

Massachusetts ECE Apprenticeship Study: Overview

May 2025

The **Massachusetts ECE Apprenticeship Study** is a new collaborative research effort designed to better understand early childhood education (ECE) Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs) in Massachusetts.

Why this study?

ECE plays an essential role in child and youth development, families’ well-being, and the economy. Yet, the ECE sector faces persistent recruitment and retention challenges, largely due to low wages and lack of professional growth opportunities. Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs) focused on industries such as ECE show promise to help address these persistent workforce challenges by serving as a pipeline to recruit and prepare ECE educators. RAPs provide a structured pathway to attract, train, and retain ECE educators by combining paid, on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction.

This study will evaluate the early implementation and initial outcomes of ECE RAPs in Massachusetts. It will examine how these programs are designed, launched, and experienced by program leaders, employers, apprentices, mentors, and family child care (FCC) intermediaries (organizations supporting FCCs)¹. It will provide new information about promising practices and innovations related to ECE RAPs.

The overarching goal of the study is to identify and share actionable lessons learned for successfully implementing ECE RAPs to inform decision-making for ECE workforce programs.

The study has three main goals, which will be met by addressing four research questions:

Study Goal 1: To understand lessons learned for successfully implementing ECE RAPs from employer and apprentice recruitment to completion.

- **Research Question 1.** How were RAPs designed and implemented (from employer and apprentice recruitment to completion)?
- **Research Question 2.** How did implementation align with fidelity to the RAP model, including the experiences of program directors, mentors, and apprentices, and what helped or hindered successful implementation?

Study Goal 2: To understand if and how ECE RAPs can help employers meet their hiring and retention workforce needs for well-qualified educators.

- **Research Question 3.** Did child care providers/employers, apprentices, and mentors benefit from participating in the ECE RAPs?

Study Goal 3: To understand early lessons learned from FCC intermediaries in designing and launching the first FCC cohort.

- **Research Question 4.** How do FCC intermediaries plan to strengthen the FCC workforce and what will help them achieve their goals?

¹ FCC intermediaries are organizations that support FCC providers through training, technical assistance, and access to resources.

Who is conducting the study?

In partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), and with support from the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS), this study is being led by a team of researchers from [Mathematica](#), along with experts from [School Readiness Consulting](#) and [Boston University's Wheelock College of Education and Human Development](#).

How is the study designed?

We will use a mixed-methods research design, combining *qualitative methods* (interviews and focus groups) to capture in-depth insights, perceptions, and practices within and across programs and *quantitative methods* (surveys and administrative data) to measure outputs, outcomes, explore variation, and identify patterns.

What is the timeline and what will it involve?

- **Co-design study:** In **spring 2025**, we will collaborate with EEC, DAS, and RAP administrators to design study activities that emphasize local learning priorities, including current program strengths and opportunities for growth.
- **Collect data:** During **summer 2025**, we will facilitate data collection activities at a subset of ECE RAP sites. The study team will use a community-informed approach—facilitating surveys, interviews, and focus groups—to elevate the experiences and perspectives of RAP administrators, program directors, intermediaries, apprentices, and mentors.
- **Share findings:** In **fall 2025**, we will summarize learnings to share, focusing on actionable recommendations. Throughout the study timeline, there will be opportunities for input from EEC, DAS, and RAP administrators to ensure that the final findings are accurate, informative, and actionable.

How will study findings be used?

The study intends to provide EEC, EOLWD, RAP administrators, and other important stakeholders—such as policymakers, practitioners, employers, and apprentices—with learnings to inform further development, implementation, and scaling of high-quality ECE RAPs. Planned dissemination activities include study research briefs and presentations.

For more information about the Massachusetts ECE Apprenticeship Study, please contact Annie Li, Project Director, at ali@mathematica-mpr.com.

