



Voices for Virginia's Children

Issue Brief in Early Childhood

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Components of A Professional Development System

☛ Competencies

What are the knowledge and skills that are necessary for an effective teacher of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers?

☛ Career Lattice

What are the connected levels of qualifications from entry at the lowest level to the highest standard of proficiency?

☛ Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

With a workforce that has a varied array of experience and credentials, how can prior learning be assessed and melded into the career lattice?

☛ Supports and Incentives

How can the system encourage and support child care teachers so that they take advantage of educational opportunities?

☛ Quality Educational Options

How can the system ensure that the faculty and programs at the CDA, AAS, and BA level are high quality and in line with national best practice standards?

☛ Articulation Agreements

How can the system ensure that each institution recognizes and accepts credits from the previous one (e.g., four year colleges accept early childhood coursework from the AAS programs)?

☛ Model Training Sites

How can the system ensure that training sites are available to make real world application in high quality settings?

☛ Credentialing Registry

How can the system manage and record the educational credentials of infant, toddler, and preschool child care teachers?

Improving Quality in Early Childhood Education: Professional Development

Nobody disputes the fact that public school teachers need to be well educated and knowledgeable in the subjects that they teach. The "No Child Left Behind" Act requires "highly qualified teachers" and extends those requirements down to pre-kindergarten. As a result, teachers employed in public schools meet licensing requirements and have at least a bachelor's degree. Head Start recognizes that their teachers need to be better educated too, and implemented new regulations that require that half of their teachers have at least an Associates' degree. Unfortunately, however, teacher education requirements are not being applied to those teaching our youngest children – infants, toddlers, and preschoolers – many of whom spend 30 – 50 hours a week in the care of teachers who may be poorly educated and sometimes are also poorly qualified for the work that they do. Early care and education teachers tend to be poorly compensated as well.

The results of the lack of "highly qualified teachers" at the infant, toddler, and preschool level are evident when large numbers of children arrive at kindergarten or first grade without the skills they need to be successful in school. Professional development for early care and education teachers is a critical issue in improving school readiness. Without a doubt, "a knowledgeable well-compensated child care workforce is the key element to program quality and positive child outcomes."ⁱ

Research suggests that education matters: teachers with bachelor's degrees (with or without college-level specialized training) were more sensitive, less harsh and less detached than teachers without bachelor's degrees and children in programs with sensitive and responsive teachers received higher language scores and exhibited a higher level of peer play than other children.ⁱⁱ Children who had teachers with a B.A. or an A.A. in early childhood education demonstrated stronger receptive vocabularies than did children in classrooms with teachers having only high school backgrounds and teachers with the most advanced education were the most effective overall.ⁱⁱⁱ

Raising the level of education and professionalism in a field like early care and education where work is underestimated and undervalued by the general public and where the workforce is underpaid and subject to high turnover rates requires strategic and purposeful effort and strong state leadership. But – change is possible. A good example is the turn-around that occurred in the military child care system.^{iv} If change can occur in a system as rigid and as regimented as the military, it certainly can occur elsewhere.

The development of a state plan for professional development is one of the components of the "Good Start, Grow Smart" early childhood initiative launched by the Bush Administration in April 2002. Although Virginia has been working on pieces of a state plan for professional development, such a plan is still a work-in-progress, with a lot still to be accomplished.

What about the development of an early childhood professional development system for Virginia?

While there is a lot yet to be done, there are a number of things already in place in Virginia:

- T.E.A.C.H.-VA provides scholarships and supports to over 300 early care and education teachers in Virginia
- 8 Community Colleges in Virginia offer AAS Degrees in Early Childhood Education
- 17 Community Colleges in Virginia offer Career Studies Certificates in Early Childhood Education
- 14 Community Colleges in Virginia offer some other type of certificate related to Early Childhood Education
- Several four year colleges in Virginia offer bachelor degrees with coursework in Early Childhood Education
- Virginia has a cadre of people who are on the Council for Professional Recognition's CDA Advisor Registry
- The Coalition for Early Childhood Education (CECE) Leadership Council, sponsored by *Voices for Virginia's Children*, held quarterly meetings over the past year to examine best practice models for professional development system components
- The Virginia Department of Social Services initiated "Training Routes and Avenues for Virginia's Early Learning Success" or T.R.A.V.E.L.S. and is working on
 - defining quality child care
 - designing a career lattice
 - developing a list of competencies and
 - working on articulation agreements
- The Virginia Department of Health through a Maternal/Child Health grant-funded initiative (Virginia Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems or VECCS) has been working on a strategic plan for early childhood. The VECCS Early Care and Education Workgroup drafted a framework for a professional development system infrastructure
- *Voices for Virginia's Children*, Virginia Commonwealth University, the Virginia Child Care and Resource and Referral Network, the Virginia Department of Social Services, Success By 6®, and ZERO TO THREE partnered to submit a grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Education under the "Early Childhood Professional Development Grant" – if funded, this project will expand T.E.A.C.H.-VA to the CDA and BA levels, and pilot a credentialing registry, a wage incentive program, a mentoring program, and a quality rating system
- Several local coalitions have been working on components of a comprehensive professional development system

Policy Recommendations

- Develop an infrastructure for early childhood education, preferably with leadership at the Governor's Cabinet level
- Develop and implement all of the components of a comprehensive professional development system
- Move resources away from the offering of a wide array of workshops and toward credit-bearing training that will be connected in the career lattice
- Encourage the development of bachelor's and graduate level coursework and degree programs at state institutions of higher ed
- Engage the corporate and business community and develop public/private partnerships that can pay for incentives to support the education and boost the salaries of early care and education teachers

End Notes:

ⁱNational Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative @ ZERO TO THREE (June 2005), "At A Glance: A Place at the Policy Table for Infants and Toddlers. Washington, D.C.: ZERO TO THREE.

ⁱⁱM. Whitebrook (2002). "Bachelor's Degrees Are Best: Higher Qualifications for Pre-Kindergarten Teachers Lead to Better Learning Environments for Children." Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Early Education.

ⁱⁱⁱC. Howes (1997). "Children's Experiences in Center-Based Child Care as a Function of Teacher Background and Adult-Child Ratio." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 43(3), 404-425.

^{iv}N. Campbell, J. Appelbaum, K. Martinson, & E. Martin (2000). "Be All That We Can Be: Lessons from the Military for Improving Our Nation's Child Care System." Washington, D.C.: National Women's Law Center.
www.nwlc.org/pdf/military.pdf

Additional Resource:

www.nccic.org/poptopics/pdsystem.pdf

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