Defining and Aligning Workforce Development and Quality Improvement Efforts

APRIL CRAWFORD, PHD • UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

WENDY WAGNER ROBESON, ED.D. • WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN

KATHRYN TOUT, PHD • CHILD TRENDS

BRIDGET HATFIELD, PHD • OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

What is Workforce Development?

Activities that support the knowledge, skills, competencies, and career advancement opportunities of diverse members of the early childhood workforce (e.g., caregivers, teachers, and administrators in public and private settings).
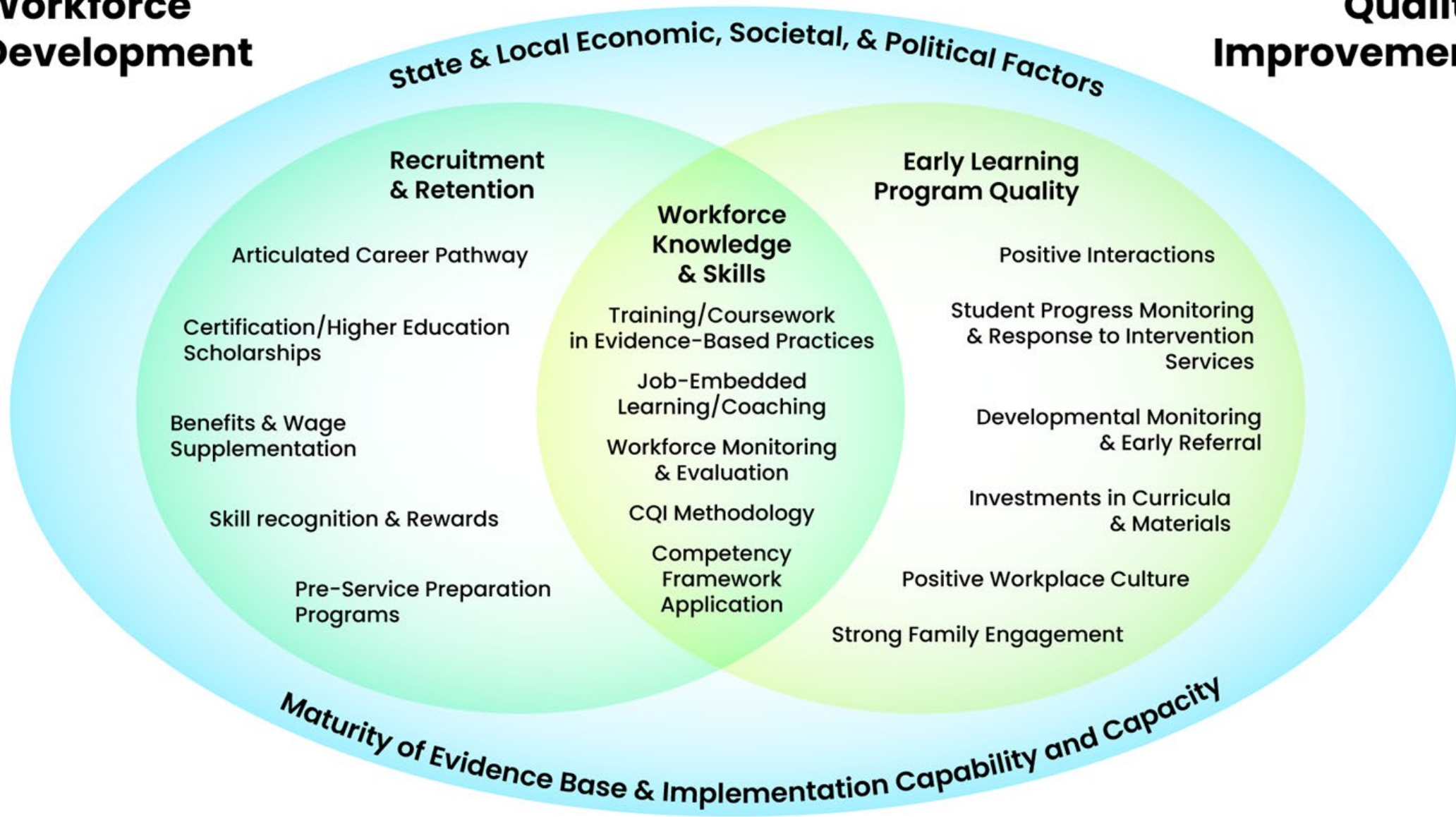
What is Quality Improvement?

Initiatives that broadly refer to activities that aim to improve the quality of care and learning experiences provided to children and families.

Why is alignment between QI and WD initiatives necessary to promote equitable outcomes?

