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Colorado Early Childhood Professional Registry Implementation: A White Paper

The purpose of this paper is to address the implementation of the Early Childhood Professional Registry by the Colorado Office of Professional Development (COPD). Goals five (5) and six (6) of the P-3 Professional Development Plan speak to the need of a unique identifier for professionals working in licensed programs, the mandatory participation of those professionals in a registry, and a mandatory registry of state-approved trainers and trainings.



The purpose of this paper is to address the implementation of an Early Childhood Professional Registry through the leadership of the Colorado Office of Professional Development (COPD). Goals five (5) and six (6) of the P-3 Professional Development Plan speak to the need of a unique identifier for professionals working in licensed programs, the mandatory participation of those professionals in a registry, and a mandatory registry of state-approved trainers and trainings .

The COPD is the statewide entity responsible for ensuring that the early learning workforce is well-trained and valued so that children succeed and families are supported. This is accomplished through a variety of efforts in our office: credentialing individuals based on level of education; providing educational stipends for qualified individuals who successfully complete early childhood courses; coordinating online education through the community colleges; conducting professional development needs assessments; providing counseling to individuals on early childhood career pathways; and collecting data on the early childhood workforce to share with local communities, state partners and other stakeholders.

Since its inception, the P-3 Subcommittee of Governor Bill Ritter's P-20 Educational Coordinating Council has focused on developing recommendations for improving the early care and education of children from birth through age eight. Research tells us that well trained and educated early learning professionals are crucial in preparing children to be ready for school and achieving success later in life^{1 2 3}. If early childhood teachers are not effective, children will lag behind⁴. To address the effectiveness of early childhood teachers, Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Education Commission of the States first held a *P-3 Summit: Preparing Teachers to Support Young Learners* on November 20, 2008. During the Summit, best practices in teacher preparation were identified, as were successes and barriers to implementing them in Colorado. Participants worked in small groups focusing on elements of a coordinated professional development system: access, core content, qualifications, credentials and pathways, funding, and quality assurance.

In November 2009, the P-3 Subcommittee, in a next step on improving early childhood professional development, appointed a special task force to develop a three year comprehensive professional development plan. Members of the task force began meeting February 2010 and worked collaboratively for six months to develop a plan that would significantly improve the effectiveness of early learning professionals. The plan proposes that Colorado accomplish this goal through the development and implementation of a well defined comprehensive, accessible and sustainable early childhood professional development system. Both the P-3 Subcommittee and the newly appointed Early Childhood Leadership Commission endorsed the Early Childhood Professional Development Systems Plan.

Implementation of the following goals and objectives found within the P-3 Professional Development Plan is addressed in this paper. The goals follow.

¹ (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howe, 2002)

² (Edwards, 1999)

³ (Lee & Burkam, 2002)

⁴ (Barnett, 1995)

Goal 5: Collect and systematically analyze data about Colorado's early learning professionals through the establishment of a unique identifier for professionals working in early care and education facilities.

Goal 6: Create mechanisms of accountability within the P-3 Professional Development System that ensure the effectiveness of the early learning professionals, early learning leaders and early learning preparation programs.

The Colorado Office of Professional Development (COPD) is uniquely situated to implement the above recommendations. The Office currently coordinates a voluntary registry and collects data on individuals who apply for or currently hold an Early Childhood Professional Credential in Colorado. This registry database also houses Colorado's voluntary Early Childhood Trainer and Training Approval System. In addition, the Office manages the Early Childhood Education program of CCCOnline which provides seventeen (17) online early childhood courses. COPD also provides educational stipends and tracks the professional progress of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) eligible early childhood professionals completing early childhood courses. Recently, the office constructed a new interactive web-based data management system which will provide user access and include differing levels of security permissions for data partners. The above mentioned programs are part of the database.

Goal 5

The following are key objectives for Goal 5 of the P-3 Professional Development Plan and COPD's current status of implementation and/or ability to implement these activities.

