

Strategies to Strengthen the Early Childhood and School-Age Workforce: West Virginia



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



National Center on Child Care Professional
Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives (PDW Center)
Jointly funded by ACF's Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start

To support the Office of Child Care's and the Office of Head Start's priority of a strong early childhood (EC) and school-age (SA) workforce, the PDW Center developed a series of briefs, a guide to planning and implementing, and a tool on targeting workforce investments. These resources are designed to help State/Territory decisionmakers increase and retain a skilled workforce by improving their workplace conditions, compensation, and access to professional development (PD). These resources and full citations are available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strengthening-early-childhood-and-school-age-workforce>.

This brief highlights West Virginia's Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist program (ACDS) as an innovative approach to aligning a State PD system to provide career pathways, address compensation, and increase career mobility for the EC and SA workforce. West Virginia adapted the [U.S. Department of Labor Child Development Apprenticeship Program](#) in its design of the ACDS in 1989. The Child Development Apprenticeship Program has now been adopted in more than 30 States across the country.

APPRENTICESHIP OVERVIEW

Apprenticeship programs combine on-the-job training (OJT) with theoretical instruction and offer key benefits not normally found in other education and job training programs. For example, apprentices earn a living wage while they are obtaining a credential. Apprentices also work under the guidance of an experienced child care professional. This on-site mentor provides ongoing feedback on job performance.

Another hallmark of apprenticeship is a negotiated wage progression that specifically addresses compensation. West Virginia uses the ACDS as an essential part of its cross sector approach to address compensation and improve workplace conditions. Employers or sponsors register with the State Department of Labor and negotiate an agreement that outlines the apprenticeship sponsor's responsibilities, including wage increases, as well as the minimum qualifications for participation in the program.

The ACDS is funded with Child Care and Development Fund quality dollars through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, and by the West Virginia Department of Education through a contract with River Valley Child Development Services. A State executive council, comprising representatives from local councils, funders, and the Department of Labor, oversees the program.

ACDS REQUIREMENTS

Apprentices in the ACDS program must complete four semesters of classroom training plus 3,200 to 4,000 hours of OJT, including observation by a mentor, master teacher, or center director. Apprentices often choose to continue their education to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree. Graduates of ACDS can have their work applied as college credit for an associate's degree at most West Virginia community colleges. There is also a pre-apprenticeship education program operating in the State's high schools. This program implements the educational portion of the ACDS without the OJT component.

A trained mentor or master teacher oversees each OJT experience. The mentors meet with their apprentices regularly to review required documentation and provide support. They also observe the apprentices with the children, provide feedback, and offer additional resources as needed. Mentors must have a degree in early education or meet the requirements for Level 5 on the State's career path. Often, ACDS graduates return to serve the program as mentors.

ACDS ACROSS SETTINGS AND SECTORS

Apprentices work in a variety of program settings, including: West Virginia's universal pre-K; public school classrooms; Head Start/Early Head Start programs; child care centers and family child care homes; SA programs, in-home family education (home-visiting) programs; early intervention programs; and young or expectant parent programs. Completing the ACDS program opens the door to other professional opportunities because it aligns with West Virginia's licensing, Head Start, and pre-K requirements.

The ACDS can be customized to accommodate differing employment situations. Local councils recruit students and to tailor the ACDS to meet local needs. The ACDS offers scholarships to pay for books during the four-semester program. Those apprentices who completed/are completing the program and wish to continue their education can apply for additional higher education scholarships targeted to ACDS graduates.

ACDS RESULTS

The West Virginia State Training and Registry System (STARS) has an agreement with ACDS to track each apprentice's coursework completion, core knowledge information, and progress on the career path. State Apprenticeship Coordinators submit course descriptions and training registration information to West Virginia STARS. Training hours are verified and awarded according to State policy. In addition, West Virginia STARS collects information on each apprentice's job role, program completion status, wage and benefit level, and general workforce information.

ACDS Data at a Glance

- Over 2,000 ACDS apprentices have graduated since it began in 1989.
- More than 4,000 young children and families have benefitted from staff participation in the ACDS program.
- 80–90% of apprentices complete the program and receive a nationally recognized certificate from the United States Department of Labor.
- Although apprentices often receive minimum wage when they enter the program, they receive wage increases ranging from \$.25 to \$2.00 per hour.

The West Virginia apprenticeship approach has been especially effective in rural parts of the State with populations that do not follow traditional pathways to higher education. Combining college-based classroom training, OJT, mentoring, and a wage progression increases positive outcomes for both the apprentices and the young children they serve.

Information in this brief was gathered through personal communications with Sherrie Barrett, ACDS State Coordinator, and Natalie Snider, WV STARS State Coordinator; and the West Virginia ACDS Web site (<http://www.wvacds.org>), January 2014.