

February
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[PROJECT OVERVIEW]

Evaluation Study: Regional Early Childhood Workforce Development Strategies

McREL Project Overview to Central Pima Council

McREL and McREL Project Team

Established in 1966, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is a 501(c)(3) private non-profit organization whose purpose is to improve education through applied research and development. McREL has more than 45 years of experience conducting research and evaluation; developing resources and tools; providing technical assistance, professional development, and consultation in system improvement; the development of standards-based programs and student assessments; evaluation and policy studies; strategic planning; out-of-school-time learning; and leadership development. Through our substantial evaluation work, including evaluations of locally- and federally-funded projects, McREL has developed considerable expertise regarding educational evaluation policies and procedures. For more than four decades, McREL has conducted school-based research, including investigating the efficacy of various curriculum and pedagogical interventions and professional development programs. Our program evaluation experience spans a variety of methodological areas, including: designing and implementing rigorous multi-year research and evaluation studies; conducting literature reviews; and collecting and analyzing data, including data showing a program's effects over time. McREL's designs and methods demonstrate an understanding of the importance and purpose of studying interventions, including the fidelity of implementation, use of implementation measures such as classroom observations and teacher surveys, and use of strategies for addressing some of the challenges in conducting school-based studies. Moreover, the breadth of approaches taken reflect a commitment to selecting appropriate designs for the object of study, the research or evaluation question at hand, and the context within which the evaluation is situated.

Select Related Experience

The following provides brief, selected descriptions of McREL's experience conducting related work in a variety of settings. Additional information about experience and related projects can be found in the original proposal submitted to First Things First.

Conducting work in Arizona. McREL currently conducts work nationally and internationally for a variety of clients. In the state of Arizona, McREL currently provides professional development to Head Start and Early Head Start directors and assistant directors in the ten delegate agencies of the City of Phoenix. The goal of this work is to develop effective leadership practices for ensuring a positive, collaborative culture and a focus on continuous improvement. McREL also provides technical assistance during site visits with Head Start delegate agencies to work with directors and their site-based leadership teams to put into practice their learning from professional development sessions in a manner that is specifically contextualized to their sites. McREL consultants also attend delegate meetings of the unified early childhood leadership team.

Previous work in Arizona includes providing research-based leadership strategies to lead a high school and community in Phoenix to fulfill their vision "to be the global role model for academic excellence and innovation." Using McREL's Purposeful Community Reflection Tool to collect unbiased data, the staff and administration addressed four areas: (1) collective efficacy, (2)

outcomes that matter to all, (3) agreed-upon processes, and (4) use of all available assets. Each of these played a vital role in the school's four-year journey toward having an aligned vision and a more positive school climate. Additionally, McREL consultants have worked with the Kayenta Unified School District, located in the Navajo Nation in Kayenta, Arizona, to deliver a unique program that combined our school improvement approach, Success in Sight, with our Classroom Instruction That Works (CITW) for English Language Learners.

Expertise in early childhood content and professional development. McREL has provided early childhood services to clients since 1999 through short-term and long-term contracts in the following areas: standards, assessment, policy, professional development, technical assistance, program evaluation, and curriculum materials analysis. In the area of standards, specifically, McREL has assisted states (e.g., Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Dakota), LEAs, and school districts with developing Early Learning standards with the issues of horizontal and vertical standards alignment, as well as with aligning early learning standards with curriculum and assessment. McREL, in collaboration with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), developed the database of state early learning standards. McREL project personnel also drafted a report for the State of Colorado on best practices in PK-3 education. In Arizona, as previously noted, assistance was offered to school districts to align the early learning standards with kindergarten standards.

McREL team members assigned to this project are also experienced in providing professional development and translating research into practice in various areas of child development, including: cognitive development, language development, development of self-regulation, and social-emotional development to a variety of stakeholder audiences such as parents, teachers, social service agencies, and community members. Professional and technical assistance in these developmental domains have been provided through seven US Department of Education Early Reading First Grants across the country. Finally, team members are also experienced in conducting research involving stakeholders from multiple early childhood sectors, as evidenced through several early childhood program evaluations. For example, McREL was contracted by the National Head Start Association in '07-'08, '08-'09, and '10-'11 to evaluate their health and physical activity initiative, Let Me Play/Go Smart.

Project Team

The McREL project team members consist of a team of experienced researchers and evaluators. Dr. Carrie Germeroth holds a M.A. and Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology, with a special emphasis on cognitive and developmental psychology from the University of Louisville. Dr. Germeroth serves as project director for the study. Dr. Crystal Day-Hess holds a M.S. and Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology, with a special emphasis on cognitive and developmental psychology from the University of Louisville and serves as data collection lead. Finally, Dr. Mark Fermanich holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and leads the cost analysis component of the study.

