

# Strategic Directions: Technical Assistance Professionals in State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems

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by **Billie Young**



national association for the education of young children

RESEARCH ■ POLICY ■ PRACTICE



## NAEYC's Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative

The Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative's (ECWSI) purpose is to assist states in developing, enhancing, and implementing policies for an integrated early childhood professional development system for all early childhood education professionals working with and on behalf of young children. Integrated policies intentionally promote the building and support of an efficient cross-sector system that decreases duplication of efforts and increases accountability and sustainability. An integrated system helps develop and retain a competent and stable early childhood workforce—a skilled cadre of effective, diverse, and adequately compensated professionals.

The Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is supported by the Birth to Five Policy Alliance and the McCormick Foundation. NAEYC thanks them for their support. The findings and policy recommendations in this paper are those of NAEYC alone.

### Acknowledgments

Several NAEYC staff contributed to this report, which would not have been possible without the leadership of Adele Robinson to keep this project on track, to ensure that our policy recommendations were on-target and to shape the overall structure of the paper. Heath Ouellette was instrumental in launching the Technical Assistance Professionals project, establishing and conducting three of the focus groups, developing the online survey, and recruiting participants. Heath also helped develop policy recommendations. Kyle Snow contributed to the preparation of the text, especially in summarizing results from the online survey, and also reviewed the paper as it was developed. Kayleigh Rogers-Torres, ECWSI's Program Assistant, provided invaluable help with the online survey analysis and overall project support. We appreciate the time and valuable insights provided by all of the respondents to our online survey and the participants in our focus groups in Washington State, New England, and at the NAEYC Annual Conference in 2011. Sheila Smith of the National Center on Children in Poverty helped us to shape our focus group and survey questions, and her feedback and encouragement were truly helpful. Interviewees Muriel Wong Lundgren, Anne Mitchell, and Kate Thegen were instrumental



in providing context and insights into relevant state policies.

Our reviewers spent a great deal of time carefully examining the draft of the report and offering feedback that was highly useful and is reflected in the final document. Thanks to Valerie Krajec, Alison Lut- ton, Sarah LeMoine, Larry Macmillan, Anne Mitchell, Heath Ouellette, Adele Robinson, Sheila Smith, and Barbara Willer.

## **Executive Summary**

As part of its Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative, the Na- tional Association for the Education of Young Children involved approxi- mately 294 individuals in the fall of 2011 and winter of 2012 in focus groups, an online survey, and individual interviews to better under- stand how states are creating policies for developing, supporting, and monitoring professional development technical assistance profession- als as part of their state early childhood professional development systems and quality improvement efforts, with a focus on the specific roles of mentor, coach, and consultant. NAEYC examined the provid- ers' qualifications, kinds of support being provided, approaches to quality assurance, and state policy opportunities and challenges for integration of these methods into state professional development systems.

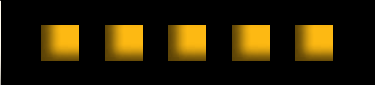
This report presents strategic directions for integrating technical as- sistance providers into state professional development systems based on NAEYC's analysis of the responses generated as a result of these focus groups, online survey, and individual interviews and identifies public policy opportunities in four areas:

1. Common terminology;
2. Standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials;
3. Pathways, ongoing support, and compensation; and
4. Data, evaluation, and quality assurance.

## **Overarching Findings**

**N**AEYC's surveys, interviews, and focus group responses clearly indicated a need for policies that support the integration of these technical assistance strategies (mentors, coaches, and consultants) in a thoughtfully planned and financed system of professional develop- ment for early childhood education professionals.

■ Policies related to technical assistance professionals are fragment- ed within and across sectors and funding streams, rather than con- ceptualized and developed as part of a systemic approach—there



is a lack of consistency in definitions of terms, required specialized knowledge and competencies, preparation, credentials, career pathways, compensation distinctions, and quality assurance.

- The roles and responsibilities of mentors, coaches, and consultants need to be transparent to the individuals in those roles, to the providers and programs that make use of these roles, and to the other professionals in the professional development system, such as higher education institutions and resource and referral agencies.
- The pathways to becoming a mentor, coach, or consultant, including the preparation for these roles, need to be more evident and intentional.
- More cross-sector work needs to be done to maximize the professional development and technical assistance support in each sector—child care, home visiting, Head Start, schools—to create more efficiencies of scale, more clarity of goals and purposes, and more support for quality improvement for children in all settings. These separate sectors rarely share professional development opportunities and have no unified system for evaluation of effectiveness.
- State stakeholders are requesting guidance on cross-sector professional development system integration, including standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, credentials, ongoing support, data collection, and monitoring. Some stakeholders requested peer-to-peer connections, facilitation for regional consortia, access to research and resources, and national frameworks to adapt for state use.

### **Overarching Policy Recommendations**

**T**he recommendations that follow were developed in response to policy findings and are intended as a launching pad for action in states with the goal of fostering robust, highly effective provision of technical assistance that will result in high-quality early learning opportunities for children and families. These overarching policy recommendations, as well as the more detailed recommendations that follow them (describing each of the four public policy areas), are designed for states to adapt to their unique contexts, needs, and opportunities.

- Map the current use of mentors, coaches, and professional development consultants, including job title, role definition standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, qualifications and credentials, governing sector or initiative, and funding sources.
- Use this map as a foundation for the development of a systemic

approach to cross-sector provision of technical assistance, including consideration of the policy principles of integration, quality assurance, diversity, inclusion, and access and compensation parity.

- Consistently use common definitions to foster a greater level of uniformity in policies, data, and evaluation and as a basis for cross-sector integration of these positions into early childhood education professional development systems.
- Adopt unifying frameworks for specialized knowledge with competencies developed for specific sectors, roles, and settings as needed.
- Integrate technical assistance providers into the state professional development system, including registries, career pathways, data systems, standards, ongoing support, and financing.
- Develop compensation and benefits policies designed to attract and retain qualified technical assistance professionals and that facilitate parity across sectors and initiatives.
- Explore alignment of technical assistance policies and supports with the K–3 sector.



