From Planning to Practice

State Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Education
NASBE wishes to thank the Foundation for Child Development for supporting states’ efforts in improving teacher quality in early childhood education. Established in 1899, the Foundation for Child Development is a national private philanthropy dedicated to the principle that all families should have the social and material resources to raise their children to be healthy, educated, and productive members of their communities. Through the Foundation’s investment in a well-aligned first level of public education in the United States, the Network states have contributed significantly to improving the early experiences of young children.

Second, we also wish to thank the IDEA Partnership for providing the initial support for the first launch (Phase 1) of the NASBE Early Childhood Education Network.

Finally, NASBE extends its appreciation to the states that make up the Network for demonstrating a sustained commitment to improving the caliber of their states’ early childhood education system. It has been a delight to work with the dedicated, hardworking agency staff, that have set such high standards for themselves in the quality of their work.

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I. Introduction

The public education system has become increasingly involved in designing early learning programs to meet the educational goal that all children start school ready to learn. Over the last few years, approximately 38 states funded some form of prekindergarten program. As the state role in public education has grown, public opinion polls have revealed strong sentiment toward increasing state authority and responsibility for making certain that preschool programs are of high quality. States are expected to define the standards for programs operating in communities and to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that all children can benefit from early education.

State boards of education, which have purview over state public education systems, have been an integral part of this movement as they focus increasingly on early childhood education as a way to improve children's chances of early school success. State boards are uniquely positioned to address issues of quality in early childhood services. With broad oversight for education standards, licensure, and certification, they have the ability to take the best of early childhood policies and practice and bring them to scale statewide.

The Formation of NASBE's Early Childhood Education Network—Phase I

In order to help states meet this charge, in March 2001 the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) launched its Early Childhood Education Network.* During the first phase of the project, NASBE convened state teams comprised of state board members, department of education directors of special education and early childhood, and representatives from departments of child and family services. Following a competitive grant process, NASBE began working intensively with six states—Wyoming, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio, Louisiana, and Massachusetts—to design coordinated, coherent systems that would ensure all children start school ready to learn.

The project required states to implement a results-oriented process to guide state planning around how to achieve the goal of school readiness. It required states to commit to a team approach, establish ongoing collaborative partnerships, and to develop and implement a work plan to connect disparate programs and policies into a cohesive early learning system. The states received extensive information regarding research on early development and recommendations for implementing systems to ensure quality and access. The starting point for building state systems varied widely, and accordingly, the Network states adopted unique approaches to coordinating elements of early childhood care and education.

States addressed a range of issues such as:

- How to design and communicate the state's vision for an early childhood education system;
- The development of prekindergarten through grade three standards that include integrated content and desired outcomes based on research on early learning development;

*Phase 1 activities were made possible with funding from the Policymakers Partnership (since reconfigured as the IDEA Partnership), housed at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The primary goal of the Partnership is to build the capacity of states, districts, and schools to improve results for students with disabilities.
Assessing program performance to determine if preschool programs are providing effective, high-quality early learning experiences; and

Increasing access to high-quality curricula and training for early childhood practitioners.

The first-year outcomes of the Early Childhood Education Network were impressive. As a result of their participation, states engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to develop early learning guidelines that infused research-based practices on developmentally appropriate practices. A major thrust of the states’ work emphasized unifying program standards across program types and promoting inclusion of young children with disabilities. Toward that end, interagency networks created resource brochures and guidebooks for parents on how to access programs and services for children with and without disabilities. The Network states defined school readiness indicators and began collecting data on program efficacy.

Early Childhood Education Network—Phase II

Because of the promising results of NASBE’s original Early Childhood Education Network and the urgent need among states to develop early childhood education systems to meet high standards of student achievement, NASBE initiated a second phase to expand the network and build upon the success of the six initial states. With support from the Foundation for Child Development, these efforts focused on teacher quality issues using state board authority to adopt teacher standards, certification rules, and professional development criteria to align prekindergarten through grade three education systems. Network staff developed a set of questions that teams used to place the issue of teacher quality within the context of their overall state system. States began efforts to improve teaching, while at the same time continuing work begun in Phase I to build a coherent, early learning infrastructure.

Key elements of the second phase include:

Establishing partnerships among state agencies, policymakers, community colleges, higher education, local communities, practitioners, and families;

Creating a common vision upon which to base the accountability for achieving results;

Determining how well state policies on teacher preparation, certification, program approval, and early learning standards reflect what we know about research-based practices;

Aligning early childhood standards with certification, preparation program approval, and on-going professional development across all program models; and

Identifying common metrics and indicators to assess program quality and child outcomes.

This report describes how each of the Network states embarked upon building the structure to create and manage a system of early childhood education. It describes what each state accomplished in both Phase I and Phase II and provides an overview of its current early childhood system. While responding to their unique context and characteristics, the states implemented similar actions and strategies to connect the diverse elements of the overall early education system.
II. The Need for State Involvement in Early Childhood Education

Today, even most people with no connection to schools are aware that the country is working hard to ratchet up academic standards so that all young people can meet the needs of a 21st century economy and democracy. The culmination of this reform effort, the No Child Left Behind Act, has had a significant impact on most schools and on every district in the country. But it is states that have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that their schools are up to the task by providing adequate resources, clear standards, guidance, and an effective accountability system.

Still, it has become evident to most policymakers that no matter how hard a state’s K-12 education system is pushed, the goal of leaving no child behind cannot be met without commensurate measures to improve both the quality of and children’s access to preschools. The logic behind this is straightforward: First, we now know that serious learning gaps between groups of children (based largely on socio-economic factors) already exist before children even enter kindergarten, and that these gaps are likely to persist and become more difficult to close the older a child gets. Second, if this is true, and with the pressure building for states to boost achievement levels for all students, it is clear that states now have a huge stake in their preschools, even though many of them are outside the purview of the department of education. The remainder of this section looks at these two points in more depth.

A. The achievement gap is already present before children begin formal schooling.

As demographer Harold Hodgkinson writes, “Long before children knock on the kindergarten door—during the crucial period from birth to age five when humans learn more than during any other five-year period—forces have already been put in place that encourage some children to ‘shine’ and fulfill their potential in school and life while other forces stunt the growth and development of children who have just as much potential. The cost to the nation in terms of talent unfulfilled and lives of promise wasted is enormous.”

Hodgkinson’s words are widely backed by both the professional experiences of countless teachers and by numerous studies. In summarizing their important study on social background and achievement as children enter school (Inequality at the Starting Gate), Lee and
Burkham note that their data, taken from the U.S. Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, “are some of the most detailed ever collected for the study of children's characteristics as they enter kindergarten. And the results are clear—disadvantaged children fall behind at a very early age, before they ever enter a classroom.” Data show, for example, that average scores in literacy and mathematics differ widely by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Before entering kindergarten, average cognitive scores of children in the highest socio-economic status are 60 percent higher than scores of those in the lowest socio-economic status group. (See Chart on page 6.)

At the same time—and what is key for policymakers and the public to know—ample evidence exists that:

V A higher percentage of our youth are living in poverty than any developed nation.

V Other nations tend to have a centralized ministry of education. We have a “crazy quilt” of 15,000 local school boards; uncountable county, city, and state education agencies including chief state school officers and state boards of education; and the federal government, which contributes only about 7 percent of education funding but lately has been issuing orders with no funds to get the jobs done. A centralized ministry is not a solution for us.

V Even when programs are successful, like Schools of the 21st Century, there is no “scale-up” procedure to get from their 1,400 schools to the nation’s 54,000 elementary schools. It would be equally difficult to “scale-up” 49 states to adopt Georgia’s universal preschool program. In France, it could be done with the stroke of a pen, but here in the United States, we probably would not like being ordered around like that.

V Only one household in four has a child in public school. For the rest of the population, the preschool issue has no direct effect on their lives.

V With 43 million of us moving each year, it gets difficult to sustain a local or even a state campaign for universal preschool....
participation in high-quality early childhood programs can help bridge the achievement gap, by accelerating social and cognitive skills that are critical precursors to later learning.

B. There has been a clarion call for quality state-funded prekindergarten programs, particularly with the advent of No Child Left Behind and the resulting demands on public education systems to prepare a well-educated workforce.

Even as many states have stepped up their investment in early education over the past decade, the fact remains that few programs exist of the quality necessary to bring out the potential benefits. Public financial support is limited. Most state prekindergarten programs reach only 16 percent of four-year olds, and economic forecasts indicate that a tough fiscal climate will continue to threaten the level of states’ investments in its youngest citizens. At the same time, even as states spent more in early childhood education, these expenditures were often made without system-wide planning and without using the wealth of research-based knowledge on how to design effective preschool environments. The result has been often a patchwork of programs and services that are at best inaccessible or mediocre (or both).

Most states have spent their time primarily developing different aspects of programs rather than focusing on the system as a whole. Programmatic differences vary widely across states on almost every count, including original goals and standards, administrative structures, teacher licensure, funding levels, and program monitoring. For example, for about a quarter of state prekindergarten initiatives, one-half or more of the participating children attend programs in settings outside of public schools. Moreover, many children participate in private childcare that falls outside the purview of agencies that govern other federal and state-funded programs (e.g., state prekindergarten programs, Head Start, Title I, and Part B under the Individuals with Disabilities Act). As a result, states face significant constraints in developing and implementing a coordinated, high-quality system of early childhood education.

