Planning and Implementing Early Childhood and School-Age Workforce Initiatives

ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

National Center on Child Care Professional
Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives (PDW Center)
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To support the Office of Child Care's and the Office of Head Start's priority of a strong early childhood (EC) and school-age (SA) workforce, the PDW Center developed a series of briefs, a guide to planning and implementing, and a tool on targeting workforce investments. These resources are designed to help State/Territory decisionmakers increase and retain a skilled workforce by improving their workplace conditions, compensation, and access to professional development (PD). These resources and full citations are available at *https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strengthening-early-childhood-and-school-age-workforce.*

Aligned PD systems can help States/Territories reduce duplication, streamline processes, and increase career mobility. **Every reduction in cost, time, and attrition makes it possible to target more funding to program stability and staff salaries.**

INTRODUCTION

This guide provides five suggested steps:

    Step 1. **Conduct a Scan of Current Initiatives and Investments**;

    Step 2. **Develop or Refine the Goals and Outcomes**;

    Step 3. **Determine the Fit and Feasibility and Readiness to Change**;

    Step 4. **Select an Approach and Develop an Implementation Plan**; and

    Step 5. **Implement the Plan and Monitor Results**.

Many of the issues addressed in this guide are interrelated and reflect the complexity of developing an **aligned PD system**.

> *State/Territory aligned PD Systems consist of interrelated efforts, services, and supports that address the continuum of workforce needs with a common goal of building and sustaining an effective workforce. PD systems include education, training, and TA. Exactly which sectors and systems compose a State/Territory's vision for an aligned PD system depends on its context, including its political and fiscal situation, where and how the PD system fits in its larger EC and SA systems, and its specific PD goals and priorities. A State/Territory's context can dictate the best approach(es) for successful alignment efforts.*

Using this guide to support planning and implementation will be most successful if the State/Territory can designate a planning and implementation team(s) and timeline for working through each of the steps. Planning and/or implementation team members should include the full range of policymakers and other leaders who contribute to building, enhancing, and administering aligned PD systems:

- Child Care and Development Fund Administrators and staff;

- Head Start State and National Collaboration Directors, large Head Start grantees, and other Head Start/Early Head Start leaders;

- EC Specialists in State Departments of Education, Early Intervention and Special Education PD and TA coordinators, and other leaders in State Departments of Education;

- Representatives from boards of regents, higher education boards, or higher education organizations;

- PD system administrators;

- Child care resource and referral administrators, training organization directors and trainers, higher education institution administrators and EC/child development faculty, and TA organization administrators and providers;

- Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care, and other EC and SA professional association administrators and staff; and

- Other EC, SA, and youth development leaders and key partners.

Because the PD approaches that States/Territories select will likely require repackaging of existing investments and a move away from "business as usual," it is important to devote adequate time and resources to decisionmaking and implementation planning. While effective systems change typically takes place over a number of years, establishing incremental steps and progress indicators can help maintain momentum and ultimately achieve the desired goal. It will likely take more than one work session for a planning and implementation team to review and discuss each step. Before using the guide's considerations, a team should determine if any of these steps have already been started or completed.

STEP 1. CONDUCT A SCAN OF CURRENT INITIATIVES AND INVESTMENTS

To inform policy decisions, the State/Territory planning and implementation team should begin with a systematic scan of existing data on the status of the EC and SA workforce and current investments across the system. The team can use the results of the scan to understand the status of current investments and approaches and to identify gaps. The comprehensive scan would target four key components:

A. Basic data on the workforce;

B. Funding level and sources;

C. Goals and progress indicators for existing initiatives; and

D. Alignment of current initiatives.

The purpose of addressing each component and the questions that establish baseline estimates of workforce and systems status are described on the following pages.

A. Basic Data on the Workforce

Purpose: Establish baseline estimates of workforce status to identify targets/goals of system approaches.

- What education levels do members of the State/Territory EC and SA workforce have?
    - Are there differences across roles—direct service professionals and those who work on behalf of young children and their families?
    - Are there differences across **settings**?

        Settings *are where services are provided, including direct and nondirect service programs, organizations, and agencies. Settings and their administration often cross multiple EC and SA sectors and, increasingly, they cross related systems. They also can and often do have a combination of the following characteristics.*
        - *Public and private;*
        - *Profit and nonprofit;*
        - *Faith-based;*
        - *Community-based;*
        - *School-based;*
        - *Home-based;*
        - *Employer-sponsored; and*
        - *Licensed and license-exempt.*

    - Are there differences across **sectors**?

