

Recommendations

Overall

Continue and advance lobbying efforts to improve compensation across the early childhood sector. Many of the challenges faced by the ECPDS are related to issues of low pay that have plagued the field for decades. For instance, low compensation in the field of early childhood contributes to high rates of turnover among early childhood professionals, which in turn creates the need to provide frequent entry-level trainings at the expense of trainings for more experienced professionals. Improving compensation across the field could incentivize retention as well as professional development, if sufficient numbers of higher-paying jobs were available to professionals who pursued additional training and higher credentials.

The Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP), stewarded by Building Bright Futures, includes a goal to promote professional advancement and economic security. One of the strategies identified in the plan includes collecting more data on the workforce compensation and exploring funding sources for a wage supplement program (VECAP, 2020). A VT Early Childhood Workforce Wage and Fringe Benefit Comparability study, sponsored by the Head Start Collaboration Office, is currently underway – marking significant progress in this area. VTAEYC’s Advancing as a Recognized Profession initiative, which engages Vermont early childhood professionals in a process of reading and interpreting the local implications of NAEYC’s Power to the Profession framework, represents another effort to lobby for better wages and recognition across the field. Leveraging these data and frameworks, as well as resources like *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*, stakeholders should continue to advocate for policies and programs that yield better compensation across the early childhood sector.

Alignment and Integration

Continue efforts to integrate systems serving afterschool and CIS providers with the professional development system serving child care providers. Focus group and survey data suggest that much progress has been made in recent years to more fully incorporate CIS and afterschool professionals into the ECPDS. The PPD committee, cross-representation and collaboration between the PPD committee and CSPD, and the development of afterschool credentials at CCV represent structures and initiatives that are improving the integration of the ECPDS across sectors. These efforts could be advanced by

- A broad-reaching campaign to communicate the roles, resources, and responsibilities of different systems components (Vermont Afterschool, CIS, CDD, CSPD, etc.) across sectors. This communication campaign should specifically target professionals in staff and not director roles, as their familiarity and engagement with Northern Lights lags behind their supervisors’.

- Mapping core knowledge and competencies across sectors in order to design or identify trainings that address the needs of multiple types of professionals.

Explore opportunities to build stronger integration and collaboration between Vermont’s Agency of Education and the ECPDS. There is considerable overlap between the work of public and PreK teachers and center-based preschool teachers, between afterschool providers and elementary educators, and between CIS providers, providers of specialized child care, and early childhood special educators in school settings. Across the system, adults staffed in a wide range of programs will require comparable knowledge and skills, yet professional development systems offered by Vermont’s public schools and the ECPDS remain largely distinct. Efforts to better integrate the ECPDS with the pk-12 professional development system may include

- Mapping the required knowledge and skills of different roles within each sector. While licensed PreK classroom teachers will likely not need the same training as an entry-level early childhood educator, the professional development needs of a paraprofessional in a public PreK classroom may be more aligned with certain groups within the child care sector. Identifying these areas of overlap may enable the development and piloting of specific integration and alignment initiatives.
- Convening a summit of district leaders and ECPDS affiliates to forge cross-sector understanding of both professional development systems and identify points and strategies for collaboration.
- Establish and communicate policies and procedures for documenting early childhood professionals’ participation in district-led professional development for the purposes of entering these training data into the BFIS account.

Seek opportunities to preserve regional resources. The 2017 transformation of the ECPDS shifted the organization of the system from a localized to a centralized design. While the equity and coordination of the new system are noted and appreciated, some regions perceive that the more centralized ECPDS comes at a cost to what was strong local professional development infrastructure. Vermont Early Childhood Networks play a large part in filling this need for regional and local professional development opportunities. These Networks are funded by the CDD and Let’s Grow Kids has been a contributor to that system. With LGK gradually phasing out support and ending their work in 2025, early childhood system leaders should consider:

- Finding additional funding sources to support regional and local groups in offering professional development that meets their identified priorities
- Partnering with a new host organization(s) to support network and leadership development after LGK ends their commitment

Professional Development Offerings

Expand the breadth and depth of training and professional development related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Survey results indicated that respondents were less satisfied with the number and level of trainings related to issues of diversity, equity, and

inclusion. Focus group participants also reported wanting deeper knowledge and skills related to honoring difference, addressing bias and discrimination, and engaging youth and families from diverse backgrounds.

Expand access to online professional development opportunities. Widespread appreciation for the accessibility of online professional development opportunities, and the degree of challenge previously posed by travel and scheduling constraints urge the ECPDS to increase the range and number of remote professional development offerings. In so doing, the ECPDS should continue to evaluate best practices for remote instruction, especially given the key features of high-quality professional development. This work is already underway, with criteria for Online Real-Time trainings having been developed and adopted by CDD.

Expand, define, and evaluate alternative approaches to delivering professional development, such as communities of practice, mentoring, and coaching. Participants' positive impressions of communities of practice, alongside the relatively sparse engagement with this model suggest that communities of practice and other alternative models for delivering professional development could change professional practice at scale if there was more widespread availability. An expansion of these alternative modes of delivery should include:

- a detailed plan for how, whether, and under what conditions to approve communities of practice, coaching, and other alternative professional development activities as meeting child care licensing professional development requirements.
- a communication campaign to help potential participants understand the requirements and potential benefits of the approach.
- training and supports for mentors and coaches that cultivate high-quality mentoring and coaching skills.
- compensation for mentors and coaches.
- evaluation of early rollout efforts for the purposes of continuous improvement. Efforts aligned with this recommendation are already underway: EDC is presently evaluating non-participation in communities of practice planned for late 2020, as well as the experiences of participants in equity and inclusion book clubs.

