



## Qualifications & Educational Support

### Research-to-practice brief series

The National Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Center is a joint research and technical assistance center that equips state and local leaders to drive change in ECE workforce policy.

This brief is based on a mixed methods evaluation of five ECE registered apprenticeship (RA) programs in California sponsored and supported by the organization, Early Care & Education Pathways to Success (ECEPTS). It reviews key facilitators and barriers to developing an RA, as well as the experiences of apprentices.

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### Intended audience

This brief is intended for state and community leaders and workforce development leaders interested in RAs.

# ECE Apprentices' Experiences Across Five Registered Apprenticeship Programs

## Top-Line Takeaways

Registered apprenticeships (RAs) offer a structured program for earning and learning via a paid job, coursework, and on-the-job training that results in a recognized credential.<sup>a</sup> In the early care and education (ECE) field, RAs are a supported pathway for both new and experienced ECE educators to advance their credentials. However, there is limited research regarding ECE RAs, particularly in terms of how they may support educators' knowledge, skills, practice, well-being, and retention in the field.

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) evaluated five RAs located in California to understand how they support the development of highly skilled early educators.

- Apprentices who responded to a survey ( $n = 76$ ) reported increased knowledge about child development, skills, and classroom practice.
- The vast majority of apprentices reported that participating in their RA program made them more likely to continue at their current place of employment (83%) or in the ECE field (95%). At the same time, only one-half indicated that they expected to be at the same place of employment when asked where they saw themselves in three years.
- Most apprentices (87%) indicated that the RA program positively affected their family's general well-being.
- Across RA programs, most apprentices (80-95%) reported that every component of the program (e.g., cohort model, the provision of child care for their own children, translation of course materials, mentors) was important or extremely important to their perceptions of success.
- The biggest challenge reported by both survey ( $n = 76$ ) and group interview participants ( $n = 14$ ) was balancing work, school, and family responsibilities during the apprenticeship.
- In interviews, program partners overseeing RAs ( $n = 16$ ) stressed the importance of designing RAs to be accessible for all participants and receiving technical assistance during program development and initial implementation. Technical assistance was provided by Early Care & Education Pathways to Success (ECEPTS), their RA sponsor and

<sup>a</sup> To be considered "registered," an apprenticeship program must meet minimum standards and be approved by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or a State Apprenticeship Agency. These requirements ensure a minimum, consistent standard across programs.



industry intermediary,<sup>b</sup> and included group training sessions and individualized support from an ECEPTS RA program director.

- Program partners also noted implementation challenges regarding the need for dedicated staff and staff time and securing sustainable funding to continue their RA in the future.

This brief aims to help state, community, and workforce development leaders who are interested in the effects of ECE RAs and the RA components that support apprentices' success. Specifically, this brief explores whether and how apprentices perceive programs as valuable contributors to their knowledge, skills, and practice as an educator; to their families' general well-being; and to their future career intentions. The brief also explores what supports help apprentices most and lessons learned from RA implementation.

## Background

RAs across different industries have been associated with improvements in apprentices' employment, skills, and earnings, while also helping employers recruit and retain a skilled workforce.<sup>1</sup> RAs are a relatively new but rapidly expanding approach in the ECE field.

ECE RAs offer several advantages for individuals entering the ECE field and for current educators, many of whom are highly experienced but often face barriers to more traditional academic pathways. RAs can reduce barriers to career advancement by combining paid, on-the-job training with financial support to cover costs related to earning a credential or degree, and wage increases tied to RA milestones.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, they create entry points for new educators while simultaneously helping current educators advance their qualifications.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Given research that many non-traditional students and ECE educators need additional supports to earn credentials and degrees, embedding additional programmatic supports (e.g., peer learning communities, academic advising, technological support, tutoring, child care, courses at nontraditional hours, virtual learning) into ECE RAs might further help apprentices.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Despite their promise and rising popularity, limited research has examined apprentices' experiences in ECE RAs, the outcomes associated with participation, or the programmatic components that support or hinder success.<sup>9</sup> This brief begins to address this gap by describing findings from an evaluation of RAs in five counties in California conducted by CSCCE in 2024. It explores (a) program partners' perceptions of facilitators and challenges encountered during the design or implementation of the RAs and (b) apprentices' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and programmatic components contributing to their participation and success.

