

# *A Third Way Forward to ECE's Next Era*

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# To Begin

- Early Childhood Education is a fragmented field of **practice** – reform efforts attend primarily to field’s fragmented financing, delivery system and policies vs. fragmentation of its **core function**.
- The Consequence is
  - Confusion re Field’s Purpose.
  - Increasing Assortment of Policies & Standards Governing ECE.
  - Uneven Performance.
  - Increasing Variety and Range of Funding Streams with Varying Sustainability And Requirements.
  - Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.

# To Begin

- Result: Field's Work And Its Trajectory Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- Who establishes the outcomes expected of ECE.
- What the public expects of us.
- What teaching and learning looks like in ECE settings.
- What it means to be a child in an early learning program.

# To Begin

- Despite Our Protestations, Not True ECE Isn't A System.
- ECE Is A System – It's Just Not One Functioning The Way We Want.
- ECE's Systemic Behaviors Reflect The Purposes and Elements Generated By The System's Current Structure .

# The Missing System In ECE Systems Development

- ECE's Fractures As A Field Of Practice Need To Be Eliminated.
- Current Approaches Further Fracturing The Field.
  - Voluntary strategies not leading to practitioners *collectively* capable of competent practice.
  - ECE becoming increasingly and unnecessarily complex and burdensome to navigate and reform.
  - Layered interventions creating still further fragmentation – intensifying capacity issues, and deflecting focus and resources from practitioner and program effectiveness.

# A Third Way Forward for ECE

*Am Advocating For ECE As A Field Of Practice To:*

- Assume **responsibility** for the competent practice of practitioners and its results for children's learning and development.
- Formally **organize itself as a profession** to realize consistency in practice across sites and program types.
- Become **self-governing** as a field of practice & shun **reliance** on public policy for **defining** the field's purpose and structure.

# A Third Way Forward

- This Call
  - Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, or Incrementally Improve What Isn't Working.
  - Argues for Deep System Change To Unify ECE As A Field of Practice And Elevate Its Practice.

# A Third Way Forward

- It's Time to Rethink Continued Expansion of the Field's Compensatory Infrastructure
- It's Time to:
  - Become A Recognized Profession Organized By A Unified System Of Preparation, Practice, and Responsibility Tailored to ECE's Aspirations and Responsibilities.
  - Become a Self-Governing Field Of Practice
  - Galvanize Equitable Compensation Based On Professional Parity



# A Third Way Forward For ECE

Will Redirect ECE's Trajectory By:

- Holding Us Accountable As **A Field Of Practice** For Competent Practice Of Practitioners And Agreed Upon Contributions To Children's Learning And Development.
- Restructuring ECE As A Field of Practice

IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

# It's Time for Change From The Inside Out

- It's Time For Us To
  - Acknowledge our complicity in ECE's present situation.
  - Acknowledge practice as ECE's core function.
  - Become collectively responsible for quality of field's practice.
  - Develop and exercise field-field leadership to maximize field's competence and contribution to children's learning and development.

“A vocation (occupation) is not a profession just because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such” (John Goodlad, 1990).

# The Missing System in ECE Systems Development

- Organizing As A Professional Field Of Practice Answers Questions Of:
  - Purpose.
  - Responsibility – For what will ECE hold itself accountable?
  - Uniform Preparation Standards.
  - Scopes of Practice.
  - Governance

# BTW: What's A Profession?

## Typical Meanings of “Professional”

- Paid vs. amateur
- Respectful
- Completes a job with skill and competence
- Provides reliable, competent service
- Knowledgeable
- “Just plain good”

# Occupation

- Market- or employer-driven
- Service for hire – consumers/ employers can hire anyone they want
- “And other duties as assigned”
- Individually (vs. collectively) oriented
- Sometimes externally regulated or monitored
- Certificates, degrees, apprenticeship associated with increased occupational skill and market viability

\*\*Both columns are a compilation from multiple resources.

# Profession

- A field-unifying systemic structure organizes the field of practice
- Occupationally controlled preparation, certification, and practice expectations
- Credentials required for entry & career mobility
- Defined boundaries & scope of practice
- Licensure required for practice – recognizes specialized knowledge and skills
- Unique knowledge & skills serve a “noble” purpose
- Those being served rely on professional exercise of clinical judgment
- Field-wide leadership

# Why It Matters

- ECE's Future Will Vary Depending

On Whether:

- It becomes unified as a field of practice (or remains a mix of disconnected programs and services).
- It assumes responsibility for practitioner competence (or retains this as an individual option).
- It structures itself so the field's knowledge base can be uniformly applied (or relies on a handful of strong programs to demonstrate quality).
- The field seizes opportunity to reorganize itself and define its future (or remains passive as field of practice).



# It's Our Turn To Be Change Agents For ECE

- Professionalizing ECE As Field Of Practice
  - Injects decisive break with field's usual ways of "doing."
  - Elevates teaching young children as a distinctive professional practice and defines our work as a profession.
  - Creates the chance to focus on compensation issue as one of occupational parity.
- It's Essential to ECE's Integrity As A Field Of Practice.

This Should Be **Our** Work.

It Shouldn't Be Left To Others.

Our Future Shouldn't Depend Upon Federal, State-By-State and  
Community-by-Community Decision-Making.

WE CAN STEP FORWARD TOGETHER  
&  
SHAPE WHAT CHANGE LOOKS LIKE

**OR**

PREPARE OURSELVES TO BE FURTHER CHANGED.

This Is A Defining Moment

One That Will Define The Identity and Competence  
of ECE As A Field of Practice

It's Up To Us

- Individually and Collectively –

To Step Forward And Assume  
Responsibility As A Field Of Practice

To Become Accountable For Preparing Competent Practitioners To  
Deliver On The Field's Promise.

Thank you