“O verwhelmingly, data show exceptional variability in experiences offered to children. Although for the most part children were involved in whole-group experiences throughout much of the day, in many rooms there were no occasions in which the child was taught in a whole group. Literacy instruction was the predominant activity, but in a substantial number of rooms there were no literacy activities at all.”

Summary of observation-based descriptions of 1,500 pre-K to first-grade classrooms. Robert Pianta, “Transitioning to School: Policy, Practice, and Reality.”
III. Common Themes in Efforts to Develop High-Quality Preschool Systems

It is clear that the six states in NASBE’s Early Childhood Network faced enormous challenges in considering how to develop and implement a coordinated, coherent preschool system that provides children with well-trained teachers. Despite the differences from one state to the next, however, there were common aspects as to how the Network states managed to advance the overall system coherence and program quality. What is also encouraging is that these common features, which are presented along with state examples in this chapter, are very much in line with the findings and recommendations of other early childhood experts discussing how to design integrated state policies on early childhood education.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) in the 2004 State Preschool Yearbook, for example, discusses the importance of leadership, strategic planning, and standards that are cited in this report as key to the accomplishments of the Network states. In a study of state-funded prekindergarten programs, Gallaher, Clayton, and Heinemeier reached similar conclusions regarding how states responded to the challenge of designing new prekindergarten initiatives. In addition to identifying important aspects such as collaboration, program quality assurance, and linking early education with broader education reforms, the authors noted that “policy change was being accomplished despite the known difficulty of instituting change in bureaucratic systems and the hidden power of the status quo in resisting change.”

In a similar fashion, what is particularly impressive about the work of the Network states has been their capacity to drive sustainable systems change. Much was accomplished despite the limits of funding and time and regardless of the challenges inherent in connecting the disparate subcultures within early childhood. States succeeded through exercising leadership, applying their knowledge of the research base on early learning, partnering with many constituencies, and committing to a vision about how to serve those children who most need quality early learning experiences. Charles Bruner and his co-authors from the Child and Family Policy Center speak to the importance of people and their relationships to building early learning systems. They write, “A final rule of thumb for planning and governing an early learning system is: there is no magic bullet or magic structure that substitutes for passion and leadership.”

The following pages describe the common features, or themes, found in the planning actions taken by Network states in their individual efforts to build expanded yet integrated early education systems. Although these features are discussed separately, it should be understood that they are closely related and frequently overlap. For example, an overarching strategy such as “on-going collaboration” is also an important aspect of other strategies, such as integrating special services delivery across programs.

Partnerships and On-going Collaboration

Partnering has been the cornerstone of integrated state infrastructures for early childhood education. With this in mind, participation in the NASBE Network was made contingent on states forming teams that included representatives from state education and health agencies, the state board of education, higher education, community colleges, special education, and advocacy groups. States expanded these partnerships to build coalitions across state and local levels and to articulate a common vision for early childhood policies and programs.
Because public schools are accountable for all children once they reach school age, the states designed strategies to link the disparate early childhood programs and services operating in the state. While states exercise jurisdiction over state-funded programs and some federal programs, often the neediest children are served in non-public programs. In the Network states, publicly funded programs serve less than 50 percent of all four-year-olds enrolled in some type of preschool program. Furthermore, the largest source of funding for early learning comes from federal programs, not state or district initiatives. Federal funding supports Head Start, Title I, Even Start, and preschool programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. States recognized the need to work with both federal- and state-funded public and private programs in determining the overarching goals and maximizing benefits to all children.

Kansas, for example, convened a standing group of policymakers, state education agency (SEA) staff, higher education representatives, Head Start staff, private and public practitioners, and other stakeholders to develop readiness indicators and new teaching standards. The state team members acknowledged that the process of engaging multiple players extended the time it would take to develop new guidelines. Yet, they were assured that without it, they would fail to secure the long-term buy-in of the early childhood community, which was accustomed to strong local control and community advocacy. Moreover, it was important to design policies and structures that coordinated to the maximum extent possible the requirements placed upon programs supported through different funding streams. In particular, states were intent on partnering with Head Start, because they have no direct authority over this largest of the federally funded early childhood programs.

Ohio mobilized partnerships to help construct a coordinated system of programs and policies to respond to the diverse needs of young children. The state collaborated with agencies and advocates for children with special needs and higher education. As a result, the state developed a framework to train itinerant early childhood specialists to support the education and care of children with disabilities. These specialists served a continuum of preschool settings, including private childcare.

**Sustained Political Leadership**

In order to garner political support and sustain funding for early childhood initiatives through lean budget years, the states linked their initiatives to larger education reforms. Early childhood education was promoted based on its benefits for at-risk children who need specific educational and social supports in order to be as ready to start kindergarten as their more affluent peers. States were able to divert resistance and opposition to formal preschool by working with a wide range of stakeholders and by building a consensus around the system’s major objectives. Ensuring high-quality programs and services to reduce achievement gaps and promote school readiness served as a primary goal for states’ early learning systems.

The Wyoming Department of Education has established a coalition (including the Children’s Action Alliance, higher education, the Department of Family Services, and local providers) to launch a campaign to gain legislative support for a preschool initiative. The state is gathering and compiling the results of a statewide kindergarten readiness survey to press the case for state investment in early childhood education.

States have also responded to policymakers’ calls for a return on public investments in early childhood education. With growing allocations come increased pressure to document how funds are spent, to provide evidence that children are experiencing positive outcomes, and to make this information available to policymakers and the public. States recognized that policymakers often do not have the confidence to simply expand existing programs without some guarantees of how these initiatives will lead to critical child outcomes.

Louisiana gathers extensive data on the range of programs serving four-year olds by local parish and statewide and evaluates programs annually to demonstrate program efficacy. Evaluations
indicated that participation in preschool reduces the gap in children's readiness for kindergarten—children in Louisiana begin preschool below the national average and complete the program with readiness skills appropriate for successful school entry. The legislature responded to this information on program outcomes and the need for early intervention by substantially increasing funding for the state's preschool program.

Illinois has a long history of providing quality, free early education and services to three- and four-year olds. According to the NIEER 2004 State Preschool Yearbook, the state earned nine out of 10 benchmarks used to assess states' policies in areas identified in the research literature as contributing to the quality of preschool programs. The governor and the legislature continue to support increased funding and access to young children with diverse needs through its Prekindergarten Program for At-Risk Children. From the beginning, there has been an emphasis on program quality to reassure the public that its money was being well spent.

**Strategic Planning by Lead Agency**

Sustained agency leadership is critical to crafting policies and programs in accord with a credible, agreed-upon vision for an early childhood system. This is a long-range endeavor that requires advance strategic planning to maximize resources, expand access, and ensure quality. States have generally begun with the most vulnerable populations in order to mitigate early learning problems and increase long-term savings to states. Through a phased-in approach, states have been successful in sustaining public support and in increasing funding to reach more young children.

As more states have targeted expanding early childhood education to close achievement gaps, they have stepped up efforts to develop a system of education and care through the integration of state-funded subsidized childcare, Head Start, and other public programs. States have taken actions to expand preschool, establish program reviews, and devise public awareness campaigns to help families navigate the early learning system.

Working closely with the state board of education, Illinois' department of education provided the stewardship for framing a cohesive infrastructure for all early childhood programs. Early on, Illinois laid the groundwork for its early education system by collaborating with stakeholders (e.g., Head Start, special education providers, childcare providers), examining the research on early development, and designing interim implementation strategies to consolidate support and enhance quality. A lead spokesperson for Illinois' state team remarked, "Everybody thinks early childhood is wonderful, but nobody appreciates what it takes to have it function either in terms of integrating it into the school or in terms of building quality into the programs themselves."

Program administration through local boards proved effective in committing local programs to early childhood standards, as well as allowing subcontracting to configure more service options (such as wrap-around services or use of special education funds to support inclusive practices). The state is now expanding local options to increase access for its neediest youngsters, as well as encouraging agencies outside the public schools such as childcare centers and Head Start to compete directly for funding. Those receiving state funds must comply with the same quality standards that apply to public schools, such as implementation of state-approved curricula and formative assessments. Teachers must be certified in early childhood education. Illinois provides considerable resources and training to help public and private programs meet the strong standards for personnel and programs. The state is continuing these efforts through collaboration with higher education to produce a cadre of certified teachers.

Massachusetts, like Illinois, also adopted a strategy to fund communities, through its Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) program, to coordinate services offered by all early care and education programs within a community. CPC councils distribute funds to programs to achieve specific priorities, such as collaboration across programs and outreach to
hard-to-reach families. All participating programs must agree to meet high-quality standards and serve children with and without disabilities.

The state has continued to focus on how to unify existing early education and care functions by creating a new lead agency, the Department of Early Education and Care, through legislation passed in July 2004. The legislation calls for a phase-in plan to establish universally accessible, high-quality early education for all Massachusetts children, ages three through five, by the 2012 school year.

