdles for ECE teachers, particularly as many teachers continue to work full time for low wages while completing additional training.[2]

This report is part of a series on the challenges child care teachers face when working towards new early educator certification.[3] It focuses on Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC), a credential introduced by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) in 2014. LDOE offered scholarships to teachers working at publicly funded child care centers, making the ECAC free to teachers. In addition, all teachers who earned the credential and continued to work in a publicly funded child care center were eligible for a tax credit, creating a financial incentive. Nevertheless, many teachers who started working towards the ECAC failed to earn the credential.[4]

The goal of this report is to better understand teachers' experiences working towards Louisiana's credential. We use administrative data to track all teachers—over 1000 in total—who started working towards the ECAC between 2016 and 2018. We describe the frequency at which teachers who began the process earned an ECAC; for those who did not, we identify the points where they dropped out. Better understanding teachers' experiences working towards new education credentials is critical to identifying strategies to better support teachers and bolster completion rates.

In addition to describing overall completion rates, we also explore whether patterns vary by teachers' race and years of experience. Increasing training requirements for early educators may have particularly negative effects for teachers of color, who have historically had less access to higher education and are less likely to have post-secondary degrees.[5] Similarly, veteran teachers who entered the field before the requirements were instated may be driven out of their jobs. Finally, we examine whether completion patterns differ across ECAC programs. Programs in which teachers are more successful in earning the ECAC may offer promising lessons to the field.

Our findings suggest troublingly low rates of completion but also highlight potential strategies for improvement.

Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate

In 2014, Louisiana introduced the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate to ensure all lead teachers working in publicly funded child care centers in Louisiana received essential training. Starting in 2019, the state required all lead teachers to earn their credential within two years of being hired to their position. This report focuses on the period from 2016 to 2018, before earning a credential became a requirement.

The process of earning an ECAC differs depending on teachers' prior training. Teachers who hold a BA in any field or an Associate degree in early childhood

automatically qualify for the ECAC. Those without postsecondary degrees obtain their credential through a state-approved ECAC program.

During the period this report covers, there were 16 approved ECAC programs.[6] To earn an ECAC through one of these programs, teachers had to complete all requirements for a Child Development Associate (CDA) – which is the most common credential for early childhood educators across the country. Earning the CDA requires a combination of coursework, work experience, a portfolio, and an exam. In addition to completing the CDA requirements, teachers enrolled in ECAC programs receive teaching observations, coaching, and training focused on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The CLASS is a widely used observational tool that measures the quality of teacher-child interactions and is the cornerstone of Louisiana's Quality Rating and Improvement System.[7]

While all ECAC programs must include the components highlighted above, they vary in format and length. Most combine in-person class time with online activities, though some are exclusively in-person or online. Programs often include about 9 months of part-time coursework, though some are as short as 5 months while others take more than a year.

LDOE offers scholarships that cover the cost of tuition for ECAC programs, and once they earn the credential, teachers are eligible for an annual tax credit of up to $3,600.

The Multi-Step Process of Earning an ECAC

Earning an ECAC requires that teachers complete a multi-step process. Some of these steps are part of the training experiences (e.g., coursework, observations, portfolios, etc.). Others are required administrative steps (e.g., submitting application materials). Figure 1 summarizes this multi-step process, which is also described below.

Figure 1. Overview of ECAC Process

Pre-Program Onboarding	- Enroll in LA Pathways/submit employment verification - Enroll in program - Apply for scholarship through program - Get scholarship approval/return signed scholarship agreement
ECAC Program Requirements	- Complete 120+ hours of coursework - Complete 30 hours of applied practice activities - Complete 2 CLASS observations with feedback - Get scholarship approval/return signed scholarship agreement for additional semesters
CDA Requirements and Credentialing	- Complete 1 observation with CDA professional development specialist - Apply for CDA exam scholarship through LA Pathways - Get scholarship approval/return signed scholarship agreement - Schedule/take CDA exam - Complete CDA portfolio with family feedback, transcripts, and professional statement - Submit CDA application and portfolio to Council for Professional Recognition
ECAC Credentialing	Submit ECAC application, professional conduct form, and copy of CDA credential for ECAC via Teach LA Live certification portal

Pre-Program Onboarding

As a first step in the ECAC process, teachers must apply to one of the state's approved ECAC programs and complete paperwork for a tuition scholarship. The process is not competitive: teachers are admitted to ECAC programs and receive scholarships from LDOE if they meet the minimum requirements (i.e., work at least 16 hours at a child care site and have at least a high school diploma). ECAC programs submit teachers' scholarship applications to LA Pathways—the management system for all employment verification, scholarships, and tax credits associated with the ECAC.

In practice, this onboarding phase involves multiple potentially burdensome administrative steps. For instance, teachers must provide an employment verification form specifying their date of hire and hours worked per week completed and signed by a representative from their current site. Additionally, when they are approved for a scholarship, they must print, sign, and return the agreement by mail or email, as LA Pathways does not accept electronic signatures.

