



Can emails and financial incentives increase early childhood education workforce members' participation in professional development?

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest conducted a **study of emails and differing financial incentives** designed to encourage early childhood education (ECE) workforce members to participate in Oregon's ECE career lattice—a system that promotes continued professional development. Little existing research documents the most effective ways to encourage ECE workforce members to participate in a career lattice system and increase their education and training.

This infographic presents information on the different types of emails and incentives tested through the randomized trials used in the study. It also shows the potential impact of the incentives on Oregon ECE workforce members' career lattice sign-ups and movement, college credits earned, professional development training hours, scholarship use, retention at the same workplace, motivation to take college coursework or complete an educational degree in the future, and self-identification as early learning professionals.

To Oregon's early childhood education workforce

Subject Learn how to increase your education and training

WHAT TYPES OF EMAILS WERE TESTED?

REL Northwest conducted two randomizations to test the effects of three different email interventions on participation in professional development. Individuals in the treatment groups received up to five emails between August 2018 and July 2019.



Sign-up randomization

A treatment group received an email inviting them to **sign up for the ECE career lattice**.

The control group did not receive this email but could **still sign up for the career lattice online**.



Financial incentive and scholarship randomization

One treatment group received an email offering **earlier financial awards for advancing to certain steps on the career lattice**.

One treatment group received an email that they were automatically **enrolled in a scholarship for community college classes**.

The control group did not receive these emails **but was eligible for financial awards** at a later career lattice step and **could apply for the scholarship online**.



HOW DID ECE WORKFORCE MEMBERS RECEIVE AND INTERACT WITH THE EMAILS?



All the emails were delivered successfully.

84%

At least 84 percent of recipients across the three treatment groups **opened at least one email**, according to email platform reports.

25%–34%

Between 25 percent and 34 percent of the three treatment groups **engaged with the emails by clicking on a link in the message**.



Send

How did the interventions impact ECE workforce members?¹



Sign-up randomization



Sending up to five emails to encourage career lattice sign-ups did not appear to impact the percentage of ECE workforce members who signed up or remained at the same workplace. It also did not appear to impact ECE workforce members' self-identification as early learning professionals.

Financial incentive randomization



ECE workforce members who received an email offering financial awards for reaching certain career lattice steps completed more community-based training hours on average (42.5 hours) than ECE workforce members who were not offered the incentive (32.2 hours).



The financial incentive intervention did not have a detectable impact on career lattice movement, college credit hours earned, retention at the same workplace, motivation to take college coursework or complete a degree, or self-identification as early learning professionals.

Scholarship randomization



Emails notifying ECE workforce members of automatic scholarship enrollment did not have a detectable impact on scholarship use, progress on the career lattice, college credit hours earned, retention at the same workplace, or self-identification as early learning professionals.



The automatic scholarship enrollment intervention positively impacted ECE workforce members' motivation to take a college course in the next year and to take a college course or earn a degree in the next five years.²

What do the findings tell us?

Study findings suggest the need to improve how information is provided to ECE workforce members about the workforce registry, career lattice, and available financial incentives and scholarships. Future email campaigns targeting the ECE workforce might increase engagement through the use of simplified and personalized messages, trusted organization logos and names, and content in multiple languages.

Additional supports such as release time may reduce barriers to participation in professional development, as a small number of study participants reported lacking time to take coursework.

A longer study time period and further research on barriers to participation, ECE workforce members' motivation to progress through the career lattice, and different incentives may inform adjustments to the career lattice system.

References

¹ A state policy change reduced the study period from 16 to 12 months. This may have prevented the study team from detecting changes in longer-term outcomes such as progress in the career lattice.

² High rates of survey nonresponse for motivation outcomes mean these results should be interpreted with caution.

Read the report: Pierson, A., Cannon, J., Perera, R., Mihaly, K., & LeMahieu, R. (2021). *Professional development incentives for Oregon's early childhood education workforce: A randomized study*. (REL 2021-111). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.