## What We Found in Our Research










This evaluation focuses on ECEPTS-sponsored RA programs in five California counties: Alameda, El Dorado, Los Angeles, Marin, and San Diego (see Table 1). The evaluation draws on data collected from 76 apprentices who completed surveys and 14 apprentices who also participated in group interviews. In addition, 16 program partners (e.g., program coordinators, employers, mentors, faculty members) from these ECE RAs participated in interviews about the development and early implementation of their RA programs, including

<sup>b</sup> According to the U.S. DOL, industry intermediaries are organizations within an industry or sector that serve as liaisons to employers, other industry partners, and the DOL's Office of Apprenticeship (Apprenticeship USA, 2023). They can be central to determining skill needs, analyzing workforce trends, and collaborating with employers to expand apprenticeship opportunities.



challenges and successes during implementation.<sup>c</sup> (For more details about our research methods, see the Methods text box at the end of this brief.)

**Table 1. Overview of apprenticeship program designs.**

Alameda County	
	<b>Lead Employer:</b> YMCA of East Bay
	<b>Additional Employer:</b> Kidango
	<b>Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Partners:</b> Berkley City College, Chabot College, Merritt College, Los Medanos College, Contra Costa College, EDvance College, Cal State East Bay
	<b>Course Format:</b> Virtual; 8-14-week courses
	<b>Length of Time (approximate):</b> 1 - 2 years
<b>Notes:</b> Uses a cohort model. Apprentices are recruited from among the families they serve and from other local community partners.	
El Dorado County	
	<b>Lead Employer:</b> El Dorado County Office of Education
	<b>Additional Employer:</b> Step by Step; Lake Tahoe Community College, Baby Steps
	<b>Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Partners:</b> San Joaquin Delta College
	<b>Course Format:</b> Virtual
	<b>Length of Time (approximate):</b> 2 years
<b>Notes:</b> Partnered with a college in a different county that was equipped to offer virtual courses. As a mostly rural county, the apprenticeship needed multiple employers in order to create a cohort with enough educators to fill a college course (i.e., 20 students).	
Los Angeles County	
	<b>Lead Employer:</b> Child Care Resource Center
	<b>Additional Employer:</b> Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOA)
	<b>Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Partners:</b> Pierce College
	<b>Course Format:</b> Hybrid; alternating virtual and in person weekly classes
	<b>Length of Time (approximate):</b> 2 years
<b>Notes:</b> Courses offered at a community-based location.	
Marin County	
	<b>Lead Employer:</b> Community Action Marin
	<b>Additional Employer:</b> North Bay Children's Center
	<b>Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Partners:</b> College of Marin
	<b>Course Format:</b> In person
	<b>Length of Time (approximate):</b> 2 years
<b>Notes:</b> Courses offered in both Spanish and English. Spanish cohort also completed English language courses. Paid time at work to use for homework and course assignments.	

<sup>c</sup> For Alameda County, CSCCE interviewed program partners from Kidango, as they were in their first year of implementation. CSCCE did not interview program partners from YMCA of the East Bay because they were already operational for several years, and the program partner interviews focused on RA development and early implementation. However, apprentices from both Kidango and YMCA of the East Bay were invited to participate in surveys and group interviews.



## San Diego County



**Lead Employer:** MAAC



**Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Partners:** Palomar College



**Course Format:** In person



**Length of Time (approximate):** 2 years

**Notes:** Recruited their cohort of apprentices from parents of children in the Head Start program and local community.

All participating RAs are implementing the ECEPTS apprenticeship model. ECEPTS serves as the apprenticeship sponsor and provides ongoing technical assistance and funding to the RA partnership in each of these communities. Based on their experience with ECE workforce development, the apprenticeship system, and existing research, the ECEPTS apprenticeship model embeds a variety of supplemental supports. In addition to standard RA components (i.e., paid job, on-the-job training, coursework, credential upon completion, and wage increases tied to milestones), ECEPTS apprenticeships also include the following components<sup>10,11</sup>:

- A cohort learning community for apprentices,
- Embedded tutoring in college coursework,
- Dedicated program staff to support apprentices in their on-the-job training, and
- Education, training, and supports provided at no cost to apprentices.