Louisiana took specific steps to design a cohesive infrastructure as it expanded its state prekindergarten programs, primarily through implementation of the LA 4 voluntary preschool initiative in 2001. Administered by the department of education, LA 4 serves four-year-olds from low-income families primarily through local school systems. The enabling legislation promotes local collaboration with other federally funded and private programs and inclusion of children with disabilities. Along with increasing access to early education, Louisiana has systematically focused on ways to broaden implementation of research-based practices in all early childhood programs by: 1) developing and disseminating early learning standards; 2) providing training on effective practices to providers in public, Head Start, and childcare programs; 3) designing a data system to track preschool participation and outcomes; and 4) implementing a two-tiered monitoring system to review programs' adherence to guidelines and regulations.

Standards-Driven System

The literature on early development provides a consistent picture of what children need to ensure their growth and development. The early development field calls for states to establish comprehensive early learning standards based on research that address social and emotional development, health and physical development, and curriculum content that will prepare all young children for school. All of NASBE’s Network states developed learning standards as one of the initial steps to creating a cohesive early childhood system. States convened interagency councils, working with families, higher education, advocacy groups, early childhood experts, and practitioners to develop and pilot the standards. These groups examined the research on what we know about effective programs that achieve important outcomes for children. They attended closely to designing standards that aligned with curriculum standards for kindergarten through grade three and that were widely applicable across all program models.

The state boards of education within the Network states played a pivotal role in the design, dissemination, and approval of the early learning standards. The Network states designed strategies to broaden the implementation of early learning standards following their adoption by the state board.

As one of its preliminary steps in Phase I of the Network project, Wyoming’s state board of education approved the state’s early learning standards. Subsequently, the state began collecting data to determine whether children entering kindergarten were in fact meeting the standards for kindergarten readiness.

Following the 2003 state board approval of Ohio’s early learning standards, two state agencies jointly funded regional training on the standards for practitioners across all programs. In addition, the state began collaborating with higher education programs to align preparation programs with the standards and to train language and literacy teachers in support of early childhood administrators and teachers.

Kansas focused on the development of early childhood standards for children zero to five, consistent with kindergarten through grade twelve standards. By addressing policy issues across organizations and agencies, the state intended to develop a shared definition of what constitutes quality in early childhood programs and services. These partnerships would inform not only the policies per se, but promote buy-in to implement the approved standards and change teaching practice accordingly. Kansas also created a
Teacher quality matters greatly—indeed, it has been shown to be the primary school-based factor in promoting children’s achievement. Increasingly, scholars have focused on the need to improve early childhood teacher training by establishing state standards for teacher preparation and strengthening licensing requirements. Advocates and child development experts recommend that teachers be required to hold a bachelor’s degree with specialized training in preschool. Yet, as with public school teaching, studies show that credentialing alone does not ensure that teachers have the necessary skills needed to advance children’s development.

Researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Center for Early Development and Learning conducted extensive observations of prekindergarten, kindergarten, and 1st grade settings. Based on observations of over 1,500 classrooms, the researchers described the settings and teacher practices and behaviors in both social and instructional quality. Not only did the data show wide variability across classrooms, the observations also revealed that children are exposed to relatively low levels of instruction.

What was most surprising was that classroom quality was not related to the level and nature of the teacher’s education and experience, on whether or not there was a curriculum in place, or even class size. Apparently, many states have not crafted licensure standards that demonstrate a clear relationship between early childhood education training and child outcomes. States need to institute policies that result in the provision of direct and thorough feedback to teachers regarding high-quality instructional practices that are linked to how much children are learning and developing.

During Phase II, the Network states grappled with how to craft state policies to enhance teaching quality across both public and private programs. The teams focused on ensuring that the systems their states put in place to prepare and support teachers would in fact spread the use of effective research-based practices. First, the Network states worked with agency staff, practitioners, higher education, and community colleges to determine what improvements were needed in preparation and training programs. Second, the states designed multiple strategies to make changes in professional development systems that would improve practitioners’ knowledge and skills. These strategies included:

a) Developing curriculum and teaching standards for what children should learn and what teachers should teach;

b) Broadening implementation of standards through training and dissemination of publications;

c) Aligning professional development with early learning standards to build a more aligned and coherent system of teacher preparation;

d) Designing certification and licensure requirements to ensure that practitioners have the knowledge and skills they need to teach children effectively;

e) Affiliating community training with higher education and developing articulation agreements between two-year and four-year programs;

f) Training faculty to ensure their coursework is up to date in terms of the current research and practices in the field;

g) Increasing the degree of coordination and cooperation between different agencies involved in the professional development of practitioners;

h) Providing extensive training coupled with an infrastructure that provides curriculum frameworks, monitoring and support, and resources; and
i) Expanding the capacity of higher education to prepare students for instructional and supervisory roles in serving children with disabilities in natural environments. (For details on each state's respective Phase II grant activities, see the state profiles in Chapter 4.)

The Network states focused on strategies that would reach practitioners working in different program models. For the most part, early childhood providers in public and state-funded programs were required to have bachelors' degrees—unlike private programs that often serve children with significant needs.

For example, during Phase II of the project, Wyoming, in addition to its elementary/early childhood certification program, created a birth through five endorsement program to meet the needs of practitioners in Head Start and private preschools. The University of Wyoming, the state's only four-year university, seven community colleges, and state agency staff worked with early childhood professionals to design the early childhood endorsement program. The program, based on NAEYC standards, provides training to degree candidates and to practitioners through the network of university and community colleges and through distal online coursework as well.

As Massachusetts moved towards housing all early childhood programs within one department, the state designed its strategies to enhance linkages across multiple agencies and institutions of higher learning. Activities included: establishing a partnership between the Department of Education and the Office of Childcare Services to work with communities on implementing the state's early childhood program standards and guidelines; training teachers and administrators in public and private early childhood family child care; and launching the Early Childhood Transfer Compact, an articulation agreement adopted by higher education and community colleges.

**Program Quality Assurance**

Recent studies have illuminated the wide variability across programs and teachers and the concomitant disparity in the outcomes for children. Policies and procedures need to be put into place that will afford practitioners feedback regarding effective instructional practices that are linked to child outcomes. The Network states had to take a strategic, continuous improvement approach to ensuring a focus on program quality even as they continued to build the overall early childhood system. It required reconciling disparate regulations across agencies and establishing system-wide early learning standards and teacher licensure requirements. In addition, states needed to find ways to leverage their impact on local programs despite the wide range of authority state systems have over non-public programs. The Network states accomplished this by establishing funding criteria for local programs; providing training, technical assistance, curricula, and resources; collecting data on preschool enrollment; and conducting periodic program reviews.

For instance, Illinois expanded its Prekindergarten Program for At-Risk Children to agencies outside of public schools in order to increase the quality of private preschool programs. These agencies could receive direct funding, but only if they met the same standards that apply to public schools, including teacher certification and implementation of approved curriculum and assessments. Moreover, the state began providing extensive technical assistance and curricular training to practitioners statewide, including Head Start and community child care providers. Illinois state monitors visit private programs that receive state funds several times a year.

The Network states also formulated mechanisms to conduct on-site reviews of preschools and collect data on programs and outcomes. Massachusetts requires that its Community Partnerships for Children programs, which constitute 75 percent of the states' preschool programs, have NAEYC accreditation and undergo comprehensive reviews every three years.

Louisiana implemented a monitoring system whereby program coordinators observe classrooms using the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)* and review program adherence to the guidelines and regulations.
Ohio recently developed an early childhood assessment system that attends to child achievement, progress monitoring, and program capacity. In 2005 the state began requiring that all children entering kindergarten be assessed on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in literacy. Likewise Kansas and Wyoming committed to collecting information on children's school readiness upon kindergarten entry using classroom observations and readiness surveys. These states plan to use the results to improve the overall system of early childhood education by refining readiness indicators and curricula and designing professional development.

Integration of Special Education

As part of Phase I, the Network states focused particularly on the alignment of policies and programs in order to serve children with and without disabilities. With the '97 reauthorization of IDEA, states and districts were charged with identifying more inclusive settings to serve children with special needs. Part B regulations of IDEA stipulate that a continuum of alternative placements must be provided so that children with disabilities receive services in the least restrictive environment.

This mandate served as an important impetus to begin connecting and restructuring different components of the early education system. Historically, special education early childhood programs operated largely in isolation from other “regular education” preschool initiatives. State teams began to develop a work plan to identify policy gaps in education and services across the range of preschool options. States have continued through their focus on teacher quality, to strengthen the skills and knowledge of all practitioners in serving children with diverse needs.

The Illinois State Board of Education worked with two- and four-year colleges to support early childhood faculty in preparing personnel to work with diverse populations, including children with special needs. Statewide training on the Child Care Plus Curriculum was provided statewide through a “training the trainers” model to infuse innovative practices for serving children with disabilities in natural preschool settings.

Kansas adopted a new licensure system that merged licensing standards for early childhood and early special education. As a follow-up during Phase II, Kansas created a consortium of higher education institutions to develop new course content and a range of on-site and distance learning delivery mechanisms to meet the new licensing requirements.

