ViewPoint: Invest in our children and our economy

When young children birth to five have access to high-quality early care and education, they are far more likely to complete high school, go to college, and become productive workers and engaged citizens. When working parents have access to quality child care, they can be productive and focused employees. The group that is consistently overlooked in this “win-win” scenario are the child care providers that parents and employers rely on. It is time to elevate the critical role of the early education workforce and their contributions to our children and economy.

The early education system is in crisis because we have failed to recognize the essential role that early educators play. Our research shows that low compensation and a lack of professional development opportunities are to blame. Early educator salaries average $25,000 a year, only a fraction over the federal poverty level for a family of four. Economic hardship forces many of these workers — who are predominantly female — to rely on public support systems to make ends meet.

Speaker Robert DeLeo and the Massachusetts Business Roundtable (MBR) launched a groundbreaking public-private partnership with the recent release of a landmark report, “The Business Imperative for Early Education.” We applaud the speaker and members of the Early Education and Care Business Advisory Group for their leadership. We strongly endorse their vision and bold recommendations for rebuilding a broken workforce development system through increased compensation and professional development opportunities.

Now that the MBR report has focused public attention on this crisis, we must address a critical question: What will it take to implement these recommendations? Unlike in many other professions, there are few incentives to enter this field, and experienced early educators lack opportunities to grow throughout their careers and access the supports they need to exercise leadership in their classrooms, programs, and beyond. Our research shows that current workforce development systems have neglected experienced early educators and the possibilities of their leadership as a powerful force for change. Early educators are the largest, and most racially and linguistically diverse, teaching workforce in America. Over 2 million strong, they are nation-builders, equipping and inspiring the next generation to do great things.
A new world-class professional development system must establish an infrastructure to enable early educators and program administrators to be change agents. When we build leadership from within this workforce, we tap the expertise and insight that can revolutionize quality and early learning outcomes. We retain urgently needed talent and seed innovation for future generations to come.

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