**naeyc**<sup>®</sup>

National Association for the Education of Young Children  
1313 L Street NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005-4101  
202-232-8777 800-424-2460  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

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# Introduction

Over the past decade, public interest in raising the quality of early childhood education programs across all settings has increasingly focused on professional development, recognizing the importance of professional knowledge and skills in determining quality. Recent studies have demonstrated the benefits of high-quality on-site professional development as a quality improvement strategy. As a result, the practice of offering on-site professional development in early childhood education settings has grown rapidly. Within any given state, multiple government and early childhood education agencies have developed various on-site technical assistance strategies to improve program quality and to increase the odds of achieving desired results, such as infant/toddler consultation, mental health consultation, accreditation support, and mentoring and coaching for quality initiatives such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).

With the increased focus on the provision of technical assistance related to professional development, attention is also being paid to those professionals who provide such technical assistance. States are working to align role definitions, job requirements, specialized knowledge and competencies, compensation, practice frameworks, and quality assurance for technical assistance providers. The focus of this brief is to describe these efforts as they relate to providers of three specific strategies of technical assistance: mentoring, coaching, and consultation (see definitions in sidebar).<sup>1</sup>

As part of its Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) involved approximately 294 individuals in the fall of 2011 and winter of 2012 in focus groups, an online survey<sup>2</sup>, and individual interviews to better understand how states are creating policies for developing, supporting, and monitoring professional development technical assistance professionals as part of their state early childhood professional development systems and quality improvement efforts, with a focus on the specific roles of mentor, coach, and consultant. NAEYC examined the providers' qualifications, kinds of support being provided, approaches to quality assurance, and state policy opportunities and challenges for integration of these methods into state professional development systems.

NAEYC conducted two focus groups composed of stakeholders and representatives of national organizations, as well as focus groups in Washington State and the New England region. Focus groups included individuals who were working as mentors, coaches, and consultants; supervisors



## Training and Technical Assistance Definitions

Technical assistance is the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional with subject matter and adult-learning knowledge and skills for the purpose of developing or strengthening process, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients.

### **Mentoring**

A relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more experienced individual with adult-learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less experienced protégé, or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual's personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.

### **Coaching**

A relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult-learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal setting and achievement for an individual or group.

### **Consultation**

A collaborative, problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult-learning knowledge and skills, and an individual or group from one program or organization. Consultation facilitates the assessment and resolution of an issue-specific concern—a program, organizational, staff, or child/family-related issue—or addresses a specific topic.

The complete Training and Technical Assistance Glossary is available at [http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining\\_TA.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining_TA.pdf)

Source: Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary, Appendix A, 2011.

of technical assistance professionals; QRIS program directors; Child Care Resource and Referral staff; higher education faculty; researchers; funders of technical assistance; staff from state professional development agencies and workforce registries; Child Care and Development Fund State Administrators; and staff from national agencies that provide technical assistance to states. Together, the online survey, focus groups, and individual interviews represented more than 20 states and nearly 350 individuals who work in all levels in government, higher education, child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten, early intervention and special education, QRIS, resource and referral agencies, and home visiting.

Our focus group participants and survey respondents reported that in most of their states all three strategies of professional development technical assistance (mentoring, coaching, and consultation) are available to providers and programs serving all ages of children. They also said that access to technical assistance provision is inconsistent and the quality and content vary, depending on the location of the provider; their eligibility for services; the setting, sector, or initiative they are affiliated with; and the availability of funding.

They reported that several individual states have developed, or are in the process of defining, requirements and specialized knowledge and competencies for those individuals providing on-site professional development such as technical assistance. Some states have created credentials, and a few states have integrated technical assistance positions into registries and career pathways. However, cross-sector system integration of mentors, coaches, and consultants is desired, and much more work is needed in order for state technical assistance policies to be truly inclusive of child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, early intervention, higher education, K–3 settings, and home visiting. One respondent noted, “We have all types, but they are not aligned across early childhood systems.” For example, The Head Start Act of 2007 includes a definition of a mentor teacher and directs more attention toward the credentials of education consultants to Head Start programs; however, this definition is unique and rarely integrated across child care, early intervention, QRIS,



and other professional development positions. States are asking questions such as

- Who are these professionals, and what are their qualifications?
- What specialized knowledge and skills do they need?
- How can we ensure quality and effectiveness?
- How do these professionals fit within our larger professional development systems?

This report presents strategic directions for integrating technical assistance providers into state professional development systems based on NAEYC's analysis of the responses generated as a result of these focus groups, online survey, and individual interviews and identifies public policy opportunities in four areas:

1. Common terminology;
2. Standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials;
3. Pathways, ongoing support, and compensation; and
4. Data, evaluation, and quality assurance.

### **Overarching Findings**

**N**AEYC's surveys, interviews, and focus group responses clearly indicated a need for policies that support the integration of these technical assistance strategies (mentors, coaches, and consultants) in a thoughtfully planned and financed system of professional development for early childhood education professionals.

- Policies related to technical assistance professionals are fragmented within and across sectors and funding streams, rather than conceptualized and developed as part of a systemic approach—there is a lack of consistency in definitions of terms, required specialized knowledge and competencies, preparation, credentials, career pathways, compensation distinctions, and quality assurance.
- The roles and responsibilities of mentors, coaches, and consultants need to be transparent to the individuals in those roles, to the providers and programs that make use of these roles, and to the other professionals in the professional development system, such as higher education institutions and resource and referral agencies.
- The pathways to becoming a mentor, coach, or consultant, including the preparation for these roles, need to be more evident and intentional.
- More cross-sector work needs to be done to maximize the profes-





Integrate technical assistance providers into the state professional development system, including registries, career pathways, data systems, standards, ongoing support, and financing.

sional development and technical assistance support in each sector—child care, home visiting, Head Start, schools—to create more efficiencies of scale, more clarity of goals and purposes, and more support for quality improvement for children in all settings.

These separate sectors rarely share professional development opportunities and have no unified system for evaluation of effectiveness.

■ State stakeholders are requesting guidance on cross-sector professional development system integration, including standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, credentials, ongoing support, data collection, and monitoring.

Some stakeholders requested peer-to-peer connections, facilitation for regional consortia, access to research and resources, and national frameworks to adapt for state use.

