

## **Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System**

The Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System (AECPDS) includes several components in an effort to create a coordinated system of professional development. The major elements include the SPECTRUM and the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System Registries. While components of the system are funded through CCDF and other funds that are dispersed by the Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE), the system is governed by a steering committee comprised of stakeholders in the system.

Efforts to coordinate professional development for early care and education providers in Arkansas pre-date the current system by many years. Those efforts were typically sporadic and did not lead to any systematic coordination efforts. Antecedents of this last, successful effort, include encouragement from the Child Care Bureau and a change in teacher licensure in the state of Arkansas. Prior to 2001, an "Early Childhood" certificate in Arkansas only encompassed kindergarten. Beginning in 2001, the new licensure Early Childhood Education licensure became Pre-school through Grade Four. This move galvanized stakeholders to develop professional development pathways to support individuals already working in preschool setting to move toward licensure.

### **GOVERNANCE**

The AECPDS is governed by the AECPDS Steering Committee. The committee is comprised of representative stakeholders in the system, including chairs of the standing committees of the system (including Registry, SPECTRUM, and others). This committee develops/approves policy relevant to the system. Evaluation of the system as a whole is also under Steering Committee's purview. The Steering Committee also plays a role in issues such as investigating complaints against and appeals from trainers.

The system is funded through the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. In many ways, the AECPDS Steering Committee is advisory to the DCCECE. Because state policy can fluctuate due to political concerns, the Steering Committee is not completely subsumed by the DCCECE. The steering committee's purpose and point of view may not always be congruent with DCCECE policy, and the steering committee is committed to being an advocate for the professionals it serves and the children and families of Arkansas.

### **THE SPECTRUM**

The SPECTRUM was developed to help individuals determine where they are in the myriad levels of professional development in Arkansas's early childhood education system. Since those who work with young children in Arkansas range from individuals with a high school degree and no training or experience to individuals with doctorate degrees in early childhood education and many years of experience working directly with young children, the concept of a "career lattice" was adopted. Individuals come into the system at many points and have multiple pathways they might pursue.

Three levels of professional development were identified: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. One's level in the system is determined by a combination of education, direct experience with young children, and completed professional development options. Following are examples:

- High school degree, Completed 8 clock hour Family Child Care Orientation Training, opened own family child care home within the last 6 months would be placed at the BASIC level
- Working toward Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education, 3 years of direct experience working with young children, completed 20 clock hour Child Care Orientation Training, completed Child Development Associate Credential would be considered at the INTERMEDIATE level
- Completed a Bachelor of Science in Child Development degree would be placed within the ADVANCED level

Each of the three broad levels (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced) are broken down into more refined categories, primarily based upon the professional development options the individual has completed. These levels are based primarily on the type of credential, endorsement, or degree the individual has completed. The SPECTRUM lists the various professional development options available within Arkansas, and how completion of specific professional development options can move an individual move up within the levels.

## **THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REGISTRIES**

The AECPPDS has developed three different yet interdependent registries. The first and largest registry, the Practitioner Registry, tracks professional development for all individuals in the system. The second registry is the Trainer Registry, which is used to verify and maintain approved trainers within the state. The Training Registry maintains all professional development opportunities that have been registered and identified as appropriate.

### **Practitioner Registry**

Anyone involved in early childhood settings, from teacher aids to university faculty, are encouraged to register in the Practitioner Registry. This Registry coordinates with the SPECTRUM. Upon completion of the Registry application, the individual's level of professional development is determined as Basic, Intermediate, or Advanced. The Practitioner Registry allows individuals to track their completed professional development opportunities, including state-sponsored training, conferences, higher education coursework, and specific professional development opportunities. A short-term goal for the AECPPDS is for Licensing to use the Practitioner Registry to verify that child care personnel have completed the required number of training hours per year. A long-term goal for this Registry and the AECPPDS system as a whole is to increase compensation to practitioners based upon their movement through the SPECTRUM.

### **Trainer Registry**

If an individual wishes for the professional development opportunities he or she offers to count in the Practitioner Registry, the individual must be an approved trainer. This registry verifies that an individual has the appropriate qualifications to conduct specific trainings. Trainers are assessed to deliver training in the different Competency Areas and at the different levels of the SPECTRUM. The Registry Office also aggregates the Trainer's evaluations yearly and assesses them to assure the individual is meeting the expectations of the system.

### **Training Registry**

Professional development opportunities must be registered within the Training Registry for hours to count. The Training Registry becomes a vehicle for tracking the training offered throughout the state as well as a vehicle for publicizing that training.

Current DCCECE policy is that all professional development funded through it must be Registered Training conducted by an individual who has been verified as qualified to conduct the training.

### **A FEW LESSONS LEARNED**

- The "language" of early care & education is in flux (e.g. training vs. professional development, provider vs. practitioner vs. teacher vs. caregiver)
- Many people do not fit into easily identified categories
- The Professional Development System should be separate from the state, in case there is conflict among politics, policy and best practice
- Theoretical buy-in is much easier to obtain than practical buy-in