ECAC Program Requirements

Once enrolled in the ECAC program, teachers complete at least 120 hours of coursework and must log 30 hours of applied practice. Each teacher is also observed and evaluated twice using the CLASS.

Most ECAC programs require more than one semester or term. To receive funding for these subsequent terms, teachers must once again complete scholarship applications and receive approvals through LA Pathways. To maintain eligibility, they must also remain employed at a publicly funded center.

CDA Requirements and Credentialing

In addition to the ECAC program requirements, teachers must also satisfy all components of the CDA. They must first compile a portfolio consisting of (1) feedback from families with whom the teacher has interacted; (2) a professional philosophy statement; and (3) an observation with a CDA professional development specialist.

Next, teachers must take and pass the CDA assessment, which consists of 65 multiple choice items. The CDA exam costs $425. LDOE will cover the cost of this exam, but teachers must apply for an additional scholarship through LA Pathways to receive this coverage.

Once all these steps are completed, teachers must also submit an application, their portfolio, and their program transcript to the Council for Professional Recognition – the CDA credentialing organization.

ECAC Credentialing

After completing all program requirements and receiving their CDA credential, teachers still need to formally submit an ECAC application through another system – the Teach LA Live Certification online portal. As part of their application, teachers must upload a transcript from their ECAC program, a copy of their social security card or state ID, a professional conduct form, and a copy
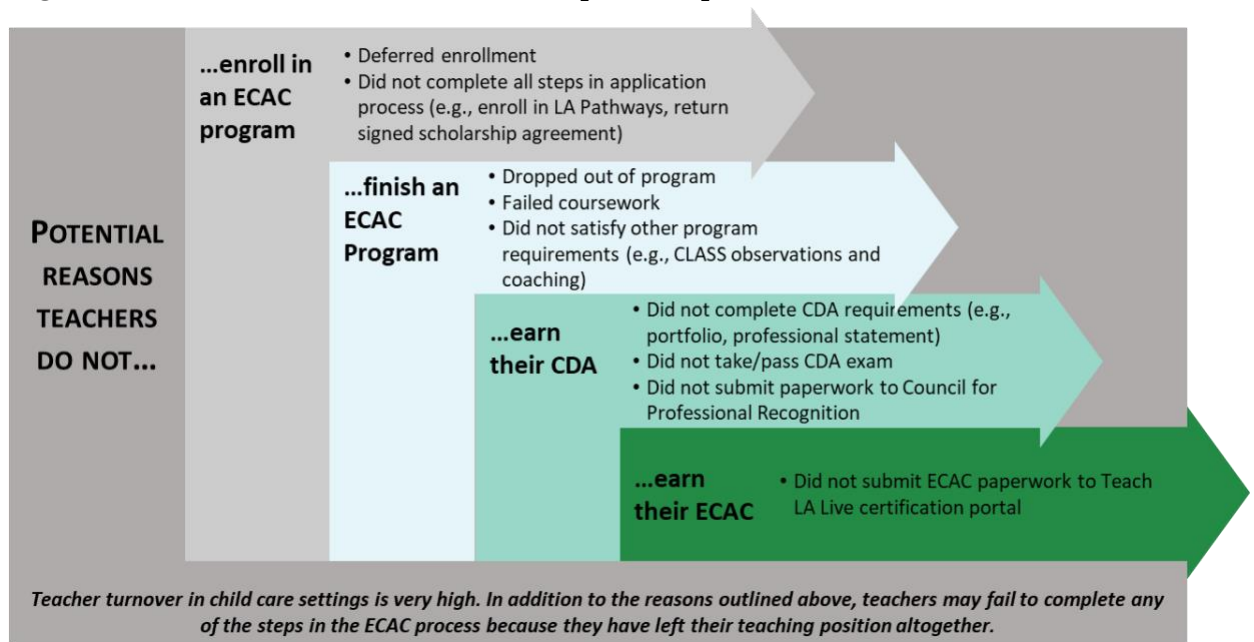
of their CDA credential. Even though teachers may have completed ECAC coursework and the CDA, they are not eligible for the annual tax credit until they submit these materials and are approved for an ECAC.

Challenges Navigating the Multi-Step ECAC Process

There are many steps of the ECAC process that may pose challenges for teachers. Identifying when and why teachers drop out is key to determining the supports teachers need. For instance, if most teachers struggle to complete program coursework, the solution may be different than if they have trouble navigating the various requirements of the CDA.

Our prior surveys of Louisiana child care teachers and directors as well as ECAC program leaders showed that teachers experienced challenges throughout the process. Figure 2 highlights some of the common struggles.

Figure 2. Reasons Teachers Do Not Complete Steps in the ECAC

POTENTIAL REASONS TEACHERS DO NOT...