### Overarching Policy Recommendations

**T**he recommendations that follow were developed in response to policy findings and are intended as a launching pad for action in states with the goal of fostering robust, highly effective provision of technical assistance that will result in high-quality early learning opportunities for children and families. These overarching policy recommendations, as well as the more detailed recommendations that follow them (describing each of the four public policy areas), are designed for states to adapt to their unique contexts, needs, and opportunities.

- Map the current use of mentors, coaches, and professional development consultants, including job title, role definition standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, qualifications and credentials, governing sector or initiative, and funding sources.
- Use this map as a foundation for the development of a systemic approach to cross-sector provision of technical assistance, including consideration of the policy principles of integration, quality assurance, diversity, inclusion, and access and compensation parity.
- Consistently use common definitions to foster a greater level of uniformity in policies, data, and evaluation and as a basis for cross-sector integration of these positions into early childhood education professional development systems.
- Adopt unifying frameworks for specialized knowledge with competencies developed for specific sectors, roles, and settings as needed.
- Integrate technical assistance providers into the state professional development system, including registries, career pathways, data systems, standards, ongoing support, and financing.

- Develop compensation and benefits policies designed to attract and retain qualified technical assistance professionals and that facilitate parity across sectors and initiatives.
- Explore alignment of technical assistance policies and supports with the K–3 sector.

**NAEYC’s Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative has developed a Policy Blueprint to help states to implement an integrated early childhood professional development system, which is defined as** A comprehensive system of preparation and ongoing development and support for all early childhood education professionals working with and on behalf of young children. An integrated system crosses sectors serving early education professionals working in direct and non-direct

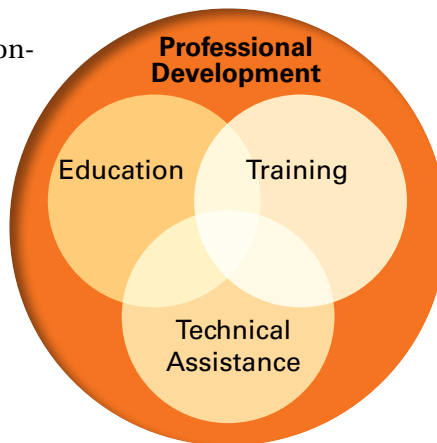
service roles. Such roles may be in Head Start; for-profit and not-for-profit child care programs in centers and homes; state prekindergarten programs in community-based and school settings; public school programs; early intervention and special education services; resource and referral agencies; higher education institutions; or state departments of education, licensing, health, and other early childhood education–related departments.

## FOUR RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS IN PUBLIC POLICY

### 1. COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Based on NAEYC’s analysis of the focus groups, survey, and individual interviews, professional development technical assistance professionals are employed in a variety of ways, such as the following:

- Teacher mentoring and coaching
- Infant/toddler or mental health consultation
- Prekindergarten quality improvement coaching
- Licensing compliance technical assistance
- QRIS and accreditation coaching or mentoring
- Early intervention/early childhood special education consultation
- Literacy and curriculum coaching
- Family child care mentoring
- School-age care coaching
- Home visiting mentors



Source: Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary, 2011. Available at [http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining\\_TA.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining_TA.pdf).



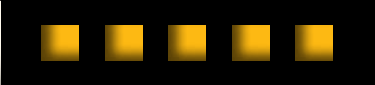
In all of these cases, the actual terminology for the position can vary from “coach” to “mentor” to “consultant.” Focus group and survey participants stressed that these roles often overlap, with several commenting that they are often interchangeable, as the technical assistance professional is often “changing hats” depending on the situation, the program, and their goals. One state determined that “mentor,” “coach,” and “consultant,” are all words that describe a process and approach rather than describing distinct roles. Despite this fluidity in roles, participants in our project called for a common language as a starting point for building technical assistance into state professional development policy work—which is a key element in professional development systems—

along with training and education.

Recognizing a need for more consistent terminology, NAEYC worked with partners to develop a two-part Training and Technical Assistance Glossary for professional development, using a definition for professional development that included technical assistance, training, and education. NAEYC and the National Child Care Resource and Referral Association (NACCRRRA) jointly developed definitions tailored for professional development providers, state policymakers, early education advocates, and program administrators working to align professional development activities and initiatives into an integrated system, which were published in 2011.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, NAEYC and the Alliance of Early Childhood Teacher Educators jointly developed national education-related definitions.<sup>4</sup> Developed with significant input and review from the early childhood education field, this glossary serves as a guide for states to adapt and adjust to meet their specific needs in clarifying professional development roles and policies; assisting with determining and supporting the knowledge and capabilities of those providing professional development; and, in data efforts, counting and tracking all types of professional development. The definitions are also designed to provide common understandings, or starting points, for research and cross-state or national discussions. They provide an opportunity to improve communication across the early childhood education field nationally.

### **Summary of Findings on Common Terminology**

■ When survey respondents were asked to compare their state’s defini-



tions for technical assistance (mentoring, coaching, and consultation) to those in the Glossary, the vast majority of those that specified having definitions indicated alignment or strong alignment across definition components.

- A majority indicated that their states had adopted the Glossary, while 5% reported a lack of alignment in definitions, and 14–20% stated that they were unsure about the alignment.
- In written comments, 12 respondents said that the definitions didn't match those in their states, and 8 reported that definitions were either lacking at the state level or that definitions may be developed by multiple agencies without a common definition adopted across agencies or programs.
- Several focus group participants expressed resistance to adoption or alignment with the Glossary definitions, citing unique state, sector, or program approaches to defining the roles of mentor, coach, and consultant.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Initiate the adoption of the Glossary by individual states; adopting the Glossary can create more consistent use and understanding of the distinct technical assistance roles and responsibilities among governmental and other early childhood education agencies administering programs, as well as with providers of early childhood education, higher education institutions, and researchers. The adoption of the national terminology would lead to greater cross-state alignment.
- Use common definitions to foster consistency in policies, data, and evaluation and as a basis for cross-sector integration of these positions into early childhood education professional development systems.
- Working cross-sector, map the current use of mentors, coaches, and professional development consultants—including job title; role-definition standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials; governing sector or initiative; and funding sources—and use this map as a foundation for the development of a systemic approach to cross-sector provision of technical assistance, including issues of access and quality.