A robust and compensated system that incorporates mentoring, coaching, communities of practice, and other alternative approaches to professional development may have the downstream effect of cultivating cultures of observation, feedback, and continuous improvement within programs, a need articulated by the PPD committee during the presentation of interim findings from this study.

Improve professional development offerings for the field's most experienced providers. Across sectors, the most experienced early childhood professionals noted a dearth of affordable and high-quality training options. This is in large part because there are considerable demands placed on the ECPDS to meet the professional development needs of a large and mobile entry-level workforce. One strategy for improving professional development offerings for the most experienced, and often most-educated professionals is to support advanced-level professional development opportunities such as the ECEI and Higher Education Collaborative.

Consider ways to encourage the assignment of pre-work before and follow-up work after trainings. Survey respondents found these aspects of trainings to be helpful, but not consistently implemented. This is perhaps, in part, because hours spent on these activities do not count toward licensing requirements. The ECPDS may encourage sponsors and instructors to assign pre- and follow-up work by allocating additional training hours to trainings where instructors assign, and can verify the completion of, work outside of training hours, and expanding the number of trainings using the 2+2+2 model, which builds in opportunities for follow-up and reflection on initial training sessions.

System Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommendations related to system monitoring and evaluation are intended to help the ECPDS refine its data collection protocols to enable ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement, and to identify areas where more research is warranted.

Design and implement a process for ongoing annual monitoring, and undertake more formal formative evaluations every 3 to 4 years. The 2011 evaluation of the ECPDS suggested a range of metrics that could be used to track the system's progress. These included the number of quarterly visitors to the Northern Lights website; the number of trainings offered annually, by region, level (see below), core competency, and target population (infant, toddler, CIS, etc.); the number of sponsors and instructors across the system. Suggestions below highlight additional measures and evaluation activities that may be useful to the ongoing monitoring of the ECPDS.

Collect longitudinal data to measure providers' perceptions of alignment, integration, and transformation of the ECPDS. The results presented here may be viewed as a baseline assessment of providers' perceptions of the transformed ECPDS. Ongoing data collection efforts should track the evolution of these perceptions as refinements are made, professional development offerings are expanded, and new initiatives are rolled out. The survey used in this evaluation and included in the appendix that follows (or sections of it) may be administered again, or a new instrument mapped to the recommendations of Transforming the Workforce could track ECPDS' progress towards its goals of alignment and integration.

Expand tags in Northern Lights' and BFIS training calendars to include domains of interest for longitudinal tracking. Trainings listed in the Northern Lights or BFIS calendar are tagged with indicators related to content area, age group focus, and training hours. These indicators should be expanded to capture additional information of interest to CDD, AOE, PPD, or other stakeholders. For example, trainings should be tagged with an indicator for training level. The three Early Childhood Educator designations (I, II, III) delineated in the Power to the Profession Unifying Framework may adequately capture the varying levels of trainings. By tagging trainings with a level indicator, the ECPDS will be able to track, over time, the number of trainings geared towards the field's most senior professionals. Additional domains of interest may include whether a training addresses themes directly related to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Revise training evaluation tools and procedures to focus on practice change. One of the shortcomings of present training evaluations is that they do not assess how trainings affected participants' practice. Evaluations of trainings could be refined in multiple ways to better address this important question.

- Rather than at the conclusion of the training, evaluations could be distributed weeks later. The lag time introduced by this evaluation schedule would make it possible to ask questions like: "have you used the knowledge or skills you gained from this training in your day-to-day practice". Although the lag time may also decrease the likelihood of receiving a completed evaluation, receiving a completed evaluation could be a prerequisite for having training hours entered into their quality and credential accounts.
- Someone adjacent to the training participant could complete a non-evaluative attestation about changes to the participants' practice. Training participants could nominate supervisors, colleagues, or even families to complete an assessment of how the participants' practice has changed since attending the training. The assessment might ask, for example: "NAME attended a training on TOPIC on DATE. Since that time, have you noticed any change in the way they (manage behavior/engage families/demonstrate knowledge of child or youth development)? These assessments would not be suitable for all trainings, and would have to make clear that it is not the participant being evaluated, but rather the training's effect on the participant's practice.

The evaluation of Northern Lights at CCV presently underway is prioritizing the development of a new approach to evaluating trainings. These recommendations should be seen as a starting point relative to the recommendations that emerge from that more comprehensive evaluation.

Conduct additional research to understand participants' cost-related barriers to accessing professional development. While this evaluation reveals that cost is a prevalent barrier to accessing professional development, additional research is needed to better understand the specific amount or the circumstances under which cost impedes access. This information could be used to design grantmaking efforts that support access to higher-cost trainings, or to subsidize opportunities geared toward participants with more cost-related barriers to access.

Conduct additional research to understand the particular professional development needs of Family Child Care Providers. Family Child Care Providers reported facing different constraints and weighing different considerations related to accessing professional development compared to other center-based providers. More information from Family Child Care Providers is necessary to ensure that the ECPDS is aligned with their needs and interests.