...enroll in an ECAC program
- Deferred enrollment
- Did not complete all steps in application process (e.g., enroll in LA Pathways, return signed scholarship agreement)

...finish an ECAC Program
- Dropped out of program
- Failed coursework
- Did not satisfy other program requirements (e.g., CLASS observations and coaching)

...earn their CDA
- Did not complete CDA requirements (e.g., portfolio, professional statement)
- Did not take/pass CDA exam
- Did not submit paperwork to Council for Professional Recognition

...earn their ECAC
- Did not submit ECAC paperwork to Teach LA Live certification portal

Teacher turnover in child care settings is very high. In addition to the reasons outlined above, teachers may fail to complete any of the steps in the ECAC process because they have left their teaching position altogether.

Many teachers struggled to navigate the various administrative requirements embedded in the ECAC completion process, such as enrolling in LA Pathways and applying for scholarships. ECAC program leaders noted these processes were lengthy and confusing and, as a result, teachers often did not complete the necessary paperwork.[8]

Even once enrolled, many teachers did not go on to complete required coursework and coaching. According to both ECAC program leaders[9] and

teachers,[10] this was in part because it was difficult for enrolled teachers to balance the demands of the training program on top of their existing work and family obligations. Teacher turnover also posed a major hurdle, as many teachers left their site or the profession altogether before finishing these requirements.

Some teachers who completed the ECAC program requirements reported that they struggled to navigate the additional paperwork and requirements associated with the CDA. For instance, in one recent survey, more than one-quarter of teachers in our survey sample who had either started or completed an ECAC program noted that compiling the CDA portfolio was a major barrier to completing the ECAC, while 14% identified scheduling CDA observations and the CDA exam as hurdles.[11] ECAC program leaders echoed these CDA-related challenges and found they were further stymied by limited communication from the Council for Professional Recognition, which administers the CDA National Credentialing Program.[12]

Although prior reports documented the challenges teachers face when pursuing an ECAC, we lacked information about how widespread these challenges were and where in the process teachers dropped out. This report provides the most comprehensive look to date at teacher attrition throughout the ECAC process.

Data Sources and Methods

We follow 1,010 teachers who applied for an ECAC program scholarship between 2016 and 2018.[13] We track teachers through seven steps in the ECAC process, which include (1) applying for a program scholarship,[14] (2) beginning the first semester of coursework, (3) finishing the first semester of coursework, (4) beginning the second semester of coursework, (5) finishing program requirements, (6) earning the CDA,[15] and (7) earning an ECAC.[16]

Table 1 provides detailed information on how we used data from two sources—*LA Pathways* and *Teach LA Live*—to capture each of these steps. We also use LA Pathways data to capture information about the program to which a teacher applied, their race/ethnicity, and their years of experience.

Table 1. Operationalizing ECAC Steps

ECAC Step	Data Description
1. Applied for Program Scholarship	Teacher applied for an ECAC program scholarship (for the first time) to LA Pathways.
2. Began First Semester of Coursework	Teacher was approved for a first ECAC program scholarship in LA Pathways; in some cases, teachers may not begin ECAC programs after scholarship approval.
3. Finished First Semester of Coursework	Teacher applied for a second ECAC program scholarship. In some cases, teachers who finished a first semester of coursework may choose not to continue; this measure would not include those teachers. This measure does include teachers at programs only requiring one semester of coursework; in those cases, teachers would be counted as finishing the first semester of coursework if they applied for a scholarship to cover the CDA exam fee.
4. Began Second Semester of Coursework	Teacher was approved for a second ECAC program scholarship in LA Pathways; in some cases, teachers may leave the ECAC program after second semester scholarship approval but before the second semester of coursework began. This measure includes teachers at programs only requiring one semester of coursework; in those cases, teachers would be counted as finishing the first semester of coursework if they applied for a scholarship to cover the CDA exam fee or completed a later step.
5. Finished Program Requirements	Teacher applied for a scholarship for the CDA exam fee; some teachers may finish coursework but not apply for a scholarship for the CDA exam fee. This measure would not include those teachers.
6. Earned CDA	Teacher reported to LA Pathways that they earned the CDA. In cases where a teacher earned the ECAC but were not listed in LA Pathways as having earned a CDA, in consultation with LDOE, we backfilled the information that the teacher had earned a CDA. As this measure is self-reported, it is likely that some additional teachers earned a CDA. Therefore, we may be undercounting the number of teachers who earn a CDA but fail to earn an ECAC.
7. Earned ECAC	Teacher is recorded as earning the ECAC in Teach LA Live.

Overview of Teachers

Table 2 describes teachers in our sample, which included any teacher who applied for an ECAC scholarship between 2016 and 2018. Virtually all teachers identified as female. More than half were Black, and more than one-third were White. About 60% of the sample were under 30 years old at the time of their application, and 54% had less than one year of experience working in ECE. More than four in five teachers listed their role as lead teacher in LA Pathways; 17% were assistant teachers.

