

Project Profile

Exploring the Effectiveness of Skills Training and Wage- Based Incentive Programs on the Social Mobility of Rural Early Childhood Education Providers in Tennessee

Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success

A decorative orange line graphic consisting of several interconnected, irregular shapes that resemble a stylized path or a series of connected triangles, located in the bottom right quadrant of the page.

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Organization

Digital Promise Global | Washington, DC

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Geographic Focus

Tennessee

Population Focus

This research focuses on early childhood education providers working in licensed facilities who live or work in rural areas of Tennessee.

Project Overview

This project explores the effectiveness of skills training and wage-based incentive programs on the social mobility of rural early childhood education providers in Tennessee, with the intent of increasing understanding of early childhood education providers' lived experiences regarding upskilling. The project evaluates the effectiveness of the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) and Child Care WAGE\$® Tennessee (WAGE\$) programs, with the goal of closing the skill gaps in the field.

The findings from this research seek to highlight practices that successfully support early childhood education providers and capture the perspectives and experiences of rural early childhood education providers and administrators. These findings are intended to yield provider-generated recommendations regarding the types of systems needed to access educational opportunities and fair compensation. The research also explores the skills gained by participants and the impact of these programs on the confidence of early childhood education participants.

In alignment with the second goal of the Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success initiative, this project also examines the ways postsecondary education providers have supported rural early childhood education learners. In particular, the research team will explore the ways Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority-serving institutions implement TECTA programs to support the upskilling of rural early childhood educators.

Consistent with Digital Promise’s efforts to lead and promote equity-centered research and development projects, this endeavor addresses the growing demand for early childhood education providers, a workforce population predominantly comprised of ethnically and racially diverse females (Whitebook et al., 2018, p. 2). Our goal is to inform the early childhood education field of the best practices and methods to increase access to high-quality skills training and higher wages for women — particularly Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant women — who provide foundational education to children in rural communities.

– *Digital Promise*

Research Questions

For TECTA

1. In what ways has TECTA impacted the field of early childhood education across rural regions of the state?
2. To what extent have upskilling opportunities (including non-degree and degree pathways) promoted economic mobility for early childhood education providers earning low wages in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of early childhood education providers concerning potential return on investment for upskilling opportunities associated with TECTA?

For WAGE\$

1. Did WAGE\$ achieve its intended goals for rural participants?

Research Methodology

This project will use a mixed-methods research approach, including interviews with early childhood education providers for qualitative data collection and quantitative analysis on a sample of early childhood education providers working and/or living in rural areas of Tennessee. Qualitative data will be collected through focus groups with rural early childhood education providers and the educators and administrators who serve them. Quantitative data will be obtained from the Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning, TECTA, and WAGE\$ databases and state sources. Difference-in-differences design will evaluate WAGE\$ participation on retention, education, and income for rural participants.

Research Significance

The evaluation of TECTA and WAGE\$ can provide a model for other rural regions to support the economic mobility of the early childhood education workforce. The findings will inform policy makers and institutions implementing similar programs, as well as programs coordinative initiatives to train and retain early childhood workers in rural areas.

Grant Period of Performance

March 2023 to February 2024