inaeyc Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

2955 N Meridian Street, Suite 120
Indianapolis, IN 46208
t (855) 484-2392 / o (317) 356-6884
f (317) 259-9489 / inaeyc.org

TALKING POINTS: INDIANA CHILD CARE LICENSING PROPOSAL

Re: 470 IAC 3-4.7-25 Lowering Licensed Centers Lead Teacher Qualification Requirements

1. Core Position

- High-quality early childhood education depends on well-prepared educators.
- Lowering the lead teacher requirement from a CDA or college coursework to a high school diploma risks undermining program quality and child outcomes.

2. Impact on Child Development and School Readiness

- Research consistently shows that teacher education and training directly affect child outcomes, including language development, social-emotional growth, and school readiness.
- Lead teachers guide curriculum, assessment, and classroom environment, roles that require specialized knowledge of child development, not just general education.
- Reducing requirements may result in less intentional teaching and weaker learning environments.

3. Quality and Licensing Standards

- Indiana has made progress toward improving early care quality; this change moves backward from nationally recognized standards.
- National organizations (e.g., NAEYC) recommend lead teachers have postsecondary credentials in early childhood education.
- Lower standards create inconsistency between licensed care expectations and quality rating systems.

4. Workforce Professionalization

- Early childhood educators deserve recognition as professionals.
- Lowering qualifications sends the message that specialized skills are not necessary, which:

  - Undermines professional respect
  - Reduces incentives for educators to pursue education and training

- This may discourage long-term workforce development and leadership in the field.

- The ECE profession's core competencies require specialized knowledge and skills that are supported through the CDA and ECE degrees in areas such as:
  - Assessing child development and learning
  - Instructional practices that support cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development
  - Pedagogical content knowledge across nine disciplines

5. Workforce Shortage Argument (Counterpoint)

- While workforce shortages are real, lowering qualifications is not a sustainable solution.

- Where wages and benefits have improved, the supply of educators has increased.

  - Washington, D.C., for example, implemented wage enhancements and saw measurable growth in workforce participation and program availability.

- Instead, Indiana should:

  - Invest in scholarships and CDA supports

  - Expand apprenticeships and career pathways

  - Improve compensation and retention strategies

- Lowering standards may increase turnover rather than stabilize the workforce.

  - The idea that having increased standards pushes people away from early childhood education is simply not true.

  - National research confirms that the top two reasons educators leave are because of the low compensation, little to no benefits, and having to work with colleagues who have not been prepared to work with children.

  - National research has also confirmed that having higher standards for ECE workforce qualifications does not increase turnover, but research has shown that lowering standards does.

- National research also shows that early childhood educators with credentials such as the CDA and degrees have a lower turnover rate than those who do not.

6. Access Considerations

- Children in licensed child care, particularly those from low-income families—should not have reduced access to qualified educators.
- This proposal risks creating a two-tiered system, where the most vulnerable children receive care from less-prepared teachers.

7. Business and Parent Confidence

- Parents rely on licensing standards as a signal of quality and safety.
- Lowering qualifications may erode public trust in licensed care programs.
- Employers depend on reliable child care; weakening quality can impact workforce productivity statewide.
- In addition to eroding parent trust, reducing qualifications for staff risks increases the perception of risk by liability insurance carriers, at a time when costs and access to needed coverage are already posing a challenge for programs in communities across the country.
- Data from a national survey of parents and providers by NAEYC and MomsRising found that when given the choice, parents and providers across the political spectrum prefer that qualifications for providers be increased, rather than decreased to meet the need for more supply.

8. Better Policy Alternatives

Instead of reducing requirements, consider:

- Maintaining CDA as a minimum but allowing a grace period for completion
- Providing state-funded pathways to earn credentials while working
- Offering wage supports or incentives tied to education
- Expanding coaching, mentoring, and professional development

9. Bottom-Line Message

- “We cannot solve workforce shortages by lowering the bar for those teaching our youngest children.”

- “Indiana’s children deserve prepared, supported, and qualified educators, not reduced expectations.”

Closing Statement

- “We urge policymakers to pursue solutions that strengthen the workforce without compromising quality, ensuring every child in Indiana has access to high-quality early learning experiences.”