Table 2. Descriptive Information on Teachers

Characteristics	2016-2018 Applicants
Gender[a]	
Female	100%
Race/Ethnicity	
Black	57%
Hispanic	3%
White[b]	37%
Other/Unknown[c]	4%
Age[d]	
Under 30	59%
30-39	22%
40-49	9%
50+	10%
Total Experience in ECE[e]	
Less Than 1 Year	54%
1-2 Years	26%
2+ Years	20%
Job Title	
Lead Teacher	82%
Assistant Teacher	17%
Other Role	1%
Year of Initial Application	
2016	21%
2017	32%
2018	47%
Total	1,010

[a] Fewer than 1% of ECAC teachers were male.

[b] White includes teachers whose race/ethnicity was identified as Acadian American, European American, or Caucasian American in LA Pathways.

[c] Other/Unknown includes teachers whose race/ethnicity is identified as Asian-American, Native American, or Other in Pathways. Other/Unknown also includes teachers whose race/ethnicity was missing in LA Pathways.

[d] We estimate teachers' ages based on their birthday and date of first scholarship.

[e] We estimate teachers' years of experience based on their start and end dates at any employer recorded in LA Pathways. For individuals missing end dates, we assumed that the candidate was still employed on the day the table was last updated in LA Pathways.

Progression through ECAC Process

Figure 3 shows the percent of teachers who remained at each of the steps. By definition all teachers (100%) completed the first step, "Applied for Program Scholarship." We find that less than one-third of this group (31%) got to the final step of the processes and earned their ECAC.[17]

Figure 3. Proportion of ECAC Applicants Remaining at Each Step of the Process
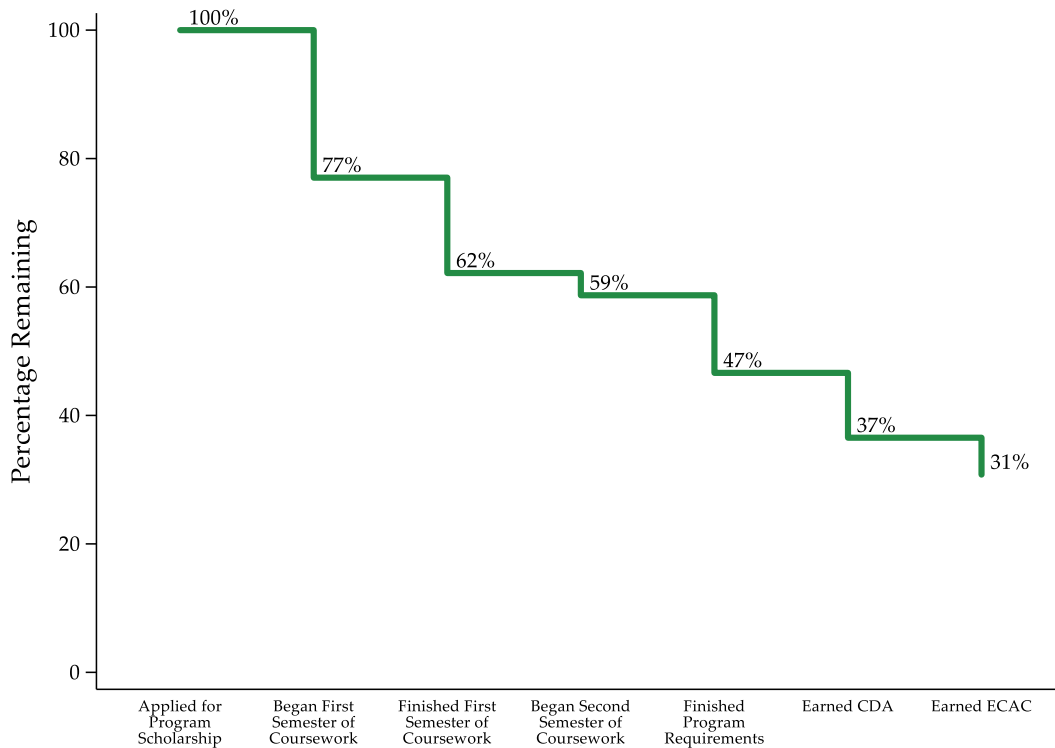
This high level of overall attrition reflects teachers leaving throughout the ECAC process. Only 77% of teachers who applied for a scholarship were approved and went on to begin the first semester of coursework. It is unclear why nearly one quarter of teachers drop out at this early stage. The reasons scholarships were not approved are not fully documented in LA Pathways. Teachers may receive an approval but decide to delay or defer their enrollment in an ECAC program. Teachers may also struggle to complete the many interim administrative steps required between applying for a program scholarship and enrolling. For instance, teachers must submit a signed proof of employment and countersign and return the scholarship agreement to LA Pathways upon approval. In either scenario, teachers would not receive the scholarship and would not enroll in an ECAC program.