        The EC and SA system is composed of ***sectors.*** *Sectors are delineated by their discrete funding streams, regulations, and requirements. Because early intervention and special education services cross and serve multiple sectors, they are sometimes described as part of each of these sectors and sometimes described as separate systems. However, for the purposes of discussing and framing intentional PD system alignment, they are defined in this guide as EC and SA primary sectors to underscore their importance, as well as their discrete professional preparation and development history, delivery, and requirements. The EC and SA primary sectors include:*
        - *Child Care;*
        - *Head Start/Early Head Start;*
        - *Public preschool/primary education; and*
        - *Early intervention/special education.*

    - Are there differences by age group of children in care (e.g., infant/toddler, preschool, SA)?
- What languages are spoken in the workforce? What are the implications for access to training and coursework?
- Is any data available at the State/Territory or community level related to the salaries, benefits, workplace conditions, or turnover rates within the EC and SA workforce by education level or by age group of children served?
- Are there particular projected needs for PD and quality improvement that the State/Territory has identified to best serve its population?
- Is there any additional national data that would be useful to inform State/Territory decisionmaking (e.g., data on compensation by sector or by education level)?

B. Funding Level and Sources

Purpose: Establish a detailed map of system investments and options for repackaging investments to achieve desired goals.

- What Federal, State/Territory, and local funding sources are currently being accessed to pay for PD and quality improvements?
  - What is the current funding level for each PD or related quality improvement system element (e.g., Quality Rating and Improvement System [QRIS], the registry, scholarships for credit courses, training, TA for program improvement, career advising)?
  - What percentage of current investments is used to support improving salaries, benefits, and workplace conditions?
  - Have funding sources or levels changed in the past 5 years? Does the State/Territory expect any changes in the level of funding in the next budget cycle?
  - Are there any current conditions that provide an opportunity to refocus investments to have a greater impact on salaries, benefits, and workplace conditions?
- What Federal, State/Territory, and local funding sources are currently used to pay for access to training and education for the EC and SA workforce?
  - What percentage of current investments supports access to degrees or credentials?
  - What percentage of current investments supports inservice training that is aligned with an individual PD plan or program improvement plan?
  - What is the current funding level for each initiative? Has it changed in the past 5 years? Does the State/Territory expect any changes in the level of funding in the next budget cycle?
- What proportion of State/Territory expenditures to promote PD and reduce turnover is used to support salaries, benefits, and work environment initiatives?
  - Has this proportion changed in the past 5 years?

C. Goals and Progress Indicators for Existing Initiatives

Purpose: Examine the array of existing system activities dedicated to supporting access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions and the extent to which they are achieving desired goals.

- What are the stated goals and purposes of currently available initiatives to improve access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions?
- Who is eligible for each initiative (e.g., infant/toddler teachers, pre-K teachers, SA staff, family child care providers)?
- How many participants did each initiative have last year as compared to the total potentially eligible in the workforce?
- How are results and/or outcomes of these initiatives measured? What have the results been in the past 5 years?

D. Alignment of Current Initiatives

Purpose: Examine how existing activities align to incentivize participation and achievement.

- How, if at all, do current initiatives align with each other and with other features of the PD system to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce? (For example, an aligned combination of initiatives might include scholarships and supports for higher education, onsite TA to support application of new knowledge to practice, QRIS standards, and/or a career lattice to recognize educational attainment.)

- How are current initiatives to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce aligned with the State/Territory child care subsidy system and payment rates for providers? (For example, higher payment rates go to providers that have staff with credentials or degrees; that use a salary schedule based on qualifications, ongoing PD, and performance; or that conduct an environment assessment that examines compensation, benefits, and support for PD.)

- How are current initiatives to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce aligned with other priority strategies to improve school readiness and success from birth through age 13, including any place-based and community initiatives in the State/Territory? (For example, training and TA related to implementing early learning and development standards offered to staff across settings and sectors to promote shared understanding of school readiness expectations; community collaborations between public schools and local Head Start/Early Head Start grantees to deliver public pre-K programming ensure equitable compensation for certified teachers across the settings.)

STEP 2. DEVELOP OR REFINE THE GOALS AND OUTCOMES

In this step, the State/Territory planning and implementation team can review the outcomes of the scan. They can assess the degree to which current approaches are (or are not) meeting their expectations and work toward clarification of the goals and desired outcomes for the workforce.

Goals and Outcomes

Purpose: Define the goal and outcomes as concretely as possible.

- What is the vision for a supported and effective EC and SA workforce in our State/Territory?
- Are there articulated goals and outcomes for PD and quality improvement of the EC and SA workforce?
  - Do they include specific goals for access to PD, equitable compensation, and positive work environments?
- Is there sufficient buy-in and consensus in the State/Territory regarding the goals?
  - If not, is there a vehicle or body that can raise the issue of access to PD, equitable compensation, and positive work environments in order to develop consensus?
- Which stakeholders should be involved in any revision or fine-tuning of State/Territory goals and policy so that revisions include the issues of access to PD, compensation, and work environment?

