Policies and Practices that Strengthen Technical Assistance

August 8, 2012 from 2:00 to 3:15 p.m. EST
Call-in Number: 1-888-850-4523 / Passcode: 389687#

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

Billie Young, Senior Advisor
Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative

Policies and Practices that Strengthen Technical Assistance
August 8, 2012
Overview

• TA Supports Project
• Findings & Policy Recommendations
• Resources
Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative

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?
Technical Assistance Strategies

- Mentoring
- Coaching
- Consultation
- PD Advising
- Peer-to-Peer TA
Project Methods

Focus Groups

Individual Interviews

Online Survey
Four Areas for Public Policy Action

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

- 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.
Overarching Findings

- 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.
Overarching Findings

• 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

• 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.
Overarching Policy Recommendations

- 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.
Overarching Policy Recommendations

- 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.
Technical Assistance and Tools: Sample

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

**Policy Advocacy Tool**

This tool is intended as a companion to the Strategic Directions report to help state professional development teams assess their status in relationship to the policy recommendations and to develop priorities for action. The full Strategic Directions report is available at [http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/TA_Professionals.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/TA_Professionals.pdf). Contact Billie Young at byoung@naeyc.org for more information or technical assistance and additional tools.

*Priority Level: Indicates if it is a high (H), medium (M) or low (L) priority for action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Policy Recommendations</th>
<th>Fully Met</th>
<th>Partially Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th><em>Priority Level</em></th>
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| **Overarching & Systemic**   | 1. 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.  
2. Use this map as a foundation for a systemic approach to cross-sector provision of TA. Consider the policy principles of integration, quality assurance, diversity, inclusion, access and compensation parity.  
3. Adopt unifying frameworks for specialized knowledge with competencies developed for specific sectors, roles, and settings as needed.  
4. Integrate TA professionals into the state PD system, including registries, career pathways, data systems, standards, ongoing support, and financing. |           |               |         |                  |
Resources available at:
http://www.naeyc.org/policy/ecwsi
Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative

• Contact Information

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Quality Assistance in Quality Rating Improvement Systems as Reported by TA Providers

Sheila Smith, NCCP

Policies and Practices that Strengthen Technical Assistance

August 8, 2012
Overview

♦ Brief summary of research that should inform technical assistance and coaching strategies in Quality Rating Improvement Systems

♦ An overview of results from a study in which we interviewed QRIS TA providers about how they provide on-site assistance, and the training and supervision they receive

♦ Recommendations for strengthening TA/coaching in QRIS
Elements of quality in ECE that matter most for children’s development and school readiness

- Emotionally responsive, supportive teaching that promotes positive teacher-child relationships (e.g., O’Conner & McCartney, 2007; Mashburn et al, 2008)
Dimensions of quality that matter most, cont.

- Learning experiences that help children gain competencies needed for later reading and academic success (e.g., Kendeous et al., 2009; Coolahan et al., 2000); These foundational competencies include:
  - Language skills
  - Early literacy skills
  - Early math skills
  - Social-emotional competencies
Dimensions of quality that matter most, cont.

- **Individualized supports for their learning** (e.g., Smith et al, 2009)
  
  - This requires *monitoring* of children’s learning and *using results* to tailor learning supports to each child’s needs and interests

- **A set of strategies for helping parents support their child’s early learning and social-emotional growth** (e.g., Arnold et al, 2008; Powell et al, 2010; Reese et al, 2010)
Emerging research on coaching

- Effective TA and coaching help teachers *intentionally practice* strategies for promoting children’s learning (e.g., Powell et al, 2010; Wasik et al, 2006; Neuman and Cunningham, 2009)
Frequent and sustained coaching may be needed to help teachers acquire complex skills (e.g., for promoting language growth) and to promote development in multiple domains (e.g., Zaslow et al, 2010)
QRIS TA PROVIDER SURVEY

- Interviews with two TA providers in each state that had a state-wide QRIS (a few states were omitted because they were redesigning their systems)

- Interviews used a mix of closed and open-ended questions focused on
  - Features of on-site assistance in Centers and in Home-based settings
  - Training and supervision offered to TA providers
Characteristics of TA Providers

- 34 TA providers in 17 states were interviewed:
  
  CO, LA, TN, OH, NM, IL, IN, PA, VT, ID, ME, OK, NC, IA, MS, DE, KY

- Most TA providers worked in both centers and in homes that serve infants and toddlers
The number and frequency of visits vary widely, but are generally low.