Additional information about the participating RAs and their key components is presented in Table 1.

Below, we present key findings from the evaluation related to (a) facilitators and challenges to implementing an RA as described by program partners and (b) apprentices' experiences, perceptions about if and how RAs increase their knowledge, skills, practice, and well-being, and perceptions about the supports that contributed to their success.

### Facilitators and challenges to implementing a registered apprenticeship

Program partners who participated in interviews described facilitators to successful development and early implementation of their RA programs, as well as challenges they faced.

*Program partners stressed the importance of designing RAs to be accessible for all participants and receiving ongoing support from ECEPTS during launch and throughout implementation.*

- **Designing RAs to be accessible for all participants.** This included offering courses in the evening to accommodate work schedules, providing child care so apprentices could attend classes or complete on-the-job training, offering courses virtually or on-site, spreading courses over multiple semesters instead of a

*"We are able to program the classes to be after work hours. So that's been super, super helpful for them..." - Program partner, Alameda County*

*"[We] provided free classes and all the other supports. For example, the cost of books was free and parking permits, and then we had an embedded tutor who was also available to support in the beginning of the classes." - Program partner, Marin County*

*"[ECEPTS] brought us slowly through the components that were needed to be successful. It was great to learn and think about each one of the components of the apprenticeship program, learning and having a supportive partner walk us through the paperwork because all the federal forms and the contracts and everything are pretty daunting." - Program partner, El Dorado County*



more accelerated schedule, translating materials, providing tuition and course materials free of charge, and providing additional resources (e.g., computer, parking passes).

- **Receiving support from an intermediary.** ECEPTS “knew the language” and could help partners meet the required standards for becoming registered with the U.S. DOL’s Office of Apprenticeship and the CA Division of Apprenticeship Standards.

*Program partners also described implementation challenges, including the need for dedicated staff and staff time, and securing sustainable funding.*

- **The need for dedicated staff and staff time.** RAs are collaborative in nature, but all of the program partners shared that the coordination and execution of the RA often fell on one individual, who typically had other job responsibilities. Partners noted that having full-time staff dedicated to coordinating the RA would support implementation.
- **Securing sustainable funding to operate and continue the RA.** ECEPTS covered some program costs, but program partners noted that identifying and weaving together a variety of public and private funding sources to fund and sustain their RAs was the biggest challenge for operating and continuing the RA.

*"You have to have institutional buy-in from the highest levels of leadership that they're willing to dedicate staff and time to launching an apprenticeship program." –*

**Program partner, San Diego County**

*"We want to grow the program, we want to start working with other colleges, we want to be able to provide more support to the apprentices. And as it is right now, we're just not equipped to do that." –* **Program partner, Alameda County**

## Apprentices’ perspectives on RA outcomes and contributors to success

Apprentices who completed the survey reported on what they saw as benefits of participating in the RA in terms of their knowledge, skills, and practice, as well as their own and their families’ financial and general well-being. They also reported on the RA supports that helped them to participate in the RA, as well as challenges they experienced. Apprentices who participated in group interviews spoke about these same topics.<sup>d</sup>

*Across all participating apprenticeship programs, apprentices reported a positive influence of the RA on their knowledge about child development, teaching skills, and classroom practice.*

- **Knowledge:** Between 80 and 91 percent of apprentices reported the apprenticeship program was helpful or very helpful in improving their knowledge of child growth and development, social and emotional learning,

### Who were the apprentices in this evaluation?

- Approximately half of apprentices were new to the ECE field, having entered the field between 2023 and 2024, whereas approximately 20 percent had been in the ECE field for five or more years.
- Over two-thirds of apprentices had less than an associate degree when they entered their program.
- Nearly all were women (99%).
- Apprentices were predominantly Latina (71 percent), followed by White (12 percent), Black (7 percent), Asian (3 percent), or other race-ethnicity (8 percent).
- About two-thirds (67%) spoke English and another language fluently, with Spanish and Arabic being the most common.
- Just under one-half (43%) of apprentices reported being born in a country other than the United States.