- *Develop an Early Learning Professional Registry (Registry) based on The National Registry Alliance (TNRA) Common Core Data Elements.*

The COPD currently collects (voluntarily) all of the common core data elements of credentialed participants proposed by The National Registry Alliance (TNRA). The Office has been a member of TNRA since its inception in 2002 and hosted the annual conference in 2007. COPD has been solicited to participate in the newly developed Partnership Eligibility Review process and is currently working on eligibility determination.

COPD provides a variety of data reports to Early Childhood Councils and state agencies. These include information on the numbers of early learning personnel who are credentialed or endorsed in the areas of early childhood, school-age/youth development, infant and toddler, and early childhood social emotional. Each credential is tiered from entry level to a doctoral degree and is based on the acquisition of defined core knowledge, degrees and work experience. The exception is the Early Childhood Social Emotional Interdisciplinary Credential. Colorado content experts researched, defined, and developed the core body of knowledge and advocated that the amount and level of knowledge for this credential was quite extensive. Therefore it was determined that individuals must have at least a baccalaureate degree to qualify. The early childhood credentials are aligned with the

professional development requirements in Division of Child Care licensing rules and regulations and will be modified to reflect recommendations of the *Quality Rating and Improvement System: the Next Generation* working committee. This transformation will allow a seamless process for early learning professionals to become registered with licensing and credentialed simultaneously by the same entity.

TNRA's recommended *Common Core Data Elements* and those data elements collected by COPD include the following:

1. Educational attainment such as degrees, number of early childhood courses taken, approved non-credit training.
 2. Demographics such as gender, ethnicity, bilingual ability, primary language, and languages spoken.
 3. Employment information such as the number of total years in the field including both direct and indirect services, current (main) position held, other positions currently held, current wage, if they hold a paying position outside of the early childhood profession, and if their employer provides incentives for advancing their education and the type of incentives.
 4. Program/center information where they are currently employed including child care license number, type of program (part-day, full-day, part-year, full-year), length of employment with this program, ages of children served and the ages of children with whom they work directly.
- *Develop a mechanism within or outside of a Registry that can assign a unique identifier to each early learning professional working in a licensed facility and/or Registry participant.*

The COPD database assigns a unique identifier to each individual regardless of function of entry (e.g., professional credentials, training/trainer approval, and educational stipend awards). As the Early Childhood Leadership Commission works on formalizing the process of using teacher identifiers, COPD will work with the Commission, the Governor's Technology Office and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to ensure that the identifiers are linked and aligned. Common data definitions and standards will be developed and periodic data audits will be conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

- *Develop formalized processes for streamlining, linking and aligning the Registry with any existing databases (e.g., early intervention provider database) and systems that will benefit from accessing and interacting with Registry data (e.g., Child Care Licensing, Qualistar Early Learning).*

The Registry will house all early childhood workforce data in one place where users can securely access the information. Currently, early childhood professionals may have to submit official transcripts, work history and applications to three or four different entities in the state. This is not an efficient use of their time or staffs' time to evaluate and record this information. The Colorado Office of Professional Development is converting its database into a web-based, interactive data management system. This system will allow access to early childhood workforce information and reports through various levels of

security for early learning professionals, Division of Child Care licensing staff, Early Childhood Council representatives, Qualistar Colorado and other appropriate partners. Protocol for data sharing will be developed based on the National Registry Alliance's best practices and will include data accessibility, data linkages and usage, justification for the collection of specific data elements, and timeline of data retention. COPD is collecting samples of work practices from other states such as data sharing memorandums of understanding. Opportunities for linking and aligning data variables between the Registry and Early Intervention Statewide Provide database also exist. These opportunities will be explored for data integration implications.