As part of its efforts to align the education and care delivery systems across funding streams, Ohio focused on preparing itinerant early childhood special education teachers to provide consultative services in a collaborative capacity with other early childhood colleagues in community-based programs. It focused on ensuring that children with disabilities in community-based settings receive the best opportunities to meet not only goals that may be directed toward the disability but also to meet the educational goals needed for kindergarten success.

Conclusion

States are mobilizing committed individuals to knit together the programmatic strands that make up early education. Many of the components necessary to build an integrated, effective system to support children's development already exist. As we have reviewed in this discussion, states have tapped key constituencies that have long shared a common concern for young children's development, but have largely operated idiosyncratically and in isolation. With the increasing recognition of the linkage between early learning and later school success, states have begun framing an overall early learning system that targets school readiness as a primary objective.

This review can serve other states as a guide for meeting the challenge of expanding child and family access to high-quality early care and education in a coherent, coordinated system. Following are some of the key findings from our experience in NASBE's state-based Early Childhood Network:

The importance of state leadership in establishing strong partnerships at all levels to devise delivery
mechanisms that accommodate a common vision and purpose cannot be understated.

The process of building the early childhood system requires planning and attention to the interplay between state policies and local governance.

The state must facilitate widespread dissemination of what the research tells us about early learning and effective teaching practices.

Most importantly, states must continually focus on ensuring the quality of programs and services for all children and across all settings. They must demonstrate leadership in holding quality paramount, whether through policies on standards, preparation and professional development, program review, or assessing outcomes.

As a nation, we cannot afford to sacrifice young children to the forces of poverty and culture that work against students' learning and developing to their maximum potential. Every child needs the full benefit of what we have the capacity to offer.
IV. Profiles of Network State Efforts in Early Childhood Education

Illinois

System Overview

Illinois has a long history of providing quality, free early education and services to three- and four-year-olds. According to the 2004 National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) Yearbook, the state earned nine out of 10 benchmarks used to assess states’ policies in areas identified in the research literature as contributing to the quality of prekindergarten programs. The governor and the state legislature continue to significantly expand funding and access to young children with diverse needs through the Prekindergarten Program for At-Risk Children.

The state’s success in ramping up funding, access, and quality derives not only from strong political support, but from able agency leadership as well. Working closely with policymakers, state agencies have successfully partnered to provide the stewardship for designing a cohesive infrastructure for all early childhood programs. For example, in order to increase access to quality programs for the states’ neediest youngsters, Illinois is now encouraging agencies outside the public schools, such as childcare centers and Head Start, to compete directly for funding. Heretofore, non-public programs received funds from the state only through subcontracts with the schools. In order to receive state funds, these agencies will still have to comply with all the same quality standards that apply to public schools (e.g., teachers certified in early childhood education).

Illinois has devoted considerable attention to strategically aligning all early childhood education and services provided to children with and without disabilities. In particular, the state has focused on designing coherent policies for integrating services under Part B and C of IDEA with other federal and state prekindergarten initiatives. This serves two purposes: first, expanding options for children with disabilities to participate in natural school and community settings and second, increasing the skills and strategies of practitioners serving children with highly diverse needs in a wide range of preschool placements.
### Program Standards/Certification Requirements

| **Comprehensive Standards Aligned to K-3** | Yes, and also requires programs to select curriculum and assessment from approved list |
| **Certification Requirements for Teachers** | Requires BA of all preschool teachers in programs that receive state funds |
| **Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education** | Yes, early child specialized training certificate is required |
| **Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers** | AA degree |
| **Role of School Districts** | 81 percent of districts offer state prekindergarten program |
| **Policy on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities** | Yes, policies and guidance to promote inclusive practices; implemented Child Care Plus Curriculum |
| **Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development** | 120 clock hours every five years or eight credit hours every five years |
| **State Technical Assistance Provided** | Yes, state provides extensive technical assistance and training; provides materials and curriculum frameworks |
| **Accountability/Monitoring System** | Monitoring of all programs; nonpublic school settings that receive state funds receive additional visits from state monitors |
| **Data System for Tracking Students/Program Outcomes** | Programs must select assessment system from approved list (e.g., Creative Curriculum assessment, Meisels work sampling system) that has been aligned to state standards |
Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

Sustained Phase I Grant Activities

The Illinois State Board of Education partnered with the Division of Early Childhood and Special Education, the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Child Care and Development, Head Start, and the Governor’s Office/Office of the First Lady. Following an extensive analysis of early childhood policy, states’ initiatives and rules and regulations, the state initiated the Illinois Access and Equity for All Young Children. The initiative targeted increasing access and equity for children with disabilities and their families. Towards this end, the state team accomplished two major objectives:

- the development and dissemination of a guidebook, One of Us: Access and Equity for All Young Children, designed for use by special education directors, providers, and child care directors to expand the implementation of high-quality inclusive and collaborative practices; and
- the development of a training curriculum that provides rationale, strategies, and resources for inclusion of children with disabilities in natural environments.

The state board paid to distribute over 12,500 guidebooks statewide. Finally, the Access and Equity Project selected the Child Care Plus Curriculum from the University of Montana to begin implementation of a “training the trainers” model on provision of special education and related services in natural preschool settings. Thirty Master Trainer candidates completed the training and will provide “training of trainers” through regional offices and other early childhood training entities.

Phase II Grant

Objectives:

The Illinois State Board of Education partnered with Natural Allies (Natural Allies: Working with Community Colleges to Prepare Personnel to Provide Quality Services for All Young Children in Natural Environments) to support higher education early childhood faculty in preparing personnel to work with diverse populations, including children with special needs. The primary objectives of Phase II work included:

- strengthened linkages among state agencies, higher education, early intervention programs, early childhood teachers, and families;
- continued the Master Training in Child Care Plus Curriculum;
- increased knowledge and skills of college faculty related to using innovative instructional approaches for infusing exceptionality and early intervention content in their instructional programs; and
- enlarged the capacity of higher education to prepare students for instructional and supervisory roles in serving children with disabilities in natural environments.
OUTCOMES:

Illinois has been highly successful at integrating the work of the Access and Equity Project into other state initiatives designed to strategically upgrade the quality of education and services to all young children. Working through STARNET (Support and Technical Assistance Regionally), the state has expanded its “training of trainer models” to implement statewide the Child Care Plus Curriculum. Working with Natural Allies, the state provided training to all Illinois early childhood higher education faculty on infusing methods, models, and materials into higher education curriculum for preparing personnel.

Illinois accomplished the following:

- thirty Master Trainers conducted 12 Child Care plus trainings throughout the state for second level trainers; 275 second-level trainers completed the replication training. The second level trainers represented agencies such as: Head Start, community child care programs, school districts, Children’s Home and Aid Society of Illinois, ARC, Human Services, Ounce of Prevention, Easter Seals, Boys and Girls Club, Jane Adams Hull House, Jewish Children’s Bureau, LaRabida Children’s Hospital, YMCA, Healthy Child Care IL, and Health Departments;

- in July 2004, the Access and Equity Project held a two-day Faculty Institute for about 250 participants, at which the Master trainers (from Phase I) provided training on the Child Care Plus Curriculum. The Project provided mentoring and regional follow-up institutes to participating faculty members;

- the guidebook, One of Us, developed in Phase I continues to be disseminated in Illinois and nationally. One of Us is in the process of being revised to add more scenarios describing methods and strategies Illinois school districts are using to include young children into preschool programs with typically developing peers;

- the state conducted a December meeting for Master Trainers at the Division of Early Childhood in order to reflect on the training that has been done, network, and plan future activities; and

- the state designed a strategy to work with administrators and special education directors in expanding inclusive preschool options for young children with disabilities.
Kansas’ At-Risk Four-Year-Old program, begun in 1998, serves children manifesting risk factors such as developmental delay, migrant status, eligibility for free/reduced lunch, and/or English Language Learner. Access to the program has expanded considerably despite significant budget deficits—twice as many children were served during 2002-2003 as during the previous year. Child and family investments such as the Parents as Teachers Program have generated widespread support for the state’s early childhood initiatives, helping to stave off potential cuts. The At-Risk Four-Year-Old program operates in public schools and receives state general revenue funds, derived in part from tobacco settlement money.

