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Exploring the professional development landscape: Summary from four states☆

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ABSTRACT

This study provides results from the *Landscape Survey*, a statewide survey of professional development (PD) created by the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI). The survey included a sample of 831 professional development providers across four states. Results focused on similarities and differences across states and sectors in learner characteristics, PD content, and approaches to PD delivery. The study also examined characteristics of PD providers that may influence their choice of PD intensity (one time event or PD with follow-up activities). Suggestions are provided for the use of statewide PD data, such as the data gathered in this study, to inform state PD planning and data system efforts.

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Several recent initiatives emphasize the use of state data to examine how professional development (PD) is organized and delivered across early childhood sectors. While an emphasis on data for PD is increasing, little data are available that allow states to examine PD across sectors and populations. Although statewide data systems are required by some initiatives, many such systems are not yet well established, coordinated, or have not been fully implemented (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2012).

Recent federal Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT—ELC) awards aim to help states implement integrated systems of services and programs to improve early care and education, particularly for children with high needs (ED.gov, 2012). RTT—ELC requirements place emphasis on data collection systems that focus on improvement rather than compliance and reporting (the historical uses for early childhood data), but most states are still in the early stages of developing such systems and the data governance bodies to guide them (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2012). A broad system of efforts to improve early care and education and its workforce must consider a number of components and their interplay, such as teacher characteristics, teacher turnover, compensation, program characteristics, and administrative support (National Research Council, 2012). A PD system is one key component of such a system of efforts. Federal and state requirements for the collection of professional practice data continue to illuminate the need for comprehensive data systems, but there is little evidence to suggest that data are being used in a uniform way across sectors to define, measure, and investigate quality in PD (Data Quality Campaign, 2012). National policies encourage cross-sector systems of services in early childhood and recognize the importance of PD, specifically incorporating cross-sector PD within their priorities. For example, state Early Learning Councils, or Early Childhood Advisory Councils, created by the Improving Head Start Act of 2007, were intended to increase cross-sector coordination and PD (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011). For our purposes, cross-sector refers to joint efforts involving "the major organizations, agencies, and institutions in a state that provide services and support the development and learning of young children, their families, and the practitioners who serve them" (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2011b, p. 6). The BUILD Initiative, a project of the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative, also aims to help states build comprehensive systems for early learning through technical assistance and

Table 1
Abbreviations and definitions of primary approaches to PD delivery.

Acronym	Definition
DEC	Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
NACCRRA	National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCCIC	National Child Care Information Center
NPDCI	National Professional Development Center on Inclusion
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs of the US Department of Education
PD	Professional Development
QRIS	Quality Rating and Improvement System
RTT—ELC	Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge
SPP	State Performance Plan Indicators
WWH	Who, What, and How Framework
Primary approach to PD delivery	Definition provided on the *Landscape* survey
Coaching	Interactions focused on helping the learner acquire a specific skill or set of skills
Communities of practice or study groups	A group with diverse membership organized to promote shared inquiry and learning in an effort to improve a particular practice
Consultation	A planned and coordinated sequence of meetings and activities that are negotiated with the client to address a mutually defined goal for change
Co-teaching	An arrangement in which two practitioners with different expertise share teaching roles and responsibilities
Courses, workshops, or institutes on specific topics	—
Distance learning	A wide range of teaching and learning activities using Internet and Web-based resources and tools
Mentoring	A relationship for learning based on reflection and observation that is designed to promote awareness and refinement of one's professional practice
Technical assistance	Responds to program or systems-level needs for improvement using a range of resources, information, and supports

uniform information (BUILD Initiative, 2012). Initiatives such as the Data Quality Campaign, and Early Childhood Data Collaborative are currently working with states to provide guidance, governance structures, implementation support, and potential uses for comprehensive data systems (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2012). With all efforts mentioned above, states still struggle with the collection of PD data and measurement of PD implementation in a uniform way across sectors. Table 1 provides a list of abbreviations used in this article, as well as the definitions for primary approaches of delivering PD noted later in "Measure" section.

In addition to efforts aimed at building and fortifying data systems, states are also addressing PD via improvements to program quality. One of the most widely adopted initiatives focusing on improving quality in early childhood care and education is the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) initiative. Initially developed in response to evidence of the link between program quality and children's development, and in response to reports of low quality (Tout & Maxwell, 2010), QRISs are mechanisms through which states attempt to increase program quality and early childhood workforce competence simultaneously (Child Care Bureau, 2007; National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), 2010). Most states are implementing a statewide QRIS, and many who have not are in the QRIS planning process or have launched regional QRISs (QRIS National Learning Network, 2013). Research on characteristics of early care and education programs that relate to optimal child outcomes has driven development of the standards upon

which QRIS ratings are based, and most states include PD as one of their categories of quality standards (Child Care Bureau, 2007). Although there is potential for QRISs to facilitate the building of highly effective systems of early care and development, and cross-sector participation in PD has been a recommended component of QRISs, this potential has yet to be fulfilled (Tout & Maxwell, 2010).

One challenge to achieving cross-sector PD is fragmentation in early childhood: "in many communities, child care, prekindergarten, and early intervention programs operate in separate worlds, turning to different sources for professional development" (Wesley & Buysse, 2010, p. 7). To illustrate this, one can look to the number of training and technical assistance networks available for the multiple sectors mentioned above. Head Start, child care, and early childhood special education each have differing national and regional training and technical assistance centers such as Child Care Aware (http://childcareaware.org/), the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc), and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (http://ectacenter.org/), which offer similar content yet differ slightly in their definition of program quality and implementation of quality improvement initiatives. Often, when operating in states, these training networks are collecting PD system data and implementing PD opportunities that could benefit all, but have no data to support cross-sector efforts.

Another major initiative, in conjunction with QRISs, has been the development of state PD registries. At least 33 states have developed registries that house data relating to the early childhood workforce and PD (National Registry Alliance, 2013a). In general, existing registries serve to catalog members of the early childhood workforce within the state, their professional credentials, and the PD events these members have attended (NCCIC, 2010). Information on PD attended can then be linked to PD standards in QRISs. Often, state registries are focused primarily on one sector (Ryan & Whitebook, 2012), and early care and education practitioners provide information on a voluntary basis (NCCIC, 2010). Furthermore, most registries gather information about early childhood practitioners (National Registry Alliance, 2013a), and there is a lack of information available about individuals who provide PD to those practitioners. Although some states do have approved trainer registries, limitations of these registries have been noted (e.g., lack of buy-in from cross-sector trainers, difficulties in establishing a meaningful process for evaluating approved trainers; National Registry Alliance, 2013b). In some cases, registries require trainers to be approved in order for their trainings to count in state QRISs (National Registry Alliance, 2013b). State registries were not part of the analysis for this study; however, information by state may be found at The National Registry Alliance (http://www.registryalliance.org/).

There is a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of multiple delivery methods (coaching, consulting, mentoring, technical assistance) on professional learner outcomes and program quality, and many states are incorporating measures for these PD approaches in their QRISs and state registries (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & O'Herin, 2009). While the use of these methods for PD has become more widely accepted as aiding implementation of evidence-based practices, there is a lack of consensus on definitions of these approaches and on which approaches have the greatest impact on learner outcomes (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011; Trivette, Raab, & Dunst, 2012). Additionally, little evidence exists of statewide initiatives that have been able to incorporate and measure these approaches in comprehensive data systems to measure effectiveness of PD.