## **2. STANDARDS, SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES, QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDENTIALS**

Survey respondents noted repeatedly that they were unsure if their state has preparation requirements or minimum qualifications for becoming

One focus group participant stated, “Most technical assistance providers learn on the job; there is no system that prepares them.”

a mentor, coach, or consultant. Individuals in the workforce are often sought out for technical assistance positions because of their ability to do their job effectively. For instance, a home visitor who excels in working with families on child health goals may be seen as the perfect candidate for a position as a consultant on children’s health. A director of a child care center that achieves high ratings in a state QRIS may be asked to be a coach or mentor to other directors.

There are also many intersections between training and trainer approval (T/TA) systems developed in states over the past decade and those developed for technical assistance professionals. Several national focus group participants noted that many of the T/TA requirements are also applicable to technical assistance professionals: most states are looking at some kind of educational qualification plus either specific

experience, courses, or a credential that will verify if candidates have the skills to work as an adult educator. Many states have educational requirements that include content knowledge and training related to working with adults. There are parallels in terms of what has worked and hasn’t worked in provision of supporting trainers.

Often, those who are currently serving as trainers are moving into roles as coaches for QRIS even though the role of coach requires some essential skills and dispositions that are different than those necessary for a successful trainer. In the words of one focus group participant, “Many of our trainers have moved into coaching roles. We need to develop a framework for coaches. We are wrestling with differences between trainers’ knowledge and competencies and those for coaches.”

National focus groups summed up what was reported in the Washington State and New England focus groups—there is rarely a system for recruitment and preparation for professional development technical assistance roles. One focus group participant stated, “Most technical assistance providers learn on the job; there is no system that prepares them.” There are exceptions, however. Illinois’ National-Louis University incorporates training as part of their director credential to help master directors become eligible to develop into technical assistance providers, trainers, and faculty. Working with adults is at the core of this training. Some states have courses on adult learning theory, and training on program assessment tools—most often the Environment Rating Scales or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). However, training on topics such as cultural competence and organization change theory are lacking, and the training that is available may be setting- or sector-specific.



## Standards

**P**rofessional standards are an essential component of professional development systems and one of the six essential policy areas in the NAEYC Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems. The NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards were adopted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in the early 1980s. They are aligned with the standards of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). NAEYC standards create a unifying framework for career pathways and credentials from the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential to state certifications, to the NBPTS accomplished early childhood general-

### NAEYC's Professional Preparation Standards

NAEYC's Professional Preparation Standards describe what early childhood professionals are expected to know and do, defining essential learning outcomes in professional preparation programs and presenting a shared vision of excellence. These standards offer practitioners a framework for applying new knowledge to critical issues. They support important early learning goals across settings serving children from birth through age 8. They support critical early childhood policy structures, including professional credentialing, accreditation of professional preparation programs, state approval of teacher education programs, and state professional development systems. For further descriptions of the standards, visit: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/programStandards.pdf>

#### What tomorrow's teachers should know and be able to do:

1. Promote child development and learning.
2. Build family and community relationships.
3. Observe, document, and assess.
4. Use developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families.
5. Use content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum.
6. Become a professional.

ist certification. NAEYC's professional standards provide the common foundation for all early childhood professionals upon which specialized core competencies for technical assistance providers can be developed.

Some states are making significant progress on the establishment of technical assistance standards, knowledge and competencies, qualifications and credentials. While most individuals in the study indicated their states have not adopted standards and specialized knowledge and competencies, many are engaged in developing them, and a few states have developed credentials. Vermont drafted knowledge areas, competencies, and a self-assessment tool. New Hampshire's Early Childhood Master





Survey respondents generally noted that there were not specific expectations for technical assistance providers in their states. Overall, 35% reported that there were no general requirements established for professional preparation, technical assistance knowledge and competencies, or credentials.

credential has a program consultation endorsement. New England states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont) worked collaboratively to create knowledge competencies, and dispositions in a cross-sector guide to effective infant/toddler consultation that

has the endorsement of the Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start. One survey respondent noted that Iowa State University has designed consultant and coaching credentials with three levels.

Several members of the focus groups and survey participants stated that the development of standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials were in process or were planned activities for the future. One state reported that this was a priority for its Early Learning Challenge Grant. Respondents were asked about their potential interest in standards and credentials for technical assistance in their states, and there was

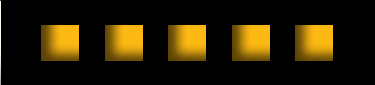
significant interest in exploring state and national credentials, professional preparation requirements, and specialized knowledge and competencies.

### **Specialized Knowledge and Competencies**

Survey respondents noted that several states have credentials for a spectrum of specialized technical assistance areas, such as infant/toddler, mental health, early intervention, and home visiting, and also for some specific programs, such as QRIS. One respondent reported, “At this point, because nothing else is in place, many technical assistance providers have obtained Trainer Credentials, which our state does offer.” Another respondent reported that coaches are selected on a case-by-case basis, depending on provider needs.

Survey respondents generally noted that there were not specific expectations for technical assistance providers in their states. Overall, 35% reported that there were no general requirements established for professional preparation, technical assistance knowledge and competencies, or credentials, and 33% reported they were unsure about expectations in any of these areas. Where there were expectations reported, about 25% of those respondents indicated expectations for professional preparation requirements, 21% noted technical assistance knowledge and competencies, and 13% reported a specific technical assistance credential. About 16% noted some other expectations, which generally included a college degree (with or without specialization in early childhood development or education).

Overall, approximately 40% of respondents indicated that their state required some field experience as a basic requirement for technical assistance providers, while 21% indicated their state had no such requirement, and 40%<sup>6</sup> reported that they were unsure of this require-

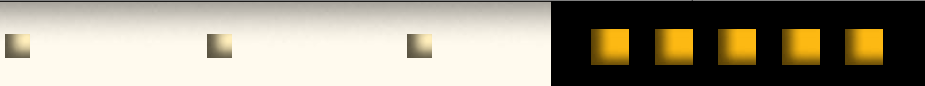


ment within their state. Respondents were also asked about the adequacy of these requirements. In general, even where states had provisions for specific requirements, these were generally seen as not adequate, or respondents reported they were unsure about their adequacy.