Kansas has successfully collaborated to create a cohesive infrastructure for early childhood education. Spearheaded by the Kansas Department of Education, multiple constituencies have convened regularly to develop a common definition of school readiness, a single set of teaching standards, and readiness indicators for Head Start programs, childcare, other public and private preschool programs, and IDEA services and programs. The early childhood group worked successfully with a consortium of higher education institutions, including private colleges, to shape preservice programs that align with the new early childhood unified license requirements. This coherent focus is reflected in the state’s technical assistance and training efforts. Examples include:

- policies requiring practitioners to complete coursework and individual development plans for license renewal;
- Title II support that provides stipends and release time for practitioners to participate in training;
- the design of a special education State Improvement Grant Supplement (Early Childhood Higher Education Options), which supports a consortium of colleges to meet the new requirements the early childhood license; and
- a new birth through Grade 3 teacher licensure system that combines special education and general early childhood training.
### Program Standards/Certification Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Standards Aligned to K-3</td>
<td>Collaborative interagency work to develop zero through five standards is nearing completion (seven subcommittees on different areas have been meeting throughout the grant period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Teachers</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Yes, new licensure for birth through grade 3 that merges special education and early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers</td>
<td>Two-year degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities</td>
<td>The state board of education approved the unified teacher licensure system for early childhood teachers, birth through age eight, that underscored the state’s commitment to inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development</td>
<td>New licensure system requires coursework and individual development plans for renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Technical Assistance Provided</td>
<td>No, but some training provided to teachers through Parents As Teachers program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability/Monitoring System</td>
<td>Uses annual funding cycle to leverage program components, e.g., programs must identify assessment system; districts make their own decisions about many programmatic features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data System for Tracking Students/Program Outcomes</td>
<td>No state data infrastructure, but state has begun a pilot assessment to track kindergarten readiness; results will be used to refine readiness indicators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

Sustained Phase I Grant Activities

Kansas successfully tackled problems of fragmentation across various early childhood projects and policies initiated throughout the 1990s. The state successfully convened a standing group of policymakers, Department of Education staff, higher education, Head Start staff, private and public practitioners, and other stakeholders to address the development of readiness indicators and new teaching standards. In addition, the early childhood group developed a series of materials designed to help families broker services across different programs and agencies. These included a Readiness Brochure, Early Childhood Fact Sheet, and an Early Childhood Resource Directory disseminated widely across the state.

As part of the grant activities, the state worked closely with special education department staff and providers to merge licensing standards for early childhood and early special education. In July 2003, the Kansas State Board of Education approved the unified teacher licensure system for early childhood teachers, birth through age eight, and created the infrastructure for the state system.

Phase II Grant

Objectives:

Kansas’ grant activities focused on sustaining linkages across multiple stakeholders to 1) advance the quality of early childhood education teachers across agency programs, and 2) enhance children’s school readiness skills by having them participate in quality early childhood programs in Kansas. The core work focused on the development of early childhood standards for children zero to five, consistent with K-12 standards. By addressing policy issues across organizations and agencies, the state intended to develop a shared definition of what constitutes quality in early childhood programs and services. These partnerships would inform not only the policies per se, but promote buy-in to implement the approved standards vis-a-vis a consensus-building process.

Another key area recognized as critical to infusing the standards into practice included the development and dissemination of public information materials. This was considered critical to the success of any statewide effort to develop a single set of standards that would be applied to any program serving young children. Grant activities towards this end included development of brochures about the standards and making presentations to constituencies across the state, such as school boards, school administrators, principals, and special education administrators.

Lastly, the state planned to continue collecting kindergarten observational data using the Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC) during 2004. The analysis of APEEC data will be used to refine the School Readiness Indicators developed in Phase I. The state will use grant funds to pay for graduate students to be trained on the APEEC to observe kindergarten classrooms.
OUTCOMES:

Kansas expanded partnerships with the Child Care and Early Childhood Development Unit, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Association for the Education of Young Children to address cohesive policies on early childhood programs. Over the grant period, these constituencies conducted a series of forums to develop the birth to five early learning standards. Most of the work of the seven subcommittees, each of which addresses different domains of child development, has been completed, but as noted by the state team, the collaborative interagency work, while extremely beneficial in establishing a common mission for all programs, tends to slow the development process. The state steers away from top-down strategies and historically works with diverse groups and local providers to ensure strong support of state policies.

At the same time, the state created a consortium of higher education institutions, including preparation programs housed in private colleges, which have not been engaged heretofore in state discussions about how to advance early childhood teacher education. This consortium focused on developing new content and a range of delivery mechanisms to meet the new licensing requirements. Universities are creating common course offerings that can be provided across different colleges or distally. The State Improvement Grant, supported by state special education funds, targets universities’ efforts to create preparation programs that blend special education and early childhood coursework.

The grant supported the distribution of the materials developed during Phase I— the Readiness Brochure, Early Childhood Fact Sheet, and an Early Childhood Resource Directory— to gain input on needed revisions. The brochures have been revised accordingly. This has resulted in the redesign of the Readiness Brochure and the development of an additional document, Quality Early Learning Experiences and Kansas Early Learning Guidelines: A Developmental Sequence, Birth through Grade 3. These materials have been printed by the Kansas State Department of Education and disseminated statewide.

Finally, the state conducted additional kindergarten classroom observations in order to refine the Kansas Readiness Indicators. Grant funds paid a small stipend for observers, travel costs, and observation materials in order to train a cohort of 30 individuals on how to administer the APEEC. The results will be analyzed to revise the readiness indicators and coordinate 11 early childhood teacher preparation programs. According to the state team, the preliminary observations conducted by graduate students and volunteers revealed similar findings as reported in the literature; that is, the absence of sustained, systematic child-teacher interactions. These results will be used to enhance preparation and training, focusing more intently on ensuring that teachers acquire the necessary skills to engage children actively in learning experiences.
System Overview

Louisiana has demonstrated a significant commitment to prekindergarten by expanding its state-funded early childhood programs, primarily through implementation of the LA 4 voluntary preschool initiative in 2001. Administered by the Department of Education, LA 4 serves four-year olds from low-income families primarily through its local school systems. The enabling legislation promotes local collaboration with other federally funded and private programs and inclusion of children with disabilities. The LA 4 programs provide 10 hours of service—six hours of preschool and four hours of before and after-care enrichment activities. Recently, the state bolstered its commitment to the program by allocating 51 percent of General Revenue funds and 49 percent of TANF funds. The state has begun consolidating other state initiatives such as Starting Points, begun in 1992, which provides six hours of preschool education to four-year olds.

Along with increasing access to early education, Louisiana has systematically focused on measures to upgrade the quality of its programs by:

- developing and piloting early learning standards in accord with guidelines set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood, and the Head Start Performance Standards. The state board approved the Louisiana Standards for Four-Year-Old Children in June 2003, which apply across all state-supported programs (Title I, Part B preschool under IDEA, Head Start, and the Student Enhancement Block Grant).

- developing and implementing Grade Level Expectations that add specificity to the early learning standards.

- implementing a system to collect data on the range of programs serving four-year olds by local parish and statewide. Data is collected on the number of children estimated to be at-risk in order to compare against the number served in prekindergarten programs.

- demonstrating gains in pre-academic reading and mathematics skills through independent evaluations. Results indicate that participation in preschool reduces the gap in children's readiness for kindergarten: children in Louisiana begin preschool below the national average and complete the program with readiness skills appropriate for successful school entry.

- implementation of a two-tiered monitoring system whereby program coordinators observe classrooms using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and also review program adherence to the guidelines and regulations.
### Program Standards/Certification Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Standards Aligned to K-3</td>
<td>Yes, based on NAEYC, DEC, and Head Start Performance Standards and aligned to K-3 curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Teachers</td>
<td>Yes, must have degree and be certified in nursery school education, kindergarten, early intervention, noncategorical preschool handicapped, or PreK-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>A valid teaching certificate in nursery school education, kindergarten, early intervention, noncategorical preschool handicapped, or PreK-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers</td>
<td>Determined locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities</td>
<td>Yes, legislation promotes collaboration with special education preschool; standards designed to address needs of children with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development</td>
<td>At least 18 hours of professional development per year in fields related to early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Technical Assistance Provided</td>
<td>Yes, state coordinators provide materials, training, program review, and targeted technical assistance; agency staff and coordinators intervene in accord with the results of the ECERS-R and children's readiness measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability/Monitoring System</td>
<td>Yes, programs are reviewed annually. Coordinators use the ECERS-R to assess program quality as well as review adherence to standards and guidelines, and encourage portfolio assessment to drive instruction; there is more frequent monitoring for programs that fall below set criterion on ECERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data System for Tracking Students/Program Outcomes</td>
<td>Yes, the state has a well-integrated system for tracking data across program types and across age and grade levels that is housed in the Department of Education; the state collects data on children's skill levels using the Developmental Skills Checklist and kindergarten screening scores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

Sustained Phase I Grant Activities

Louisiana created a number of interagency groups among Head Start, legislators, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, institutes of higher education, and regional program coordinators to address state and local policies that dealt with the birth to eight population. At the time of the grant, the state rolled out the LA 4 legislation authorizing the Department of Education to use a competitive grant process to offer voluntary preschool in collaboration with other federally funded programs. The grant activities focused on implementation of the LA 4 preschool program in 11 parishes.

The state worked with each parish on site to coordinate local public and private services systems. Many of the preschool programs also shared IDEA Part B-619 preschool funds to provide programs and services to children with and without disabilities in inclusive settings.

During the grant period, the state developed a set of standards for all prekindergarten programs that incorporated research-based instructional practices and began working with higher education and local programs to infuse the standards into practice.

Phase II Grant

Objectives:

Louisiana continued its partnerships established during the first planning grant to infuse the early learning standards and provide targeted training to programs in greatest need of professional development. Grant activities supported a collaborative training effort among the Louisiana Department of Education, Head Start, and Class A and B childcare centers. The state department of education worked closely with its special education counterparts in designing and delivering standards-based training, since many children served in community settings and Head Start programs have special needs. Teachers receive training in how to design developmentally appropriate activities that incorporate the early learning standards.

