

As members of the Network of Infant Toddler Researchers (NITR), we come together to help policymakers apply research knowledge to support programs—including child care, home visiting, Early Head Start, early intervention and child protective services— that serve pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. Issues related to program quality and workforce development are key to our mission. Thus, we are very interested in the work of the Power to the Profession initiative and would like to provide some feedback concerning one of the recommendations.

A knowledgeable, skillful, adequately paid workforce that is supported through ongoing supervision and professional development is essential to optimizing the potential of early education to help eliminate the persistent opportunity gap between low-income children and their higher-income peers. While the importance of education and specific workforce competencies are increasingly being recognized for those professionals working with preschoolers, that is not the case for professionals working with babies. The reality is that those serving our youngest children are paid the least and are the least educated of the educational workforce. We believe this is a problem.

It is a popular belief that what babies experience before they talk doesn't matter – they won't remember it. Science has disproved this. The earliest experiences shape the brain, with lifelong impacts on health, abilities, relationships, and achievements. In fact, working with babies requires unique knowledge, skills and abilities, such as:

- the ability to respond, in a sensitive and contingent manner, to babies' often subtle cues and needs, which helps babies feel secure and valued;
- the knowledge of rapid developmental sequences in the birth to three period and the skills to help children progress along their developmental trajectories as well as how to identify when a child is deviating from the norm and requires screening for a possible developmental delay;
- and critically, the ability to effectively communicate with and work with parents.

Given the demands of working with babies and their families, it is inconceivable that those working with babies would require *less* education than those working with older children. We understand the difficulties inherent in the task of taking the least educated workforce and imposing new requirements for education or supervised experiences. However, if we do not seize this opportunity to make change — in ways that honor those with experience and skills — the inequities in education and compensation between those working with babies and those working with older children will continue. This is an opportunity to honor those who work with babies and the knowledge, skills and abilities they require that should not be squandered.

Thus, we urge NAEYC and its partners crafting Power to the Profession to recommend a uniform level of formal education or uniform process for demonstration of required competencies for all early childhood teachers staffing classrooms serving the full spectrum of

birth through age 8. We recognize this is a lofty goal, but one that that can be achieved with support. Head Start's successful implementation of policy directives increasing the qualifications of their workforce stands as a model. We encourage NAEYC to use this opportunity to professionalize the workforce for all young children.

[This letter does not reflect the view of the Administration for Children and Families that supports NITR or even all NITR members, just those members that have signed this letter]

Rachel Chazan Cohen, PhD
University of Massachusetts Boston

Diane M. Horm, PhD
University of Oklahoma-Tulsa

Julie Leis, PhD
James Bell Associates

Ann M. Stacks, Ph.D.
Wayne State University

Carla A. Peterson, Ph.D.
Iowa State University

Martha J. Buell, Ph.D.
University of Delaware

Karen E. McFadden, Ph.D.
Brooklyn College, The City University of New York

Kyong-Ah Kwon, Ph.D.
University of Oklahoma-Tulsa

James Elicker, Ph.D.
Purdue University

Claire Vallotton, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Nicole Gardner-Neblett, Ph.D.
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Kere Hughes-Belding, Ph.D.
Iowa State University

Danielle Riser, M.S.
University of Delaware

Maria Fusaro, Ed.D.
San Jose State University

Beth L. Green, PhD.
Portland State University

Zachary Price, Doctoral Student
University of Massachusetts Boston

Ann Easterbrooks, Ph.D.
Tufts University

Christopher Watson, PhD
University of Minnesota

Mary Dallas Allen, PhD
University of Alaska Anchorage