When asked what should be included as essential areas of specialized knowledge and competency, survey respondents and focus group participants identified the following: the change process, organizational development, adult learning, team building, assessment, application of data to practice, approaches to consultation, and child development. Depending on the assignment, technical assistance professionals might need specific content knowledge and skills related to the model of technical assistance—such as a particular coaching model—or related to the work—such as a strong nursing background for health consultation. Dispositions such as leadership, professionalism, active listening and communication skills, flexibility, cross-cultural competence, trust-building, boundary-setting, and motivational skills were also identified as key to technical assistance providers’ success.

The following is a table that compares three sample state technical assistance knowledge and competencies policies.

Examples from States: Specialized Knowledge and Competencies	
Program	Competency Area
California, ASAPconnect <a href="http://www.afterschoolconnect.org/">http://www.afterschoolconnect.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Assessing ongoing improvement</li> <li>■ Effective communication</li> <li>■ Skill development</li> <li>■ Asset-based collaboration</li> <li>■ Commitment to quality</li> </ul>
Colorado Coaching Consortium <a href="http://www.cocoaches.net/Coaching_Competencies.html">http://www.cocoaches.net/Coaching_Competencies.html</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Setting the foundation</li> <li>■ Co-creating the relationship</li> <li>■ Communicating effectively</li> <li>■ Facilitating learning and results</li> <li>■ Assessing success of the coaching partnership</li> </ul>
Minnesota’s MN Smart, Relationship Based Professional Development <a href="http://mnpcpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20site%20Jul%202009_files/RBPD_Web_site_Jul_2009.htm">http://mnpcpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20site%20Jul%202009_files/RBPD_Web_site_Jul_2009.htm</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Coaching relationship</li> <li>■ Effective coaching practices</li> <li>■ Professional responsibilities in coaching</li> <li>■ Managing challenges</li> </ul>





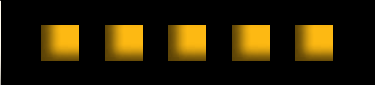
### **Qualifications and Credentials**

While there was some agreement from respondents about the need for minimum qualifications for technical assistance providers, there was also concern about the potential for screening out potential specialists that might be effective despite a lack in formal education and degrees, and the likelihood of being able to recruit qualified candidates in some

areas, such as rural communities. One focus group participant said, “There is a growing rural gap, and expertise is relative. In some areas, there just aren’t people available that might meet standards, so we need to tailor our expectations and be specific about the kind of technical assistance that will be provided.”

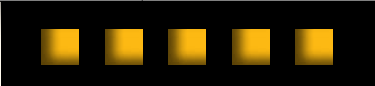
One focus group participant expressed concern that because many technical assistance providers are already doing this work as part of their jobs, or are working as independent consultants, they might not be motivated to comply with the standards and participate in a registry and instead work outside of the system and its requirements. There was also concern that developing stringent requirements related to early childhood education might exclude professionals from multi-disciplinary fields, such as health and mental health, from being eligible and limit diversity. In response to this concern, focus group participants identified states that have multiple levels of technical assistance providers, including an entry level. Other states, such as Pennsylvania, have created a technical assistance specialist position to accommodate those without early childhood credentials and who provide multi-disciplinary assistance.

In some areas there just aren’t people available that might meet standards, so we need to tailor our expectations and be specific about the kind of technical assistance that will be provided.



Below is a summary of requirements in four states that demonstrates the range of qualifications. Note that some states, such as Georgia, have different levels for specialists with associated requirements.

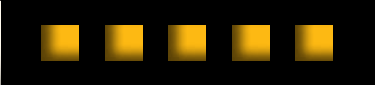
Minimum Qualifications: Sample Requirements	
Program	Minimum Qualifications
School's Out Washington, Pathway to Excellence, School Age Coach Position  <a href="http://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/193/PathwaytoExcellenceProject.htm">http://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/193/PathwaytoExcellenceProject.htm</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Bachelor's degree in elementary education, secondary education, social work, counseling, recreation, or other related field</li> <li>■ At least 3 years of experience in an education or youth-related field</li> <li>■ Demonstrated experience in adult learning theory</li> <li>■ Demonstrated experience and ability to work with multi-lingual/multicultural populations</li> </ul>
California Early Childhood Mentor Program, Mentor Teachers  <a href="http://www.ecementor.org/mentorQuickFactSheet.html">http://www.ecementor.org/mentorQuickFactSheet.html</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Completion of a college early care and education program               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree or certificate</li> <li>• Student teaching component or CDA included</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Two years of teaching experience</li> <li>■ Eligibility for the master teacher level, or above, Child Development Permit               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 early care and education units, including core courses</li> <li>• 16 general education units</li> <li>• 6 specialization units</li> <li>• 2 adult supervision units</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Idaho STARS Mentor/Coaching Services, Mentor/Coaches  <a href="http://idahostars.org/ForChildCareProviders/MentorCoachingServices.aspx">http://idahostars.org/ForChildCareProviders/MentorCoachingServices.aspx</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ PhD, MA, BA (preferably in early care and education), AA, or CDA</li> <li>■ Five years of experience</li> <li>■ Two letters of reference</li> <li>■ Background check</li> <li>■ Orientation and courses</li> </ul>
Georgia Early Care and Education Professional Development System for Bright Start, ECE Technical Assistance Providers, Specialist Level*  *Georgia has three levels: Candidate, Associate, and Specialist.  <a href="https://www.training.decal.ga.gov/bfts/technicalAssistanceProviders.do">https://www.training.decal.ga.gov/bfts/technicalAssistanceProviders.do</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Two or more years of experience providing technical assistance</li> <li>■ Three or more years of work experience in early childhood education</li> <li>■ Bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or related field</li> <li>■ Successfully completed the Art of Technical Assistance, including all course assignments and qualifying exam</li> <li>■ Successfully completed a Technical Assistance Portfolio</li> </ul>



Respondents to the survey were asked whether their state's workforce registry system was used to verify whether technical assistance providers meet state preparation requirements. About 1 in 5 (21%) reported that the registry is used, while 37% said they were unsure if the registry was used. Among respondents reporting that the registry was not used, most indicated either that the registry was under development or in revision, or that some other form of verification, including individualized agency verification, was used. Some reported that the registry includes trainers but not technical assistance professionals, or that there was no category for technical assistance. Another reported that organizations certify their own technical assistance providers. One state reported that it has a separate Technical Assistance Registry; another respondent identified the South Carolina Center of Child Care Career Development's (SC-CCCCD) registry and technical assistance data system as documenting technical assistance that is implemented, stating, "All technical assistance providers must be certified by SC-CCCCD." Another respondent reported that her state does not have a registry but that the credential component verifies all of the requirements for technical assistance providers.