- Does the State/Territory have access to these vehicles, bodies, or stakeholders? If not, what partners could engage the needed stakeholders?
- How can this effort be used to unify the field?
- Has there been substantial change in the research since the last PD system plan or evaluation was completed?
- How will we success be measured?

STEP 3. DETERMINE THE FIT AND FEASIBILITY AND READINESS TO CHANGE

Conduct a fit and feasibility analysis to determine what combination of policies and allocation of resources is most likely to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. The purpose of a fit and feasibility analysis is to examine an array of options and assess the degree to which each option, or package of options, could be successfully implemented in the State/Territory. The components of a fit and feasibility analysis include:

- Identification and validation of need—questions for initial considerations; and
- Consideration of required changes—key questions for indepth considerations that create readiness for change.

Identification and Validation of Need

Purpose: Ensure that PD system stakeholders understand the aligned approach and are committed to successful implementation.

- Is there consensus among stakeholders that access to PD, equitable compensation, and positive workplace conditions are important investments—for children, families, the workforce, the economy?
- Is the existing evidence on the need for improved access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions perceived as valid by the various stakeholders in the State/Territory?
- How will the efforts to improve PD access, compensation, and workplace conditions include and serve professionals in all/targeted settings and sectors and fit with other **related systems** and **quality improvement efforts**?

  > *Related systems* include 1) family support (which may provide parenting education), home visiting, economic supports, and other services and 2) health and mental health, which may provide preventive care, screenings, and supports to access health providers, as well as instructional support.

  > PD systems are an integral part of other ***quality improvement efforts*** in States and Territories. These efforts may include:
  > - *Licensing;*
  > - *QRIS; and*
  > - *State/Territory system-building initiatives/plans (e.g., Child Care Development Fund, State Early Childhood Advisory Council, Head Start/Early Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grants, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Grants, Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant, etc.).*

- What are the unique needs of the infant/toddler and SA community and how will the efforts to improve PD access, compensation, and workplace conditions meet them?

- What are the unique needs of those who provide PD (trainers, TA providers, faculty, and other adult educators), and how will the efforts to improve PD access, compensation, and workplace conditions meet them?

- How will the efforts to improve PD access, compensation, and workplace conditions "fit" with community values, including the values of diverse cultural groups?

- What additional evidence is needed to promote understanding of PD access, compensation, and workplace condition issues and establish a common, multifaceted solution?

Consideration of Required Changes

Purpose: Identify the specific system components, governance, political, financial, and sustainability issues that are involved in the aligned approach and the changes needed to make the approach operational.

- What combination of system elements is likely to make the greatest impact on access to PD, compensation, benefits, and workplace conditions? Is there an evidence base for the programs or services being considered?

- What reallocations of investments, changes in policies, QRIS, licensing standards, or contracts for services are needed to improve access to PD, salaries, benefits, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce?

- Which combination of investments or system elements is a good fit for the State/Territory?

- What funding resources can be used to improve access to PD, salaries, benefits, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce?

- If additional funding is required, what additional funding is available and from what sources?

- Upon reviewing articulated State/Territory goals for PD and quality improvement and the data collected in Step 1, are the levels and proportions of investments appropriate to support the goals with regard to access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions?

- How can the State/Territory move toward achieving effective investment strategies to address access to PD, compensation, benefits, and workplace conditions?

- If it is determined that more funding should be dedicated to support access to PD, compensation, or workplace conditions initiatives, to what extent could current resources be reallocated to support State/Territory goals?

- Are there ways of managing current and/or future investments to meet State/Territory goals for improving access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions (e.g., targeting specific percentages in State/Territory contracts with PD entities toward certain identified topic areas or for certain populations of the workforce)?

- Are there opportunities to integrate expectations for appropriate salaries, benefits, and workplace conditions into a career lattice, QRIS criteria, quality initiatives, and/or the approval process for contracts/grants or vouchers to provide care for low-income children and families in the subsidy system?

- What changes are needed in existing policies, QRIS standards, contracts with vendors, career lattice components, or TA (coaching, consultation, and mentoring) to support an aligned approach to address access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions?

- What agencies and/or organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow, and sustain the aligned approach to improving access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions?
- Which funding sources can be used to sustain innovations?
- What policies and procedures can be developed to sustain initiatives through changes in leadership and political agendas?

STEP 4. SELECT AN APPROACH AND DEVELOP AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In this step, the planning and implementation team selects an approach and develops the implementation plan based on considerations in Steps 1 through 3. The team confirms the approach by delineating the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals to align specific components or the overall PD system. A successful implementation plan will address the management of changes in the system, communications, regular review and monitoring, and data collection and reporting. Key elements of an implementation plan and questions to guide the planning are described below.

Planning for Change

Purpose: Prepare for implementation by ensuring that roles and responsibilities for implementing a new approach are clear and agreed upon by stakeholders.

