EARLY CHILDHOOD CREDENTIAL

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

This planning and implementation guide helps states and territories create or revise early childhood education (ECE) credentials. It's based on the _Core Knowledge and Competencies Planning and Implementation Guide_ developed in 2014 by the National Center on Professional Development and Workforce Initiatives.

As states and territories strengthen their professional development systems, they often focus on creating state, territory, or regional credentials connected to a coordinated professional development system. A comprehensive professional development system (PDS) includes a distinct career pathway that moves professionals upward, instead of having them solely accrue professional development hours. Credentials can be concrete steps that move professionals forward, especially when they receive other system supports like college courses or advancing another level. This guide includes considerations built on a readiness for change framework. The framework's steps are: 1) identify the need and related evidence; 2) determine fit, feasibility, resource availability, and capacity to implement; 3) operationalize approach, determine usability, and developing implementation plan; and 4) implement the plan, evaluate the results, and establish a quality improvement (QI) process. This guide also offers considerations to support the change using the Hexagon Tool.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "READINESS FOR CHANGE"?

"Readiness" is a developmental point at which a person, organization, or system is able and willing to engage in an activity. Creating readiness for change is an important part of initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations. Implementing early (i.e., before an individual or an organization is ready to change) can be both ineffective and expensive. **Readiness for change** needs to be developed, nurtured, and sustained.

Accountability for creating readiness rests with the implementation team, not with those who are expected or invited to change (Fixsen, Blase, Horner & Sugai, 2009).

WHO IS THIS GUIDE DESIGNED FOR?

This guide is for policymakers and leaders that build, enhance, and administer aligned PDS, specifically the following:

- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administrators and staff
- Head Start state collaboration directors, Head Start training coordinators, large Head Start grantees, and other Head Start leaders
- Early childhood (EC) specialists in state departments of education, early intervention and special education professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) coordinators, and other leaders in state departments of education
- Representatives from boards of regents or higher education boards
- Professional development system administrators
- Child care resource and referral administrators, training organization directors and trainers, higher education institution administrators and EC or child development faculty, TA organization administrators and providers
- Head Start, child care, and other EC and school-age (SA) professional association administrators and staff

THIS GUIDE IS PRESENTED IN THREE SECTIONS:

I. Overview of Aligned PDS
II. What is an Early Childhood Education Credential?
III. Developing or Revising and Implementing ECE Credentials
  a. Introduction to the Hexagon Tool
  b. Step 1: Identify the Need and Find Related Evidence
  c. Step 2: Determine Fit and Feasibility
  d. Step 3: Operationalize the Approach, Determine Usability, and Develop Implementation Plan
  e. Step 4: Implement the Plan, Evaluate Results, and Establish a Quality Improvement (QI) Process

I. OVERVIEW OF ALIGNED PDS

State and territory aligned PDS have interrelated efforts, services, and supports that address the continuum of workforce needs to build and sustain an effective workforce. PDS include education, training, and TA.

As states and territories build aligned PDS, there are an increasing number and variety of stakeholders to consider across

- roles—direct service professionals and those who work for young children and their families;
- settings—centers, schools, and homes;
- sectors—child care, Head Start or Early Head Start, public preschool/primary education, home visiting, and early intervention or special education; and
- related systems—family support, health, and mental health.

Exactly which sectors and systems make up a state and territory's vision for an aligned PDS depends on its context—including its political and fiscal situation—where and how the PDS fits in its larger early learning and EC systems, and its specific PD goals and priorities. A state and territory's context can dictate the best approaches to a successful alignment.

II. WHAT IS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CREDENTIAL?

Credentials are academic degrees, diplomas, licenses, endorsements, or certificates awarded to people who finish a training or education program. They may be awarded by institutions of higher education, training organizations, state agencies, or professional associations, councils, or boards. Credentials gain value when recognized or required by the profession, government agencies, employers, professional development systems, or the public. They also become more valuable when professionals can stack them to demonstrate increasing knowledge and when professionals can use them across workplace settings, regulatory sectors, and state lines (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011; NAEYC & The Alliance for Early Childhood Teacher Educators, 2011).