<sup>d</sup> Throughout this section, we highlight results from the survey based on data from 76 apprentices across the five RAs who completed surveys. Consistent with our mixed methods approach, we also include quotes from the subset of 14 apprentices who completed group interviews. Note that the percentages reported are drawn from the survey sample, and quotes are used to provide examples or elaborate on survey findings.





child development theory and its relation to teaching, and engaging with families to enhance children's learning. In addition, between 65 and 77 percent of apprentices reported the apprenticeship program was helpful or very helpful in increasing their knowledge about how children develop reading, science, and math skills, and about how a disability can affect child development. Apprentices who participated in group interviews also noted benefits

- **Supporting children's learning across multiple domains:** Between 84 and 92 percent of apprentices reported the apprenticeship was helpful or very helpful in improving the ways in which they support and extend children's reading, art, play, physical skills, and social and emotional development. Between 74 and 76 percent reported the apprenticeship was helpful or very helpful in improving the ways in which they support and extend children's math learning and scientific thinking.
- **Supporting children's unique needs:** Between 74 and 85 percent of apprentices reported the apprenticeship was helpful or very helpful in improving the ways they support children of all abilities, dual language learners, and children experiencing different challenges (e.g., children experiencing poverty, children with challenging behaviors).
- **Classroom practice:** Most apprentices (76-91%) indicated that the apprenticeship was helpful or very helpful in improving their classroom practice, including their use of play as an approach to learning; their ability to develop curriculum that is developmentally appropriate; their ability to observe, assess, and document child behavior; their approach to classroom management; and their use of different teaching strategies (e.g., planning, instructing, facilitating). Apprentices who participated in group interviews also reported that the program helped them with their classroom practice (see text box).

*"Before, when I was working with children, without having any knowledge about the levels that children have, I would take care of them, play with them, and teach them, but I didn't know about all these things in depth. Now, automatically, when I see a child, I can already measure them and know what level the child is at."*

**Apprentice, Alameda County**

*"Through these classes you learn a lot. I mean, you start to understand how the child develops from the time he is in his mother's womb. So, all of that helps you to know and understand the 'why' of some children's challenging behaviors."*

**Apprentice, Marin County**

*Many apprentices reported that participating in their RA program was making them feel more likely to continue working at their current place of employment and/or in the ECE field, but fewer apprentices indicated that they planned to be working at their current center or in the ECE field when asked about their longer-term career goals.*

A large majority of apprentices agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the apprenticeship program was making them feel more likely to continue in the ECE field (95%) or continue at their current center (83%).

However, these perceptions did not necessarily translate to their longer-term career plans: When asked where they saw themselves in three years from a list of options (e.g., still working in my current program, working in a different child care center, working as a public school teacher, furthering my education, working in a job outside early childhood, other), 51 percent indicated that they envisioned themselves still working at their current place of employment (the most common response among survey respondents), 32 percent indicated that they thought they would remain within the education field (e.g., at another center, family child care, public school teacher, etc.), and 11 percent indicated a desire

*"I feel more confident implementing lesson plans, curriculum, meeting with the families, knowing what to say."*

**Apprentice, Alameda County**



to further their education with a new degree. One apprentice who participated in a group interview viewed the program as a “stepping stone” in their career path (see text box).

These findings might indicate that participating in the apprenticeship encourages continued growth, which may or may not include continuing at their current center or in the ECE field.

*“Joining the apprenticeship is my stepping stone to being a teacher.” – Apprentice, San Diego County*

***Most apprentices thought that participating in their RA program would improve their and their family’s well-being.***

Most apprentices agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the RA would improve their family’s well-being (87%). This emerged in group interviews, as well (see text box).

Nearly all apprentices who had children agreed or strongly agreed that the RA helped enhance their parenting skills (95%).

*“I think it made my family’s well-being super positive. I’m the first in my family to go to college, and I didn’t have the luxury to go straight to college, I had to help and support my family. [Becoming an apprentice] really made them happy, and that’s healthy for everyone.” – Apprentice, Alameda County*

Approximately 80 percent (82%) of apprentices believed their salary would improve upon completing the program. Nearly 20 percent did not believe their salary would improve upon completing the program, which may reflect the chronic underfunding of the ECE workforce more broadly. Current wages reported by apprentices ranged between \$16 and \$39 per hour across all programs, indicating that most hourly wages for apprentices remained below a living wage for a single person in their area. For example, the median reported hourly wage for an apprentice in Los Angeles was \$17.27, while the living wage for a single person is \$28.71 or \$48.65 for a single person with one child.<sup>12</sup> Salary increases upon completing the apprenticeship would need to be large to bridge these pay gaps.

