

Power to the Profession: Exploring compensation for #EC leaders

POLICY [M]ATTERS | SEASON 3, EPISODE 2 VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VOICEOVER: Welcome to Policy [M]atters Season 3, Episode 2. Policy [M]atters is a video chat series between Teri Talan of the McCormick Center, and a guest thought leader in early childhood policy.

Our guest for this season is Marica Cox Mitchell, Deputy Executive Director for Early Learning Systems from NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

In episode 2, Marica and Teri explore the overarching question of why the [“Power to the Profession” initiative](#) is the pathway to fair compensation

TERI: Good morning Marica and welcome everybody to our second in a three-part series of policy video chats. So I’m here with Marica Mitchell from NAEYC and we are going to continue our conversation about Power to the Profession, how it supports the field, and then today, have a special focus on what the relationship is to improving compensation with Power to the Profession.

So good morning everybody and whatever time it is when you’re watching this video chat.

So Marica, you know that I and the McCormick Center have really drunk the kool-aid, and we believe strongly in the value of the Power to the Profession initiative and are really excited to be a thought partner along with NAEYC, and how this gets rolled out to the field, and how to make it most relevant for supporting the professionalization of the early childhood education profession.

I am very excited about the newest decision cycle rollout. I’m really looking forward to even further work as we move along the decision cycle with Power to the Profession, but I know that there’s such building anxiety having to do with compensation that I don’t want to wait until that part comes out, and thought this was an opportunity to give people a preview of what some of the thinking is. How Power to the Profession is going to help professionals receive the compensation that is fair based on their qualifications and their scope of responsibilities.

MARICA: Absolutely, and I think that well first, I’ll say thank you for having these ongoing conversations in many ways, the conversations we’re having Teri, are exactly the conversations that are occurring across this nation as our affiliates, other task force organizations, and stakeholder organizations, are all focused on this dynamic conversation around who are early childhood educators, what do we do, how to create a unifying framework to define our work.

Revised: 3/23/2018

So I appreciate this opportunity to model such a conversation and show that this is an opportunity for us to test out each other's ideas, challenge in some ways each other's thinking, and that this is a healthy process so that we get to the point where we are on the same page, and are aligned in how we talk about the early childhood education workforce.

So I'll say that Power to the Profession first and foremost, is about young children. It is our field's way of ensuring that early childhood educators are able to support the development and learning of all young children, birth through age eight. And we can't do that if we don't talk about compensation.

So while Power to the Profession is about young children, it is also about ensuring that the early childhood education profession is prepared, compensated, effective, and that we're all using the exact same framework to talk about the profession.

TERI: Yeah, and I know that a lot of the work early on with Power to the Profession looked at some models from other professions, particularly nursing comes to mind, and thinking about the relationship between compensation and the increasing levels of qualification for the nursing profession, seems to me to be an example that we might want to talk about.

So can you share, what was the experience in nursing relative to changes in compensation?

MARICA: Just a really high-level overview first of all, they led that change, the nursing profession had conversations like the one we're having right now, to create their unifying framework. They acknowledged that it was gonna be an ongoing process.

There's still tinkering right now with what that looks like and so they adopted that the continuous quality improvement model. So we can sort of look towards that and say that we can put out a framework. We can have a similar conversation, put out a framework, and commit to collectively improving that framework to ensure that we're incorporating new signs, as well as what we're learning from implementation.

So I think that in defining early child education, particularly around whether or not we're going to have levels in this profession, how we talk about early childhood educators, are we talking about teachers or teacher assistants? What does that mean across multiple settings and sectors?

There were opportunities for us to draw upon other professions, like the nursing profession, and how they have clear designations, and each of their designations clearly signals at the level of preparation.

So if you think about the CNA versus the LPN, versus the RN. I think that model helps to inform the taskforce conversation. What we see is there are definitely differentiations across each of those designations, and we attempted to do the same with this first iteration of the early childhood profession as is described in decisions cycles of three four and five. And it was a very healthy conversation with the discourse and we're now presenting that for additional feedback from the field.

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TERI: So for those who may not be as familiar with that: This decision cycle is recommending three levels for the early childhood educator. Level one which is a training level, and I believe at this point the recommendation is a minimum of a hundred and twenty integrated clock hours of professional development. Level two would be at the associate degree level, and then level three would be at the baccalaureate or graduate level.

And I will say that one of the things that I did most recently, was present this model to our Professional Development Advisory Council in Illinois to really think about what this meant, how it would impact the work of our professional development system, how we saw it related to compensation. Would it help? Would it get us further along that conversation?

So I think that was a really healthy way to take these iterative cycles, and I recommend for folks listening or watching, to think about what are those forums that you could bring this conversation to. Because it's really important as we move to this national framework that we actually understand how it's gonna relate to state framework.

