

A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems* Summary of 6 Policy Areas

Policy Area 1: Professional Standards

Professional standards define the *what*, or the content, of professional preparation and ongoing development. Most professions require staff to meet both professional preparation and continuing professional development requirements; they require professionals to demonstrate their preparedness to successfully fulfill their job duties and to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. State policies should specify qualifications and ongoing development required for all early care and education professionals—from teacher assistants to trainers and higher education faculty, family child care providers, licensors, resource and referral staff, and program, school, district, and agency administrators. These specifications should address levels and content of education as well as ongoing development. The preparation and ongoing development requirements for these various roles also should be explicitly detailed in career-pathway policies aligning and connecting content.

Policy Area 2: Career Pathways

Professional standards, described in the previous policy area, should align and create coherent career pathways for early childhood professionals. State policy should support continuous progress of individuals. Early childhood professionals need to be able to plan and sequence the achievement of increased qualifications, understand the professional possibilities resulting from such acquisitions, and be appropriately compensated. Policies should institutionalize or embed pathways in all sectors and for all roles—both direct service (those individuals working with young children and their families) and nondirect service (those working on behalf of children and families in training, resource, and other administrative roles). Policies should recognize and support individuals entering the system from other fields and those that move in the early care and education field and among its sectors.

Policy Area 3: Articulation

Part of creating a career pathway and building capacity to meet required professional standards involves developing and enforcing policies around articulation. Articulation includes the transfer of professional development participants' credentials, courses, credits, degrees, etc., as well as student performance-based competencies, from one program or institution to another, ideally without a loss of credits. States should require colleges and universities to form articulation agreements that assist early childhood professionals in moving seamlessly through and across undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Grants or specific directions for resource allocations should be attached to such policy requirements; colleges and universities will need fiscal support to change or augment long-standing, institutionalized processes.

Policy Area 4: Advisory Structure

Professional development system coordination does not happen by chance. Effective systems are supported by a policy requiring a specific group of people to focus on this work. State policy should require the creation of an advisory structure to examine needs and provides policy recommendations to the entity or combined entities funding the professional development system. The advisory body should be free standing and have some authority or

direct link to authority in the state's governance structure. For this group's work to be recognized and valued across sectors, its composition must include representatives from the diverse settings, auspices, and roles of the early childhood field and professional development system supports. Requiring this makeup sets the context for ensuring cross-sector, integrated recommendations. The work of the advisory structure also should be transparent, taking input and feedback from individuals and other stakeholders. Each sector must respect and be willing to collaborate with other sectors to create an integrated system that does not depend on the different funding streams for different types of programs or families served.

Policy Area 5: Data

Data are essential to gauge any impacts and systems change. Workforce and professional development data inform planning, evaluation, and quality assurance and accountability. Data may be gathered and maintained by multiple partners such as workforce/practitioner registries, researchers at higher education institutions, and others. State policies should require the methods and collection of specific data and also mandate nonduplication of efforts, cross-sector data collection, sharing, and alignment. Policies also should require comprehensive workforce studies at regular intervals and ongoing collection of professional development utilization and improvement indicators.

Additionally, policies should include specific requirements for disaggregated data by type of setting, demographics, and primary financing source(s). Data about the workforce and how the professional development system is working helps the advisory structure and other administrators assess how individuals are benefiting and how the system entities and delivery are changing to be more effective. Projective statistics are the basis for evaluations and inform strategic planning.

Policy Area 6: Financing

All systems require funding to operate. Resources have to come with direction. Professional development systems benefit from financing policies that ensure monies are directed where they are most needed and that they are used efficiently. Some degree of specificity must exist to do the needed or newly required work so that funds are not used to backfill gaps. This direction is especially important in a field in which resources are so scarce. State policies should support the financing of integrated professional development systems in four specific areas:

- 1. Financial support for early childhood professionals** to obtain education and ongoing development, based on need.
- 2. Financial support for programs/workplaces** that facilitate professional development through resources for release time and substitute staff, teacher mentors and coaches, purchase of materials and equipment, and other supports.
- 3. Explicit rewards and compensation parity** for attainment of additional education and development. Other financing mechanisms such as higher reimbursement rates and grants that reflect the cost of quality do not always take into account or sufficiently address the cost of compensation parity.
- 4. Financing of the professional development system infrastructure**, which may be linked and/or embedded in the state's larger early childhood system. Infrastructure pieces that require financing may include the advisory body, data systems, support to higher education institutions and training systems, and quality assurance processes.

*Lemoine, Sara, NAEYC Public Policy Report, 2008