State or regionally recognized credentials help professionals move up along his or her pathway. Statewide or regionally, these credentials advance the profession using clear and distinct avenues for people to gain knowledge and skills. Comprehensive PDS also include, at their base, mutually recognized core knowledge and competencies (CKC). Credentials that align to the system's CKC help professionals move forward in their careers and ensures that the CKC are practiced. Credentials encourage professionals to develop foundational knowledge and skills while specializing the knowledge and skills they might need for certain roles, settings, or sectors.

III. DEVELOPING OR REVISING AND IMPLEMENTING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CREDENTIALS

The following considerations emphasize understanding the context in which a systems-level initiative is planned and implemented. Many of these issues and considerations are interrelated and reflect the complexity of developing components of an aligned PDS. Use this guide to plan and implement. Designate a team and timeline to work through each of the steps. It is important to devote adequate time and resources to make decisions and plan implementation. While effective systems change typically takes place over years, establishing incremental steps and progress indicators can keep momentum and ultimately achieve the desired goals. It will likely take more than one work session for a planning and implementation team to review and discuss each step. Before taking these steps, the team should decide if they have already been started or completed.

The considerations are organized in four suggested steps:

1. Identify the need and present related evidence
2. Determine fit and feasibility, resource availability, and capacity to implement
3. Operationalize the approach, determine usability, and develop implementation plan
4. Implement the plan, evaluate results, and establish a quality improvement (QI) process

INTRODUCTION TO THE HEXAGON TOOL

The Hexagon Tool assists in identifying effective practices, strategies, or in this case credentials, by reviewing six broad factors. These factors are the following:

- **Needs** of professionals who will earn the credentials and how the credentials might meet those needs.
- **Fit** with current initiatives, priorities, community values, and organizational structures and supports.
- **Resource availability** related to funding requirements, funding dedicated to sustaining credentials, and how they are aligned with professional development activities.
- **Evidence** showing what outcomes to expect if the credentials are developed and implemented in a professional development context.
- **Readiness for replication** shows to what degree credentials are service-ready. It also addresses what type of assistance may be available to those implementing or rolling-out credentials.
- **Capacity to implement** as intended and sustain and improve implementation over time.

Use these factors with the four-step framework to help your team have a productive discussion and arrive at a decision grounded in evidence. That discussion will also help you develop an implementation plan that supports credential development and integration into a professional development system. See the diagram below for a visual summary of these factors.

HEXAGON TOOL
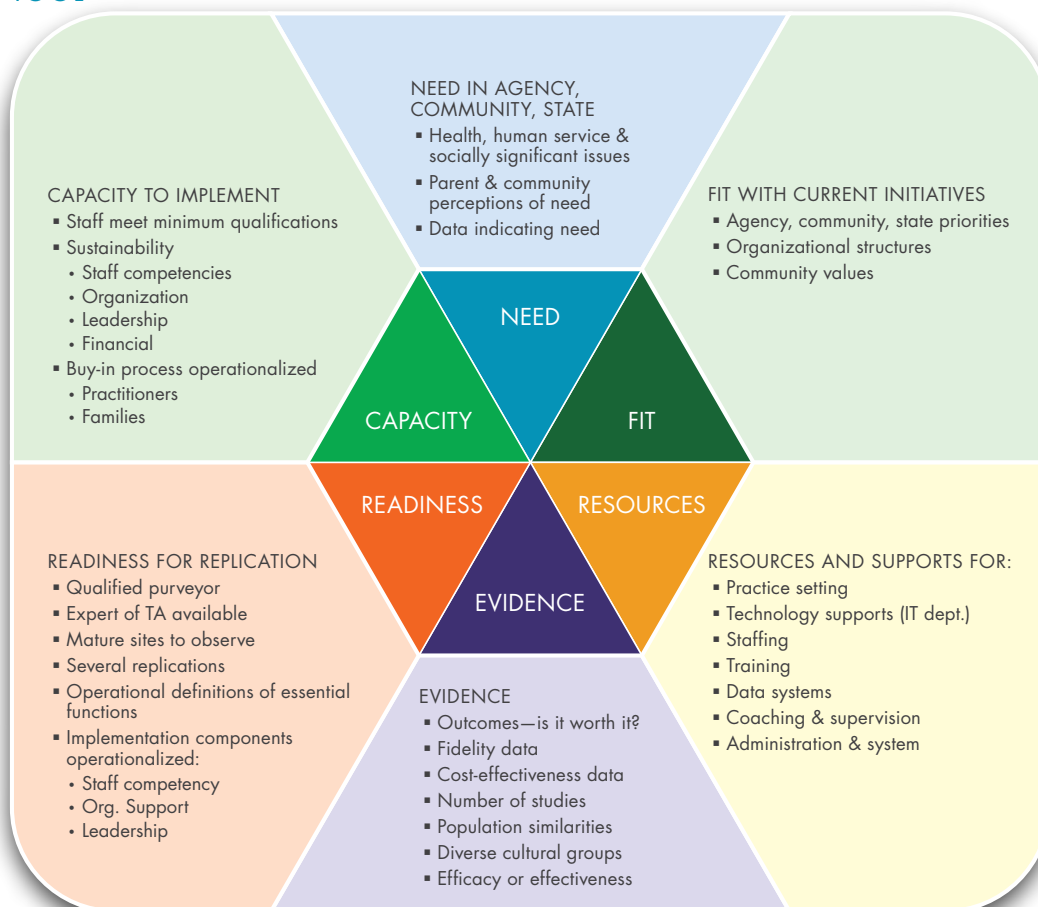
Based on the work of Kiser, Zabel, Zachik, & Smith (2007) and The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (2017). Used with Permission.

