



## STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

### Community-Based Professional Development for Early Care and Education Professionals

#### I. Description of Strategy Issue

Because young children, including infants and toddlers, spend so much time in early care and education settings outside their own homes, it is especially important to ensure that the professionals responsible for their early care and education have the tools and skills to promote learning and healthy social and emotional development, and know how to help when development is not progressing as it should. The preparation and ongoing professional development of early educators is a fundamental component of a high quality early learning system. The education and training of teachers and administrators is strongly related to early childhood program quality, and program quality predicts development outcomes for children.<sup>1</sup>

Early care and education professionals are often nontraditional learners who benefit from a range of professional development supports. First Things First recognizes the need to provide a variety of options to engage early care and education professionals in professional development. In addition to college coursework, other formats of professional development can provide individuals with updated research and knowledge, teach specialized skills for working with young children, or encourage individuals who have been away from formal schooling to return to the classroom.

While community-based professional development has not been well evaluated, it does provide another logical stepping stone to more formal and credit bearing professional development or as a supplement to educational credentials and degrees for those already in the field. Participants who do not already have these degrees will be encouraged and supported to eventually continue their education through college credit coursework and/or participation in T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood<sup>®</sup> ARIZONA and Quality First. All professional development opportunities will be required to show successful outcomes, either through an assessment process, achievement of milestones, or a follow-up visit by a mentor or coach to determine if professional practice has been changed based upon what was learned.

First Things First invites innovative and creative thinking based upon promising and best practices to provide high quality professional development to the early care and education workforce in Arizona. The broad nature of this strategy allows stakeholders to collaborate creatively to increase access to quality community-based professional development opportunities. For example, some models of community-

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Education (January 2006). *Critical Issues in Early Educator Professional and Workforce Development*. Columbus: OH. This paper was funded by the Department under the Commission of the School Readiness Solutions Group, and was developed by Jana Fleming.

based professional development may focus on enhancing leadership and management skills among child care administrators in order to enhance program quality. Additionally, grantees may pursue other approaches to professional development, such as the use of cohorts for participants, single day seminars, or multi-day trainings that are held over the course of several months. While these programs come in different forms, they have a common goal of increasing the level of preparation and skill of early care and education providers, and encouraging them to pursue certification and college degrees in the field.

Research demonstrates that the most effective types of professional development approaches include content-based workshops as well as hands-on, one-on-one mentoring or coaching, also referred to as “consultation.”

A national, multi-state evaluation on consulting as professional development concluded that on-site consultation resulted in improvements for both center-based care as well as family child care on factors measured by the environmental rating scales developed by Harms, Clifford and Cryor (ECSR/ITERS/FCCRS).<sup>2</sup> Further, formal professional development is related to higher quality care; however, experience without formal training has not been found to be related to quality care. Therefore, the value of applying theory to practice is a key element of community-based professional development.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Standards of Practice

### A. Implementation Standards

- While each First Things First funded community-based professional development program may be uniquely designed, they all have a valuable role to play in meeting the complex needs of early care and education professionals, families and communities across the State of Arizona. First Things First focuses on programs and services that provide children with the best opportunities for school and life success.
- First Things First funded programs may supplement but not supplant other state expenditures on, and federal monies received for, early childhood development and health programs. Funding decisions are based upon a robust process of review to ensure programs are supported by research, value the family and use approaches considered to be best practice.
- Providers of community-based professional development are expected to partner with First Things First during all stages of planning and implementation, and with local early care and education professionals and other early care and education stakeholders in developing and marketing the program. They will also be required to demonstrate a willingness to work with First Things First Regional Partnership Councils via the Regional Director and the systems of communications established by First Things First. In order to document progress towards

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<sup>2</sup> Paulsell et al, 2008, *Lessons for Policy and Programs*.

<sup>3</sup> Galinsky, E.C., Howes, S., & Shinn, M. *The study of children in family care and relative care*. 1994, New York: Families and Work Institute; Kagan, S.L., & Newton, J.W. Public policy report: For-profit and non-profit child care: Similarities and differences. *Young Children*, 1989, 45, 4-10; Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. *Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America* 1989, Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.

successful implementation and the achievement of specified goals and outcomes, programs will also be required to function within the framework of First Things First data collection and evaluation efforts.