- *Link data collected in the Registry with other components of Colorado's Early Childhood Professional Development System (e.g., Child Care Licensing, Trainer and Training Approval System, Quality Rating and Improvement System, Colorado's Higher Education System, Educational Stipends and T.E.A.C.H.) that can be used to inform, expand and improve the efficacy of Colorado's early learning professional development system.*

Collecting data for everyone who works in a licensed (non 24 hour care) early learning program and having access to that early childhood workforce information will allow COPD and partners to investigate specifically how professional development impacts program quality, outcomes for children, and many more early childhood quality indicators. In addition to collecting TNRA Common Core Data Elements for credential holders, COPD houses and staffs the voluntary Trainer and Training Approval System. State-approved trainer and training data is included in the Office's data management system as well. Moreover, COPD is working with the Colorado Early Childhood Coaching Consortium on the development and implementation of an early childhood coaching credential.

Regardless of function or title, each individual has one record within the database which denotes each early childhood professional role(s) for which the person is qualified. For example, an early childhood professional might apply for a Level IV Credential. Once information is entered into the database, a participant's data record may be flagged to denote that the criteria to be an approved trainer have also been met. This capability can be expanded to help track data in, and from, a variety of programs such as T.E.A.C.H. recipients.

Through a mandated Registry, institutions of higher education, state legislators, policy makers and other stakeholders can be informed regarding supply and demand of early learning staff members, professional development availability and a better understanding in general of how well specific supports attract, retain and develop an early learning workforce that prepares every young child for success in school and later in life.

- *Develop reports that include information on the quality of teachers, classrooms, and programs for key stakeholder groups, e.g. parents, policymakers, Colorado Departments of Human Services (CDHS), Education and Higher Education.*

By having consistent, reliable data on the workforce and unique identifiers for early learning professionals, the Colorado Office of Professional Development will collaborate with a variety of entities to examine the impact professional development has on program and classroom quality and child outcomes. In this context professional development is a very broad category including; formalized degrees, volume and types of early childhood courses taken, coaching, technical assistance, and/or consultation, and state-approved community-based/non-credit training received. The Colorado Office of Professional Development can provide information and meaningful feedback on professional development to parents, early childhood programs of study in higher education, CDHS, CDE, early learning professionals and policymakers.

The Colorado Office of Professional Development will work collaboratively with CDE, CDHS, and other stakeholders on a coordinated system of data collection to include program specific identifiers and quality ratings, and child identifiers and outcomes. This will strategically link select data collected on young children, programs and early learning professionals. Aligning data across funding streams and agencies will provide policymakers with a unified picture of young children, early learning programs and the early childhood workforce in Colorado.

COPD will build linkages with the CDHS: Division of Child Care, as it moves to establish a new tiered licensing system. The *Quality Rating and Improvement System: the Next Generation* will be investigating a variety of quality indicators- one being the level of early childhood program staff professional development. Secure Registry data reporting will be accessible to the Division of Child Care licensing personnel.

Goal 6

The following are key objectives for Goal 6 of the P-3 Professional Development Plan and COPD's current status in implementation and/or implementation ability.

- *Develop a plan to review and fully fund a statewide expansion of the current trainer and training approval system (registry).*

The Colorado Office of Professional Development manages the Trainer and Training Approval System in Colorado. Stakeholders and early learning professionals comprise a working committee that makes recommendations for approvals of trainers and trainings within established quality assurance criteria. Committee members include representatives from the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Community College early childhood faculty, the Resource and Referral Agency of Mesa County, CCCOnline, Qualistar Colorado, Head Start State-Based Training Office and the Colorado Office of Professional Development. The Trainer and Training Approval Committee researched best practices of states that have trainer and training approval systems along with best practices in instructional training design and adult learning to help develop the criteria used in approving trainers and trainings.

The trainer and training application information is part of the COPD's database. Moreover, approved trainers who wish to, are listed on COPD's website. Currently, there are approximately 225 approved trainers. Furthermore, the office has developed an online training for early childhood trainers, which promotes best practice strategies in adult learning and course design elements. The online training is offered at a minimum of three times a year. Professional development in adult learning or instructional design is one of the requirements to be an approved trainer. In addition, to help trainers meet the adult learning component of the trainer approval process, the Trainer/Training Approval Committee conducted two face-to-face trainings at the Fall Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children conference.

