



Arizona Early Childhood Task Force

March 9, 2010
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Hilton Garden Inn

MEETING MINUTES

Welcome and Introductions

Nadine Mathis Basha, Task Force Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m., welcomed those in attendance, and introduced new members.

How Systems Work

Task Force Facilitator, B. J. Tatro, made some introductory remarks about how systems work. There are inputs into every system and these include resources and demands. Resources into the early childhood system include, for example, the strengths of Arizona children and families, the knowledge and skills of the workforce, and dedicated funding. “Demands” (in systems language) would include, for example, family requirements for child care and health services as well as workforce requirements for education and adequate wages/benefits.

Systems act on the inputs to create outputs, which are typically defined as products or services. In the early childhood system, outputs would include, for example, literacy programs, oral health services, family support services, and specialized therapy services. Within every system, there are multiple and differentiated subsystems that are connected by a web of interrelationships, making them interdependent. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Resilient systems have some redundancy; for example, in the early childhood system, there are various forms of child care—family child care, center-based child care, care provided by kith and kin, and in-home child care.

Systems are typically goal-oriented; that is, there is a clear purpose and desired outcome. In the early childhood system, the desired outcome is that children will have a solid foundation for success in school and in life by the time they are five years old. Systems wither and die if they do not receive new infusions of energy and resources. Resilient systems have internal and external feedback loops. In the case of the early childhood system, as children and families become more resilient themselves, they contribute to a strengthening of the system itself. They are also likely to have higher expectations for the early childhood system and place more demands upon it. For example, families who see the benefits of having more highly educated and skilled teachers seek out settings that provide well-qualified teachers for their children.

In summary, using the words of the Build Institute, systems contain numerous subsystems, are part of a larger system, require interconnections to achieve optimal results, and are “loosely coupled.” There are five focus areas: context, components, connections, infrastructure, and scale. See *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*, which was included in the meeting packet, for more information.

Finalize Vision and Model for the Arizona Early Childhood System

Task Force members reviewed the changes to the vision and model system that had been suggested following the posting of the draft document on the website. See the revised *Arizona Early Childhood System Model* posted with materials for the March meeting for the latest draft.

With respect to the areas addressed by the early childhood system, the Task Force added Early Education as a separate entity and noted that emergent literacy is a part of this. Emergent literacy will need to be defined in the final document that is produced by the Task Force. The Task Force further elaborated the developmental domains.

It was noted that when the model system is conceptualized graphically, it will be necessary to keep it simple and ensure that it is understandable by the general public. Terms such as healthy brain development should be used to talk about the importance of the early years.

The Task Force discussed the section of the model system that addresses what families might want/need, i.e., information, services, and support. The section should focus on the strengths of the family. It was noted that “Support” should be focused on family, friends, faith-based, and community. “Family support services” such as home visiting would be subsumed in the “Services” category. With respect to the reference to services to address special needs, Mary Ellen Cunningham (Arizona Department of Health Services) will check with their Office for Children with Special Health Care Needs for preferred language.

In the section on the foundational elements, it was recommended that “nurturance” be added.

In the sections on key partners and elsewhere, there was agreement to include those who provide transportation, faith-based communities, and organizations that support providers. “Early learning” will be changed to “early care and education.”

Review of Systems-level Outcomes

Task Force Consultant, Karen Ponder, presented *Early Childhood Systems Outcomes*. The slides were included in the meeting packet. Ms. Ponder covered the areas of a systems focus— context, components, connections, infrastructure, and scale. She shared information from Virginia, Washington, New York, and Louisiana, and then reviewed the outcomes of responsive systems. These include: increased capacity to assess child and family needs and promote positive development; increased capacity of providers to connect families to the supports and services they need; increased capacity of state and local government to support cross-sector

service delivery; increased use of evidence-based practices; increased and more diverse resources and support; increased availability of data for decision making; and increased public awareness and support.

Identify Systems-level Outcomes

B. J. Tatro reiterated that the Task Force would be focusing on overall early childhood system outcomes, not only FTF outcomes. This will come later in the process when the Task Force identifies the FTF role in the overall system. To set the stage, Amy Kemp (FTF) provided an overview of accountability from the FTF perspective. Dr. Kemp noted that there are three levels of evaluation: longitudinal (are Arizona's children healthy and ready to learn), key measures and system indicators (have we produced systemic change for children and families), and performance monitoring (are grantees providing desired services). The focus of today's meeting is on systemic change.

Following Dr. Kemp's remarks, the Task Force reviewed the system outcomes that are included in the current FTF Strategic Plan Roadmap and had copies of outcomes from several states to consider. Ms. Ponder cautioned the group to remember that every state is different and that people define system outcomes in different ways.

The Task Force then brainstormed ideas including the following:

- Even though the focus today is not on identifying measures for the outcomes, the outcomes should be measurable.
- System outcomes should focus on the system. Ultimately these should lead to outcomes for children and families, but the child is not the "outcome."
- With respect to children, it is hoped that an outcome of having a well-functioning early childhood system will be that children feel and are valued, that they are at the center of the work we do. It is also hoped that children will feel and be safe.
- With respect to families, it is hoped that that an outcome of having a well-functioning early childhood system is that families will feel and be valued.
- There will be different outcomes as the system develops. In the shorter term, the desired outcome is to have a quality system in place. If the system is "ready for the child" and it is used, we can expect to see measurable results over time. The longitudinal study that is being done by the University Consortium will be evaluating this impact.
- With respect to the shorter term outcomes (the system being in place and ready for children), some of the results we would hope to see are:
 - Each agency, organization, and individual involved in the system understands their role and what every other entity does.
 - Resources are sufficient to meet the demands placed on the system.
 - The system responds to the demand.
 - People in the system are competent and confident. This is not limited to the paid workforce, but includes anyone caring for young children.

- The public is aware of the importance of the early years and champions the early childhood system.
- The connection between a well-functioning early childhood system and economic development is well understood and appreciated. Longer term, we would like to see businesses locating in Arizona because of the quality early childhood system.
- There is a coherent system that families can count on to be there for them.
- The governance system is clearly defined; statewide and local structures and resources are well articulated.
- Services and supports are available statewide; we have brought the system as envisioned to scale.
- If we value and support children and families, in the longer term we can expect to see a well-educated and engaged community.
- If we value, prepare, and support the early childhood workforce, in the longer term we can expect to see strong leadership that has grown from within our state.

Begin Identification of FTF Role

In the next meeting, the Task Force will begin with a brief review of the FTF statute in order to ensure all members are familiar with the requirements, and then the members will engage in a discussion of the agency's role in the early childhood system that the group is conceptualizing.

Next Steps/Information Needed for the Next Meeting/Meeting Evaluation and Reflection

Meeting notes will be prepared and posted on the website for review, along with any documents prepared for the next meeting. Comments will be solicited.

Task Force members completed a Meeting Evaluation and Reflections form to help guide planning for the next Task Force meeting.

For the next meeting, Task Force members requested the following documents:

- Arizona population data (A link will be posted.)

The next meeting will be April 19 from 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. at a location to be announced. At that meeting, the Task Force will review the draft system outcomes, identify FTF's role, and identify outcomes/benchmarks for FTF.

Adjourn

Ms. Basha adjourned the meeting at 12:30 p.m.