Evaluation Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to conduct a targeted strategy evaluation to examine the extent to which the Central Pima Early Childhood Professional Development strategy is successfully implemented and advances desired outcomes, as well as the impact of the strategy within the

region. The Central Pima Regional Council has identified access to high-quality early education programs, in addition to building and retaining a strong early childhood workforce, as strategic priorities. The Council has also recognized the importance of providing early childhood professionals with support to gain access to higher education opportunities. Since SFY 2010, the Regional Council has envisioned a continuum of strategies that address a variety of professional development needs, while simultaneously increasing the educational qualifications of early childhood professionals in the Central Pima region. Since this same time, the community-based professional development model of Communities of Practice (CoP) has been an integral part of the professional development continuum in the Central Pima region, working in conjunction with the other professional development programmatic models, including non-T.E.A.C.H., T.E.A.C.H., and REWARD\$. The CoP model is the primary focus of the overall strategy evaluation. Evaluation questions will examine programmatic model differences to evaluate how the CoP model may contribute to the overall portfolio of professional development strategies funded and implemented in the region. For further details on the methodological approach and evaluation questions, please refer to McREL's Methodological Plan and Table 1 in this document.

Following the CIPP Model, McREL's evaluation approach will be designed to examine higher-level strategy variables, such as the elements of the Early Childhood Professional Development strategies (with a primary focus on the CoP Model) in terms of context, inputs, processes, and product/strategy effectiveness to determine its impact, realized and/or potential. Context evaluation will be used to gather information on the needs, issues, and assets within the region served by the suite of professional development strategies. The contributions of various CoP model elements to the overall success of the strategy will also be assessed in order to evaluate intended versus actual CoP model implementation and effects in the region. Input evaluation will be used to gather information on the CoP model and alternative programmatic models within the strategy (i.e., Non-T.E.A.C.H., T.E.A.C.H. and REWARD\$), including a description of the amount and allocation of financial and other resources. The roles programmatic models, services, and local innovations play in implementing the overall Early Childhood Professional Development strategy will be assessed in the process evaluation (with a main focus being on the CoP model). Taken together, all of this information will inform the product/strategy effectiveness evaluation, which will examine the intended and unintended impact and cost effectiveness of the community-based CoP professional development model within the region and, to the extent possible, compare it to the other programmatic models of the overall strategy.

Evaluation study questions

The investigative plan and evaluative questions relevant to the strategy evaluation will apply mainly to the CoP model, and will include the collection of both program and process measures related to the project components identified in the RFP. It is important to note that evaluation questions were based on the RFP and feedback and communications between McREL and FTF Research and Evaluation (R&E) staff; however, questions may be refined through ongoing discussion with the FTF Project Officer, the Council Director, and other key client stakeholders.

Judgments about value inform evaluation questions and must consider key stakeholders and how they will use the information (see Table 1 for evaluation questions; potential interview questions of upstream stakeholders to inform Merit, Worth, and Significance [MWS]; methods; and sources of information). Stakeholders have diverse and sometimes competing interests and may

assign value differently, and resource and time constraints make it impossible for any single evaluation to answer everyone's questions or to give full attention to all possible issues. As such, McREL will engage select upstream stakeholders (including FTF R&E staff, the Central Pima Regional Director, FTF professional development staff, grantees, and sub-grantees) in a process to focus on intended use to make deliberate and thoughtful choices for assigning merit, worth, and significance. McREL's plan for establishing merit, worth, and significance will provide important information regarding the strategy's perceived quality (merit), ability to meet the needs of early childhood professionals (worth), and importance in the larger context of the region and the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy (significance). Key upstream stakeholders were selected because they are the primary intended users of the strategy evaluation findings. They are also the primary funders and/or implementers of the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy, particularly the CoP model. As such, these upstream stakeholders are able to provide detailed information to the evaluation team related to the desired/intended outcome goals and activities associated with the strategy. Involving key upstream stakeholders in the process of identifying criteria of merit, worth, and significance will ensure that the evaluation includes questions that are of the most importance to the Council to inform future decisions related to the FTF-funded Early Childhood Professional Development strategy.