The state focused on Head Start and childcare centers in as much as these programs do not require practitioners to obtain the same level of preservice training as practitioners in LA 4 preschool programs. The state met with Head Start and childcare centers to enlist their cooperation in the collaborative training effort. The state intended to craft professional development based on an initial appraisal of teachers' needs and measure the overall classroom environment using ECERS-R and the growth in children's readiness skills to further refine future training for practitioners.
Outcomes:

As a first step, the state designed and administered a teacher needs assessment to tailor professional development activities that focused primarily on the following:

- effective classroom environments and methods used in developmentally appropriate teaching practices;
- strategies for providing developmentally appropriate instruction in the content areas of math, science, language, and social studies;
- examination of effective and appropriate classroom management;
- appropriate strategies for classrooms serving children with disabilities; and
- promotion of cultural awareness.

Based on the results of the teacher needs assessment, the Department of Education designed and provided professional development activities to the selected Head Start and childcare centers. For the duration of the grant and continuing on throughout the next year, the participants are using materials procured through this grant in a variety of ways. These include whole study groups on designated topics, designing and sharing lessons and materials to be used in each of the content areas, evaluations of classroom environments, classroom observations, and examination of student progress. Some of the selected materials disseminated to preschool practitioners include:

- Tools for Teaching Developmentally Appropriate Practice NAEYC
- ECERS Book, Rating Scale, and Video Kaplan
- Appropriate Curriculum for Young Children NAEYC
- A Guide to Discipline NAEYC
- Early Learning Environments that Work Gryphon House
- The Inclusive Classroom Gryphon House
- Learning Language and Loving It The Hanen Centre

The grant supported training practitioners to administer the Developmental Skills Checklist (DSC) to four-year olds served in these programs to ascertain baseline skills. Grant monies supported scoring and analyses of the DSC as well. The state intends to measure children’s readiness skills again following completion of the preschool program (May 2005) and revamp professional development accordingly.
Massachusetts initiated the Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) program to coordinate the services offered by all early care and education programs within a community. The state distributes funds to local CPC councils comprised of all the local programs that provide services to young children and families, as well as parents of young children. These local councils distribute funds to programs to promote specific priorities, which include increasing quality; affordability (e.g., scholarships and sliding scale fees), comprehensive services (health and dental screening, transportation, mental health services), collaboration across programs, and outreach to hard-to-reach families. All participating programs must agree to meet high quality standards and serve children with and without disabilities.

Massachusetts has continued to focus on laying the foundation for a comprehensive, high quality, accessible system of programs and services for young children and their families. In recent years, the state identified the need to create one set of standards for all programs that addressed health, safety, and education. Early Childhood Program Standards and Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences were approved by the Massachusetts Board of Education in April 2003 and apply to all early childhood programs that accept Community Partnerships for Children funding.

To address the issue of governance in July 2004, the state legislature passed and Governor Mitt Romney signed legislation that creates a new board and Department of Early Education and Care. Plans are underway to unify existing early education and care functions into the new agency. Strong advocacy from multiple constituencies spearheaded the move towards unifying early education and care under one board and department. The new board will be appointed in March and the new department will become operational July 1, 2005.

Massachusetts also implemented the Statewide Transfer Compact, which provides an articulation agreement for students to transition from early childhood programs in two-year community colleges into four-year public colleges and universities.
## Program Standards/Certification Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehensive Standards Aligned to PreK-3</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification Requirements for Teachers</strong></td>
<td>BA required for all public school teachers, one course in child development required for teachers in early childhood programs not operated by the public schools; new standards require all newly hired teachers in non-public early childhood programs to attain a college degree, a minimum of associate’s degree by 2010 and a bachelor’s by 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education</strong></td>
<td>Varies by program; public school requires early childhood license Early Childhood: Teacher of Students With and Without Disabilities (PreK – Grade 2); for nonpublic positions new standards require an associate degree by 2010 with 12 credits in early childhood and a practicum or related work experience in early childhood and a Bachelor’s degree by 2017 with 18 credits in early childhood and a practicum or related work experience in early childhood. The new board is charged with developing a workforce development system, which includes the development of core competencies and guidelines for a career ladder with salaries and benefits that suitably compensate professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers</strong></td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of School Districts</strong></td>
<td>School districts participate in the Community Partnerships for Children program by providing services along with child care centers, Head Start programs and family child care programs. Statewide the CPC programs serve 45 percent of the children in center-based child care, 33 percent of the children in the public schools, 15 percent of the children in Head Start and 6 percent of the children in family child care. Schools also act as lead agency and administer the funds for 69 percent of the CPC programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities</strong></td>
<td>Yes. Board-approved Standards and Guidelines apply to all children with and without disabilities; the state has a history of supporting inclusive programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>All programs require 20 clock hours annually.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yes, state agencies provide extensive technical assistance, which varies by agency. The new board will develop recommendations for a cohesive technical assistance system.

Use of authentic assessment to inform curriculum and instruction is embedded into the Standards and Guidelines; the new board is charged with overseeing the development and management of an educationally sound kindergarten readiness assessment for preschool children; multiple accountability/monitoring systems that need to be reconciled (e.g., Comprehensive Review and Site Visit system for CPCs, licensing visits by the Office of Child Care Services; CPC programs, which constitute about 75 percent of Massachusetts’ preschool programs, are required to be accredited by NAEYC or NAFCC).

Massachusetts has a data system for tracking students in the public schools that needs to be broadened to capture children’s early educational experiences. Massachusetts has implemented Cost/Quality Studies in three sectors (public schools, child care centers, and family child care programs) to assess program quality and the true cost of quality. Head Start was not included in the Massachusetts studies due to the large number of federal studies assessing the quality of Head Start programs.

Massachusetts focused on working with multiple agencies such as the Department of Public Health, the Office of Child Care Services, and the Department of Education to identify best transition practices. As part of the NASBE grant to coordinate early childhood education and services, the state convened forums to examine models to promote seamless transition between Part B and Part C services for children with disabilities. As a final product, the state contracted with a consultant to develop the guidebook—Best Practices in Early Childhood Transitions Guide, which the state board of education disseminated across the state.

In April 2003, the state board of education approved Early Childhood Standards and Guidelines requiring all newly hired teachers to attain a college degree, a minimum of an associate degree by 2010 and a bachelor’s by 2017. The Early Childhood Program Standards and Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences have been mailed to all Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) programs and lead agencies, public school superintendents, center-based child care programs, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and higher education institutions with early childhood degree programs.

Finally, the state began examining ways to coordinate across programs and providers, including daycare, state programs, and preschool funded through IDEA.
Phase II Grant

Objectives:

Massachusetts designed its grant objectives to enhance linkages across multiple agencies and institutions for higher learning in concert with other major state initiatives, including:

- consolidating early childhood education system within single department in accord with legislation passed in 2004;

- training teachers and administrators in public and private early childhood family child care through local Community Partnerships for Children Councils (CPC’s);

- broadening the dissemination and training on the Massachusetts Early Childhood Program Standards and Guidelines for Preschool approved by the state board of education in 2003; and

- implementing the Early Childhood Transfer Compact accepted by institutions of higher education and community colleges.

The grant activities focused on integrating initiatives across all colleges and universities, state agencies, vocational high schools, and other early childhood training sites. Activities included disseminating materials, holding training sessions for the CPCs, working with the subcommittee on professional development of the Early Care and Education Council (planning board for the new department) to develop a framework for core competencies, and partnering with the National Association of the Education of Young Children to begin its Associate Degree Accreditation project in selected institutions in Massachusetts.

Outcomes:

With the passage of the legislation to establish a Department of Early Education and Care, the Massachusetts state team aligned the grant activities with the work of the Council on Early Education and Care. The council’s charge, set by the legislature and the governor, laid the groundwork for restructuring the early childhood education system and determining how the new department will provide oversight for many professional development activities and programs. With that in mind, the state used the grant to fund dissemination of the Massachusetts Early Childhood Program Standards and Guidelines for Preschool to institutions of higher education and within communities.

The state also designed a grant program, entitled Building Careers, designed to:

- provide financial support to institutions of higher education to align courses with the standards and guidelines;
• offer college credit courses to early childhood teachers;
• provide career counseling to enable the teachers to matriculate and receive a degree; and
• work with Community Partnerships across the state.

Twenty-three institutions were approved for this grant and are beginning the program. Using funds provided through the NASBE grant, in October 2004, the state convened a forum for 23 institutions of higher education with early childhood programs and local providers in order to introduce the new initiative.

It is expected that between 500 and 1,500 early childhood teachers will matriculate into a degree-granting program. In addition, there is an evaluation component built into Building Careers that will be completed by September 2005. Evaluation information will include descriptive data on enrollment, graduation, and other benchmarks on career development as well as qualitative measures to assess the impact of professional development programs on practice.

In order to address in-service training needs, the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Office of Child Care Services, hired 35 teams of trainers (two people on a team) to go into communities to train early childhood teachers and administrators on the standards and guidelines. Between July and December 2004, the state held 17 workshops in order to:

• review the design of the standards and guidelines and how they connect with the state curriculum frameworks;
• discuss preparation and professional development programs;
• outline what colleges must do to prepare an early childhood workforce; and
• delineate criteria for institutions of higher education to receive state funds (e.g., collaboration with Community Partnerships for Children, alignment of courses and academic counseling to develop a workforce prepared to serve all children, including those with disabilities and English Language Learners).
System Overview

Throughout the 1990s, Ohio contributed significantly to prekindergarten education through Public School Preschool Program funding and state-funded Head Start. Prior to 2001, public schools, vocational schools, educational service centers, and federally funded Head Start programs received direct funding from general revenue (GRF) sources that targeted services to children from low-income families. More recently, the state redirected TANF funding to support state-funded Head Start when GRF was no longer available.

