

Report to the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood- DRAFT

**Recommendations Concerning Transition of Work Group Activities into the
Office of Early Childhood**

August 27, 2013

This report was developed by Karen Ponder for the BUILD Initiative to support the creation of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and to make recommendations for transitioning the work of the Early Childhood Cabinet into the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood.

In an effort to move the early childhood work forward in Connecticut, work groups were created in 2011 to focus on particular subject areas and to make specific recommendations to the Connecticut Children's Cabinet. The work groups were organized around the following areas of work:

Early Learning and Development Standards

Family Involvement and Home Visitation

Health Promotion

Quality Data

Quality Rating and Improvement (This area will not be included in the report because this work has already transitioned into the Office.)

Workforce and Professional Development

The Work Groups included a broad-based membership and were chaired by experts in their content areas. Each group developed goals and a work plan and achieved significant results. The recommendations offered in this report based largely on reports from the Work Groups as well as interviews with chairs or co-chairs from each group.

An overall recommendation, in addition to the recommendations within each content area, is to ensure that each segment of the Connecticut early childhood system is responsive to the needs of children of diverse race, culture and language.

Early Learning and Development Standards

The goal of the Early Learning and Development Standards Work Group was to adopt comprehensive and multi-domain early learning standards that reflect a progression of skills, birth through age 5, aligned with kindergarten to grade 12 standards.

In addition to the Work Group members, the process to develop standards included many local, state and national experts. The Group's work was also informed by nationally respected guiding documents on standards development and recommendations. In addition, the standards were reviewed for different aspects (e.g., skill levels, age appropriateness, wording, cultural relevancy, dual language appropriateness, special needs, etc.) by many early childhood content experts in addition to the Work Group experts.

The following are specific recommendations concerning the work of the Early Learning and Standards Work Group in transitioning into the Office of Early Childhood:

1. Develop a statewide plan for disseminating and incorporating the standards in all early learning settings.
2. Develop a statewide plan for professional development and supports on the standards for all sites and settings. Include outreach and education for families as part of the plan.
3. Launch an age validation study of the standards; consider a multi-state study for efficiency and cost savings.
4. Be certain that standards are informing the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).
5. Consider ways that standards are connected to K-3 policies and procedures and make sure principals and teachers understand the connections to teaching and learning.
6. Ensure that Connecticut's standards work helps to inform the national work and Consortia on Kindergarten Inventory Development.

Health Promotion and Access to Health

The goal of the Health Promotion Work Group, which was created in 2013, was to ensure comprehensive health (developmental, physical, socio-emotional, oral, physical activity, nutrition, environmental, etc.) and safety within the early childhood vision and action of Connecticut.

Historically health has operated separate from early learning and children and families benefit when health is integrated into early learning. They also benefit when early learning knowledge and practices are integrated into health services. A continuing collaboration between the Office of Child Development and health services and providers is needed.

Based on the work of the Health Promotion Committee, the following recommendations are made to the Office of Early Learning:

1. Consider having an ongoing health promotions resource group to assist in collaborating, coordinating, informing and promoting health in all areas of early childhood programs and services.
2. Develop standardized health promotion training and integrate it into staff competencies and into the early childhood professional development system.
3. Develop a statewide health consultation plan, based on research and best practices models. Assure that all health consultants are integrated into the state plan, use common standards and have access to ongoing professional development.
4. Make a prevention philosophy core to promoting comprehensive health and safety.
5. Promote early identification and services as a matter of practice.
6. Convert the Early Childhood Health Assessment Record to an electronic version for quicker access and better accuracy.
7. Continue to develop the idea of no wrong point of entry for families. Regardless of where a family enters the system, make sure they can connect to all programs and services that are needed for health and early learning.

Parent Engagement and Home Visitation

Parent engagement and home visiting are two areas that have not been fully integrated into the early childhood system in Connecticut nor in many other states. Connecticut's work in these areas is cutting edge and other states are looking to integrate some of Connecticut's thinking and policies into their own systems work. Connecticut leaders are regularly a part of national organizations, work groups and webinars helping to better develop and disseminate policies and practices in this area of early childhood systems building work.

The Parent Engagement and Home Visitation Work Group is a diverse group, given its dual task of integrating home visitation policies into the system and working to develop and embed parent leadership and engagement practices into all early childhood programs and services. The work group has expressed a willingness to continue their work in support of the Office of Early Childhood and would morph into an advisory group or panel to the Office of Early Childhood. This appears to be necessary in addition to staff support of this area of work, because of the breadth and depth of the parent engagement and home visiting work and because its best practices are important in every area of the state's policies and services to children and families.

