

2019 Statewide Tribal Consultation

Discussion Guide

Supporting Professional Development of the Early Childhood Workforce

When it comes to brain development, birth to 5 is prime time. Research shows that about 90% of a child's brain develops *before* the child enters kindergarten, and a child's experiences in the early years lay the foundation for success, in school and in life. Parents and families are a child's first and best teachers. They play a critical role in the health, emotional well-being and learning of their child. In Arizona, 60% of young children live in households where all the adults work, so they place their children with paid or volunteer caregivers during all or part of the day. In addition, families who care for their children at home may choose to supplement their child's learning with educational experiences outside of the home.

Research demonstrates that when child care and other early learning programs are of high quality and developmentally appropriate, children are more prepared for kindergarten and do better in school. They also have better relationships with their peers and are more likely to graduate. But the quality of early care and education depends on the professionalism, education and skills of the teacher. Research shows that professional development of teachers makes a difference, in K-12 schools and in early care and education. Highly qualified early childhood teachers can significantly affect a child's cognitive outcomes, specifically early literacy and language development, letter knowledge, and writing skills.

In Arizona, state licensing and certification requirements for child care providers do not require teachers to have degrees. Quality First, the state's child care quality improvement and rating system, does require a portion of the teaching staff to have degrees in order to meet quality standards. In addition, school districts and federally funded early education programs, like Head Starts, strive for all early childhood teachers to have bachelor's degrees. Despite this emphasis on education, in 2016, the National Institute for Early Education Research reported that only 40% of teachers in Arizona had a bachelor's degree or higher in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Child care and preschool teachers are not the only professionals working with young children who need to be highly skilled. For example, home visitors provide families with voluntary, personalized, in-home support, offering information, education, and support on parenting, child development, and health topics while simultaneously assisting with connections to other resources or programs as needed. Of the three home visitation program models currently funded by First Things First (Healthy Families, Parents as Teachers and Nurse Family Partnership), only Nurse Family Partnership has a national office that requires a degree. However, FTF requires home visitors working for its funded programs to have a bachelor's degree, nonetheless. In limited circumstances, an FTF grantee may recommend that a non-degree individual be hired, however, approval of that hire is contingent upon the individual having a professional development plan that typically includes a pathway to degree attainment.

In Arizona, there are several efforts to support the early childhood workforce to promote higher education for early childhood professionals including providing scholarships for an individuals to receive their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, associate degree or bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field. For professionals (those with or without degrees), it is also important to provide access to professional development that offers continuous learning for anyone working with young children. It is beneficial to all staff and children when early childhood professionals

continue to gain knowledge by developing new skills based on the most recent research and best practices.

The Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry (Registry) is a resource in which professionals can receive access to scholarships and information for trainings on child development, program guidelines and a number of other topics (www.azregistry.org). In addition, FTF and its partners at the Department of Economic Security (DES), the Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Department of Child Safety (DCS) are collaborating to enhance training for home visitors. Professional development opportunities already provided have addressed improving the quality of developmental screening (including engaging families in the process) and meeting the social-emotional needs of young children. Future training also is being developed in working with families who have substance-exposed newborns.

Education helps the early childhood workforce develop the knowledge and skills they need to support young children and their families effectively, but getting that education or ongoing professional development can be challenging. A statewide task force comprised of diverse community leaders identified professional development for the early childhood workforce as an area that FTF should prioritize. In addition to funding education and professional development opportunities, FTF works with other system partners throughout the state to identify what gaps or challenges exist in preparing the early childhood workforce. To that end, FTF seeks to understand what educational and professional development opportunities are available for the early childhood workforce in your community, and what challenges or barriers to accessing those opportunities may exist.

Please consider the following questions:

- How is access to education and professional development for early childhood professionals (teachers, home visitors, or others working with young children and families) provided in your tribal community?
- What are the successes and challenges of early childhood professionals accessing education and professional development in your tribal community, including opportunities provided online?
- Are there successes and challenges with professionals accessing and utilizing the First Things First College Scholarships in your tribal community?
- Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) or Head Start provide technical assistance for their funded programs. What additional assistance could be provided?
- What are the opportunities to enhance coordination to further support professional development for early childhood professionals in your community?
- A mechanism is being developed in the Registry to assist early childhood professionals in creating their own plan. Does your tribe already have a mechanism for supporting early childhood professionals to develop their plan? Please share how it was developed and any successes or challenges you encountered.
- Do you know if early childhood professionals are using the registry, if so, what successes or challenges have they encountered?