#### **Summary of Findings on Standards, Specialized Knowledge and Competencies, and Qualifications and Credentials**

- While some agencies that hire technical assistance professionals offer preservice training, most technical assistance professionals learn on the job; there is rarely a systemic approach to their preparation.
- Focus group participants most often noted that their states had not developed standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, or qualifications and credentials, though this is planned for future action.
- Survey respondents reported that even where states had provisions for specific requirements, these were generally seen as not adequate, or respondents reported they were unsure about their adequacy.
- Many respondents were unsure as to whether or not states have developed standards and credentials, and also about whether or not there is preparation for the practice of mentoring, coaching, and consulting. They also expressed a lack of surety regarding and the role of registries. This indicates a need for better communication within the field across sectors.
- Promising models and practices are emerging from states that have developed credentials, standards, and technical assistance knowledge and competencies. For example, some states have linked standards to registries and/or a system of verification of qualifications.
- Respondents identified potential risks and unintended consequences



related to the development of standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials. Concern was expressed about the need to avoid unnecessarily burdensome processes that might exclude potential technical assistance providers.

- Many respondents and several focus group participants indicated they would appreciate national frameworks and the opportunity to work with peer states in the development of standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Use the NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards and an inclusive cross-sector process to identify the unique knowledge and skills needed for different technical assistance providers and how they should be integrated into a professional development system.
- Consider developing credentials with multiple levels that acknowledge apprenticeship through master specialists and provide an alternative for unique disciplines, such as mental health.
- Use the state early childhood education registry or another professional development system verification process to verify qualifications and credentials for candidates for technical assistance professional positions.
- Conduct outreach efforts across stakeholders and the workforce to ensure a high level of awareness and understanding of the cross-sector standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials with linkage to the registry or another verification process, to ensure integration within a state's early childhood professional development system.
- Explore potential conflicts of interest related to the development of Technical Assistance Provider credentials and review potential policies to ensure that they do not pose undue limitations on access, diversity, and inclusion.

## **3. PATHWAYS, ONGOING SUPPORT, AND COMPENSATION**

The goal of defining technical assistance roles and establishing their corresponding standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials is to ensure that these roles will be filled by individuals who “have what it takes” to succeed. Establishing career pathways, ongoing support, and adequate compensation levels increase the likelihood of retention and that these highly skilled individuals will continue to develop their skills, allowing them to become even more effective in these roles over time.



Focus group participants reported that ongoing support—when it is available at all—is delivered in silos, dependent upon the funding and policies of individual agencies or initiatives.

### Pathways

When asked if there is a clear career pathway to become a technical assistance professional (e.g., the pathway is represented in the state’s early childhood career lattice), only 17.8% of online survey respondents indicated there was, while 21.7% said they were unsure, and 60.5% said there was not. The low proportion of respondents who felt the pathway was clear may actually be overstated, because responses from individuals within a given state often did not match. For example, respondents indicating that there was a career pathway for providers in their state represented 20 states and the District of Columbia, but among these states, 14 had one or more respondents indicating that there was not a pathway for a technical assistance professional. Some of this discrepancy may be attributable to interpretations of the question (i.e., the meaning of “clear pathway”), but it is also likely that much of it is due to a lack of clarity within states for pathways, at least clarity in so far as individuals working on professional development within the state do not consider the state to have clearly delineated pathways for technical assistance professionals.

One survey participant reported that “pathway-building is complex and in progress,” while others commented that even when there is a credential or certification process, it is

not built into career pathways, and sometimes there are unique pathways for just these positions. One respondent said, “It depends on the sector. Some have more transparent pathways, while others do not.” Sometimes different kinds of technical assistance professionals are “lumped in” with trainer requirements.

For those states that do include technical assistance professionals in their pathways, it may not be inclusive of all sectors. One survey respondent reported the following regarding one state’s method of integrating coaches into the state professional development pathways: “A coach must be at least a Level 4 on our Career Pathway, with a plan to attain Level 6 (at least a bachelor’s). The majority of our coaches are Level 6 on our Career Pathway. All coaches at this point are Professional Development Specialists with the local child care resource and referral agency.”

### Ongoing Support

Focus group participants reported that ongoing support—when it is available at all—is delivered in silos, dependent upon the funding and policies of individual agencies or initiatives. The type, duration, and frequency of support ranged from weekly peer group meetings with on-site observations and feedback to nothing at all. Methods of support included issue-specific consultation and problem solving, quarterly



learning community meetings, apprentice coaching opportunities, and sharing resources or research on effective approaches. Overall, there was a strong emphasis on fostering peer-to-peer opportunities or learning communities.

Survey respondents reported additional methods. One state employs job shadowing for new mentors, buddy coaching, and professional learning communities, though these are not consistently implemented across the state. One respondent noted that several types of support are available in one form or another but to a limited group; there is no consistency across the state. For example, technical assistance professionals for Head Start may have many more opportunities for direct supervision, team meetings, and ongoing training. Another respondent said, “State



technical assistance is largely provided under contract, so available support varies by contractor.”

