

Developing Practitioner Competencies that Support Inclusion: An Innovative Approach

How is your state approaching the development of professional competencies that support inclusion? Read about Florida's work and add your examples.



Crystal Bishop

In Florida, we are committed to an integrated, cross-sector early childhood professional development (ECPD) system. One component of the system focuses on practitioner competencies. Like many states, we are developing competencies for early childhood practitioners in the context of inclusion. We acknowledge that previous training in both early childhood education and inclusion might vary widely across professional disciplines. As such, we would like to develop competencies that can be used to inform ECPD for the broad spectrum of early childhood practitioners who might be providing supports and services to young children with disabilities and their families in inclusive early learning settings. Two major initiatives, the Florida Early Care and Education Professional Development Initiative and Florida Expanding Opportunities have worked closely together over the past several years to develop competencies for early care and education practitioners working with all children, targeted competencies for specialists supporting inclusion, and competencies for individuals providing technical assistance in early childhood settings. These three sets of competencies will be used in conjunction with one another to inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of ECPD for early childhood practitioners from various disciplines. We are in the process of presenting Florida's Targeted Competencies for Specialists Supporting Inclusion to professional organizations for feedback, with plans to disseminate them within the year.

Recognizing there are several different approaches to developing competencies that support inclusion, we are interested in how other states have or are approaching this issue.

About the Author

Crystal Bishop is a 4th year doctoral student studying early childhood special education at the University of Florida. Crystal's professional interests involve the intersection of early childhood policy, research, and practice. She has been involved with Florida Expanding Opportunities since

her first year of doctoral study, and has worked closely with an interdisciplinary team from this initiative to help develop Florida's Targeted Competencies for Specialists Supporting Inclusion.

Starter Questions

- How have other states approached the development of competencies for early care and education practitioners to ensure that children with disabilities and families are provided high quality supports in inclusive early childhood settings?
- In what ways are other states ensuring their competencies can be used to inform a cross-sector PD system that is inclusive of practitioners from different disciplines?

Related content

- Competencies for Early Childhood Educators in the Context of Inclusion: Issues and Guidance for States

Add Comment

aligning the three sets of competencies

Crystal, Thank you so much for sharing the innovative approach to early childhood competencies and inclusion developed in FL. In some states there are different sets of early childhood competencies that are seemingly unrelated to each other, making it difficult to plan and implement cross-sector professional development organized around a coherent set of competencies. How did you ensure that the three sets of early childhood competencies in FL are aligned with each other? I'm very interested in the steps that you took and advice you and your colleagues have for other states who might want to embark (or have embarked) on a similar quest.

Reply

aligning the three sets of competencies

Thanks for this question, Pam. Although different committees took the lead on the development of the three sets of competencies--the steering committee for the Florida Early Care and Education Professional Development Initiative Committee drafted the competencies for early care and education practitioners and the competencies for TA specialists, and Expanding Opportunities drafted the Targeted Competencies for Specialists Supporting Inclusion--these two committees have worked very closely to ensure the three sets of competencies are aligned and complementary to one another. We have taken several steps to help us during these iterative processes:

1. Both work groups are inter-agency, with representation from various constituents involved in early learning in the state of Florida.
2. There are several members across these agencies that are involved with both work groups, which helps facilitate information sharing.
3. At each stage of drafting the competencies, the two groups have shared drafts with one another for feedback and insight as to how to best use the competencies together.
4. Although each work group meets quarterly to continue their work individually, we have committed to have at least one annual meeting where the two groups come together to review current drafts of the competencies, share feedback, and make plans for disseminating and using the competencies in a state-wide, comprehensive early childhood professional development system.
5. We developed a form for gathering and sharing information between the groups during meetings when we do not come together. One of the group members who serves on both

committees acts a liaison to gather and document this information, which is then reported at the beginning of each meeting.

We have been extremely fortunate to have such dedicated inter-agency representation and to have so many individuals committed to the depth of collaboration it has taken to align our competencies and devise a system for using them in conjunction with one another. Some of the measures we have taken to help in this process have been in place since the competency work began, and others have been adopted further along in the process, but the collaboration between the two groups has been invaluable to our work.