***Apprentices reported that all RA components contributed to their success.***

Apprentices were asked which components of their RA programs contributed to their success in the program, including course schedule flexibility, financial support, class location, stipends while working, raises, child care for their own children, and support from classmates, course instructors, coordinators, and supervisors/mentors/coaches. For each of these components, at least 80 percent of apprentices indicated that the component was either important or extremely important to their success. Apprentices who participated in group interviews highlighted how these multiple components of the program contributed to their success (see text box).

*“There were certain things that helped me to be in the program, for example, that the classes were in Spanish. Also, we received a sheet indicating that we had a parking permit while we were at the college, and, thanks to that, we didn’t have to worry about the parking ticket... It also helped that they gave us... an hour and a half at our childcare center [to study], so that made everything easier because, in my case, at the end of the week, my assignments were completed. I must also mention the books, with all that quality information in Spanish, in our language, that was perfect. All those aspects had a positive influence.” – Apprentice, Marin County*



### *Apprentices noted that a top challenge was balancing personal and professional responsibilities.*

Notably, one-third of apprentices (33%) indicated that they did not experience any challenges while participating in the program. This could be an indication of the robust support offered by the RA program, as mentioned above. For those who did report a challenge, survey respondents indicated experiencing these challenges “sometimes.”

Among survey respondents who experienced challenges, the most commonly reported challenge was balancing school and personal/family responsibilities (50% of apprentices). About one-third (32%) of apprentices reported difficulty finding time to complete homework and assignments, and 28 percent reported difficulty balancing school and job responsibilities. Apprentices who participated in group interviews highlighted the challenge of juggling multiple responsibilities, as well (see text box). That said, as noted by one apprentice, the RA also made it possible for apprentices to complete a degree while managing these multiple responsibilities (see text box).

*"Without a doubt, having a full-time job, being a mother, and studying at the same time has its ups and downs."* –Apprentice, Marin County

*"I never thought I could go to school and get my degree... I knew I couldn't afford it or leave work to go, but [the apprenticeship] made it so good and so workable for someone who needs to work full-time, take care of her son, but still get a degree... [And I] can move up."* – Apprentice, Alameda County

## Where to Go From Here

ECE RAs are rapidly expanding, and there is relatively little research to inform their development and implementation. The findings in this brief, based on insights from program partners and apprentices themselves, can help state, community, and workforce development leaders who are interested in implementing RAs that support apprentices in advancing their qualifications and careers, as well as their professional practice and financial well-being.

Below we offer some considerations for using research to inform those developing and implementing RAs, as well as directions for future research on RAs.

**If you are a state or local ECE administrator interested in launching and implementing an RA, we offer the following considerations:**

- **Design RAs to be accessible for all apprentices, many of whom find it challenging to participate in RAs while also managing a full-time job and personal responsibilities.** Apprentices noted that balancing personal and professional responsibilities was one of the top challenges they faced during their RA, and program partners and apprentices alike emphasized the importance of multiple RA components designed to facilitate apprentices' participation in RAs. Based on the findings from this evaluation, **RA components that can facilitate participation include:**
  - Financial support covering tuition and materials needed to complete college courses (e.g., laptops, internet, parking passes)
  - Child care while apprentices complete coursework or on-the-job training
  - Evening and weekend classes to accommodate work schedules
  - Appropriately paced (vs. overly accelerated) coursework
  - Opportunities to receive support from classmates, course instructors, coordinators, and supervisors/mentors/coaches

While these components were found to be helpful for apprentices who participated in these California-based RAs, it is possible that these and other components may be helpful in different





contexts depending on the funding streams and other resources that are or are not available in those settings.