Completing the program requirements was another large barrier: less than two-thirds (62%) of all teachers who applied for a program scholarship finished the first semester and less than half (47%) finished their ECAC program. This could be for various reasons: teachers may have difficulty with the coursework itself, have conflicting obligations that make continuing the ECAC process difficult, or leave ECE altogether and therefore stop pursuing the ECAC. Slightly more than one third of teachers (37%) earned their CDA.

While Figure 3 shows the percentage of teachers remaining at each phase, it is also helpful to consider the likelihood of getting to a particular step conditional on reaching the previous one. For instance, among those teachers who actually started the coursework, how likely is it that a teacher completes the first semester? Table 3 shows the percentage of teachers who persisted from one step in the ECAC process to the next.

Table 3. Percentage of ECAC Applicants Remaining at Each Step of the Process

ECAC Step	Remaining Teachers	% of Teachers Staying, Out of Remaining Teachers
Applied for Program Scholarship	1010	
Began First Semester of Coursework	778	77%
Finished First Semester of Coursework	628	81%
Began Second Semester of Coursework	593	94%
Finished Program Requirements	471	79%
Earned CDA	369	78%
Earned ECAC	311	84%

We find that the percentage of teachers who make it from one step to the next ranges from 77% to 94%. For instance, only 81% of teachers who begin the first semester complete it. Similarly, 79% of teachers who began the second semester went on to finish the ECAC program requirements.

Table 3 also highlights ways in which attaining the CDA creates a barrier. About four out of five (78%) teachers who completed the ECAC program requirements obtained their CDA. While we are unable to assess why 22% of teachers who finished all program requirements did not earn their CDAs (e.g., did not pass the

exam, never took the exam), these results suggest that obtaining the CDA is challenging for a considerable portion of teachers.[18]

The final step of the ECAC process is submitting paperwork to Teach LA Live. This step is necessary to formally receive the ECAC and is required for tax credit eligibility. However, only 84% of the teachers who earned the CDA complete this step. This means that 16% of those teachers who completed all the training requirements needed for the ECAC did not earn the credential and did not receive the tax credit.

Do ECAC completion rates differ depending on teacher characteristics?

We find little evidence of differences in ECAC completion between Black and White teachers, though Black teachers were two percentage points less likely to earn their ECAC. We only compare White and Black teachers given the very small proportion of teachers identifying as any other race/ethnicity.

In contrast, we do find that teachers with less experience dropped off at higher rates. In our sample, only 27% of individuals with less than one year of prior ECE experience earned their credential, compared to 32% of teachers with between 1 and 2 years of experience and 40% of teachers with more than 2 years of experience. Although we do not know why newer teachers struggled more with the ECAC process, it is also the case that overall turnover rates are highest among new child care teachers.[19] These new teachers may stop pursuing the ECAC because they have left their positions or ECE altogether.

Do ECAC completion rates differ across ECAC programs?

Figure 4 highlights that ECAC completion rates vary considerably across ECAC programs.[20] Each bar shows completion rates from a different ECAC program. To preserve the anonymity of the programs, we label each from 1 to 13.

The figure shows that completing the ECAC posed a challenge for teachers at all programs. Each bar illustrates the percent of teachers who completed each stage by program. For the first bar, which represents results across all programs, just under one-third of teachers (31%) finished all requirements of the process and earned an ECAC. Another 6% of teachers completed the program requirements (including all coursework) and earned a CDA but did not earn an ECAC. Another 10% of teachers completed all program requirements but did not earn a CDA or an ECAC. Finally, over half of teachers (53%) did not finish the requirements of their ECAC program.

Figure 4 also suggests considerable variation across programs. At program 1, 50% of all teachers who applied for a program scholarship ultimately earned the

ECAC. In contrast, fewer than one in five teachers (18%) at Program 13 ultimately earned their credential.

At all but one program, some teachers (between 2% to 10%) complete both the program requirements and the CDA but failed to earn their ECAC.