The following is a more detailed overview of each of the four steps. It includes key questions and considerations for each step and references categories from the Hexagon Tool within each of the steps.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE NEED AND FIND RELATED EVIDENCE

Purpose: Clearly articulate the need for ECE credentials and the evidence that supports specific credentials that meet this need.

NEED

- ▼ What do we want to achieve by developing or revising and implementing ECE credentials?
- ▼ Will the ECE credentials target specific populations or are there any planned specializations? What do the infant, toddler, and preschool communities need from ECE credentials?
  - ▪ Roles
  - ▪ Age ranges
  - ▪ Settings
  - ▪ Sectors
  - ▪ Related systems
  - ▪ Levels of proficiency and mastery
- ▼ What key components should be included?
  - ▪ Baseline requirements set by the planning group (may include education, experience, etc.)
  - ▪ Professional development based on core knowledge and competencies—includes content specific to the role the credential was created for
  - ▪ Demonstration or other assessment of target competencies
  - ▪ Renewal process includes ongoing professional development requirements
  - ▪ Requirements aligned to state or national quality rating systems or accreditation
- ▼ Do adjustments need to be made to include all or targeted populations? Will any unique elements be embedded in a universal document? Will there be a set of specialized knowledge and competencies for any targeted roles, such as the infant, toddler, or preschool workforce?

EVIDENCE

- ▼ If we are revising ECE credentials, has there been substantial change in the research since the last ECE credentials were developed?
- ▼ How will we measure success?

STEP 2: DETERMINING THE FIT AND FEASIBILITY—INCLUDING RESOURCE AVAILABILITY AND CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

Conduct a fit and feasibility analysis to determine what combination of policies and resources are most likely to meet the need and evidence as outlined in Step 1. Examine an array of options and assess the ways each option (or package of options) the state and territory could successfully implement. The components of a fit and feasibility analysis include the following:

- ▼ *Validate the Identified Need*—questions about the steps and considerations
- ▼ *Consider the Required Changes*—key, in-depth questions about the steps and considerations that prepare staff for change

VALIDATION OF IDENTIFIED NEED

Purpose: Make sure PDS stakeholders understand the TA needs and are committed to building capacity and successfully implementing.