This past year, a new program, Head Start Plus (HS+), was created to provide full-day, full-year education and care services. The new initiative was designed to address the needs of working families and provide school readiness experiences to children most often at risk. In addition, the design of Title IV-A Head Start Plus was to move toward the development of a system of education and care through the integration of state-funded subsidized child care and Head Start services.

In an effort to continue to address the coordination of early childhood education and care services to increase access to quality programs, the Ohio State Board of Education has established a school readiness task force. The charge to the task force is to develop a public policy agenda, a financing plan, and action steps that will take a system to scale.

As part of its efforts to align the education and care delivery systems across funding streams, Ohio focused on preparing itinerant early childhood special education teachers to provide consultative services in a collaborative capacity with other early childhood colleagues in community-based programs.

Program Standards/Certification Requirements

| Comprehensive Standards Aligned to PreK-3 | The state board of education adopted early learning content standards for English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies in December 2003 |
| Certification Requirements for Teachers | Instituted new preschool-grade 3 license for teachers under the auspices of the Department of Education |
| Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education | Yes, the state requires PreK certification. For permanent licensure, teachers must pass Praxis III, a performance-based observation |
| Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers | High school diploma—unless working in a Title I funded preschool program. If so, the teacher assistant must meet the requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act |
| Policy on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities | Yes, policy recommendations promote a consultative model to support inclusion of children with disabilities in community settings |
| Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development | 15 clock hours—per program licensing requirements |
| State Technical Assistance Provided | Yes, the state coordinates professional development across Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Job and Family Services funding streams. State provides opportunities to all teachers working with young children through regional delivery to understand Ohio’s early learning standards, the Department of Education and Ohio Job and Family Services funding streams, and research-based practices. In addition, 10 early language and literacy specialists have been placed within two-year higher education programs to provide increased support to administrators and teachers |
| Accountability/Monitoring System | NAEYC standards are embedded into NCATE, which is used for accrediting higher education. Ohio will pilot a tiered rating system to monitor child care quality. Ohio designed a new system for reviewing early childhood special education programs; developed an early childhood assessment system that attends to child achievement, progress monitoring, and program capacity; and will require in 2005 that all children entering kindergarten be assessed on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in literacy |
| Data System for Tracking Students/Program Outcomes | Different data systems within separate agencies pose barriers to interagency tracking and compilation of information; the Department of Education has a system for tracking outcome data from Ohio Department of Education-funded public preschool, special education preschool, Title IV-A Head Start, Title IV-A Head Start Plus, and the kindergarten literacy readiness assessment |
Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

Sustained Phase I Grant Activities

The Ohio State Board of Education and the Department of Education convened a state planning policy panel to address the need for coherent state policies to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have access to high-quality care and education that will promote success in kindergarten and beyond.

The state collaborated with an extensive range of stakeholders, including child care providers, the Ohio Departments of Education, Health, Job and Family Services, Mental Health and Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities, higher education, legislators, local education, itinerant teachers, and local practitioners. The state compiled testimony from parents, policymakers, early childhood education experts, families, and providers and published a compilation of the findings. The intended outcome was to provide a framework to inform policy, legislative, and budget decisions and provide guidance to schools, communities, and service providers. The document, 2002 NASBE State Planning Policy Panel, probes major issue areas (e.g., affordability of services, monitoring and program regulations, professional development) that illuminate the larger context for service provision for young children with disabilities. The report outlines implications for action which include:

- provide state-of-the-art professional development pre-service and in-service opportunities for early education and child care professionals;
- review and amend rules across state agencies to increase access to services;
- coordinate grants and legislation in order to blend and braid funding streams;
- identify the best strategies for and provide hands-on technical assistance to direct service providers; and
- invite the participation of consumers (families) in all levels of the decision-making processes

The panel recommended the design of a consultative model to train itinerant early childhood specialists to support the education and care of children served in the least restrict environment. Ohio initiated other projects to carry out this key recommendation on implementation of the consultative approach. For example, the state initiated a personnel preparation grant—New Roles for Early Childhood Special Education Teachers: Preparing for Itinerant Services—to define the roles and responsibilities of itinerants to support quality services in community settings.

Phase II Grant

Objectives:

Based on the policy recommendations formulated during the first phase, Ohio focused on preparing itinerant early childhood special education consultants in a collaborative capacity with other early childhood colleagues in community based programs. The state has continued to collaborate with a range of stakeholders including the Department of Jobs and Family Services, the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities, and the Ohio Family and Children First Initiative, Head Start providers, special education regional resources centers, and two- and four-year institutions of higher education. In addition, two of the collaborators of this initiative, the Ohio Department of Health and the University of Toledo, committed to additional funding to more fully...
sustain the project. The primary objectives for the planning grant targeted: 1) developing a policy framework for the roles, responsibilities and performance indicators for the consultative model; and 2) designing guidance for higher education preparation programs and professional development.

**Outcomes:**

The grant served to mobilize partnerships to help construct a coordinated system of programs, policies and programs that respond to diverse needs of young children. Over the grant period, the state brought together multiple stakeholders including parents, school district personnel, Head Start, two- and four-year institutions of higher education, and agency staff to address:

- the importance of the consultative model on the continuum of service delivery options in settings utilizing itinerant teachers that results in intentional service provision;
- the need for additional direct research to guide and inform policy, build consensus around effective itinerant service delivery models and increase program options for children in the least restrictive environment; and
- the potential for the Ohio Department of Education to assume a national leadership role in the development of a highly effective itinerant service delivery model.

To date, the state spends only 20 percent on itinerants and hence, the state focused on the question as to how to expand use of the consultative model across program options. Results of forums held in the summer and fall centered on how to engage universities, the Department of Education, and other state agencies in supporting the development of personnel to serve in this capacity.

This stakeholder group outlined a number of steps to mobilize efforts to train, license, and deploy itinerant services for a continuum of early childhood settings. The state has begun to implement a number of objectives through a range of initiatives ongoing in the state. In particular, the Ohio Department of Education contracted with the University of Toledo to create training programs over a two-year period beginning August 2004. These include:

- developing curriculum materials and design a trainer of trainer models for in-service professional development;
- collaborating with higher education colleagues to conduct research and surveys on the degree to which people are prepared to use this model;
- conducting a faculty institute on pre-service training of itinerants; and
- creating a website that will serve as a resource for providers on itinerant services

The state acknowledges the need to create licensing provisions for itinerants but recognizes the need for additional research on the efficacy of the proposed model prior to changing teacher licensure.

This year, through a partnership between the Ohio Department of Education and the Department of Job and Family Services, the state began providing support for Early Learning and Language Specialists that are housed at two-year higher education programs. It is the intention of both departments to implement jointly the early language and literacy initiative so that the educational goals of all preschool children can be met in whatever program they attend. Both departments share the funding of direct professional development on early literacy across all private and public early education providers.
Wyoming does not have a separate state-funded prekindergarten program, but does provide $1.5 million in TANF funding each year to augment the quality of preschools operating in the state. The state has set forth a two-year planning period to cull legislative support for a preschool initiative spearheaded largely by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Children's Action Alliance, higher education, the Department of Family services, and local providers. These constituencies are gathering data and compiling the results of the kindergarten readiness survey in order to garner support for state-funded programs. In recent years, Wyoming has systematically addressed critical areas to enhance the quality of early education, such as examining gaps in statewide data collection, developing early learning standards, and designing higher education early childhood endorsement programs.

In spring 2004, in response to increased demand for public early childhood education, the state undertook a collaborative effort to establish a stand-alone preschool certification program (birth to five). The University of Wyoming, the state's only four-year university, seven community colleges, and state agency staff worked with early childhood professionals to design the early childhood endorsement program.

In order to ensure that students are meeting standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the Wyoming Professional Teaching Board, common assessments serve as final projects for most classes. Common assessments are required by NCATE and they are a means of demonstrating student proficiency in all NAEYC and state early childhood teacher education standards.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Standards/Certification Requirements</th>
<th>Yes, early learning standards developed in Phase I of the NASBE Early Childhood Education Network planning grant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Standards Aligned to K-3</td>
<td>Certification available through a dual elementary/early childhood B-8 program; created B-5 early childhood endorsement as major grant objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Endorsement in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification Requirements for Assistant Teachers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Number of Hours of Professional Development</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Technical Assistance Provided</td>
<td>Yes—Technical assistance is provided for preschools with state education agency oversight; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funded and special education preschools in Child Development Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability/Monitoring System</td>
<td>Yes—TANF funded and special education preschools in Child Development Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data System for Tracking Students/Program Outcomes</td>
<td>Yes—Kindergarten Readiness Survey tracks preschool experience and kindergarten readiness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

Sustained Phase I Grant Activities

The state created an early childhood education team composed of representatives from four agencies to address the development of an early education infrastructure. Team members outlined plans to develop an interagency data management system. The resulting report recommended that Wyoming foster collaboration and cooperation among early childhood entities in order to share information and inform decision-making. Wyoming contracted with an outside consultant to examine the nature and extent of information gathered across program types and to identify gaps in statewide data collection.

