



## HERE WE GO

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# INVESTING IN EARLY LEARNING BENEFITS US ALL

**If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a learning community to prepare the child's educators.**

**L**ittle children are a big deal for schools today. Mounting evidence about the benefits of early childhood education has motivated thousands of school districts to offer pre-K. Research on the foundations of literacy has spurred greater identification of reading disorders in kindergarten. And knowledge about how students develop over time is driving efforts to align early childhood and the elementary grades.

As public investment in the early years increases, we are seeing a growing interest among Learning Forward's audience in how to support and build on early childhood education. Over the past year, some of our most-attended webinars have focused on teaching and learning from pre-K to 3rd grade. And an increasing number of our members work with young learners or their teachers.

We recognize the immense value of high-quality early learning. That's why we're so excited about this issue of *The Learning Professional*. It highlights some of the leading voices in early childhood education today on topics like developmentally appropriate instruction, building literacy, integrating social, emotional, and academic skills, and dismantling inequitable systems of discipline. It also homes in on strategies for building capacity, looking at the rich history of early childhood coaching, how community coalitions can bolster teachers' skills, and the benefits of aligning early childhood and elementary education.

This issue shows why it is important for everyone in education to understand the early foundations of learning and child development, even if you work at the secondary or higher education level. Connecting the dots from early childhood through high school is vital, and it takes all levels working together. As Iheoma Iruka explains (p.40), "Early childhood educators need to know what happens once their kids move on to K-12. And K-12 educators should really understand what's happening in the early childhood space."

As the authors show us, early childhood educators are models for us all. They are masters of agility, engagement, and creativity, experts at weaving together instructional practices from across developmental domains and personalizing instruction to each student's needs. They don't develop these skills by accident, but through sustained, job-embedded, and standards-aligned professional learning. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a learning community to prepare the child's educators. K-12 educators can learn from the rich history of early childhood coaching and the field's necessary focus on job-embedded learning.

Even as we look to early childhood for inspiration, we must also support the field's learning and growth. One of early childhood education's persistent challenges is financial support and infrastructure. Early educators have historically been paid less, received fewer benefits, and had less access to professional learning than K-12 educators.

That's a problem not only for early childhood teachers and young children, but for all educators, because their work depends on the foundations established in the years before children walked through their doors. As advocates and policymakers aim to fill the gaps in early childhood funding, K-12 leaders must be at the table and their voices must be loud and clear about the value of early childhood education.

Little children become big children who become adults. Their learning and development are continuous, not limited to the boundaries of grade levels and education structures. They need the adults in their lives to know where they've been and where they're going. That takes us investing in our own learning to support their learning. In that spirit, we invite you to dive into this issue regardless of your place in education. ■



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