- Where is the authority for implementing the combination of approaches and reallocation of resources to improve access to PD, salaries, benefits, and/or workplace conditions for the EC and SA workforce?
  - Who will coordinate the work?
  - What cross-agency agreements will need to be in place?
  - How will the work be done and who will manage it?
  - What is the time frame?
  - What is currently in place to support the work?
  - What TA is available?
- Who should be involved in the development?
  - What sectors and related systems?
  - What roles and specialized areas (e.g., adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, infant/toddler, Head Start/Early Head Start, family child care, SA, special needs/early intervention, schools, etc.)?
  - Members of already existing community/State/Territory advisory or planning groups?
- What are the barriers to involving multiple sectors/related systems and can the challenges be overcome?
- What options exist for implementing a pilot of a comprehensive approach?

Communication Plan

Purpose: Develop an intentional communication and marketing strategy to support implementation.

- Who needs to know about the plans to improve access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions, what do they need to know, and how will the information be communicated?
  - Representatives of each setting, sector, and related system
  - Policymakers
  - Partners
  - Professionals working directly with young children and their families
  - Program directors/administrators
  - Training and TA providers
  - Professional associations
  - Higher education faculty and administrators
  - Unions
  - Others
- What information products are needed for which audiences?
  - How will opportunities to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions be marketed to eligible participants and sponsors?
  - How will the priorities set for the initiative (i.e., who is eligible, what are the requirements, what outcomes will be tracked) be shared with stakeholders?
- What is the timeline for testing the comprehensive approach to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions, and how will it be communicated to stakeholders and potential participants?
- How will stakeholders' feedback be solicited, collected, and incorporated?

Implementation Team

Purpose: Support implementation by creating roles and responsibilities and a plan for regular monitoring of activities. (Also see Step 5, Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- Who should be on the implementation team to guide implementation and ongoing monitoring of the comprehensive approach to improving access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions?
- What infrastructure is needed at the community/State/Territory level to support the comprehensive approach?
- What staff is available to coordinate this work?
- What training and supervision will staff need to coordinate this work?
- What work plan will be developed, and who will oversee the activities in the work plan?

Data Collection and Reporting Plan

Purpose: Develop a data system to support implementation and reporting of progress to funders and to the implementation team. (Also see Step 5, Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- How will the State/Territory team monitor the implementation of the comprehensive approach to improve access to PD, compensation, and/or workplace conditions?

- What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time?

- What capacity exists to collect, house, and analyze data on access to PD, compensation, and workplace conditions?

- What existing data systems (e.g., registries, licensing, Head Start Program Information Report, child care assistance, education) could be used?

- What new data systems, linkages, or tracking capacity may need to be established?

- How can cross-sector/system privacy issues be addressed?

- What capacity exists for developing regular reporting that can inform the implementation team?

- How will data be used to inform decisionmaking?

- Is an evaluator in place who can conduct analyses to determine if the comprehensive approach is improving retention and quality of programs?

STEP 5. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN AND MONITOR RESULTS

In this step, the planning and implementation team assigns tasks and timelines, monitors results, and makes system adjustments as needed. Implementation occurs through assigned roles and responsibilities for specific action steps and a timeline for completion as considered in Steps 1–4. To the extent possible, the implementation plan should build on the information gathered to date and use the results garnered through Step 4 of the considerations. Results from the data collection and monitoring of implementation inform revisions or modifications to activities. Appropriate selection of staff, ongoing TA, and analysis of data to inform decisions can support this process of continuous improvement and help the State/Territory planning and implementation team reflect on lessons learned as the approach is implemented and the PD system matures.

Checking In

Purpose: Develop a process for checking in on implementation activities to date.

- How will the State/Territory team collect information about the progress of implementation activities to date?

- How will the team receive feedback from key stakeholders involved in the implementation of specific initiatives and the overall comprehensive approach, as well as from the recipients of the efforts?

- What process will be used to gather information from evaluation efforts, data systems, and regular reporting from key implementers to inform adjustments needed?

Evaluating

Purpose: Develop a process to reflect on current implementation activities to determine changes needed to meet implementation goals.

- Who will be responsible for reflecting on the information gathered through the established check-in processes? Which stakeholders need to be involved?

- How often should the feedback gathered through monitoring processes be considered?

- What process will the State/Territory team use to evaluate feedback from multiple monitoring activities to make decisions about adjustments to the implementation plan?

Making Adjustments

Purpose: Develop a process for adjusting current implementation activities based on successes and challenges identified in the current implementation plan.

- What threshold will the State/Territory team use to determine that the evidence collected points to a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?

- How will the team implement modifications to its comprehensive approach?

- What parts of the implementation process will need to be revisited to make adjustments? For example, will the adjustment require a new communication plan or an invitation to new stakeholders?

- What process will the team use to ensure that modifications have led to a stronger implementation plan?