Reply

aligning the three sets of competencies

Thanks Crystal for this thorough explanation of the process. Very helpful. I also noticed from looking at the competency documents that they all were based on the same basic domains. Is that correct? If you were going to give 1-2 pieces of advice to states wanting to embark on something like this, what would you say?

Reply

aligning the three sets of competencies

Yes, we did align the domains across the Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Practitioners and Florida's Targeted Competencies for Specialists Supporting Inclusion to help link the competencies together.

As for advice, I can certainly share my perspective from working on this project, but I would also welcome other members of both Florida Expanding Opportunities and the Florida Early Care and Education Professional Development Initiative to share their insights, as this was my first experience with this type of work.

One of the things we as a group have really worked to do is stay focused on the "big picture." Because the ultimate goal in Florida is to create a cross-sector, comprehensive statewide system for designing, delivering, and evaluating PD in early childhood, we began by mapping out all the activities we needed to work on to accomplish this goal. Expanding Opportunities is focused most specifically on increasing opportunities for high quality inclusion for children with or at risk for disabilities and their families, so it was essential that we think about our work in the context of a system to enhance early learning experiences for all young children. Developing the competencies for specialists supporting inclusion and aligning them with the core competencies for early care and education practitioners and TA providers is just one component of the system we're trying achieve, so we've had to balance taking on the competencies, but also staying focused on how they will fit into the bigger picture. We frequently revisit our original plan and discuss how we will integrate the competencies into the larger PD system. We've also begun to articulate what this integration might look like through a series of case stories in our competency document, which I think has been incredibly helpful for us as a team and for those who are seeing the competencies for the first time.

Reply

aligning the three sets of competencies

Thanks Crystal,

I really like the case stories that were in the last draft of the document about the competencies that I saw; they bring the competencies to life and also demonstrate the alignment. Is the document in its final form yet and available to share? It would be great if others could see it.

Reply

inclusion

It might also be a good idea to check on the Early Learning Challenge Grant applications to see what folks addressed in workforce development. In Ohio, we are developing a rubric Quality Inclusion Reflection Tool to identify elements for the broader early learning community in recognizing if they are indeed ready to work with districts in implementing IEPs and supporting children with disabilities. The intent is for the tool to be done with stakeholders and plan for the future. Although competencies are not directly referenced, the elements can be connected to competencies.

Reply

inclusion

That's exciting, Kim. Would you be willing to post the tool when complete?

Reply

inclusion

yes

Reply

inclusion rubric

Thanks Kim. When do you think the tool will be available? That will be of interest to many states. Has the tool been piloted yet in Ohio? Looking forward to learning more.

THanks

pam

Reply

inclusion rubric

Thank you for sharing this information, Kim. I will look forward to seeing a draft of the tool and hearing how you have used it in Ohio!

Reply

Inclusion competencies

In Oregon, we are planning to infuse inclusion competencies that were developed by the Oregon Early Childhood Inclusion Collaborative (OECIC) with current Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education competencies through the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon

Registry. We will be holding a statewide meeting in November to move our cross-sector professional development framework forward as our state has appointed a new Early Learning Council who have professional development under their charge. In an effort to share the work that has been completed over the past 3 years in partnership with NPDCI, we will complete an executive summary of our accomplishments and resources.

Tom Udell and Patti Blasco
Center on Inclusion and
Early Childhood Care & Education
www.centeroninclusion.org

Reply

Inclusion competencies

Wonderful Patti. I know there has been a huge amount of effort put into this. Hope you will share the Executive Summary when it is ready. You mention the link with the Oregon Registry. That seems like an important piece of this work.

Crystal, are you all thinking about how the competencies in FL might link to a registry, career ladder/lattice or other infrastructure components? I know this is all very difficult to accomplish but seems important when trying to avoid the phenomenon that sometimes happens...competencies get developed and then sit on a shelf without really being used.

Reply

Inclusion competencies

Pam, we have begun discussions about linking the competencies to a registry and career ladder, but we are just in the beginning stages of this process.

Patti, it sounds like Oregon is much farther along in this process. I would love to hear more about how you have gone about this difficult task and what your advice to us might be as we get ready to tackle this issue.

Reply