Figure 4. Completion of Teachers by ECAC Program
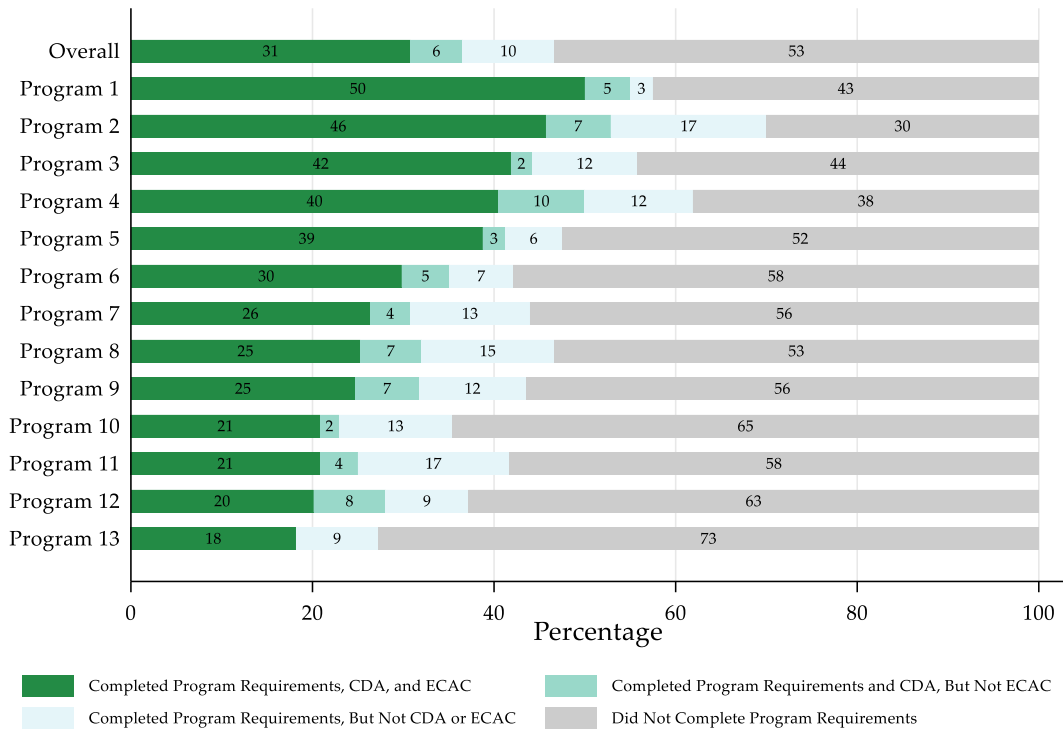
Note: Excluding programs with fewer than 10 teachers applying for tuition scholarships to LA Pathways during the period of study, teachers who enrolled at multiple ECAC programs (17 teachers), and teachers for whom the ECAC program was missing (29 teachers). Teachers from small programs, who attended multiple programs, or for whom the ECAC program was missing are included in the Overall bar.

Programs varied considerably in the likelihood that teachers who completed coursework and program requirements went on to also get the credential. For instance, 70% of teachers enrolled in Program 2 successfully completed all program requirements (as indicated by summing across all green portions of the bar). However, over a third of these program completers did not go on to earn their ECAC. In contrast, at Program 5, a lower share completed all program requirements (48%), but, conditional on completing, most teachers then went on to earn an ECAC: only 19% of program completers failed to earn an ECAC.

These findings suggest that ECAC programs varied considerably both in their ability to support teachers through coursework *and* in the extent to which teachers who did finish the program requirements to complete the remaining steps (e.g., completing additional CDA requirements, and submitting final paperwork for the ECAC).

ECAC programs have small numbers of participants, and the patterns we highlight here may be anomalous. They may reflect differences in the teachers who chose to enroll in each program, rather than differences in the programs' supports. We therefore do not draw strong conclusions about program effectiveness. Still, those programs with relatively high program completion and/or ECAC attainment rates may offer important insights about ways to support teachers through the process.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Louisiana's ECAC program was designed to support and professionalize the child care workforce. By covering tuition and offering a substantial tax credit to those with an ECAC, LDOE made concerted efforts to reduce the financial burden and incentivize completion for teachers. These efforts align with many of the best practices laid out for agencies looking to increase training or educational requirements for early educators.[21] Yet, more than two-thirds of teachers who start the ECAC process never complete it, despite the supports and incentives provided by LDOE.

Using administrative data to from 2016 to 2018[22], we find considerable evidence of teachers dropping off at nearly every point in the multi-step ECAC process. Many teachers who applied for a program scholarship never actually enrolled. Of those who enrolled, relatively few finished the program requirements. Identifying potential reasons for low completion has important implications – for LDOE and other states rolling out similar training and certification requirements for early educators. Without addressing the underlying barriers teachers face to earning credentials like the ECAC, efforts to professionalize child care are unlikely to yield the desired results.

Multiple strategies—ranging from simple and low-cost to larger investments—may be needed to address these challenges. We highlight five approaches that may help LDOE and other agencies designing credentialing programs for early educators.

1. *Decrease administrative hurdles for teachers*.

   When child care teachers work towards a credential, they are oftentimes doing it on top of full-time work and family responsibilities. As part of the ECAC process, teachers must complete a large number of administrative steps (e.g., submitting forms documenting their employment, signing and scanning scholarship documents, etc.). Each of these steps create burdens for teachers, who are already overextended.

   One particularly striking finding is that nearly one in five teachers who finished their program requirements and completed their CDA did not complete the final step needed to earn ECAC. By the time teachers complete their CDA they have already invested a substantial amount of time and effort into the process and only needed to submit final paperwork to be eligible for financial benefits.