FIT

- ▼ How are ECE credentials defined? What is our vision for ECE credentials in our state and territory?
- ▼ What are the goals and outcomes for ECE credentials and the way they're used in PD and quality improvement of the ECE workforce?
- ▼ How will the ECE credentials fit in the professional development system?
  - Foundational knowledge and connection to the CKC
  - Community-based training, higher education courses, approval, tracking, etc.
  - Relationship to career pathway levels and other recognized credentials
  - Specializations
  - Articulation links (including with national criteria and state and territory certifications)
- ▼ How will it fit with community values, including the values of diverse cultural groups?
- ▼ How will ECE credentials work across settings and sectors, while fitting with other related systems and quality improvement efforts?
  - **Settings:** Settings are where services are provided, including direct and non-direct service programs, organizations, and agencies. Settings and their administration often cross multiple ECE sectors and related systems. They often have a combination of characteristics listed below.
    - Public and private
    - Profit and non-profit
    - Faith-based
    - Community-based
    - School-based
    - Home-based
    - Employer sponsored
  - **Sectors:** The ECE system is made of sectors. They often differ in funding streams, regulations, and requirements. Because early intervention and special education services cross and serve multiple sectors, they are sometimes included in these sectors and sometimes described as separate systems. For the purposes of discussing and framing intentional PDS integration, this guide defines them as ECE primary sectors to underscore their importance. It also emphasizes their discrete professional preparation and development history, delivery, and requirements. The ECE primary sectors include the following:
    - Child care (center- and home-based)
    - Head Start and Early Head Start
    - Public preschool and primary education
    - Early intervention and special education
  - **Related Systems:** Systems that are related to the ECE system include family support, which may provide parenting education, home visiting, economic supports, and other services. It also includes health and mental health—providing preventative care, screenings, and access to health providers.
  - **Quality Improvement Efforts:** PDS are a big part of other quality improvement efforts in states and territories. These efforts may include the following:
    - Licensing
    - Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)
    - State and territory system building initiatives and plans (CCDF, State Early Childhood Advisory Council, Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grants, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, etc.)

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

▼ Is there sufficient agreement that ECE credentials need to be developed or revised in the state and territory? If not, is there a vehicle or body that can help develop consensus?

CONSIDERING REQUIRED CHANGES

Purpose: Identify specific system components, governance, political, financial, and sustainability issues that need to be developed or revised and implement ECE credentials.

FIT

▼ How can this effort unify the field?

▼ Are there overarching issues to be addressed, such as dispositions or cultural diversity?

▼ Are there specific content areas that need to be addressed?

▼ Does the required professional development for the ECE credentials specifically address the importance of
- early experiences and their impact on later development?
- helping families engage with their children?
- brain development?
- relationships as the context for learning—especially in the first three years?
- relationships with early learning guidelines?
- identifying the skills and competencies both teachers and children need?
- providing practice related to competency development?

▼ How will ECE credentials be used and what changes need to be made by the parties below?
- Systems
- Those providing PD, including faculty
- ECE and direct service staff
- ECE and staff working on behalf of young children

▼ How will the required professional development for the ECE credentials align with the training approval process?

▼ Do career pathways need to be revised based on changes to ECE credentials?

RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

▼ What funding is required to complete this work?
- What are sources of funding?
- Is the funding stable?

▼ Will credentialing involve assessing competency acquisition?
- What resources are available to support assessment?

▼ Are career advising resources available? Do they relate to higher education if needed?

CREDENTIAL READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

▼ Which stakeholders should be involved in any revising or fine-tuning state and territory goals and policy to refine and implement ECE credentials? How can higher education be involved?

- Does the state and territory have access to these vehicles, bodies, or stakeholders?
- If not, which partners could engage them?

▼ How will the state and territory roll out the ECE credentials?

▼ What training and supports are needed?

- How will staff receive training on the ECE credentials?
- How will organizations issue credentials and who will monitor the process?
- How will the credentials work with higher education?

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

▼ What organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow, and sustain ECE credentials?

▼ How can law, regulations, policy, and guidance support ECE credentials as the base of an aligned ECE PD systems? Will they

- incorporate ECE credentials into next revision of licensing law and regulations as PD requirements?
- develop policies that require specific roles have credentials in the ECE field (teacher, provider, interventionist, consultant, home visitor, TA specialist, coach)?
- provide guidance on assessment and approval of distance learning courses, if used as a requirement for certification or renewal?
- provide guidance on ECE credentials as goals for individual professional development plans (IPDPs) and career advisement?

STEP 3: OPERATIONALIZE THE APPROACH, DETERMINE ITS USABILITY, AND DEVELOP AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Pick an approach and develop the implementation plan based Steps 1 and 2. Delineate the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals. A successful implementation plan will address how the changes are managed in the system, communications, regular review and monitoring, and data collection and reporting. Below are key elements and questions to help you design an implementation plan.

