

Building Integrated Professional Development Systems in Early Childhood Recommendations for States

The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) is working with states to ensure that early childhood practitioners are highly effective in supporting the development and learning of every young child, including those with diverse abilities. The centerpiece of this effort involves supporting a state-level planning process that leads to a single, integrated professional development system that incorporates professional learning resources and opportunities across all sectors of early childhood (e.g., child care, Head Start, early intervention, early childhood special education, and public pre-kindergarten). The following recommendations grow out of this work and are relevant for other state-level efforts, particularly those related to federal initiatives reflecting the recent emphasis on early childhood cross-sector collaboration and planning to improve early childhood programs and services.

Recommendation 1.

States should create structures that support an integrated, cross-sector professional development system.

The cornerstone of these structures are heavyweight state-level teams—people who represent the various early childhood sectors who have the influence and authority to transcend traditional boundaries to create new ways of working together and innovating to transform professional development.

Figure 1
A Conceptual Framework for Professional Development in Early Childhood



Recommendation 2.

States should reach consensus on a single definition of professional development that emphasizes both the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions and the application of this knowledge in practice.

The NPDCI conceptual framework and definition of professional development (see Endnote) provides a common language around professional development issues that helps state planners frame the problem and generate effective solutions. (See Figure 1: A conceptual framework for professional development in early childhood)

Specifically, the *who*, *what*, and *how* framework helps planners identify pressing challenges related to creating cross-sector systems of professional development, to categorize these as either *infrastructure* issues (outer circle) or *core* to delivering professional development in terms of evidence-based content and methods (inner circle), and to begin to make connections across these dimensions.

Recommendation 3.

States should identify evidence-based practices that promote the development and learning of every child and make these practices the centerpiece of their professional development system.

Currently, too many professional development efforts in early childhood focus on general knowledge rather than the specific instructional and intervention approaches that respond to the most pressing needs of young diverse learners and their families. An evidence-based approach to professional development requires that state planners: (1) determine which educational programs and practices have been validated through research and found to be effective for use with young children with diverse learning characteristics; and (2) support practitioners in using research, along with other sources of evidence (including professional and family wisdom and values, and assessment information that practitioners themselves gather) to make sound decisions in practice.

Endnote

Professional development is defined as “facilitated teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and dispositions as well as the application of this knowledge in practice” (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009; National Professional Development Center on Inclusion [NPDCI], 2008, p. 3). The key components of the PD definition include: (1) characteristics and contexts of the learners and the children they serve and the PD providers (the *who*), (2) the content focus of professional development (*what* professionals should know and be able to do), and (3) the organization and facilitation of learning experiences (the *how*, or the methods and approaches used to implement PD).

Resources

The Big Picture Planning Guide:

Building Cross-Sector Professional Development Systems in Early Childhood

<http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/files/NPDCI-Big-Picture-Planning-Guide-3rd-edition-7-2011.pdf>

What Do We Mean by Professional Development in the Early Childhood Field?

<http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/files/NPDCI-ProfessionalDevelopment-03-04-08.pdf>

Buysse, V., Winton, P.J., & Rous, B. (2009). *Reaching consensus on a definition of professional development for the early childhood field. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 28* (4), 235-243.

CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge

<http://connect.fpg.unc.edu>

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