Professional development methods for technical assistance professionals that were identified by the focus groups included ongoing training embedded in meetings, preconference days or a track within an annual conference, and quarterly or annual meetings. Focus group participants also identified examples of professional development provided in their states on topics such as assessment tools, adult learning theory and the process of change, overcoming resistance, and uses of data to inform classroom practice. Some states offer training on tools and strategies for on-site professional development. Examples cited include the art of technical assistance, the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early



The three most frequently reported areas for ongoing professional development were adult learning (50%), content knowledge (41%), and building relationships (38%).

Learning's (CSEFEL) Pyramid Model, and strengths-based coaching models. Training is also provided on specific content, such as an identified curriculum, assessment tools, or QRIS standards. Some focus group participants reported that their states are using or plan to use a self-assessment tool to identify support needs and to promote reflective practice.

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about the nature of ongoing professional development opportunities and supports provided to technical assistance professionals. The three most frequently reported

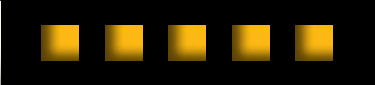
areas for ongoing professional development were adult learning (50%), content knowledge (41%), and building relationships (38%). However, given the topics provided, the overall low rate of reporting suggests that the diverse ongoing training needs for technical assistance professionals are not typically available to those in the field. The high reporting of "unsure" (32%) suggests a lack of clarity in what is available within each state, and the similar reporting (31%) of "other topics" suggests that some of the categories used to describe ongoing training opportunities may not resonate

with technical assistance professionals in the state.

When asked to report on how often different types of support are provided to technical assistance professionals, responses revealed the limited types of support and the duration of those supports. None of the practices identified was reported to be available at least once for all technical assistance professionals. The most common practices reported were ongoing training (11%) and team or peer meetings (68%). The ongoing training most typically reported is also generally less frequent (44% report one or two times per year), whereas team and peer meetings occur most frequently (35% report a frequency of greater than once per quarter). Just over one half of all respondents reported the use of one-on-one reflective supervision and peer-reflective supervision (51%). When reflective supervision is used, however, it is done infrequently (38% of respondents indicate this occurs at least quarterly).

### Compensation

**A**mong the respondents to the survey, the view of professionals providing technical assistance is one of a diverse workforce primarily composed of individuals who work either part- or full-time in providing assistance with neither representing a clear majority (43% of respondents report this mix), about 22% indicated that the workforce was all or mostly full-time, and 11% reported that they were all or mostly part-time workers. About one quarter (25%) reports they are unsure of the part- or full-time status of those working in the field. When asked about compensation, more than half of the respondents (61%) were



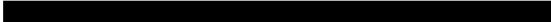
unsure which other profession within early childhood education was most comparable to technical assistance professionals in regard to compensation. The most comparable position reported was child care director (13% of all responses), although 14% indicated that it was some position other than those specifically asked about (e.g., child care director, lead teacher, prekindergarten teacher, elementary teacher, and program director). Reflecting upon the early childhood field generally, very few reported that the level of compensation was adequate to recruit (17%) and retain (17%) highly qualified and effective technical assistance professionals. Fewer than half of respondents reported being unsure about compensation adequacy. One survey respondent stated, “We have a lot of dedicated people who work as contractors for a pittance to be mentor/coaches.” It was frequently commented that the Child Care Resource and Referrals (CCR&Rs) had their own policies for compensation and retention and that, overall, compensation varies by the hiring organization, with no uniform data or practices for tracking compensation and retention across sectors and initiatives established within a given state.

When asked about benefits for technical assistance professionals, respondents indicated that while full-time providers enjoyed a range of benefits (e.g., health, dental, life, and disability insurances and retirement plans), very few of these benefits were provided to those who work part-time. Considering other benefits, including policies about paid time off, the disparity between full- and part-time providers was again evident (except for minor differences in the reporting of unpaid personal time off, sick time, and vacations). One survey respondent said, “These benefits are widely variable, as the technical assistance professional may work in a large organization such as a university, a small nonprofit, or be self-employed.” Another reported that more than half of their QRIS pilot coaches are contractors and receive no benefits; others are employees of the CCR&R and receive that organization’s benefit package.

### **Summary of Findings on Pathways, Ongoing Supports, and Compensation**

- Most states have not yet integrated mentoring, coaching, and consultation positions into their career pathways.
- While a wide range of professional development and support opportunities are provided to technical assistance providers, typically there is a lack of a systematic approach to their provision, and access to these opportunities is limited.
- Workforce data on technical assistance professionals that track compensation, benefits, and retention across sectors and initiatives are lacking.

**A majority of survey respondents were concerned that the level of compensation and benefits was inadequate to ensure retention of qualified individuals.**



- A majority of survey respondents were concerned that the level of compensation and benefits was inadequate to ensure retention of qualified individuals.
- According to respondents, professional development mentors, coaches, and consultants often perform those functions on a part-time basis while also serving in other roles in the field. They are often independent contractors without benefits.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Develop clear pathways for individuals providing professional development technical assistance as part of the state’s system, illustrating the range of occupational opportunities for professionals in the field and making transparent the pathways to qualifying for jobs that usually have a higher level of compensation.
- Provide more support for technical assistance providers, including supervision, training, and other supports tied to defined competencies.
- Ensure that the pathways support the diversity of the workforce and equitable access to opportunities along career pathways.
- Map training and support opportunities for professionals in various sectors and initiatives and use this analysis to craft more consistency and greater access across sectors and initiatives for mentors, coaches, and consultants, including those working in K–3 settings.
- Use online supports to enhance communication among technical assistance professionals and to foster peer learning communities. Strategies include websites with resources and practice tools, online discussion forums, chat groups, and online training.
- Develop compensation and benefits policies designed to attract and retain qualified technical assistance professionals and that facilitate parity across sectors and initiatives. Where possible, link compensation and incentives to those available as part of the state’s professional development system and in the K–3 sector.
- Establish technical assistance financing that will supplement—and not compete with—program financing.
- Allow individuals who are part-time mentors, coaches, or consultants to provide those services without disrupting the financing of the program, higher education institution, or organization that serves as their other employer.

## **4. DATA, EVALUATION, AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Focus group participants and respondents to the survey identified various ways in which states are trying to establish monitoring and quality



control for technical assistance providers. As with other areas, collecting data on technical assistance and monitoring how the system policies are being implemented are uneven within and among states.