So that might be a topic for another, maybe our last policy chat once the decisions are firm. But I think that we are really committed in Illinois to stay aligned with NAEYC and with the Power to Profession, and we see lots of places for that alignment to continue to grow. I know that compensation is a tricky business, and as we continue to have conversations at the state level about how to make that happen, and are really eager to see this addressed very directly in terms of the Power to Profession cycles that are coming down the pipe at a later date.

So you know, I think about the conversations that are have happening in Washington State, where they've raised the minimum wage, and the impact this has had on early childhood services, the providers the ability for families to afford increased rates of care, and realize that you know this is an experiment that we can watch in Washington State and learn from. And so I just hope that whatever models we develop we're thinking about how to move public policy and not put it on families, I think that's such an important component.

MARICA: Absolutely, which is why this conversation around being very clear about who early childhood educators are is an important conversation and lays the groundwork we need and the foundation we need to make the case for public investments.

We're very clear that additional funding to support compensation will have to come from public sources to get that funding we'll have to be clear about who we are and actually demonstrate that we can be accountable for delivering on the promises of those public dollars.

And so, part of it is exactly that it's knowing that we have to be accountable for the public dollars, and private dollars that we receive and we have to be accountable to supporting all young children.

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TERI: Yes we're in the midst of it all and we are getting piecemeal ways of addressing it, parity with state pre-K teachers, and working in community-based programs, and state pre-K in schools, and how to achieve that parity, how to look at it as a social justice issue, like they're doing in Washington, in terms of raising the minimum wage for all people employed in the state. Both of these models need to come together, and I hope that as we move further with these different levels of the early childhood educator that we can link it to both social justice, and to compensation based on increased qualifications, and responsibilities.

MARICA: Absolutely, I think there are some conversations we have, I think there are times where we have isolated conversations on compensation and we say compensation parity and when it comes to accountability parity, or preparation parity, or responsibilities parity, we don't have those conversations. And so what Power to the Profession provides is an opportunity for us to have that comprehensive conversation so we're not talking about compensation in isolation.

We're actually talking about compensation in the context of preparation and accountability. If we want additional public funding, we're gonna have to be clear and accountable about how we're gonna use that funding, and who is actually going to get that funding.

Is every early childhood educator going to be paid as much as a third-grade teacher? What about the associate degree graduate? Where do they stand? What's comparable compensation for them? Are there some responsibilities that will be the same across the varying levels? How will we show differentiation? What we see right now with career lattices, as they're currently implemented is why we provide some sort of broad guidelines and guidance about how to navigate through the complex early childhood education occupation as it exists today.

We also know that some of those levels can feel meaningless to the educators themselves because currently progressing from a level 2 to a level 5 does not necessarily mean you are gaining greater skills. It doesn't necessarily mean you have increased accountability and responsibilities. It doesn't mean you even have a change in professional designation. It does not mean you have more accountability requirements.

So we're trying to make sure that the designations we use in this profession are meaningful and that we have compensation that are tied to those varying levels. And we're clear about the scope of their practice.

Right, so what's the difference between educator 1, as it is currently framed by the task force in this draft document, versus educator 2? What's the difference between educator 2 and educator 3? And recognizing that we need multiple pathways for educators to assess, access those levels. We need to ensure those levels are stackable, we need to create pathways that minimize the impact of systemic racism and elitism.

We need to ensure that we have articulation. So there's lots to a unpack with Power to the Profession. And it is through conversations like these, us holding on to what works well, but us also being open to new ideas and ways of rethinking the early childhood education profession.

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TERI: Well I think you've summed it up really nicely Marica. I would love us to have this conversation next time about how our state professional development systems can best align with the recommendation regarding levels for the early childhood educator, and share with you more about how Illinois has looked at this in terms of its career lattice and how it relates to the levels.

So, I think this is a great place to end, and I look forward to our next part of the series when we focus on that alignment with the state systems.

MARICA: Absolutely, again Teri, thanks for this opportunity, I look forward to future conversations.

VOICEOVER: Thanks to Marica for joining us and thanks to you for watching. Join the conversation with Teri and Marica in-person at Leadership Connections National Conference.

In the meantime, what questions do you have about Power to the Profession? Tell us in the comment section below. Until next time!

Dr. Teri Talan is Michael W. Louis Chair and Senior Policy Advisor at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership and Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at National Louis University. She is co-author of the Program Administration Scale (PAS), Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care (BAS), Escala de Evaluación de la Administración de Negocios, and Who's Caring for the Kids? The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois.

Marica Cox Mitchell is responsible for NAEYC's major program efforts in early childhood program and higher education accreditation. She is also leading the alignment among and between our Center for Applied Research, accreditation, and higher education with early childhood and higher education systems across the country. Mitchell has been in the early childhood education field for more than 16 years and has worked in both administrative and classroom settings.

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