

Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States



State Report for Alabama

National Prekindergarten Center
FPG Child Development Institute
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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OVERVIEW

In 2004, the National Prekindergarten Center (NPC) conducted a national survey of post-secondary early childhood teacher preparation programs that prepare individuals to work with children birth through age 4. The primary purpose of the study was to update and extend the 1999 national survey of early childhood teacher preparation programs conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL; Early & Winton, 2001).

This report provides state-specific information about early childhood teacher preparation programs that prepare individuals to work with children under age 5. It is intended to supplement the information provided in the national report (Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006) and should not be read in isolation. Readers are encouraged to read the national report first because it contains additional detailed information about the study context, purpose, and methodology as well as implications of the national findings. The purpose of this state report is to provide descriptive data about early childhood teacher preparation programs in a single state. Interpretations and implications of these state-specific findings are not included because they are more appropriately drawn by those with greater knowledge of the state context, policies, and practices that influence early childhood teacher preparation programs. We hope the data presented in this report will be useful to state policymakers, practitioners, and others who care about early childhood education and teacher preparation programs.

METHODOLOGY

We sought to obtain information from every degree-granting Institute of Higher Education

in the US and its territories that prepared individuals to work with children under age 5. We created a list of all IHEs in the United States and its territories that offered one or more programs that might prepare students to work with young children, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) annual data collection from all IHEs (NCES, n.d.). For each IHE, we then identified and tried to recruit a key contact in the early childhood teacher preparation program (usually the program chair or director). Data for this study were collected between February and September 2004. A more detailed description of the study methodology is presented in the national report (Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006).

According to IPEDS of 2002, there were 79 degree-granting institutions in Alabama that offer an Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and/or Doctorate in any discipline. Of these, 35.4% ($n = 28$) offered an early childhood teacher preparation program of some type. Respondents from 25 of the 28 IHEs with early childhood teacher preparation programs in Alabama participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 89.3%.

FINDINGS: PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Of the 25 IHEs offering early childhood programs that participated in the study, 60% ($n = 15$) were 2-year institutions and 40% ($n = 10$) were 4-year institutions. Table 1 presents the percentages of programs that were housed in various types of institutions, including Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU¹) and Tribal Colleges, as well as private and public.

¹ HBCUs are IHEs that were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans.

Table 1: Numbers of Institutions of Each Type (percentages appear in parentheses)

	HBCUs	Tribal	Other IHE	TOTAL
2-year private	0	0	0	0
2-year public	4 (16.0)	0	11 (44.0)	15 (60.0)
4-year private	1 (4.0)	0	2 (8.0)	3 (12.0)
4-year public	1 (4.0)	0	6 (24.0)	7 (28.0)
TOTAL	6 (24.0)	0	19 (76.0)	25 (100)

ADMINISTRATIVE HOME

Early childhood programs are administratively housed in various departments within institutions. In Alabama, 70% ($n = 7$) of early childhood programs in 4-year institutions were administratively housed within Schools of Education. The most commonly reported administrative homes for early childhood teacher preparation programs in 2-year institutions were Social/Behavioral Sciences (40%), Child Development or Family Studies (26.7%), and health-related and Human Services departments (13.3%).

DEGREE OFFERINGS

Overall, 1 (4%) of institutions in the study offered a Doctoral program in early childhood education, 8 (32%) offered a Master's degree, 10 (40%) offered a Bachelor's degree, 15 (60%) offered an Associate's degree, 16 (64%) offered CDA training, and 14 (56%) offered a one-year certificate program. Of the participating 25 institutions, 92% ($n = 23$) offered more than one early childhood program. A fifth of the 4-year institutions offered a Bachelor's degree only (see Table 2). Of the institutions offering an Associate's degree, 57.1% ($n = 8$) granted an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) with only 14.3% ($n = 2$) offering an Associate's of Arts (AA) and 28.6% ($n = 4$) offering other types of Associate's degrees.

Table 2: Numbers of 2- and 4-Year Institutions Offering Various Combinations of Degrees (percentages in parentheses)

Degree/Certification Offered	2-Year <i>n</i> = 15	4-Year <i>n</i> = 10
1-Year Certificate ^a Only	0	0
1-Year Certificate and CDA ^b	1 (6.7)	0
1-Year Certificate, CDA, and Associate's	13 (86.7)	0
1-Year Certificate, CDA, Associate's, and Bachelor's	0	0
1-Year Certificate, CDA, Associate's, and Master's	0	0
1-Year Certificate and Associate's	0	0
1-Year Certificate, Associate's, and Bachelor's	0	0
CDA only	0	0
CDA and Associate's	1 (6.7)	0
CDA, Associate's, and Bachelor's	0	0
CDA, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's	0	0
CDA and Bachelor's	0	0
CDA, Bachelor's, and Master's	0	1 (10.0)
CDA, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral	0	0
Associate's only	0	0
Associate's and Bachelor's	0	0
Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's	0	1 (10.0)
Bachelor's only	0	2 (20.0)
Bachelor's and Master's	0	5 (50.0)
Bachelor's, Master's and, Doctoral	0	1 (10.0)
Master's only	0	0
Master's and Doctoral	0	0