- *Garner recognition by licensing that the trainer and training approval system/registry meets quality assurance standards for ongoing training hours.*

The Colorado Office of Professional Development will work with the Division of Child Care, early childhood professional organizations and other stakeholders to put forth a child care licensing rule change that addresses the 15 clock hours of mandatory, ongoing, yearly training. Currently, there are no quality assurance standards attached to this training or to those who provide the training. To implement quality assurances, the recommended rule change would be to have only trainings provided by an approved trainer as accepted ongoing training by the Colorado Department of Human Services. COPD will work with the Division of Child Care to implement this change over the first year. During the second year, COPD will conduct surveys to help evaluate the changes in the quality of trainings and public accessibility and use of the approval system. The results of the surveys combined with input from stakeholders will be used to decide the feasibility of providing a mandated trainer and training approval system.

- *Develop marketing strategies and public awareness of the system to trainers and early childhood providers on how to interact with the registry.*

The Colorado Office of Professional Development will simultaneously market and recruit for both the Early Childhood Professional and the Trainer/Training component of the Registry. COPD has access through the Community College of Denver, its fiscal and administrative home, to award-winning marketing and design experts who create exceptional marketing materials. COPD's user friendly website will be updated with pertinent information about the Registry and Trainer/Training Approval System. Early learning professionals will be able to complete their application online. COPD will provide technical assistance on the Registry requirements and how professionals will interact with it in local communities through the Early Childhood Councils, early childhood faculty from Colorado Community Colleges and four-year higher education institutions, site visits and web-based meetings.

Early childhood conferences and early childhood professional organizations' newsletters will be used to disseminate information directly to early learning professionals. COPD will provide marketing materials to local child care resource and referral agencies, the Division of Child Care and its funded programs, the Child Care and Adult Food Program, the Infant Toddler Expanding Quality Program at CDE and other programs that work directly with

early learning teachers, aides and directors. COPD staff will seamlessly begin outreach efforts for the Registry through their daily interactions with early learning professionals.

In conclusion, the Colorado Office of Professional Development provides a readymade infrastructure for the Early Learning Professional Registry which ensures a cost effective home for the Registry. Current staff members bring expertise: data management; survey tools; development and analysis; online learning; adult learning; professional development/transcript review; early childhood and school age content; marketing and outreach; website design and update; registry best practice; grant writing; fiscal management; inclusion practice; and, social emotional development.

One staff member is the credential coordinator. She communicates with applicants, tracks their progress, provides career counseling, reviews applications, verifies transcripts, inputs data, and issues the credentials. With the Early Learning Professional Registry, her work will continue with all professionals working in licensed centers and homes. An additional staff member will be hired to supplement the increased workload assuring two full time staff members working exclusively on the Professional Registry. COPD's associate director allocates half of her time staffing Colorado's Trainer and Training Approval System. With hiring one additional staff, the Registry will have 1.5 full time equivalent, dedicated staff for the Trainer and Training Approval Section of the Registry.

By housing the Registry at the Colorado Office of Professional Development, there will be cost savings on the creation of the Registry database. The major components of a registry database are a part of COPD's database. While there will be the need for resources to expand its web-based database to increase accessibility with appropriate security measures, this is less costly than building a completely new database.

The Colorado Office of Professional Development staff has a proven record for implementing many functions of the professional development system, and has the knowledge and experience to administer Colorado's Early Learning Professional Registry. The COPD staff have a combined experience of 53 years working on early childhood professional development. Office accomplishments include establishment of the Early Childhood Professional Credentialing System as mandated by statute, starting and expanding the early childhood section of CCCOnline's college courses, successfully competing to become the Colorado Office of Professional Development (originally COPD was the Early Childhood Credential Office) and management of grants totaling over \$1,000,000. COPD looks forward to bringing these policy recommendations to fruition on behalf of Colorado's early childhood professionals, children and their families.

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