- Applicants in regions that contain federally-designated tribal areas must describe their outreach activities for early care and education providers within tribal communities.

**Providers delivering professional development opportunities will be required to ensure that opportunities are designed and implemented according to the following principles:**

- Professional development opportunities are based upon a culture of trust and respect.
  - Clearly define program objectives to ensure comprehension, engagement, and retention.
  - Create opportunities for and act upon formal and informal feedback ensuring that input shapes on-going decision-making.
  - Encourage honest, open communication between participants and instructors.
  - Maintain confidentiality, being respectful of program participants.
  - Incorporate culturally responsive practices.
- Professional development is based on current research, core areas of competency and early learning standards.
  - Incorporate and reflect the theoretical framework into curriculum that informs practice in the classroom.
  - Ensure that curriculum clearly addresses core competencies.
- Professional development is responsive to the needs and interests of the region's early care and education professionals.
- Participants are afforded opportunities for practical application of the theoretical foundation to real-life classroom activities and situations.
  - Provide experiences that are relevant to the participant's background and current role.
  - Provide a pathway leading to a specific goal, such as a Child Development Associate (CDA), a set of skills or an educational degree.
- Sessions involve adult active learning techniques for participants.
- Professional development includes opportunities for follow up on-site technical assistance, mentorship, and/or supervision.
- An assessment is implemented (either formal or informal) to determine the outcomes for each participant before a certificate of completion is awarded.

**All providers of community-based professional development opportunities for early care and education professionals will:**

1. Increase the availability of and participation in high quality professional development opportunities for those working with or preparing to work with children birth through age five;
2. Provide high quality professional development opportunities through innovative and creative approaches as well as experienced and responsive staff;
3. Develop outreach and recruitment practices that engage and retain participants;
4. Track individual's progress in obtaining the skills necessary to be qualified to care for children;

5. Provide resource and referral information to participants on the healthy development of young children and resources available in the community such as early literacy programs, family support agencies, and physical and oral health resources;
6. Provide resource and referral information to participants relative to degree and certification programs in early care and education (and related fields), and higher education scholarships;
7. Work in partnership with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARIZONA scholarship program and Professional Careers Pathways Project to link participants to financial assistance in achieving college credit to ensure participants access all available financial assistance prior to utilizing funds from this grant;
8. Identify and coordinate with existing professional development opportunities within the region;
9. Conduct professional development based on best practices and research, giving consideration to:
  - utilizing subject matter experts (visiting faculty, published authors, researchers, etc.) to enhance training content and delivery
  - the frequency and sequence of training sessions
  - having specific identified outcomes that participants must achieve and assessing those outcomes for each participant before documentation of completion is awarded;
10. Provide professional development sessions that are interactive, model desired behaviors, and address the multiple learning styles of adult learners;
  - Topics should address the core competency areas identified by the National Council for Professional Recognition. At a minimum, topics must include:
    - understanding the 5 domains of early childhood development, including early childhood special education
    - observing, documenting, and assessing children’s behaviors
    - ensuring safe and healthy learning environments
    - upholding ethical and professional standards
    - utilizing developmentally appropriate practices
    - advancing physical and intellectual competence
    - supporting social/emotional development and using positive guidance techniques
    - establishing respectful, positive, and productive relationships with families
    - ensuring a well-run, purposeful program responsive to child and family needs;
  - Additional training topics may include, but are not limited to:
    - sensory integration, behavioral health, and special needs
    - role of creativity in learning
    - role of materials in the classroom
    - role of the arts in cognitive and social emotional growth and development
    - role of the environment and environmental design in children’s learning
    - role of the teacher/educator as researcher
    - significance of play
    - written and oral communication skills of providers;
11. Design and implement an assessment process to determine the extent to which the training has enhanced the knowledge and professional practice of program participants;
12. Ensure that community-based professional development meet requirements of the National Council for Professional Recognition (for the Child Development Associate), and the standard

requirements for transfer of credit to a certificate or degree in early care and education (or a related field) at the community colleges;

13. Maintain flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues in the community and the early childhood field;
  - Recruit staff from the community who have extensive knowledge of community resources
  - Recruit staff that reflect the cultural and ethnic experiences and language of the participants and integrate their expertise into the program
  - Develop a collaborative, coordinated response to community needs
  - Implement continuous quality improvement by reviewing feedback from program participants
  - Ensure a class size and appropriate staffing which ensure individualized attention and active learning for the participants.