Data collection

McREL is in the process of finalizing survey, focus group, and interview questions that evaluate the strategy and meet the needs of FTF and the Council. To reduce the burden on participants, each data collection activity will inform multiple evaluation questions relevant to the strategy evaluation. All surveys and protocols will go through the internal quality assurance process at McREL and will be reviewed and approved by FTF R&E staff, as well as other FTF key stakeholder groups.

Evaluator independence. As an independent evaluator, McREL provides an objective and transparent examination of the strategy. The evaluation team members are not involved and/or invested in local program development, thus strengthening evaluator independence. However, given that evaluation team members are located out of state, there is a need to be more "strategic" when it comes to planning primary data collection. Both primary and secondary data collection described below will be managed by project staff from a distance. The McREL Project Manager will coordinate with FTF R&E staff and CoP administrators and key stakeholders to collect such data (surveys, interviews, and program information) from out of state. Staff assigned to this project have experience and demonstrated capacity to coordinate data collection from a distance on large- and small-scale projects.

Interviews. Interviews provide opportunities to generate in-depth information on specific issues, as well as opportunities for follow-up on information collected during other data collection activities or associated analyses. The McREL evaluation team is in the process of developing interview protocols to collect data that inform the merit, worth, and significance of the evaluation and that are aligned to the strategy evaluation questions (see Table 1 for potential questions). Up to 13 interviews will be conducted with a selection of key upstream stakeholders via phone conference. These interviews will be conducted during January and February and will include a representative from the Central Pima Regional Council, FTF Professional Development strategy staff, United Way of Tucson, and coordinators from each Community of Practice.

Surveys. To the extent possible, McREL will utilize existing program surveys that assess participant perceptions of changes in practice as a result of strategy participation. Additionally, McREL is in the process of developing surveys to gather data not currently collected. Surveys will be administered to all CoP participants and coaches/mentors to assess questions related to implementation, impact, and value of the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy, with a primary focus on the CoP model. Additionally, to identify the effectiveness or potential effectiveness of the CoP strategy in meeting the needs of participants not currently participating in the PD pipeline and/or those teachers not currently participating in the CoP model, survey data will be collected from these teachers via online surveys. Specifically, the potential survey questions will focus on what CoP participants share from their experiences, how their learning may influence the learning of others, and/or structures in place at the program level to allow for shared learning; questions will also be asked relating to other programmatic models in the strategy (i.e., non-TEACH, T.E.A.C.H. and REWARDS). All surveys will be electronically administered by McREL in April using SurveyGizmo, a commercially-available online survey software program.

Focus groups. Similar to interviews, focus groups also provide opportunities to generate in-depth information on specific issues, as well as opportunities for follow-up on information collected during other data collection activities. The McREL evaluation team is in the process of developing focus group protocols to collect data from CoP participants that inform and are aligned to the strategy evaluation questions. The focus group protocols will be semi-structured with a specific set of questions or issues to be addressed in order to make the process more systematic and comprehensive. These activities will allow feedback and input from diverse individuals across the region to provide information on the strategy. CoP participants will be asked questions related to the implementation, impact, and value of the CoP model. One in-person focus group per CoP will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location and time in April, and will include no more than 8-10 participants. Participants for each focus group will be randomly selected from within each CoP.

Recruitment. McREL will work with FTF R&E staff to collaborate with individual CoP coordinators to determine appropriate times for data collection efforts in order to ensure the highest possible response rates. Additionally, the best and most appropriate methods of recruitment (e.g., email, recruitment by CoP directors, etc.) will be determined mutually with feedback from FTF to ensure the highest possible response rates.

Overview of Cost Analysis

McREL's fiscal analyses will consist of a description of input factors (resources allocated/used), cost-effectiveness, and other information designed to assist the Central Pima Council in making informed decisions regarding resource allocation and estimating the resources required for the long-term fiscal sustainability of its professional development strategy. To accomplish this, we will conduct a comprehensive fiscal data collection and analysis strategy in conjunction with our data efforts for the other objectives of the evaluation. Our data collection and analysis will include data on resources dedicated to the Council's CoP approach for FY 2009-10 through 2012-13, and at least one year's worth of data for the other professional development models

employed by the Council — non-T.E.A.C.H, T.E.A.C.H., REWARD\$ and relevant components of Quality First.

In all cases, financial/resource data collection will be integrated with the data collection efforts described above to avoid duplication and minimize the time demands on participants. Questions to be included with our survey and interview/focus group protocols include: inquiries regarding revenues, expenses, and the adequacy of current resources for CoP coordinators, and out-of-pocket expenses for program participants. As discussed above, the questions will be reviewed and approved by FTF R&E staff, as well as other FTF key stakeholder groups. Annual budget and expenditure data for all three of the professional development approaches will be collected from FTF, the United Way of Tucson, and if necessary, individual CoP coordinators using existing administrative reports.