   A growing body of evidence suggests that small bureaucratic obstacles, such as paperwork or verification requirements, can pose major barriers to program take-up, and streamlining these processes can have substantial impacts on participation.[23] For this reason, LDOE and other organizations should work to simplify processes and administrative hurdles. Making simple changes – like switching to online forms that allow electronic signatures rather than paper copies that must be mailed – would reduce the number of steps teachers must complete and simplify the overall process.

2. *Use data to track completion and target supports*.

   LDOE collects a large amount of information about teachers' experiences as they work towards the ECAC. They, and other states implementing similar systems, could use these data to target supports for teachers who are struggling. Administrative data can be used to assess whether some groups of teachers (e.g., by race, by region) are facing unique struggles. Disaggregating completion patterns by relevant teacher characteristics will help LDOE and other organizations understand how to improve processes to increase access for all teachers and design supports (e.g., increasing ECAC programs in rural areas).

3. *Ensure teachers understand processes and remind them of next steps*.

   Low-cost communication materials that simplify processes can significantly increase the number of individuals enrolling in and completing programs.[24] These types of efforts may be particularly important when individuals are navigating difficult and unknown systems, such as the ECAC process.

During this process, teachers must interact with many different systems (i.e., LA Pathways, ECAC programs, LA Teach Live, the Council for Professional Recognition) and lack a centralized place to go for help or information.

Agencies designing credentialing programs can incorporate regular reminders to help keep teachers on track and make sure they understand the benefits of the certification. For instance, LDOE could send automated text messages and/or emails encouraging teachers to finish incomplete steps in LA Pathways – like filling out their scholarship application. LDOE could also reach out to teachers who have completed steps with information about what they need to move forward. These proactive communications can reduce confusion and make it easier for teachers to access what they need to complete each step in the process.

Although program benefits are often clear to those designing programs, they are sometimes obscure for participants.[25] For example, the large number of teachers who earned their CDA but did not submit the final paperwork for their ECAC suggests some teachers may not be aware of the tax credit tied to the credential. Increasing communication about benefits tied to a credentialing program could also help with retention efforts.

4. *Rely on programs that have relationships and regular contact with teachers to shepherd them through the process.*

   LDOE and other organizations designing similar programs need to establish strong partnerships with the educational programs that work directly with teachers. In Louisiana, differences in completion rates across programs suggest they may vary in the supports provided to candidates. LDOE and other organizations can work with programs to identify promising practices, such as helping teachers complete CDA paperwork after the coursework phase, and to make these practices the expectation. Regular communication of these expectations can also help ensure consistency.

5. *Embed other financial supports for teachers as they work towards their certificates, such as stipends or paid release time for teachers who are enrolled in programs.*

   One major benefit of completing the ECAC is eligibility for a tax credit; however, teachers must invest considerable time and effort before receiving this credit. Given the low wages[26] generally paid to child care teachers, access to monetary supports earlier in the process may be meaningful.

   Frontloading some financial supports and incentives as teachers pursue their certification may make the benefits of the ECAC and similar credentials more

immediate and tangible for teachers. In turn, teachers may be more likely to stay enrolled.

Recent evidence suggests that bonus payments reduce ECE teacher turnover.[27] Up-front stipends, in addition to tax credits, may help both with overall teacher retention in ECE and retention in credentialing processes.

Beyond the five strategies outlined above, which are focused specifically on supporting teachers as they work towards credentials, larger investments are also needed to address the high levels of turnover common in the ECE workforce. Undoubtedly, teacher turnover is a major driving factor for the low ECAC completion rates documented in the current study. Recent data from Louisiana shows that nearly half of child care teachers in Louisiana leave from one year to the next, and only 30% of teachers remain over a three year period.[28] The instability of the child care workforce makes it likely that many teachers will quit their jobs before earning their credential, regardless of barriers within the ECAC process itself. In order to see returns on investments to workforce training and professional development, these efforts must be coupled with investments to mitigate teacher turnover.

As states work on new approaches to professionalize the ECE workforce, Louisiana's novel ECAC provides a useful set of lessons. Teachers do not have to pay tuition out of pocket. Teachers also report that information they learn as part of obtaining the ECAC is useful,[29] which likely speaks to the close alignment of the ECAC with Louisiana's QRIS. LDOE also deserves praise for its substantial investment in understanding what parts of the ECAC work (and don't work) for teachers and introducing new approaches to improving ECAC programs. These lessons will prove useful to both LDOE and others looking to provide better professional development opportunities for ECE teachers.