THE CHALLENGES TOO OFTEN CONVERGE

QI initiatives often require significant commitment to program quality from individual workforce members without commensurate rewards or recognition

Workforce turnover will likely continue to limit the impact of quality initiatives that do not account for the needs of individual workforce members

THE SOLUTIONS THAT CONVERGE MAXIMIZE RESOURCES

Initiatives that design for both QI and WD maximize public dollars and the time and energy of participating early learning programs/workforce members

Lack of alignment between initiatives introduces real risks that efforts work *against* each other

Designing across Objectives: Use Cases

One goal of better defining workforce development and quality improvement is to make the connections between certain activities, objectives, and outcomes **more transparent**, and hopefully, lead to more impactful designs.

Let's consider a few use cases.

Use Case #1: Initiative to Improve STEM Instruction

Interventionists seek to address concerning assessment scores in STEM areas at kindergarten entry.

They focus their intervention activities on:

1. Group trainings in STEM content areas;
2. Coaching in evidence-based STEM instructional strategies; and
3. Provision of a high quality supplemental STEM curriculum

Take a moment to consider how this initiative includes workforce development and/or quality improvement strategies.

Use Case #1: Initiative to Improve STEM Instruction

In this example, designers have objectives in **workforce knowledge and skills** (training and coaching) and **early learning program quality** (improved interactions and investment in curriculum), but they have not included any activities that are explicitly designed for workforce recruitment and retention.

Use Case #2: Initiative to Strengthen Workforce Recognition

Administrators of a state workforce registry hope to strengthen career pathways for teachers by introducing a new competency-based recognition pathway that is parallel to the traditional degreed pathway. In this new system they integrate:

1. Online professional learning courses that support teachers in understanding and demonstrating the state's core competencies.

2. Higher level career pathway rankings within the workforce registry for workforce members who earn competency-based micro-credentials, as an alternative to higher education degrees. Both the micro-credentials and the higher career pathway ranking are portable qualifications for the workforce member.

Take a moment to consider how this initiative includes workforce development and/or quality improvement strategies.

Use Case #2: Initiative to Strengthen Workforce Recognition

In this example, designers are focused on **retention and recruitment** (through alternative career pathways and credentialing) and have added a **workforce knowledge and skills** component to support teachers' ability to attain competency-based credentials.

While their design may **indirectly support early learning program quality** (through teacher adoption of new competencies that support evidence-based practices), these designers are focused on the individual workforce member, not early learning programs.

In fact, their design may have unintended consequences for program quality, such as newly credentialed teachers moving to programs that can support higher wages.

Use Case #3:
Initiative to Strengthen Teacher Well-Being and Social Emotional Instruction

A group of researchers have designed an intervention with four promising strategies to enhance teacher well-being and social-emotional instruction in order to both improve retention rates and the quality of care provided to children. The intervention combines:

1. Teacher training in mindfulness and adult social-emotional learning (SEL);
2. Teacher coaching in developmentally SEL appropriate teaching practices;
3. Director coaching in strategies to cultivate a positive workplace environment; and
4. Incentives tied to completion of intervention requirements and demonstrations of skills.

Take a moment to consider how this initiative includes workforce development and/or quality improvement strategies.

Use Case #3:
Initiative to Strengthen Teacher Well-Being and Social Emotional Instruction

