

# Building Knowledge to Lead Change

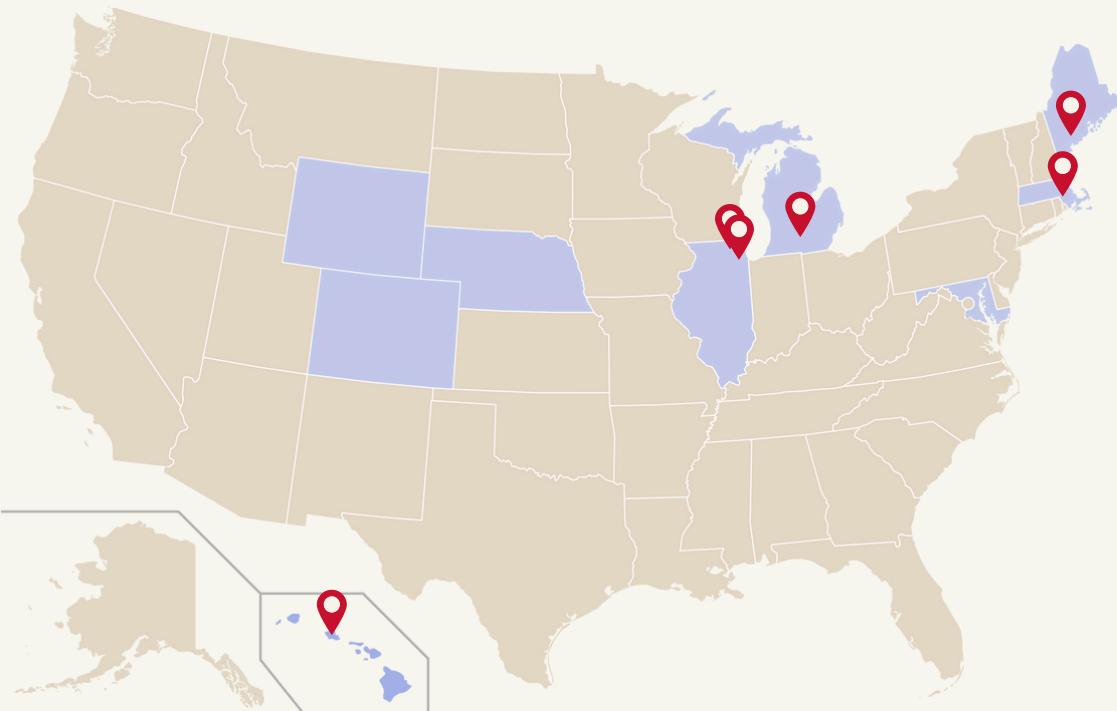
The Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) advances quality, sustainable early care and education (ECE) systems by building the knowledge, tools, and partnerships needed to improve financing strategies nationwide.



Here's a snapshot of what we've been up to in 2025:

## Partnering with States and Communities

In 2025, CELFE partnered with states and communities to redesign compensation strategies, develop salary scales, and strengthen the financial foundations of early care and education systems, supporting leaders in making more equitable and sustainable decisions.



CELFE helped us see compensation through a new lens and understand how cost modeling and salary scales can guide stronger workforce strategies. This work will help to move our Compensation Design Team's goals forward and inform future ECE initiatives.

— Vivian Eto & Terry Lock, Hawai'i ECE Compensation Design Team

At a pivotal time for early childhood in Illinois, CELFE's updated Chicago Cost Model provides providers, policymakers, and advocates with a clear, shared understanding of the true cost of quality early childhood programs.

— Bryan Stokes, Education Portfolio Director, Robert R. McCormick Foundation

- Since 2021, CELFE has helped nine states and two communities rethink their early ECE funding strategies.
- In 2025, we partnered with Hawai'i; Massachusetts; Maine; Michigan; Chicago and Lake County, Illinois.

## Creating New Tools



In 2025, we strengthened and expanded our data tools to give policymakers, advocates, researchers, and communities clearer insight into how early learning is funded and where systems need support.



### The Shortchanged Project

[The Shortchanged Project](#) tracks and compares state-by-state investments in early learning.

In 2025, we launched The Shortchanged Project website and our second report, analyzing 2022 federal and state spending on the nation's youngest learners.



### Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System Dashboard

[The CECIDS Dashboard](#) offers an interactive, city-wide view of integrated early childhood data, including population demographics, program participation, and service eligibility information, to help families, program administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders understand and plan for early childhood services across Chicago.

## Elevating the National Conversation



We published [30+ digital resources](#) on our website, sharing insights that contribute to stronger early care and education financing nationwide. Through collaboration, convenings, and participation in conferences, CELFE helped build the field's knowledge, elevate key issues, and support ongoing national conversations around sustainable, equitable ECE funding.



This [strategy spotlight](#) and [webinar series](#) explore how states can transform fragmented early learning funding into a coherent, equitable mixed delivery system centered on children and families.



This [video](#) explains the unintended effects of expanding public pre-K and highlights why solutions must support infant and toddler care without increasing classroom ratios.

In 2025, we also broadened communications and expanded our reach:

- [4](#) Cost Modeling Technical Network meetings
- [10](#) conferences attended and presented at
- [Over 3,600](#) LinkedIn followers
- [Over 1,200](#) webinar registrations