PLANNING FOR CHANGE

Purpose: Prepare to implement by ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clear and agreed upon by stakeholders.

ENSURING FIT

▼ How can the plan align with

- other parts of the PD system (CKCs, career pathways, access, capacity, articulation agreements, workforce data)?
- other quality improvement efforts and standards (licensing, national standards, QRIS, early learning guidelines, Head Start and Early Head Start standards)?
- higher education courses and programs?

CREDENTIAL READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

▼ Who decides to create and implement the ECE credentials?

▼ What cross-agency agreements need to be in place?

▼ How will the work be done?

▼ Who will manage the work?

- ▼ What is the time frame?
- ▼ What is currently in place to support the work?
- ▼ What TA is available?
- ▼ Who should be involved in the development?
    - ▪ What sectors?
    - ▪ What keeps you from involving multiple sectors in the plan? How can you overcome these challenges?
    - ▪ What roles and specialized areas—adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, infant toddler specialists, special needs/early intervention, schools, etc.?
    - ▪ Authors of already existing professional standards?
- ▼ How will the ECE credentials be developed?
    - ▪ Writing teams or by a single editor or writer?
    - ▪ If teams are used, how will they be formed?
    - ▪ Will they receive ground rules or writing and research guides?
    - ▪ What is the timeframe to develop or revise the credentials?
    - ▪ How will they use national standards and criteria?
- ▼ What will be included?
    - ▪ Purpose
    - ▪ Rationales
    - ▪ Research
    - ▪ Usage guide
    - ▪ IPDPs
    - ▪ System mapping
    - ▪ Levels
    - ▪ CKCs

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Purpose: Develop an intentional communication and marketing strategy to support implementation.

CREDENTIAL READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▼ Who needs to know about the ECE credentials initiative? What do they need to know and how will they hear about it?
    - ▪ Various professionals across settings, sectors, and systems
    - ▪ Policymakers
    - ▪ Partners
    - ▪ Professionals working directly with young children and their families
    - ▪ Program directors or administrators
    - ▪ Training and TA providers
    - ▪ Higher education faculty and administrators
- ▼ What information products are needed for which audiences?
- ▼ How will you collect feedback on drafts of the document and process from all potential users?

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Purpose: Create roles and responsibilities to support implementation. Draft a plan to regularly monitor activities. (Also see Step 4—Implementing the Plan and Monitoring Results.)

CREDENTIAL READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

▼ Who should be on the implementation team? Who is most qualified to help implement and monitor the approach and plans?

▼ What work plan will you develop and who will oversee the activities in the work plan?

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

▼ What infrastructure does the state and territory need to support the comprehensive approach? What leadership does it need?

▼ What staff is available to coordinate this work?

▼ What training and supervision will staff need to coordinate this work?

STEP 4: IMPLEMENT THE PLAN, EVALUATE RESULTS, AND ESTABLISH A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

The implementation plan developed in Steps 2 and 3 should go into action with an evaluation and quality improvement (QI) process to ensure effective implementation and sustainability. it will have assigned roles and responsibilities and outline a timeline for the process. To the extent possible, the implementation plan should build on the information gathered to date and develops action steps to guide implementation. it should also outline how to use feedback and data to ensure that implementation is proceeding as planned. Below find key elements of monitoring an implementation plan and questions to guide a continuous improvement process.

DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING PLAN

Purpose: Develop a data plan to support implementation and encourage staff to report progress to funders and the implementation team.

▼ How can you ensure a periodic review of the ECE credentials?

▼ How will the state and territory receive feedback from key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the credentials, and from the recipients of the efforts?

▼ How will the state and territory monitor the plan's implementation?
  - Integrate ECE credentials into the state's tracking system or professional development registry
  - Include the credentials on state's career pathway model
  - Receive recognition by the state's quality rating system

▼ What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time? What data is needed?
  - Staff who register for initial training
  - Staff who successfully complete the credentialing process
  - Number of renewed credentials
  - Credentialed staff currently employed in a related field or role

▼ Who will the data include and how will it be used?
  - Data on the workforce in all settings and sectors
  - Data on the workforce in related systems
  - What reports are needed for whom and when
  - Will data be shared with other state systems (licensing, QRIS, Head Start and Early Head Start)

▼ To what capacity can you collect, house, and analyze data? Do they link to a unified data system that allows cross-sector decision-making about workforce data?