- A little over half the TA providers report that they conduct **10 or fewer visits**
- Almost 10% report that they conduct **20 or more visits**
- Only 5% make **weekly visits**
- A little over half make **monthly or twice a month visits**
What dimensions of quality are a frequent focus of on-site assistance?

- The largest number of TA Providers report the following as “frequently an area of focus” during on-site work:
  - Helping teachers improve the classroom or home-based environment
  - Helping teachers improve features of the classroom or home-based setting that will help them earn a higher QRIS rating
Dimensions of quality that are a frequent focus of on-site assistance, cont.

- Over half the TA Providers *frequently* focus on helping teachers promote children’s social-emotional, language and early literacy development.

- Fewer TA Providers *frequently* help teachers increase parent involvement, provide individualized learning supports, or improve practices that promote early math learning.

- Across all areas, a sizable percentage of TA providers do *not* focus frequently on helping teachers improve support for children’s early learning.
What methods are used *frequently* by TA providers during on-site visits?

- The most commonly reported methods “used frequently” during on-site visits were:
  - Talking to teachers about improving the classroom environment and curriculum
  - Observing teachers interact with children and providing feedback

- Fewer TA Providers *frequently* model teaching strategies; Very few (under 12%) *frequently* plan an observation in which a teacher intentionally practices teaching strategies
Most TA Providers work with directors during visits to Centers

- Activities reported as frequent were talking with director about improving the classroom environment and identifying professional development activities outside the Center.

- Fewer TA Providers assist directors in planning activities within the Center to improve the skills of teaching staff.
Ongoing training experiences varied widely:

- The frequency of training ranged from **once or twice a year to once or twice a month**
- 38% recalled training or supervision sessions in the past six months focused on ways to support preschoolers’ social-emotional growth, language, literacy, and early math development
Training and Supervision of TA Providers, cont.

- Amount and types of supervision varied widely:
  - **A little over half** of the TA Providers reported *regular* supervision with meetings on a weekly, monthly, or frequent “as-needed” basis
  - A few TA Providers (15%) reported that their supervisors **observe them in the classroom** conducting coaching or providing technical assistance
TA Providers’ recommendations

- TA Providers offered the following recommendations for improving training and supervision:
  - **Increase the overall amount** of training and supervision
  - Offer training and supervision that **provide models of effective practices and on-site guidance** to TA Providers
  - During training, provide **opportunities to practice new skills**
  - In training and supervision, focus more on **coaching methods and strategies for working in sites where staff are resistant to change**
Recommendations

- Establish policies that allow TA Providers to deliver an adequate amount of on-site assistance. (For example, sustained assistance may be needed to help teachers learn multiple strategies for supporting language development.)
Recommendations, cont.

- Increase TA Providers’ efforts to help teachers learn how to promote children’s early learning in areas key to school readiness (language, literacy, early math, social-emotional skills). **Consider the following methods:**
  - **Provide guidance** that directs TA Providers to give priority to these areas
  - **Require TA Providers to document** the early learning focus of technical assistance in TA visit records
  - **Offer more training** for TA providers that is focused on teacher/caregiver supports for early learning and positive teacher-child relationships
Recommendations, cont.

- Promote the use of **coaching methods** that give teachers a chance to see and intentionally practice new teaching strategies
  - **Provide training** that gives TA Providers the skills they need to provide modeling and coaching that helps teachers intentionally practice new skills
  - **Design TA visit records** that require documentation of coaching methods, including the use of modeling and coaching that provides intentional practice
Recommendations, cont.

- Give TA Providers training in how to help center directors use **continuous quality improvement methods** such as modeling effective practices and helping teachers practice strategies and receive supportive feedback.

- Last, find ways to solicit and respond to recommendations from TA Providers for improving the training and supervision that can make their work more effective.
Resources

Coaching and Quality Assistance in Quality Rating Improvement Systems: Approaches Used By TA Providers to Improve Quality in Early Care and Education Programs

Report available at:

An Analysis of Early Learning Content in QRIS Standards
Forthcoming report, available soon on NCCP’s website, nccp.org
Thank You!

For questions, please contact:
Sheila Smith, PhD, Director of Early Childhood. 
Sheila.smith@nccp.org or call 646-284-9643

Please note: Contact Sheila Smith if you would like to use or adapt any part of our TA Provider Interview to conduct interviews with TA Providers in your state: We would be happy to provide the tool and any assistance you need.
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