^a Students may work toward a certificate only or in conjunction with a degree. Some certificates are used to acknowledge specializations (e.g. infants and toddlers, birth to kindergarten), while others may be used to acknowledge an individual's completion of a course of study. Certificates may also be necessary for meeting state licensing requirements. ^b A Child Development Associate (CDA) is a national credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition (www.cdacouncil.org) to individuals who demonstrate particular competencies through their work in child care settings.

AGE RANGES COVERED

In Alabama, at least half of the Associate's and Bachelor's degrees, and about two-fifths of the Master's degrees covered a broad age range of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary school age children (see Table 3).

Table 3: Age Ranges Covered by Programs (in percentages)

Age range	Associate's programs <i>n</i> = 15	Bachelor's programs <i>n</i> = 10	Master's programs <i>n</i> = 8	Doctoral programs <i>n</i> = 1 ^b
Infants/toddlers only (< 3 years)	0	0	0	-
Infants/toddlers and preschoolers (< 5 years)	33.3	10.0	0	-
Preschoolers (ages 3 and 4) only	0	0	0	-
Preschoolers and elementary school age (3-8 years)	0	20.0	25.0	-
Preschoolers and school age (3 and older) ^a	0	0	25.0	-
Infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary school age (birth-8 years)	60.0	50.0	37.5	-
Infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and school age (birth and older) ^a	6.7	20.0	12.5	-

^aThese categories cover children older than 8 years of age. The upper end of the range varies. Most commonly, it was 12 but could be as high as age 18 nationally. ^bBecause data were available from only one program/institution, no data are presented in order to protect confidentiality.

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

In Alabama, 22.2% ($n = 2$) of Bachelor's programs required at least one complete course in working with children and families from diverse backgrounds and 22.2% ($n = 2$) required at least one complete course in working with bilingual children (see Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs Requiring An Entire Course or More in Various Content Areas

Content Area	CDA or other Certificate programs $n = 15$	Associate's programs $n = 14$	Bachelor's programs $n = 9$	Master's programs $n = 7$
Education and care of infants and toddlers	46.7	85.7	55.6	42.9
Education and care of preschool aged children	66.7	78.6	88.9	71.4
Education and care of young children with disabilities	33.3	78.6	66.7	57.1
Working with families	26.7	35.7	22.2	28.6
Working with children and families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds	13.3	7.1	22.2	42.9
Working with bilingual children learning English as a second language	6.7	7.1	22.2	0
Assessment and/or observation of young children	46.7	42.9	55.6	85.7
Emergent literacy and literacy strategies	46.7	64.3	77.8	85.7
Numeracy and math for young children	26.7	28.6	66.7	57.1

Content Area	CDA or other Certificate programs <i>n</i> = 15	Associate's programs <i>n</i> = 14	Bachelor's programs <i>n</i> = 9	Master's programs <i>n</i> = 7
Social and emotional development of young children	33.3	35.7	44.4	57.1
Physical health and motor development of young children	53.3	50.0	55.6	28.6
Appropriate learning environments and activities for young children	53.3	64.3	55.6	57.1
Classroom or behavioral management of young children	26.7	28.6	44.4	57.1
Early childhood program administration	33.3	85.7	44.4	42.9
Collaborating with professionals in other disciplines	6.7	7.1	33.3	28.6
Professional knowledge (e.g. confidentiality, ethics and codes of conduct)	13.3	21.4	33.3	57.1
Adult learning and development	6.7	0	22.2	42.9
Leadership and advocacy	13.3	7.1	11.1	14.3
Research and evaluation methods	20.0	21.4	22.2	85.7

PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS

For the Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's programs, information was obtained about particular content covered in students' practicum requirements (see Table 5). Early childhood practicum was defined as supervised work in a care or educational setting with children, any ages from birth through 4 years. Practicum must include more than observation. Using this definition, practicum may be the same as field placement or student teaching. All of the Associate's programs, 88.9% ($n = 8$) of the Bachelor's programs, and 57.1% ($n = 4$) of the Master's programs required a practicum.