The cost-effectiveness of the Council's professional development strategy will be assessed using a method known as cost-utility analysis. Cost-utility permits the comparison of the costs and the utility, or value, of outcomes across alternatives that may have very different goals. Key stakeholders will be asked to identify the primary goals of the professional development strategy and then rate the value of each alternative approach (CoP, non-T.E.A.C.H, T.E.A.C.H., and REWARD\$) to achieving each of these goals. Cost and value ratings are combined to develop an overall cost-utility ratio for each professional development approach, which considers the cost of the strategy models to their value for early childhood professionals. The result of this analysis will allow the Council to assess which approaches are most cost-effective for achieving the various program goals and will provide guidance for allocating scarce resources.

Useful and Actionable Information upon Project Completion

Upon completion of the project, FTF and the Council will receive useful and actionable data that can inform future Early Childhood Professional Development decisions in the region and beyond. FTF and the Council will receive a final presentation and report in September 2013 with information on the following:

- How successfully the Communities of Practice model is designed and implemented;
- The cost-effectiveness of the Communities of Practice and other strategy models as compared to their value;
- How strategy models do (or do not) work together to meet the needs of early childhood professionals living in Central Pima; and
- The resources and/or efforts that may be needed to expand or replicate the Communities of Practice model.

FTF staff and the regional director and board members may use the information gained from the evaluation to inform strategic decisions, inform improvement efforts, or to answer questions they may have related to expanding and/or replicating the strategy in other areas. The regional director and board, grantees, and sub-grantees will also receive information that will help them make decisions on how to fine-tune strategy implementation, and even how to conceptualize or re-conceptualize a larger suite of strategies. The information may also assist the Council to make sound, informed allocation decisions related to regional strategies.

Project Accomplishments to Date

Several project tasks have been accomplished to date, dedicated to moving the project forward. These include:

1. Kick-off phone meeting with FTF R&E staff
2. Kick-off phone meeting with Central Pima Council representatives
3. Collection of secondary data provided by FTF R&E staff
4. Refinement of evaluation questions and methodology
5. Submission and approval of first four project deliverables (Project Management Plan, Methodological Plan, Data Management Plan, and Stakeholder Analysis Plan)
6. Submission of fifth project deliverable (Merit, Worth, Significance Determination Plan)
7. Ongoing communication with FTF R&E staff

Next Steps

The McREL project team is currently working towards completing several important steps in the evaluation. These include:

1. Conducting stakeholder analysis interviews in January and February 2013
2. Establishing a timeline and procedures for data collection (see Table 2 for tentative timeline)
3. Upcoming focus group and survey data collection in April 2013

Table 1. Strategy Evaluation Questions, Methods, and Data Sources Informing Merit, Worth, and Significance

Strategy Evaluation Question	Methods	Stakeholder and/or Source	Potential Questions for Stakeholder Interviews
<p>How does the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy meet the needs of current early childhood professionals?</p> <p>What is the specific contribution of the Communities of Practice model within the larger strategy?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Review secondary data and materials and artifacts</p> <p>Review of best practices literature</p>	<p>Upstream stakeholders: Central Pima Regional Director, FTF Central PD Staff, United Way PD Director</p> <p>FTF Needs and Assets Reports and Standards of Practice</p> <p>Strategy implementation data from FTF and CoPs</p> <p>Best practices in CoP and PD literature</p>	<p>What are the professional development needs of current early childhood professionals in the region?</p> <p>What professional development goal or goals is each model within the strategy intended to fulfill? Are some goals more important than others?</p> <p>What is the intended impact of the strategy models (Non-T.E.A.C.H, T.E.A.C.H., Reward\$, CoPs) on the early childhood system in the region? On individuals participating in the strategy?</p> <p>How well does the overall strategy meet these needs? How does the CoP method specifically contribute to meeting these needs?</p>
<p>Does the strategy’s community-based professional development CoP model---as implemented---align with FTF- and field-based expectations and standards of quality (intended vs. actual implementation and effects)?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Review secondary data and materials and artifacts</p> <p>Review of best practices literature</p>	<p>Upstream stakeholders: Central Pima Regional Director, FTF Central PD Staff, CoP directors</p> <p>Strategy implementation data and other performance measures from FTF and CoPs (e.g., quarterly reports)</p> <p>Council funding plan, community-based PD SOW, and contract</p>	<p>What was the intended implementation of the CoP model identified by the Council funding plan?</p> <p>How well does the actual implementation of CoPs fulfill the intended implementation as laid out by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council funding plan? • FTF standards of practice? • The contract? <p>How feasible is CoP model implementation in relation to the funding plan laid out by the Council?</p> <p>What is the intended CoP implementation model</p>