The following are specific recommendations concerning the work of the Parent Engagement and Home Visitation Work Group:

1. Ensure that the broad-based, inclusive work of the Parent Engagement and Home Visitation Work Group continues through an ongoing advisory group or panel. This advisory group should meet on a regular basis and advise the Office of Early Childhood about ways to better integrate best practices relating to parent leadership and engagement into all areas of the state's early childhood system, communities and schools; and review and recommend home visitation policies and practices and make recommendations about improvements, training and dissemination of materials and research.

2. Embed best practices in parent leadership and engagement into the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).
3. Consider how coordinated training, which includes both parent engagement and home visitation will be delivered statewide. Make sure this training is well coordinated with existing training for early childhood professionals and all others who work directly with families of young children.
4. Include regular focus groups as a strategy for engaging families and learning about their changing needs and desires for their children. Use input from these focus groups to inform the Office's early childhood systems' work on a regular basis.
5. Ensure that all models of home visiting are coordinated, including common standards, practices and reporting.
6. Link federal and state program and policy opportunities in home visitation and parent engagement with early care and learning opportunities.

Quality Data

The goal of the Quality Data Work Group was to plan for a more comprehensive data system for early childhood, including the data architecture to collect and link data with various elements of the state's overall data system.

The data planning also included foundational work toward the development of an MOU template between relevant state agencies and sharing aggregate data by towns for public access. In addition, the Work Group collected information about unique child identifiers across agencies and agreed that the birth certificate number (State File Number) would be the best unique child identifier across multiple agencies that are not able to use State Assigned Student IDs (SASIDS). If the State File Number could also be added to the data systems of those agencies who do obtain SASIDs, it will make it easier to link the data to “upstream” agencies such as the Department of Public Health, the Department of Social Services (Medicaid), and the Department of Children and Families.

The creation of the Office of Early Childhood includes the core early childhood programs, which facilitates data sharing and linking among those programs. Work also needs to be done to eventually link the entire P-20 continuum for policy and programmatic information.

Based on the work completed by the Data Work Group, the following are specific recommendations going forward:

1. The policy and data staff who know the individual data systems, what data is collected and how data is collected, should continue to be a part of this work and planning as the IT staff at the Department of Education begin to design the Early Childhood Information System.
2. There should be an ongoing effort to enumerate important policy, research, and programmatic questions facing early childhood systems development and determine what types of data will be needed to respond to those questions, and the degree to which these should be considered for inclusion into a comprehensive data system or addressed through other means of data and information collection.
3. Consider the development of a data governance work group to inform and make recommendations concerning data on a regular basis. Ensure that there is ongoing and clear understanding and translation between data designers, research, policy, and programmatic needs.
4. Identify how data that is collected can best be analyzed and used to address research, policy, and programmatic needs—and how analysts can be deployed to do that, including making the data available to outside researchers and evaluators.
5. Engage with leaders in other states who have worked through some of the challenges of a well developed data plan and system, have several years of experience, and can share lessons learned.
6. Finalize work on MOUs, modeled after those that exist for P20WIN when data needs to be shared with agencies/programs that are not part of the Office of Early Childhood.

7. Finalize work on a unique child identifier across agencies. Consider the adoption or addition of the State File Number by each early childhood agency that collects child record-level data.

Workforce and Professional Development

The goals of the Workforce and Professional Development Work Group are to ensure that Connecticut teachers in state-subsidized early childhood education programs meet the mandated teacher qualifications as outlined in legislation; and work toward raising the qualifications of all early care and education providers. A variety of strategies were developed and progress was made toward putting these in place. The following recommendations are made to the Office of Early Childhood, based on the work and accomplishments of this group and best practice in this area.

1. Develop a more coordinated and comprehensive professional preparation and development system for the early care and education workforce in Connecticut. This system should incorporate all early childhood professionals at all sites and include a technical assistance plan to support the system. A well coordinated and comprehensive system will help meet the mandates for 2015 and 2020. The recommendations that follow will support recommendation #1.
2. Assure that the workforce and professional development system is a part of the planning of Connecticut's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).
3. Annually update the inventory, created by the Work Group, of higher education, non-degree professional development and credentialing opportunities in early care and education. Continue surveying local community providers to learn about their professional development needs and use this information for professional development planning. Add a credentials section to the Inventory.
4. Develop a statewide professional development calendar that includes all state and community professional development opportunities. The

location of this calendar should be determined as well as a process for keeping it regularly updated.

5. Continue to consider changes in licensing staff qualifications, with a focus on improving the quality of all early education settings.
6. Develop/expand/refine a data collection system for higher education of early childhood professionals.
7. Continue support and involvement with the Higher Education Consortium, particularly regarding articulation agreements and partnerships between 2 year and 4 year institutions.
8. Expand scholarship opportunities and make higher education coursework more readily available through on-line and on-site opportunities, considering availability in more isolated communities.