Florida’s Journey: Developing and Implementing Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners

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National Inclusion Institute
Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Providers

Developed by the Florida Early Care and Education Professional Development Initiative Steering Committee

- Originally developed by a local collaborative in Palm Beach Co, FL
- Based on national standards and competency work in other states
- Cross-sector input from state agencies, higher education, provider association representatives, and Expanding Opportunities
Core Knowledge Areas

- Health, Safety, and Nutrition
- Child Development and Learning
- Building Family and Community Relationships
- Teaching & Learning Environments & Interactions
- Curriculum
- Observing, Documenting, Screening, & Assessing to Support Young Children & Their Families
- Professionalism
Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Technical Assistance Specialists

- Identify and define what TA specialists should know and be able to do to provide quality technical assistance
- Create framework for professional development, defining terms and expectations to be used consistently among TA specialists and across programs and organizations
- Serve as a standard for decisions and practices carried out by technical assistance specialists in early care and education settings and programs
TA Specialist
Core Knowledge Areas

- Content Knowledge and Professionalism
- Building Relationships and Accountability
- Facilitating Shared Goal Setting and Planning
- Utilizing Effective Communication Skills
- Modeling Best Practices
Development of Florida Targeted Competencies for Inclusion

- Developed by Expanding Opportunities Team
  - Cross-walk of discipline-specific competencies, including the Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Providers (PT, SLP, IMH, School Psych, Early Childhood Special Education)
  - Developed for any practitioners providing support or itinerant services to children birth to 5 and their families in inclusive environments
  - Designed to align with and augment the Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Providers
Alignment with Core Competencies

Core Competencies contain knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by teachers in inclusive settings.

Examples from Core:

- Health and Safety – Prepare safe environments that maximize the independence and inclusion of children with differing abilities.
- Teaching and Learning – Adapt and modify instructional strategies to support and meet the needs of each child.
- Assessment - Use the results of child assessment to assist in developing IEPs, IFSPs, or care plans for children with special needs, and to improve practices.
Need for Targeted Competencies for Inclusion

- Recognize that many disciplines are unprepared for work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families.
- Specialists have roles as consultants or coaches or work within embedded instruction or integrated therapy models.
- Specialists work in varied settings such as Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten program, Head Start, blended school-based Exceptional Student Education programs, and child care homes and early education and care programs.
Content of Targeted Competencies for Inclusion

- Specialists need skills in:
  - evidence-based practice in general & special education
  - research-based teaching and intervention strategies
  - teaching adults effectively
  - strategies for teaming and collaboration

- Address knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to provide services and supports to families, caregivers, and early care providers.

- Incorporate principles and practices unique to early childhood or that reflect best practices such as services in the natural environment, family-centered services, and relationship-based practices, integrated therapy models.
Planned Use for Competencies

- Inform the “what” and “how” of early childhood professional development
- Training based on competencies
- Link to other initiatives (e.g., Early Learning Guidelines, Local QRIS, State Early Childhood Advisory Council)
- Development of advanced credential based on training
Cross-Sector Collaboration: Key Factors to our Success

- Consultants who understood the importance of collaboration across sectors and invited participation from multiple agencies and state-wide work groups
- Champions in early childhood sectors who participated in the development of both the core competencies for early care and education providers and the targeted competencies for inclusion
- Willingness of agencies to pool technical assistance resources
- Involvement of higher education and doctoral students
- Persistence in the face of challenge
Ongoing Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Annual meetings including both groups
  - Mechanism for tracking yearly progress side-by-side
- Each group continues work and meets regularly between annual joint meetings
  - Implementation of a system for sharing information between groups throughout the year
- Written agreement between groups
  - Partnership Working Agreement between Florida Expanding Opportunities Development Workgroup and Florida Early Care and Education Professional Development Initiative
Lessons Learned

- Importance of face-to-face collaborative meetings
- Importance of tapping and utilizing higher education assets and partnerships (engage doctoral students as well as faculty)
- Time to engage stakeholders is time well spent
- Development of a professional development system is a long-term commitment, and competencies must be embedded in a system if they are to be used
- Flexibility, continued evaluation, and input from stakeholders are essential components to implementation of a professional development system
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