 In this example, designers have objectives across all three areas: **recruitment and retention** (wage supplements), **workforce knowledge and skills** (training and coaching), and **early learning program quality** (improved interactions and workplace environment).
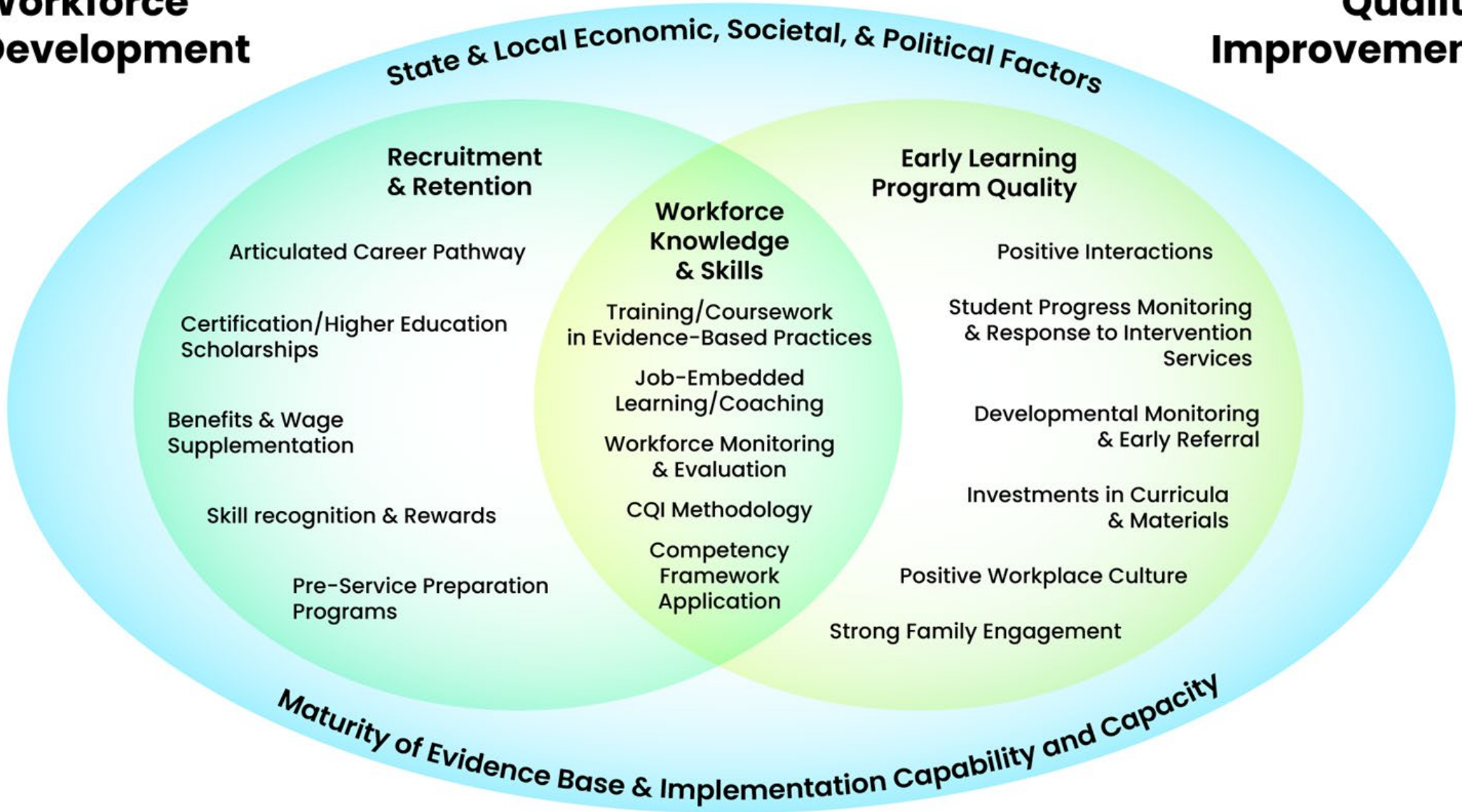
Other Factors that Impact Alignment and Success of QI/WD Initiatives

Maturity of Evidence Base:

- **Low**: no or poorly designed studies to guide us
- **Moderate**: some well-designed studies to guide us
- **High**: growing or robust evidence base, good studies to guide us

Implementation Capability and Capacity:

- **Low**: limited supports available to strengthen implementation capability and/or capacity at the state, local, or program level
- **Moderate**: good guidance/supports for maturing capability and capacity to implement
- **High**: deep implementation supports/systems to help programs reach mature implementation

State and Local Economic, Societal, and Political factors:

- **Low**: problem/issue not widely recognized or little interest or motivation to change status quo
- **Moderate**: interest in the issue/problem/solution is building, signs of solution/partner explorations emerging
- **High**: widespread attention and interest in "solving the problem," actors/champions in multiple roles are engaged, policy options/ testable alternatives are evident

Other Factors that Impact Alignment and Success of QI/WD Initiatives

Maturity of Evidence Base:

Implementation Capability and Capacity

State and Local Economic, Societal, and Political factors

High Level of Maturity = Attention to Equity

- Systematically considering sub-populations of participants in design, analysis, and dissemination

- Capacity of designers intervention teams to tailor delivery to meet the needs of individual workforce members (e.g., differences in baseline skills, life experiences, and language)

- Addressing systemic inequities in access to education, professional learning, and recognition
- Policy and outreach that strengthens positive perceptions of child care workforce

Small Group Discussion

Please choose a focus area to join:

1. Recruitment and Retention

2. Workforce Knowledge and Skills

3. Early Learning Program Quality

Discuss initiatives that you've been involved with that have primary objectives in the area you chose but also great alignment with the other areas. Help us identify elements in these focus areas we may have missed!

You may also refer to the discussion questions found on your handout.

Closing Thoughts

Thank you for joining us!