Table 5: Percentage of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs Requiring Practicum in Various Content Areas

Content Area	Associate's programs $n = 14$	Bachelor's programs $n = 8$	Master's programs $n = 4$
Education and care of infants and toddlers	78.6	62.5	50.0
Education and care of preschool aged children	100	100	75.0
Education and care of young children with disabilities	42.9	50.0	100
Working with families	50.0	50.0	75.0
Working with bilingual children learning English as a second language	14.3	12.5	50.0

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility of programs to students is increasingly important as federal and state standards require more early childhood teachers to be “highly qualified.” Accessibility of programs is improved through a variety of strategies such as distance learning, branch campuses, and articulation policies. In Alabama, distance education was offered by 26.7% of 2-year institutions and 40% of 4-year institutions (see Table 6).

Table 6: Accessibility of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs (in percentages)

Accessibility Options	2-Year <i>n</i> = 15	4-Year <i>n</i> = 10
Satellite or branch campuses affiliated with their institutions where students can take courses but still receive their degree or credential from their institutions	60.0	20.0
Distance education option (e.g. web based instruction or videoconferencing for course dissemination)	26.7	40.0
Articulation policies affecting students wishing to go on for a Bachelor’s degree	78.6	-
Awards transfer credits to students entering with CDA credential	53.3	40.0
Awards college credit for CDA course work	80.0	50.0

FINDINGS: FACULTY CHARACTERISTICS

Faculty members in early childhood teacher preparation programs play a crucial role in ensuring that future teachers can provide a high quality experience for young children and that they are well prepared to face challenges such as teaching diverse learners. This section describes characteristics of faculty in early childhood teacher preparation programs.

FULL-TIME/PART-TIME FACULTY AND FACULTY-STUDENT RATIOS

Part-time faculty at 2-year institutions made up 64% of the total faculty, while 45% of the faculty in 4-year institutions worked part-time (see Table 7). In addition, faculty at 2-year institutions served more students than faculty at 4-year institutions. It is important to note that only students enrolled in degree programs were included in the analyses of the number of students served by faculty. Faculty are also responsible for teaching other students in certificate programs, so their burden is even higher than what is reflected in Table 7.

Table 7: Mean Number of Full-Time/Part-Time Faculty and Mean Number of Students per Faculty

	2-Year <i>n</i> = 14	4-Year <i>n</i> = 7
Mean number of full-time faculty	1.3	5.8
Mean number of part-time faculty	2.9	3.6
Percentage of part-time faculty	63.9	44.6
Mean number of students per faculty (full- and part-time) ^a	26.5	14.5
Mean number of students per full-time faculty ^a	85.2	27.7

^aOnly students enrolled in degree programs (Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate) were included in the analyses. Faculty are also responsible for teaching students in certificate programs, so their burden is even higher than what is reflected in this table.

RACE/ETHNICITY OF FACULTY

Most faculty members in early childhood teacher preparation programs were White, non-Hispanic (see Table 8).

Table 8: Race/Ethnicity of Faculty in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs (average percentages across IHEs, with ranges in parentheses)

	2-Year <i>n</i> = 14	4-Year <i>n</i> = 7
Racial/ethnic composition of <u>full-time</u> faculty		
Black, non-Hispanic	21.4 (0-100)	10.0 (0-50.0)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0
Asian	0	2.0 (0-14.3)
Hispanic	0	2.0 (0-14.3)
White, non-Hispanic	78.6 (0-100)	75.3 (0-100)
Others/Multiracial	0	0
Unknown, refuse, non-resident alien	0	10.6 (0-50.0)
Racial/ethnic composition of <u>part-time</u> faculty		
Black, non-Hispanic	35.3 (0-100)	13.6 (0-50.0)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
White, non-Hispanic	64.7 (0-100)	86.4 (50.0-100)
Others/Multiracial	0	0
Unknown, refuse, non-resident alien	0	0

QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK EXPERIENCE OF FACULTY

Early childhood faculty members at 4-year institutions were more likely to have a doctorate degree as compared to faculty at 2-year institutions (see Table 9). All faculty members in 4-year institutions had at least a Master's degree. About four-fifths of faculty members at both 2- and 4-year institutions had worked with young children.

Table 9: Qualifications and Work Experience of Faculty in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs (average percentages across IHEs, with ranges in parentheses)

Qualifications and work experience	2-Year <i>n</i> = 15	4-Year <i>n</i> = 8
Highest degree earned by faculty (including full-time, part-time, and adjunct)		
Doctorate	6.3 (0-25.0)	56.9 (0-100)
Master's	92.3 (75.0-100)	43.1 (0-100)
Bachelor's	1.3 (0-20.0)	0
Associate's or CDA	0	0
High school	0	0
Faculty with an early childhood degree covering an age span that includes children ages birth to 4	77.3 (0-100)	54.8 (0-100)
Faculty who have had direct employment experience working with children ages birth to 4	83.1 (40.0-100)	82.1 (25.0-100)

FINDINGS: STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

To fully understand early childhood teacher preparation programs, it is important to gather information not only about the characteristics of those programs but also the characteristics of students in those programs. This section of the report presents basic information about the estimated enrollment and number of degrees awarded in these early childhood teacher preparation programs. Information on student race/ethnicity and employment while enrolled in school is also provided.