The final report emphasized the need to create a common systems approach to assessment, indicators, and diagnostic evaluation in order to ensure that early childhood education promoted school readiness. As one of its preliminary steps, Wyoming developed a set of early learning standards. In 2002, Wyoming began collecting baseline data using the Kindergarten Readiness Survey. Results of the survey have been used to configure professional development using the state improvement grant.

Phase II Grant

OBJECTIVES:

Wyoming designed a collaborative strategy to implement an early childhood birth-to-five endorsement program aligned to the National Association for the Education of Young Children standards and to the criteria set forth by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. The program targets students enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program in Child Development; allows post-graduate students in elementary education, child development, and related fields to take the required courses at a graduate level; and provides extensive online coursework to serve the needs of trainees scattered through the state.

Six of the seven courses are offered online. The seventh course is the internship, which is supervised by trained regional early childhood professionals. Field experiences are embedded in all required courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels to give students opportunities to apply course content as they progress through the program. The semester long internship is entirely field-based and serves as the capstone experience for the program.

OUTCOMES:

The state established partnerships among the Wyoming Department of Education, the Department of Family Services, the Professional Teaching Standards Board, and the University of Wyoming to provide an Early Childhood Endorsement through community colleges or distal learning programs. The committee developed the endorsement program and set expectations for supervising internships. Adjunct faculty will
be responsible for identifying quality early childhood programs in a region for internship sites. The series of courses covered the following key areas identified in the new NAEYC early learning standards:

- promoting child development and learning;
- building family and community relationships;
- observing, documenting, and assessing to support young children and families;
- teaching and learning (connecting with children and families; using developmentally effective approaches; understanding content knowledge in early education; building meaningful curriculum); and
- internship in child development.

During the summer of 2004, the state selected and trained eight adjunct faculty at the University of Wyoming to teach the required courses in the new endorsement program. Four of the adjunct faculty are teaching online courses and four are trained to supervise student teaching at regional sites. Adjuncts are responsible as well for identifying quality early childhood programs in a region for internship sites. In order to ensure the quality of the training program, the state added another adjunct faculty member, who was experienced in teaching online, to anchor the program, mentor other adjunct faculty, and work on the recruitment and retention of students for the endorsement program.

Twelve community college instructors from the seven Wyoming Community Colleges, the eight adjunct faculty, and the three University of Wyoming faculty attended the articulation meetings in June and September to ensure consistent course delivery for the endorsement program.

In the fall, the state launched the endorsement program, providing access to in-service and pre-service training to any individual seeking an endorsement to teach children birth to five years of age across both private and publicly funded programs. Faculty and practitioners have reported positive outcomes for the teacher education program.

As an Outreach advisor and instructor of early childhood teacher education students, I see the collaboration of all of the community colleges and the University of Wyoming as one of the greatest attributes of the program. This really is unheard of in this state. Without turf wars and whining, the stakeholders met the challenge to articulate curriculum is unprecedented ways. UW early childhood students are the winners and one day will also reap the benefits.

— Diana Currah, Lander, WY
Adjunct Faculty, Family and Consumer Sciences and Early Childhood Education

The state plans to finalize the endorsement program subsequent to the initial pilot period and move to full delivery in summer 2005.
Appendix. Summary of NASBE's Early Childhood Education Network Grant Activities

NASBE replicated the process implemented during Phase I of the Early Childhood Education Network in order to provide support to states in framing specific strategies to improve the quality of early childhood providers. The 18-month project required states to commit to a team approach, establish ongoing collaborative partnerships, develop and implement a work plan to improve teacher quality, and provide ongoing information on grant activities and progress in designing a coherent early learning system.

Memorandum of Understanding

NASBE invited the six Network states, which received planning grants to design a cohesive infrastructure for their respective state systems during Phase I, to participate in another series of grant-making activities targeted toward teacher quality. Project staff contacted the chairs of the state boards of education of the six Network states—Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Wyoming—to enlist their cooperation in working with other stakeholders in their state to design policy and programs to improve the preparation of early childhood providers. Results from the first planning grant indicated that the state boards played a pivotal role in leveraging their authority to create a common vision, strengthen partnerships, and codify standards and certification requirements.

In order to receive funding to design and implement Phase II strategies, all six state boards of education agreed to complete the following steps:

- Introduce the project on the state board agenda;
- Designate a state board liaison to work with the primary agency staff person to establish and maintain a cross-agency team composed of the department of education, the department of health and human services, higher education, and community colleges;
- Send a state team to a two-day conference to begin planning grant activities; and
- Serve as the grant administrator.

Conference for Network State Teams

In January 2004, the six state teams convened together for a two-day conference in Alexandria, Virginia. The conference was designed to front-load extensive information on critical elements of quality early learning systems, including: defining quality curricula, issues in applying research-based pedagogy, assessment, gaps in professional development, and blending higher education programs to serve diverse populations. Participants heard presentations from national experts such as Kyle Snow, Director, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Robert Pianta, Professor, Curry Programs in Clinical and School Psychology, University of Virginia; Mary Beth Bruder, Director, A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Connecticut; and Virginia Casper, Association Dean for Academic Affairs, Bank Street College of Education.

The states received extensive information regarding research on early development and recommendations for implementing effective policies and practices to ensure program quality. NASBE provided participants with a CD-ROM that included readings and resources on curricula, research on early development, assessment, demonstration projects, special education, and state policies on early childhood.

During the conference, state teams focused on critical issues related to improving the preparation and professional development of teachers to enhance program outcomes. States began initial action planning to develop policies and practices for high-quality preparation and professional development of administrators and providers across multiple systems. These efforts focused on teacher quality issues using state board of education authority to adopt teacher standards, certification rules, and align professional development systems. NASBE framed a set of questions on key elements of quality early childhood education systems that placed the issue of teacher quality within the context of the overall state education and human services system. States set about improving...
teaching, while at the same time continuing work on building a coherent early learning infrastructure.

Moreover, there was extensive discussion about recent studies on classroom instruction that indicate many programs for young children provide low levels of teacher-child interaction. It was emphasized that teacher education should be intentional, with specific guidelines and goals, and aligned with expectations for learning. Discussions centered on the need for high standards for teachers across grades from prekindergarten to grade three, and for those who teach children with and without disabilities. The conference evaluations indicated that the teams benefited immensely from the presentations and the opportunity to converse with multiple stakeholders from across the six states.

**State Planning Grants**

Following the conference, states submitted a grant application to receive a $10,000 award to establish collaborative activities to design and implement action plans related to improving the quality of preparation programs and professional development. This seed money required states to focus on developing statewide policies and practices through cross-partnerships to ensure that all students are ready to learn upon school entry. States also addressed areas that fall under the purview of state boards of education, such as accountability for program outcomes, accreditation, teacher certification, on-going professional development, program and content standards, and school readiness indicators.

The grant application, submitted in February 2004, required states to:

- Identify policy issues that the state team would address to advance the quality of early childhood education teachers (e.g., content standards; program approval, certification, on-going professional development, program evaluation, accountability systems);
- Define concrete objectives for a major initiative in that area;
- Outline the strategic steps to support and move the initiative forward;
- Identify the state's cross partners to expand the state's capacity to implement and sustain the initiative; and
- Identify a project liaison to communicate with NASBE regarding the design and implementation of the project.

Throughout the grant period, states received on-going technical assistance from NASBE. In addition, NASBE worked with the IDEA Partnerships and the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, funded by the Office of Special Needs, U.S. Department of Education, to provide technical assistance to individual states on serving children with disabilities in community preschool programs.

**Evaluation**

NASBE conducted evaluations as part of an incremental intervention at key points in the networking and planning process. The first point was reviewing grant applications to ensure that the state boards of education established collaborative partnerships and designed strategic actions to address the quality of staffing for an integrated early learning system. States received the first half of the $10,000 award following approval of their proposal. The second point of evaluation was issuing the balance of the award, contingent upon receipt of an interim report on completed state actions and specific details on proposed strategies.

NASBE gathered information on states' progress towards carrying out their proposed workplan throughout the grant period. In fall 2004, project staff conducted phone interviews to complete an extensive survey that queried states on grant activities and their overall early learning system (e.g., political support, changes in state funding, certification, standards, assessment, and accountability). NASBE compiled this information into state profiles and submitted them to the state project liaison for final review (see Chapter 4, page 17).

Finally, states were asked to provide a narrative description of strategies to improve teaching and preschool quality and to respond to questions about the critical factors that leveraged change in the state's early learning system.


W east, J . D . (2004). E arly S uccess: C losing t he O pportunity G ap f or O ur Y oungest L earners. R ockville, M D : M ontgomery C ounty P ublic S chools. A vailable online at w w w . m c p s . k 1 2 . m d . u s / d e p a r t m e n t s/ su p e r i n t e n d e n t / d o c s / e a r l y _ s u c c e s s . p df.
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