- ▼ What existing data systems (registries, licensing, child care assistance, education) could staff use?
- ▼ What new data systems, links, or tracking capacity may need to be established?
- ▼ How can you address cross-sector or system privacy issues?
- ▼ To what capacity can staff regularly report to the implementation team?
- ▼ How will the team use data to make decisions? When will they review and revise plans?

EVALUATING

Purpose: Develop a process to reflect on current implementation activities to determine any changes.

- ▼ Who will be responsible for reflecting upon the information gathered through the established check-in processes? Which stakeholders need to be involved?
- ▼ How often should the feedback gathered through monitoring processes be considered?
- ▼ What process will the State and Territory use to evaluate feedback from multiple monitoring activities to make decisions about adjustments to the implementation plan?

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Purpose: Develop a process to adjust implementation activities based on successes and challenges in the current implementation plan.

- ▼ What threshold will the state and territory use to determine the evidence found a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?
- ▼ How will the state and territory modify the ECE credentials implementation plans or activities?
- ▼ What parts of the implementation process will need to be revisited? For example, will the adjustment require a new communication plan or an invitation to new stakeholders?
- ▼ What process will the state and territory use to ensure that modifications lead to a stronger plan?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lawrence, S. 2016. *Early Childhood Career Pathways*: Research-to-Policy Resources. Research Connections. This research-to-policy resource list compiles publications from 2008 to the present about early childhood career pathways and career ladders or lattices. *http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/33005/pdf*

State/Territory Infant/Toddler Credential Overview. 2014. National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives. This document provides a snapshot of credentialing and PD efforts across the nation. It captures information available online about the various approaches used by states and territories. *https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/PDW_IT_Credential_Overview.pdf*

State/Territory Preschool Credential Overview. 2014. National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives. This document provides a snapshot of credentialing and PD efforts across the nation. It captures the information available online about the various approaches used by states and territories. *https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/PDW_Preschool_Credential_Overview.pdf*

Infant/Toddler Credential Crosswalk Child Development Associate (CDA)™ and State/Territory Credentials. 2014. National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives. This document provides a snapshot of credentialing and PD efforts across the nation. It captures the information available online about the various approaches used by states and territories. *https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/PDW_IT_Credential_Crosswalk.pdf*

Preschool Credential Crosswalk Child Development Associate (CDA)™ and State/Territory Credentials. 2014. National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives. This document provides a snapshot of credentialing and PD efforts across the nation. It captures the information available online about the various approaches used by states and territories. *https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/PDW_Preschool_Credential_Crosswalk.pdf*

Transforming the Workforce: Innovations and Lessons Learned from RTT-ELC States. 2016. Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance Program. This resource was prepared in response to a request for information about innovations and lessons learned as the result of the investments states have made in transforming their workforce using their Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grants. *https://elc.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=23915*

Limardo, C., Sweeney, T., and Taylor, L. 2016. *Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field*. Learning and Manhattan Strategy Group. This report introduces a career pathways framework that several federal agencies use. It provides a national landscape of states' requirements for ECE staff related to credentialing, highlights five states at various points in the development of ECE career pathways, and shows how early learning system components used in the majority of states align with the Six Key Elements of Career Pathways Framework that other industries use. *https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/pathways/elpathways.pdf*

Allen, L., and Kelly, B.B. 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Foundation for Child Development. The current state of the care and education workforce for children birth through age 8 is fragmented. Despite a shared objective of nurturing and securing the future success of young children, early care and education professionals across a variety of settings are not acknowledged as a cohesive workforce. They work in disparate systems and the expectations and requirements for their preparation and credentials have not kept pace with what the science of child development and early learning indicates children need. This report offers a blueprint to connect what is known about how to support children to what happens in the settings where children grow and develop. *http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2015/Birth-To-Eight.aspx*

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NAEYC. 2016. *Build It Better: Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development Systems*. Washington, DC: NAEYC. *https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Build%20It%20Better_For%20Web.pdf*

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