ENROLLMENT AND NUMBER OF DEGREES AWARDED

Data from this study suggest that over 2,500 people were enrolled in some type of early childhood degree program in Alabama in 2004. A much smaller number—about 727—earned a degree in 2003. Of those who earned a degree, most earned an Associate’s degree (see Table 10).

Table 10: Estimated Number of Students Enrolled in Programs, and Estimated Number of Early Childhood Education Degrees Awarded in 2003

	CDA or Other Certification	Associate’s	Bachelor’s	Master’s	Doctorate	Total (Degrees only) ^a
Students enrolled	348	1,433	654	410	25	2,522
Degrees or certificates awarded in 2003	83	306	222	194	5	727

^aThe totals exclude the CDA and other certifications because the individuals in those programs may also be enrolled in degree programs.

ESTIMATED STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY

Respondents were asked to report the number of students in each of several race/ethnicity categories. These were often reported as estimates and should be interpreted cautiously.

Approximately half of the students across the Associate's and Bachelor's degree programs were White, non-Hispanic (see Table 11). Program chairs/directors estimated that about a third of the students in Bachelor's degree programs were Black, non-Hispanic.

Table 11: Race/Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in Various Degree Programs (average percentages across IHEs, with ranges in parentheses)

	Associate's programs <i>n</i> = 13	Bachelor's programs <i>n</i> = 9	Master's programs <i>n</i> = 7	Doctoral programs <i>n</i> = 1 ^a
Black, non-Hispanic	55.1 (2.2-95.7)	37.1 (5.0-100)	24.2 (0-83.3)	-
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1 (0-1.4)	0.5 (0-4.0)	0	-
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.9 (0-5.0)	1.5 (0-6.7)	1.52 (0-6.7)	-
Hispanic	1.4 (0-4.3)	1.4 (0-6.7)	3.33 (0-20.0)	-
White, non-Hispanic	42.5 (4.3-94.4)	59.6 (0-93.0)	56.6 (6.7-100)	-
Race or ethnicity unknown	0	0	14.3 (0-100)	-
Others/Multiracial	0	0	0	-

^aBecause data were available from only one program/institution, no data are presented in order to protect confidentiality.

EMPLOYMENT WHILE IN SCHOOL

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of students who work full time while attending school. Fifty-seven percent of both the Associate's and Master's degree programs reported that almost all² students work full-time while in school. Only 11% of the Bachelor's degree programs reported that almost all students work full time while in school.

Comparatively, 37.5% of the CDA or other certification programs reported that almost all students work full time while in school.

FINDINGS: CHALLENGES FACED BY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

One of the purposes of this study was to document the challenges faced by early childhood teacher preparation programs. We asked chairs and directors of programs to rate 14 possible challenges on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not a challenge to 3 = somewhat of a challenge to 5 = a large challenge. Four types of challenges were covered: 1) student-related, 2) faculty-related, 3) institution-related, and 4) community-related. Two of the largest challenges for programs in 2-year institutions were students' competing work or family responsibilities and attracting and keeping students due to the poor working conditions in the field of early childhood (see Table 12). For programs in 4-year institutions, two of the largest challenges were attracting and retaining faculty who were ethnically diverse, and attracting students due to poor working conditions in the field of early childhood.

² For purposes of this report "almost all" refers to 75% or more.

Table 12: Mean Challenges Facing Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs

Challenges Facing Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs	2-Year <i>n</i> = 15	4-Year <i>n</i> = 8
Student-related		
students' competing work or family related responsibilities	4.3	3.6
lack of student motivation	2.1	2.1
students' lack of academic preparation or skill	3.1	2.3
lack of financial support or scholarships	2.8	3.4
Faculty-related		
lack of faculty in your department with expertise in early childhood education	2.0	2.8
lack of full-time faculty in your department	3.3	2.6
poor faculty working conditions and wages	1.8	2.8
difficulty attracting and retaining ethnically diverse faculty	2.7	4.1
difficulty attracting and retaining linguistically diverse faculty	2.9	3.1
Institution-related		
problems with transfer of credits and articulation	3.7	1.8
lack of support from your college/university for early childhood teacher preparation	2.4	2.3
inability to serve the number of students who want to enroll	1.7	1.9
Community-related		
lack of quality early childhood practicum sites (any ages 0-4)	2.5	3.6
attracting and keeping students due to poor working conditions and wages in the field of early childhood	4.1	3.8

Note. 1 = not a challenge; 3 = somewhat of a challenge; 5 = a large challenge

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