Strategy Evaluation Question	Methods	Stakeholder and/or Source	Potential Questions for Stakeholder Interviews
		Financial and other resource logs and data FTF Professional Standards of Practice CoP best practices literature	identified by best practices literature? How does the actual implementation compare? (this question will not be asked of stakeholders, literature review only)
In what ways does participation in the Community of Practice model help early childhood professionals develop improved competencies to provide high quality experiences for children?	Interviews Review secondary data and materials and artifacts	Upstream stakeholders: Central Pima Regional Director, FTF Central PD Staff, CoP directors Strategy implementation data from FTF and CoPs CoP Contract and SOW	How are the outcome activities associated with the CoP model planned (e.g., description of <i>how</i> outcome goals will be achieved)? What are the actual outcome measures? Are participants developing improved competencies to improve high quality experiences for children?
In what ways does the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy, particularly the CoP model, contribute to early childhood system building in Central Pima?	Interviews Review secondary data and CoP materials and artifacts	Upstream stakeholders: Central Pima Regional Director, FTF Central PD Staff Strategy implementation data from FTF and CoPs	How does the CoP model contribute to building a cohesive, effective early childhood system in the region?
In what ways does the CoP model, <i>in combination</i> with other PD programmatic models (i.e. non-T.E.A.C.H.,	Interviews Review secondary data and CoP materials and	Upstream stakeholders: Central Pima Regional Director, FTF Central PD Staff, Grantee	How has the suite of professional development models contributed to the effectiveness of the overall professional development strategy, and in turn, to strengthening the region's early childhood workforce?

Strategy Evaluation Question	Methods	Stakeholder and/or Source	Potential Questions for Stakeholder Interviews
T.E.A.C.H. and REWARD\$), strengthen the regional Early Childhood workforce and contribute to the potential effectiveness of the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy?	artifacts Administrative sources	Population of administrators or budget managers of participating grantee organizations Administrative sources and offeror-generated estimates (such as budget documents, staff rosters and audit reports for FY 2009-10 to 2011-12 and preliminary for 2012-13 for the Innovative PD strategy; likely only one year, 2010-11 for other PD strategies)	
Does the Early Childhood Professional Development strategy and the CoP model in particular, include/target the appropriate population to meet the identified professional development needs?	Interviews Review of secondary data and materials and artifacts	Upstream stakeholders: FTF Central PD Staff, CoP Directors Strategy implementation data and other performance measures from FTF and CoPs (e.g., attendance logs, participant information, recruitment information) Council funding plan, community-based PD SOW, and contract	Who are the intended groups participating in the suite of programs in the strategy (e.g., CoPs, Non-T.E.A.C.H., T.E.A.C.H., Reward\$)? Who is the intended target population identified by the Council and funding in the CoP contract to meet identified professional development needs? How are these groups recruited for participation in the strategy, particularly the CoP model? Are the intended groups participating in CoPs specifically (effectiveness in reaching this target population)? From which geographic locations are CoP participants coming?

Table 2. Evaluation Study Timeline

● = Meeting × = Milestone Δ = Final Deliverable — = Ongoing	2012								2013								
	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
Project Management																	
Ongoing communication with Council	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Phase I																	
Kick-off meeting with Central Pima Council Representatives			●														
Finalize evaluation design							×										
Develop and refine data collection instruments									—	×							
Establish mechanisms for data collection									—	×							
Develop database for inputting & downloading data									—	×							
Initial presentation to Central Pima Council												●					
Phase II																	
Collect secondary data (participation #, agenda, minutes, presenters, cost data)										—	—	—	—				
Analyze secondary data compared to quality standards										—	—	—	—				
Survey deployment												—	—				
Analyze survey data													—				
Focus group administration												—					
Analyze focus group data													—	—			
Interview administration										—	—	—	—				
Analyze interview data													—	—	—		
Analyze Cost data										—	—	—	—	—			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● = Meeting ✖ = Milestone Δ = Final Deliverable — = Ongoing 	2012								2013								
	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
Reporting																	
Quarterly report							✖			✖				✖			✖
Draft final report													—	—	—	—	
Final presentation																	Δ
Delivery of database																	Δ
Final Report																	Δ