From Pieces and Parts to a Professional Development System – Meeting Highlights

On October 14, 2010, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Office of Early and Extended Learning) and the Professional Development Committee of the Coordinating Board for Early Childhood hosted the meeting *From Pieces and Parts to a Professional Development System*. Meeting participants included a cross-sector of early childhood and youth care and education professionals, health and mental health providers, higher education, and child welfare. The morning session featured Dan Haggard, Deputy Director, Early Childhood Services, who presented on New Mexico's Early Care, Education and Family Support Professional Development System. In the afternoon, meeting participants engaged in facilitated discussion groups on topics related to professional development.   The following is a summary of the facilitated discussion groups. It includes a brief description of each of the discussion topic, priorities, and cross-cutting themes.

Discussion Topics

Building Basic Knowledge and Skills: This group discussed clock-hour coursework opportunities for early childhood and youth development professionals to learn about core knowledge and skills which include Levels 1 and II of the Core Competencies.

Knowledge into Practice: The focus of this group discussion was about supporting the use of knowledge and skills in daily practice through professional development that occurs outside of coursework, including consultation, coaching, technical assistance and mentoring.

Professional Pathways: This group discussion focused on how practitioners learn about professional development options through career advising, and have access to diverse educational opportunities from clock hours to credit hours that build knowledge and skills over time.

Articulation: This group discussed the agreements that colleges, universities and community organizations make to smooth the transition from clock hours to credit hours, from one degree level to another, making professional pathways possible.

Professional Recognition: The focus of this group was about career pathways for early childhood and youth development practitioners using specialized credentials to support the development of a Career Lattice to accompany Missouri's Education Matrix.

Quality Assurance: This group was about how we make sure that the education available to early childhood and youth development professionals meets standards for research-based content, is grounded in nationally-accepted best practices, and is delivered by professionals who meet standards for adult education and consultation/coaching skills.

Discussion Priorities and Cross-cutting Themes

Questions to Clarify

In general there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about Missouri's existing professional development efforts. All of the discussion groups had questions related to the who, what, when, where and how of professional development as it relates to the above topics.

- What is professional development? What is the purpose of professional development? Why is it important? Does it include pre-service, in-service, technical assistance? Is it clock-hours, coursework? When does knowledge and experience count? Where is professional development happening now?
- Who is a professional? Who is the professional development system for? How do we identify ourselves as professionals? What is the value of professional recognition?
- How do practitioners learn about professional development opportunities? How will practitioners access professional development?
- What are the competencies and standards for performance? Who develops these expectations, and what is the form of evaluation?
- What is the pathway? How do practitioners learn about the pathway? Where does career advising happen now?
- How does articulation happen now or not? What are the barriers to articulation? When does knowledge and experience count?
- How do we evaluate the quality of professional development? How do we ensure a comparable level of quality for everyone?
- What efforts are underway to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system for professional development?
- Where does the funding come from to support professional development activities? Is there funding for system building?

Issues or Concerns

The low level of awareness and misinformation among early childhood and school-age care and education practitioners about professional development is a major issue or concern for almost all of the discussion groups. They identified improved communication among state agencies, institutions of higher education, professional development organizations, practitioners, and other stakeholders as an important issue.   They share concerns about how to educate and engage parents, practitioners and the general public in the development of a statewide, comprehensive professional development system. Another common concern is equity - in terms of access to and quality of professional development for all sectors of the early childhood and school-age care and education system, in all geographic regions of the state. Multiple issues were identified related to the need for a systematic approach to professional development that supports lifelong learning, is intentional, provides diverse opportunities to learn and practice new skills according to a clearly articulated pathway, and supports continuous quality improvement. The following concepts were used to describe issues and concerns:

- Statewide access
- Diverse opportunities
- Quality improvement
- Systemic approach
- Collaborative relationships
- Increased communication
- Advocacy
- Clear direction
- Sustainable efforts
- Strengths-based technical assistance

Hopes or Dreams

All of the discussion groups envision for the future an integrated professional development system that ensures quality across all early childhood and school-age care and education settings. They would like this system to be:

- Cohesive
- Coordinated
- Consistent across all sectors
- Relationship based
- Universally accessible
- Competency based
- Responsive to the diverse needs of practitioners
- Seamless with multiple, well defined pathways
- Informative to parents
- Outcomes driven
- Transparent
- A lever to increase minimum standards
- A strategy to require continuous quality improvement
- A framework to retain and adequately compensate practitioners
- Fully funded and include a loan forgiveness program

Solutions or Implementation Practices

There was general consensus among discussion groups regarding the strategies that could be employed to implement an integrated early childhood and school-age care and education professional development system.   Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that we should start with what we have, expand on what is working well, and learn from the experiences of other states. Specific strategies are listed here.

- Develop guiding principles, vision and mission statements, define terms, and determine those standards that will serve as a foundation
- Examine the research for best practices and learn from other states
- Continue to communicate widely and engage a broad group of stakeholders

- Develop a profile of existing professional development
- Build on what we have that is working well and replicate
- Conduct a needs assessment
- Search for new funding sources and create innovative strategies
- Focus on articulation to ensure that everything counts
- Develop credentials and/or degree specializations (infant/toddler, prior experience and learning, CDA equivalent)
- Implement strengths-based technical assistance
- Create a "brand" for professional development – something to help us recognize our system
- Conduct a statewide media campaign to highlight the importance of a competent, effective workforce that is adequately compensated.