Endnotes

[1] Preschool and kindergarten teaching requirements for Louisiana are described here: https://www.preschoolteacher.org/louisiana/

[2] McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). "Early educator pay and economic insecurity across the states." Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/the-early-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/

[3] Bassok, D., Smith, A.E., Markowitz, A.J., & Miller-Bains, K. (2021) Professionalizing the child care workforce through credentialing: Teachers' and leaders' views of Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate. https://bit.ly/seela_ecac_keybarriers

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[4] Louisiana Department of Education (2019, May). Monthly communication for ECAC Programs. Retrieved from: https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/ecac-program-presentation-may-2019.pdf?sfvrsn=c35e9f1f_4

[5] National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). Increasing qualifications, centering equity: Experiences and advice from early childhood educator of color. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/increasing_qualifications_centering_equity.pdf

[6] In 2016, there were 11 ECAC programs housed at colleges, non-profits, training centers, and other community organizations; that number has since grown to 29 ECAC programs across the state. Some programs may have only served teachers who received Pell Grants rather than LA Pathways scholarships; as those teachers are not included in LA Pathways, we would not include those programs.

[7] Bassok, D., Magouirk, P., & Markowitz, A. J. (2021). Systemwide Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Education: Evidence From Louisiana. *AERA Open.* https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211011610

[8] Bassok, D., Herring, W., et al. (2021).

[9] Bassok, D., Herring, W., et al. (2021).

[10] Bassok, D., Smith, A.E., et al. (2021).

[11] Bassok, D., Smith, A.E., et al. (2021).

[12] Bassok, D., Herring, W., et al. (2021).

[13] We focus on teachers who began the program before 2018 to ensure that all teachers had at least two years to complete the ECAC and to avoid capturing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We only include teachers with a valid

identifier in LA Pathways and exclude individuals who applied for a tuition scholarship to LA Pathways but were never approved for a scholarship and went on to earn a CDA or ECAC, as these individuals likely earned the ECAC through an alternative route.

[14] Teachers are also able to obtain tuition scholarships through other funding sources, like Pell grants. These teachers would not appear in LA Pathways unless they later apply for CDA exam scholarship or earn their ECAC credential.

[15] This is separate from the process for submitting proof of CDA receipt to LA Teach Live Certification for ECAC receipt.

[16] Between June 19, 2015 and December 18, 2020, 7,955 ECACs were issued to 7,952 individuals. Most were issued to individuals already holding the required credential (e.g., Bachelor's degree, Associate degree in Early Childhood).

[17] We observe fairly similar completion rates if we limit the sample to those teachers who actually enroll in an ECAC program. As highlighted in Table 2, we find that only 311 of the 778 who begin coursework ultimately earn their ECAC.

[18] Because LA Pathways is our primary data source for CDA completion and some individuals who earned a CDA do not report this information back to LA Pathways, we may be understating the number of individuals who earned a CDA but did not go on to earn an ECAC.

[19] Bellows, L., Bassok, D., & Markowitz, A. J. (2021). Teacher Turnover in Early Childhood Education: Longitudinal Evidence from the Universe of Publicly-Funded Programs in Louisiana. Annenberg Institute EdWorking Papers. https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai21-453

[20] Here, we include the 13 ECAC programs with at least 10 teacher applicants between 2016 and 2018. We also exclude any teachers who enrolled in multiple ECAC programs (n=17) or for whom the ECAC program was missing (n=29).

[21] McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). "Qualifications and Educational Supports." Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/the-early-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/
National Research Council. (2015). Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation. Retrieved from:

https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a

[22] We observe similar patterns in the 2019 cohort.
[23] Simplifying applications has been found to increase uptake of federal financial aid in higher education (https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/09/09/new-study-shows-simplifying-financial-aid-process-improves-college-access-low-income) as well as program in benefits programs like Medicaid (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/puar.13133?casa_token=xtQWjQ_2VMoAAAAA%3AavKRcLCKt-i41cyljlomubg0kroeCXvSLqBCSYk34vkljwC6eV5JEXesxFGtRItxypnIFwT2wPuYv).

[24] Experimental studies have shown these kinds of light-touch communication interventions can significantly increase program enrollment and take up – for eligible enrollees who both had and had not previously expressed an interest in participating (https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.1325).

[25] Osborne, C., Dillon, D., & Bellows, L. (2013). Seeding the College Dream: An Evaluation of the Child Support for College Asset-Building Initiative. Child and Family Research Partnership. https://childandfamilyresearch.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/CS4C_FinalReport_web.pdf

[26] In 2019, Louisiana ranked 50th out of 51 states and territories in the U.S. in terms median pay for early childhood teachers adjusted for cost of living: https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/06/Appendix-Table-2.4_2020-Index.pdf

[27] Bassok, D., Doromal, J.B., Michie, M., & Wong, V.C. (Dec 2021). The Effects of Financial Incentives on Teacher Turnover in Early Childhood Settings: Experimental Evidence from Virginia. https://bit.ly/see_partnerships_incentives_turnover

[28] Bellows, L., et al. (2021).

[29] Bassok, D., Smith, A.E., et al. (2021).