The majority of survey and focus group respondents commented that frameworks help ensure consistency and quality, as well as facilitate data collection and evaluation. One respondent noted, “There should be a framework upon which everything is built and then room for communities to adapt.” A few respondents did not agree, rejecting the notion of “one size fits all.”

Examples of models that respondents cited included the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning’s Pyramid Model, state QRIS-specific models, Buysee and Wesley’s collaborative consultation model, NACCRRRA’s Opening the Door to Quality, I-Consult, and many others. Respondents noted that methods of ensuring fidelity to models are non-existent or inconsistent across agencies.

Survey respondents were also asked about methods their states used to evaluate or hold accountable technical assistance professionals for the quality of the services they provide. More than two-thirds (68%) indicated that their states did not conduct a formal evaluation of technical assistance within their states, and 25% reported they were unsure. Lacking a formal evaluation, other methods of evaluation or accountability are possible. Survey respondents were asked about the use of a range of methods to evaluate technical assistance providers. While 43% of respondents said they were unsure of the methods used, the most common methods reported were supervisory evaluations (37% of respondents) and customer evaluations (32%). Only 19% of the respondents reported the use of on-site observations of providers, and 22% reported the use of outcome data.

Washington State focus group participants cited three formal evaluations of coaching approaches linked to the QRIS pilot and a school-age care quality improvement initiative. They reported that quality assurance strategies included quarterly focus groups with coaches, online surveys of coaches, logs of hours, monitoring provider progress monthly, and use of the NACCRRRA protocol for managing technical assistance provider performance. One New England focus group participant noted that while some programs collect data, they are not shared across the system. Generally, focus group participants reported that formal evaluations are rare and mostly sporadic. More often, informal methods are used, such as self-reports from technical assistance professionals. In the national focus group, participants cited several state examples of quality assurance. For example, Mississippi uses Environment Rating Scale (ERS) data linked to technical assistance provi-

Generally, focus group participants reported that formal evaluations are rare and mostly sporadic. More often, informal methods are used, such as self-reports from technical assistance professionals.





Creative, intentional policies are needed to ensure that technical assistance professionals are prepared and supported in order for them to succeed and for early childhood education programs to realize the outcomes that funders and policymakers seek.

sion. Connecticut has a quality assurance system, primarily for trainers, but also used for technical assistance, that includes training, two observations, one-to-one feedback in person, monitored evaluations, and additional support when needed.

#### **Summary of Findings on Data, Evaluation, and Quality Assurance**

- Frameworks or practice models are used by some states to support data collection, quality assurance, and evaluation.

- More work needs to be done on the monitoring and evaluating for system improvement of the implementation of technical assistance. Tools commonly used include client satisfaction surveys and self-assessments. These tools focus on individuals, rather than the overall approach, and do not reliably predict outcomes.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- Use common terminology and clear standards with consistency across sectors and quality improvement initiatives to enhance data collection and data consistency.
- Include in-state workforce data systems mentors, coaches, and consultants working within and across early childhood education settings and sectors. Workforce data systems should also include information on the providers and provision of technical assistance by mentors, coaches, and consultants across the sectors of early childhood education.
- Articulate quality assurance and monitoring systems for technical assistance strategies and invest in evaluations of the access, consistency, and quality of technical assistance and outcomes.

#### **CONCLUSION**

“We must be creative and intentional about how to support technical assistance specialists to achieve our goals.” —Focus group participant

This quote sums up what NAEYC heard many times over in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups—this is a critical point in the development of technical assistance professionals. Creative, intentional policies are needed to ensure that technical assistance professionals are prepared and supported in order for them to succeed and for early childhood education programs to realize the outcomes that funders and policymakers seek.



Government and private sector investments in on-site professional development through the use of technical assistance providers are expanding with the goal of improving both program quality and teacher practice. However, policies related to technical assistance professionals are fragmented within and across sectors and funding streams, rather than conceptualized and developed as part of a systemic approach. This paper offers strategic directions for policies that will increase the odds that those goals will be realized through a more effective delivery of technical assistance. NAEYC proposes that policies related to technical assistance providers must be developed in partnership with all relevant sectors fully engaged and that these policies should include a common terminology; standards, specialized knowledge and competencies, and qualifications and credentials; pathways, ongoing support, and adequate compensation; and data, evaluation, and quality assurance. Given the work states have done and the work they want to advance, creation of national frameworks for states to use as they move forward has the potential to foster more consistency across the nation and within states and to make policy development more efficient.

Finally, policymakers should ask four strategic questions from the Workforce Designs Policy Blueprint:

1. Does this policy increase integration?
2. Does it improve quality?
3. Does it support diversity, inclusion, and access?
4. Does it increase compensation parity?

As reliance on the expertise and services of mentors, coaches, and consultants grows, it is imperative that states attend to these professionals in a cross-sector, integrated professional development system. Technical assistance professionals need what all early childhood education professionals need: clear standards, access to professional development, and appropriate compensation and career pathways. In the words of one of our focus group participants, “Now is the time to think this through before we get a whole generation of trainers and coaches in place.”

These strategic directions will increase the odds that technical assistance providers will be successful in improving the quality of early childhood programs and teacher practice so that children and families will benefit.

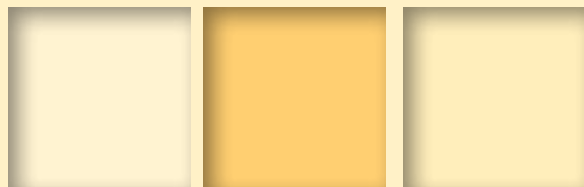


## Resources

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## Endnotes

- 1 For the purposes of this study, NAEYC did not include technical assistance provision in K–3 settings.
- 2 The online survey was distributed widely to state and national organizations, members of the ECWSI Peer-to-Peer Exchange, and focus group participants.
- 3 Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary, 2011. Available at [http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining\\_TA.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining_TA.pdf).
- 4 A collaborative effort of the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators and ACCESS—Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators.
- 5 Due to rounding, the total exceeds 100%.



National Association for the Education of Young Children  
1313 L Street NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005-4101  
202-232-8777 800-424-2460

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