### **Communities of Practice**

According to theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, Communities of Practice are ways of promoting innovation, developing social capital, and facilitating and spreading knowledge within a group. Communities of Practice (Etienne Wenger, 2006) can be defined, in part, as a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions, and building innovations. Wenger provides this definition: “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>4</sup>

**In addition the guidelines above, grant opportunities that include Communities of Practice, will, as applicable:**

1. Deliver high quality, best practice, and community-based professional development opportunities to early care and education teachers and administrators via a Community of Practice model which includes ongoing education sessions, seminars, lectures and college level classes to enhance their skills and knowledge in working with children birth through age five;
2. Offer early childhood professionals a continuum of education that is long-term, cohort-based, and tied to college credit;
3. Gather peers together, multiple times, to study and research an identified topic;
4. Provide college credit leading to an educational degree; provide academic support and consultation to the participants by an early childhood representative affiliated with a higher education institution (such as a local university or community college);
5. Provide opportunities for participants to apply newly learned theories and knowledge to hands-on practice in early care and education settings.
6. Ensure a maximum number of early childhood professionals have the opportunity to participate by providing more than one Community of Practice on multiple topics of study occurring simultaneously;

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>

7. Convene each learning community at minimum nine to ten times per year to hear various speakers such as local, state, and national early childhood education leaders and subject matter experts;
8. Ensure Communities of Practice meeting times and locations are responsive and flexible to the varying educational needs and geographical locations of the participating early childhood professionals;
9. Include innovative, evidence-based and informative topics that are directly linked to early childhood best-practice and inclusive of the Arizona Early Learning Standards (and/or Head Start Performance Standards);
10. Be either a representative within an institution of higher learning (i.e. faculty or adjunct faculty) or a community member with knowledge and strong pre-existing ties to local higher education institutions;
11. Possess knowledge and understanding of how to streamline and expedite the award of college credits for the Communities of Practice experience;
12. Demonstrate pre-existing relationships and develop new partnerships with local organizations, agencies and community networks that offer professional development opportunities and professional memberships;
13. Create inclusive learning communities by serving as an academic support to the professional development participants who are part of the Communities of Practice; and
14. Involve subject matter experts (i.e. visiting faculty, published authors, researchers, etc.) in working directly with the cohort participants, facilitating the sessions and providing opportunities for interactions and discussions. These experts will:
  15. possess proven expertise and a substantiated reputation among peers in an applicable field, or area related to early care and education
  16. possess appropriate credentials and/or recognition for contributions to one's field
  17. have demonstrated knowledge and skills that reflect current best practices and/or research
  18. have experience working with adult learners and diverse cultures, where applicable

**In addition to the guidelines above, grant opportunities that include mentoring or coaching for administrators/practitioners, will, as applicable:**

1. Establish a mentoring program that includes effective/proven components of mentoring and that views mentoring as a “core component of professional development-a replacement for less effective training modalities, rather than an additional service;”<sup>5</sup>
2. Identify selection criteria for mentors/coaches and participating administrators/practitioners;
3. Include roles, responsibilities, and expectations of mentors/coaches and participating administrators/practitioners;
4. Develop cohorts of participants;
5. Create a clear and multi-direction communication system;
6. Develop individualized professional development plans;
7. Establish mechanisms that support on-going professional development and support for mentors and participants;

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<sup>5</sup> [http://ccf.edc.org/PDF/MentorRG\\_Eng.pdf](http://ccf.edc.org/PDF/MentorRG_Eng.pdf)

8. Provide mentoring/coaching, to administrators, that supports leadership development and administrative competency;
9. Provide mentoring/coaching, to practitioners, that supports development of self-confidence and self-efficacy in teaching (a belief in one's ability to be effective with children and families);
10. Develop on-site or near-site trainings for center administrators that address fiscal administration, systems management, human resource development, and related administrative skills/tasks.