**Questions to consider:**

- How will you design your RA program to be accessible for individuals balancing work and family obligations?
  - What components—beyond the required components of an RA—might your target apprentices need to fully participate and succeed in the program?
  - What flexible structures or supports can you implement to help apprentices manage competing demands?
  - Have you considered the specific needs of your local context?
- **Draw on the expertise of industry intermediaries, apprenticeship sponsors, and other partners.** All RAs in this evaluation were sponsored by ECEPTS, which also provided ongoing technical assistance as an industry intermediary, and engaged local employers and institutes of higher education as partners in the implementation of the RA (see Table 1). Program partners emphasized the value of the support they received from ECEPTS, which was instrumental in navigating registration requirements with the U.S. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship and the CA Division of Apprenticeship Standards. Industry intermediaries can provide critical expertise and training to support successful RA program development and implementation.

**Questions to consider:**

- What intermediaries and other partnerships might you engage to support the launch and registration of your RA?
  - What technical assistance will you need to meet federal or state requirements?
- **Identify and secure public and private funding sources to launch and sustain RAs.** RAs in this evaluation were funded by a combination of public and private funding sources, and program partners indicated that securing funding was one of the biggest challenges—both in launching and sustaining their RAs. They also noted that having dedicated paid staff would strengthen coordination of their RAs, as most staff were supporting the apprenticeship in addition to their regular work duties. Financial resources are needed to fund multiple aspects of RAs, including: paying apprentices; covering wage increases upon achieving program milestones; covering tuition, materials, and support services; allocating staff time and resources to manage and oversee the program. It is important for those seeking to implement RAs to understand the costs involved, and the need to secure public and private funds to launch and continue RAs over time.

**Questions to consider:**

- What funds do you need to cover the costs associated with your RA?
  - What funding sources will you use to launch your RA?
  - What funding sources will you use to sustain the program long-term?
  - How will you support meaningful wage progression for apprentices, especially given that many still earn poverty-level wages despite gains?
- **Monitor RA implementation and apprentices' outcomes.** In this evaluation, apprentices reported improvements in their knowledge, practice, and financial well-being. However, their long-term career plans varied, with some unsure about remaining at their current place of employment or in the ECE field. Many factors may contribute to ECE educators' career plans, and the extent to which RAs (on their own or in combination with other factors, such as wages) support retention is not clear. State and local ECE administrators seeking to implement RAs can consider how they will gather data and other feedback in the service of continuous improvement.



One possible approach is to conduct periodic surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with apprentices. These tools can help state and local leaders overseeing RAs better understand apprentices' experiences, satisfaction, barriers to participation, and perceived benefits—both during and after the program. Surveys can be short (10–15 minutes), online or on paper, and distributed every 6 to 12 months, minimizing respondent burden while still offering valuable insights. Focus groups typically require more time (about 60–90 minutes) but can provide richer, more nuanced data in the voices of apprentices themselves. These can be conducted annually or at key program milestones (e.g., completion of coursework or on-the-job training).

**Questions to consider:**

- What short- and long-term outcomes will you track to assess the effectiveness of your RA?
- How will you collect data to monitor participation, program completion, and reported benefits? For example, will you conduct surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with apprentices and RA partners? How often and when?
- Will you assess apprentices' retention in the ECE field or their advancement in employment over time?

**If you are a researcher interested in evaluating RAs, we offer the following questions to guide future research:**

- **Short-term outcomes of RAs for apprentices**
  - In what ways do RAs increase apprentices' knowledge, skills, and practice?
  - In what ways do RAs increase apprentices' general and financial well-being?
  - Do RAs increase apprentices' intention to stay in the ECE field? Why or why not?
  - Which apprentices experience benefits of RAs, and which apprentices do not? Why not?
  - In what ways might the benefits of RAs differ for pre-service versus existing educators?
- **Long-term outcomes of RAs for apprentices and the broader ECE field**
  - Do RAs increase apprentices' retention in the ECE field?
  - In what ways do RAs increase apprentices' career progression?
  - In what ways do RAs increase apprentices' well-being and financial stability in the long-term?
  - Do we see increases in the number of highly qualified educators staying in and applying for ECE positions?
  - Do we see greater numbers of people pursuing further degrees and credentials?
- **Facilitators and challenges to implementing RAs**
  - What factors facilitate implementation of RAs, and what factors present challenges? These may include internal factors related to components of the RAs themselves, as identified in this evaluation (e.g., course scheduling, support services, partnerships). They may also include external factors related to the surrounding context (e.g., local labor market conditions, ECE policies and regulations, community resources, characteristics of the population).
  - What support or technical assistance (e.g., from an industry intermediary with expertise in RA programs) is necessary to support state and local ECE administrators in developing and implementing RAs?

