

Statement of Purpose
Workgroup on Defining and Measuring
Professional Development of the Early Childhood Workforce

A series of meeting sponsored by the Child Care Bureau in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, DHHS and other federal agencies identified a set of problems in defining and measuring professional development of the early childhood workforce. These problems have implications not only for understanding the accumulating findings from research, but also for policy and practice.

The purpose of the Workgroup on Defining and Measuring Professional Development of the Early Childhood Workforce is to build on what was learned during these meetings to take specific steps towards addressing the problems with definition and measurement of the early childhood workforce.

- **Two meetings were convened by federal agencies: The SEED Meeting on Professional Development and Training of the Early Childhood Workforce, and the Child Care Bureau and ASPE sponsored Workshop on Defining and Measuring Professional Development and Training of the Early Childhood Workforce. These meetings helped to identify the nature of the problem.**

A meeting held in February 2003 focused on professional development of the early childhood workforce as a contributor to children's positive transition to school. This meeting was sponsored by the SEED (Science and the Ecology of Early Development) consortium of federal agencies with a focus on early childhood development. At this meeting, a paper presented by Maxwell, Feild and Clifford summarized the evidence that a lack of agreement among researchers in how to define and measure professional development was hindering our ability to aggregate findings to identify patterns of results or to isolate key elements of professional development that are related to positive environmental quality and child outcomes. The paper indicated that researchers did not agree on distinctions between education and training. This lack of agreement makes summarizing findings difficult. There is a lack of precision in the way in which the content of formal education as it pertains to early childhood is measured, with studies often reporting whether a degree was or was not in the early childhood are without attempting to describe the number or content of relevant courses. Training is very poorly defined and measured in the research, with almost no attempt to go beyond the distinction of any vs. no training to describe such key elements as content or extent of training. Thus training involving a single workshop is grouped in the research with completion of intensive and sequential training curricula. Other papers presented at the meeting indicated problems in the way federal data collection efforts and states collect data to measure the size and characteristics of the workforce. For example, in a paper presented by Brandon, Martinez-Beck, Raikes and Tarullo, the point was made that different data collection strategies across types of early care and education (e.g., Head Start, child care) make it very difficult to create a composite picture. Further, many data collection efforts use terminology that results in family friend and neighbor providers not being included.

One year later, a follow-up workshop was held to provide a focused discussion on these issues from a research, practice and policy perspective. For example, states often require and measure ongoing training in terms of hours or credits, without specifying content. Yet states are interested in assuring that training is distributed across key content areas. The lack of a system for categorizing the content of training thus can limit the breadth of training required or encouraged. An example of the way in which this set of problems can affect policy is that it is difficult to plan for the targeted expansion of professional development activities without an accurate assessment of the size and characteristics of the current workforce. Data collection efforts in which the questions unintentionally exclude family friend and neighbor caregivers will make it difficult to plan for how to include this group of caregivers in professional development activities.

- **There are important immediate and longer-term steps that can be taken to address problems with definition and measurement of the early childhood workforce. The Workgroup will serve as a resource in moving forward, providing input and wherever possible, also coordinating follow-up steps.**

At the Workshop on Defining and Measuring Professional Development of the Early Childhood Workforce, a series of immediate and longer-term steps were identified that can be taken to begin to address this set of issues. The purpose of the Workgroup is to act as a resource, providing input into follow-up steps that are underway, encouraging further follow-up steps, and where possible, coordinating follow-up steps.

Immediate follow-up steps that are already underway include:

A new effort by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to survey the directors of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies about the nature and content of training efforts. Linda Smith is leading this effort and has welcomed input by Workgroup members.

The National Registries Alliance is working on developing common definitions and measures for recording professional development. Kathy Thornburg has worked with this group to help develop a common set of definitions to be used across states. She has requested input from the Child Care Bureau.

Other possible follow-up steps include:

Working with the Child Care Bureau State Capacity Grantees. These states are all working to include a common identifier for early childhood professionals so that information on their professional development and background could be used across multiple systems, such as licensing, subsidy and registry systems. A common set of definitions and measures to be used across such systems would be extremely helpful.

A new project focusing on market rate surveys that Bobbie Weber is leading could be a further opportunity. Market rate surveys could be extended to include data on workforce characteristics. Common definitions and measures would be useful here as well.

There is a “common core” of data collected on elementary school education in states. The common core was developed by the National Center for Education Statistics over a period of time with a working group like the one we have convened. We would like to work towards a common core of data to be collected in federal and state surveys on the characteristics, professional development and training of the early childhood workforce.