**Grant opportunities that include conference scholarships, will, as applicable:**

1. Ensure that sessions offered at conferences meet requirements of the National Council for Professional Recognition (for the Child Development Associate);
2. Include opportunities for providers to meet with each other to develop relationships that will provide support that extends beyond the conference schedule;
3. Include innovative methods to remove barriers and increase child care provider participation, which may include scholarship and/or travel stipends to remove financial barriers to attendance;
4. Be responsible for reviewing requests and making scholarship/travel stipend awards; and
5. In no way will scholarships or stipends supplant other professional development resources and opportunities that exist in the region.

**B. Staff Qualifications, Supervision and Professional Development Standards**

**Qualifications of Instructors and Supervisors:** Instructors and their supervisors must:

1. Be knowledgeable about and possess experience in working with both adult learners and young children birth to age five.
2. Have an educational degree and experience in early childhood education, elementary education with a concentration in early childhood, child and family studies, or a closely related field and must meet the qualifications of adjunct faculty at the local community college. Supervisors must meet or exceed these requirements with at least two years of program management experience.
3. Possess appropriate credentials and experience in conducting professional development activities, including working with adult learners and learners from diverse cultures.
4. Demonstrate knowledge and skills that reflect current early childhood education best practices, research and standards, such as *Arizona's Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Childhood Education, Early Learning Standards for 3-5 Year Olds and Infant/Toddler Developmental Guidelines* (in development for publication in January 2012).
5. Have a minimum of five years experience working with young children (combination of classroom and supervisory experience).
6. Demonstrate proficiency in the language(s) of the participants or have an alternate and effective procedure for communication.
7. If programs experience hardship in recruiting personnel with these qualifications, notify and consult with First Things First.

## C. Cultural Competency

**Programs will also implement the following best practices and standards related to Cultural Competencies:**

- To address cultural competency objectives, early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers shall ensure that children and families receive from all staff members and program participants effective, understandable, and respectful care that is provided in a culturally competent manner. Early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers should ensure that staff and participants at all levels and across all disciplines receive ongoing education and training in culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery. Early childhood practitioners/early childhood service providers should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with communities and utilize a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate community and family-centered involvement to ensure that services are delivered in a manner that is consistent with the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services and/or the National Recommendations on Cultural and Linguistic Competence for the National Association for the Education of Young Children.”  
<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=15>  
<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic>
- Service providers should understand individual Tribes/Nations are distinct and separate communities from other Tribes/Nations and their governmental systems and structures are not reflective of each other. Services to Tribal communities and on reservations must be provided in a manner compatible with the Tribe’s/Nation’s cultural beliefs and practices, to include the preferred language of the community. Services must also be provided in accordance with the Tribe’s/Nation’s laws, policies and procedures. The effectiveness of services is directly related to the provider’s consideration of the beliefs, customs and laws of the Tribe/Nation.
- Service providers can obtain information about providing services on tribal lands from a variety of sources. These include the FTF Regional Coordinator, Regional Council members, tribal websites and publications, as well as official representatives of the Tribe/Nation such as the governing body, standing committees and authorized departments.
- It is highly recommended that service providers seek guidance from one or more of these sources before initiating services on reservations. Failure to do so could result in contraventions of cultural beliefs, Tribal laws or sovereignty.
- The ideal applicant will demonstrate their ability to operate within these parameters through prior experience working with Tribes/Nations, demonstrating that staff are culturally competent, partnerships with agencies serving Native American families, knowledge of cultural beliefs, customs and laws of the Tribe/Nation or a combination of these elements.
- Related to data collection, evaluation or research activities:
  - In the United States, Native American Tribes are considered autonomous nations with all of the rights and responsibilities of a nation. Understanding this, Native American Tribes are charged with protecting the health and safety of their people. To this end, Tribes have full ownership over any data collected within their reservation boundaries. This means that Tribes can allow or not allow any program to collect data from or related to any early childhood development and health program or activities on the reservation.

- Any grantee implementing programs in tribal communities must have official tribal permission to collect and utilize sensitive data from or related to any early childhood development and health program or activities.