**The findings in this brief, based on insights from apprentices themselves, can help state, community, and workforce development leaders who are interested in implementing RAs that support apprentices in advancing their qualifications and careers, as well as their professional practice and financial well-being.**



## Methods

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) conducted an evaluation of registered apprenticeships located in five in California counties – Alameda, El Dorado, Los Angeles, Marin, and San Diego. The broad goal of this research was to understand how apprenticeships might affect recruitment, retention, compensation, and career pathways in the ECE field. CSCCE selected apprenticeship programs sponsored by ECEPTS because it is one of the largest and most widely replicated models of ECE apprenticeships in the country to date.

This mixed methods evaluation combined interviews with RA partners and surveys and group interviews with apprentices to create a holistic understanding of RA implementation and apprentices' experiences and perceptions of impacts.

**Partner interviews:** CSCCE interviewed 16 different apprenticeship program partners, including program coordinators, employers, mentors, and faculty members, to better understand development and implementation of RAs in their early phase. As noted above, participating RAs were sponsored by ECEPTS and received technical assistance and funding from ECEPTS during the development phase and through the first year of operation. Using a semi-structured interview, researchers asked interviewees questions related to their organization and its involvement in the development and implementation of the apprenticeship, their experiences with ECEPTS' technical assistance and sponsorship, challenges and facilitators to implementation, and their perceptions of apprentices' experiences in the program. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted via video meetings in July 2024. (For Alameda County, CSCCE interviewed program partners from Kidango, as they were in their first year of operation. CSCCE did not interview program partners from YMCA of the East Bay because they were already operational for several years. However, apprentices from both Kidango and YMCA of the East Bay were invited to participate in surveys and group interviews as described below.)

Interviews were transcribed and uploaded into a qualitative analysis software (Dedoose) and coded utilizing both emic and etic methods - an initial coding scheme was developed based on interview topics and the extant literature, which was then supplemented by Nvivo codes. After establishing agreement on the codes through the process of discussion until agreement, researchers coded all 16 interviews, then examined code counts and the co-occurrence of codes in order to condense and reduce codes to common themes, in particular themes related to the facilitators and challenges of creating a registered apprenticeship.

**Apprentice surveys and group interviews:** The survey and group interview protocols contained questions regarding current apprentices' perceived impact of participating in the apprenticeship, barriers and facilitators to their success, and demographics. ECEPTS provided administrative data containing the contact information for all current apprentices involved in these five programs. All current apprentices received an email soliciting their feedback with an individualized link to a Qualtrics survey in July and August of 2024. Survey completion took approximately 25 minutes, and participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card as an incentive. A total of 76 apprentices participated in the survey.

Upon completing the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a group interview. Should they be interested, CSCCE asked them to provide an email address that could be used to contact them. CSCCE then recruited participants from those who indicated interest, attempting to get 6 participants from each program.



To further increase participation, group interviews were offered in Spanish to those who preferred to participate using their home language, along with evening and weekend times so as not to interfere with school or work. In the end, CSCCE had a sample of convenience with participants from every program; however, programs were not evenly represented, due to busy schedules and illness. CSCCE conducted four semi-structured group interviews with a total of 14 current apprentices, one of which was in Spanish, each lasting approximately 1.5 hours. Participants received \$150 gift card to Amazon as an incentive for participation. Interviews were transcribed and translated if necessary.

Survey data were cleaned, and then basic descriptive analyses were conducted, analyzing the frequency of responses on survey items for apprentices both overall and by program. Transcripts were uploaded into a qualitative analysis software (Dedoose) and coded utilizing both emic and etic methods. After establishing agreement on the codes through the process of discussion until agreement, researchers coded all 4 group interviews, then examined code counts and the co-occurrence of codes in order to condense and reduced codes to common themes regarding how the program supported their development as an educator, along with their professional and personal well-being, and the likelihood of them remaining in the field upon completion of the registered apprenticeship.

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**The National Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Center is a joint research and technical assistance center that equips state and local leaders to drive change in ECE workforce policy.** To learn more about the Center, please visit our website <https://www.nationaleceworkforcecenter.org/>.

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