

March 31, 2022

To: The Massachusetts Board of Early Education and Care  
From: Teach Plus Massachusetts EEC Teacher Leaders



The selection process for a new Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care begins a conversation of the qualities expected of a commissioner as they charter landscapes rooted in policy and protocol that are representative and critical to the movement in advancing ECE on all levels, on all spectrums, and with the voices of the essential early care workers at the core of the conversation. We are a group of highly-effective educators from across Massachusetts and members of the inaugural Teach Plus Early Childhood Education and Care Working Group. Through this program, we strive to ensure that our state policies benefit the diverse population of students and families, as well as the early childhood workforce itself. This is especially true when it comes to addressing the multi-faceted crisis that the early childhood community has experienced and that has been compounded by the pandemic, such as teacher shortages, inequitable pay, lack of teacher diversity and teacher preparation programs, and lack of access to high-quality and inclusive care and instruction. In light of these challenges and with our own experiences as early childhood educators in mind, we ask that the Board of Early Education and Care and Governor Baker address the following when selecting the next Commissioner of Early Education and Care:

 **Set a minimum requirement of eight to ten years of working with EEC from infancy to 2nd grade experience**

**The next Commissioner should have direct classroom experience, having taught for at least five years, as the full-time teacher of record.** This insight will allow the new commissioner to understand the current policies- allowing them to manage what is working and remove or change what isn't, ensuring that every regulation moves us towards high-quality care and education. Educators with direct classroom experience have a schema of scenarios which include but are not limited to: understanding the progression, route, and lived experiences it takes to become a teacher of record; first hand knowledge of working with EEC from an entry level; experience implementing policies in real time in day-to-day practice; and building strategies for effectively connecting and engaging families and other teachers at multiple capacities.

*"It is imperative for the commissioner to have this experience so that when they are enforcing regulations, creating change, and instituting high quality education, they have had direct experience in a classroom and understand the implications of these actions."*

- Sarah Slater, Teach Plus Policy Fellow

 **Require infant and toddler experience in the next commissioner**

**The candidate pool for the next commissioner of EEC should include people with infant and toddler care experience, and so should the committee tasked with the candidate selection.** Even though infant and toddler experience is at the core of early childhood education, the EEC to-date has lacked this experience and advice for the field. During the COVID pandemic, the majority of the department regulations concerned preschool educators and as a result

were not helpful to the ECE professionals who teach younger children. Since teaching infants and toddlers is an extremely specialized field, those who are making and enforcing regulations should have the same base of knowledge as those of us working in the classroom every day.

*"The opportunity granted to us in choosing a new commissioner has the chance to make a huge difference in the realm of infant and toddler care- someone who has experience with this age group could help us push for more access for families, better teacher training, and higher pay for those of us who teach our littlest ones."*

- Aidn White, Teach Plus Policy Fellow

 **Ensure the candidate pool represents historically marginalized groups, especially women of color**

**Now more than ever, we need to ensure that the next commissioner is a person of color who can speak to and understand the roles that race, gender identity, and other systemic marginalizations play within the field, as well as the world.** Since the department was established in 2005, only one person of color has served as Commissioner of Early Education and Care. In contrast, the early childhood workforce is by far the most racially diverse within the broader workforce in the state of Massachusetts (infants-grade 12). As such, the candidate pool should reflect this diversity and incorporate leadership opportunities for historically excluded applicants. The selection of an Commissioner of Early Education and Care with a deep understanding of the complex issues facing much of the workforce will be crucial to the success of their leadership and advocacy.

*"All early childhood professionals face a multitude of challenges unique to our field. As a white teacher in a small preschool, I know that there are additional challenges my Black co-teachers face that I can never fully understand or experience. In my two decades of teaching, I have heard from multiple co-workers of color about the lack of racial diversity in many administrative roles within the field, and how difficult it is for them to rise within the ranks. I hope to see the committee demonstrate their understanding of the importance of prioritizing women of color in their selection process."*

- Suzanne Stillinger, Teach Plus Policy Fellow

 **Ensure the next commissioner has the skills to engage in a range of issues that impact ECE educators**

**The next commissioner of EEC should be prepared to help tackle issues and work directly with teachers on the problems that impact them.** Through the pandemic, it has become increasingly and alarmingly clear that our early education system is in desperate need of an overhaul. Current issues facing the field include public perception of educators, equitable pay, workforce shortages, educator training, lack of teacher diversity, and unequal access and quality of care for children and families. These issues cannot only be worked on from the top-down; the voices of all teachers must be heard, including those who work in different settings, with different ages, and who have different background experiences and identities.

*"Our next leader should be mindful of the impact Early Childhood Education (ECE) has on the economy. They must consider how adverse childhood experiences can be acknowledged by such investment. In particular, how vocational, technical education can act as a vehicle to build the future workforce. Therefore, the next Commissioner of Early Education and Care must understand that advancement in society is achieved by recognizing that the economy depends on ECE, the health of our nation depends on ECE and the future of the economic workforce continues to depend on the staffing and resources of ECE."*

- Yasmin Flefleh-Vincent, Teach Plus Policy Fellow

It is critical that teachers remain at the table with the committee as they select the next commissioner so that we can collectively ensure that the next leader of EEC is someone who knows the importance of a nap-time schedule, who knows how to calm a frightened parent or a crying child, and who has been on the rug with students. When EEC teachers come together with their students on the rug, it is to hear their thoughts, problem solve classroom and school challenges, and to build community. For these same reasons and more, the selection committee must invite current classroom teachers to the table, allowing them to give voice to this important decision. **We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Acting Commissioner Kershaw and members of the Board of Early Education and Care to discuss our ideas in this memo. Please reach out to Christopher Marino, Teach Plus Executive Director at [cmarino@teachplus.org](mailto:cmarino@teachplus.org) if this is a possibility.**

We are looking forward to continuing this conversation with the committee going forward and are excited at the possibility of working together to create change in the field of Early Education and Care in Massachusetts.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Kimberly Artez**, Lead Toddler Teacher, Watertown, MA

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**Christopher Marino**, Executive Director, Teach Plus Massachusetts