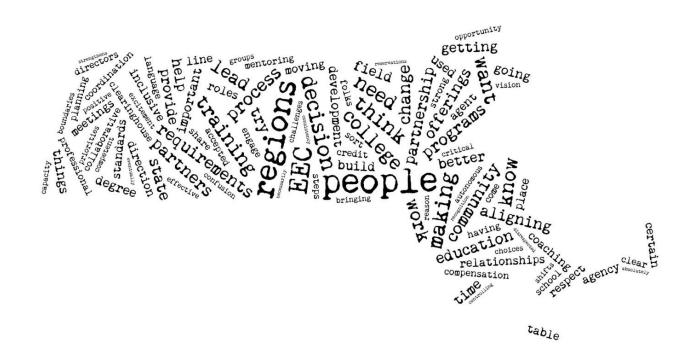# The Massachusetts
Early Education and Care
Professional Development System Study:
Year 1 Report

Submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care

August 2011

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I. Overview of the Massachusetts Professional Development System Study

A. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the first year of the Massachusetts Professional Development System Study (MA PDS). This study examined the implementation of Massachusetts' new statewide model for professional development of the early education and care and out of school time workforce. The study was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

This study examined the process of implementation of the new professional development system between August 2010 and June 2011. Implementation research is important because it provides insights into whether a new system is operating as intended and identifies areas that need improvement. This study focused on the development of the statewide and regional infrastructure, and in particular on governance and communication systems and processes. This report charts the process, growth, and challenges of building the system and its infrastructure during this timeframe. It is important to note that this study is not a comparison of the new system with the previous system.

Evaluation of the professional development system is a critical component of the state's efforts to improve child care quality and make informed policy decisions. Access to an effective high quality integrated early education and care system is critical to closing the school readiness gap for low income and disadvantaged children. Policy makers, educators, and advocates are increasingly aware that too many children enter kindergarten already behind their peers academically and developmentally. Highly effective teachers are essential for positive child outcomes. Many have noted critical gaps in the research on the EEC workforce and professional development (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). The MA Professional Development System study is designed to answer questions of policy importance to Massachusetts (as well as other states) that are working to develop more integrated professional development systems that are responsive to the needs of the diverse EEC workforce and translate into higher quality classroom and family child care environments for young children.

B. The Federal Context for Statewide Professional Development Systems

Massachusetts is making made great strides forward in advancing an integrated high quality system for early education and care. Few states have achieved a cross-sector, integrated professional development system (Howes & Pianta, 2011). The MA system aligns with new frameworks for state professional development systems (LaMoine, 2008; National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2011; Ochshorn, 2011). For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) professional development system policy "blueprint" identifies six key components (LaMoine, 2008):

- Professional standards
- Career pathways
- Articulation
- Advisory structures
- Data
- Financing

The highly anticipated Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Program grants require similar components for successful applicants, and Massachusetts has positioned itself to submit a competitive application for these new funds in the fall of 2011. The US Department of Education's Draft Executive Summary of the RTT-ELC Program (http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/rtt-elc-draft-execsumm-070111.pdf) highlights similar components among its draft selection criteria that call for:

High-Quality, Accountable Programs
- Developing and adopting a common, statewide set of tiered Program Standards
- Promoting Participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System
- Rating, monitoring, and improving Early Learning and Development Programs
- Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in improving school readiness

A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce
- Developing Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and a progression of credentials
- Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Partnering with postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in developing effective Early Childhood Educators

The ultimate outcome of these new statewide integrated systems will be highly effective early childhood professionals who support the development of all the young children and families they serve. Massachusetts has been strategic in designing a system that reflects this most current research and policy regarding effective early childhood systems.

C. The Massachusetts Professional Development System

EEC rolled out its new system in July 2010, funded through the Educator and Provider Support (EPS) Grant. Through this grant, EEC put forth its vision for a professional development system that is accessible to educators throughout the state; consists of offerings that are interconnected but occur at statewide, regional, and local levels; and establishes core functions that are available statewide with regional access points that contribute unique functions, key partners, linkages and pathways to the system. The system is intended to align professional development, QRIS, and EEC Core Competencies, and to engage stakeholders across sectors. The goal of the new system is to support the pathways that lead educators to degree attainment and increased competency and to support providers[1] in attaining and maintaining accreditation and upward movement on QRIS.

The EPS grant focuses on three core areas of professional development service delivery: educator and provider planning, coaching and mentoring, and competency development. Ultimately these supports are expected to increase the growth, whole child development, and school readiness of all children in Massachusetts. In the spring of 2010, each of the six regions

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[1] EEC uses the term "providers" to refer to programs, and the term "educators" to refer to individual educators.

in the state formed a new partnership of professional development providers and stakeholders to respond to the new Educator and Provider Support grant Request for Proposals. These six newly formed regional partnerships were awarded grants for FY11 to design and deliver professional development services in the three core areas.

This first year of implementation is critical to the future of this new system. It is the building block on which the system will grow and develop over time. Achieving successful outcomes of the new system involves change at multiple levels: change in the behavior of professional development providers, practitioners, and state agency staff; change in organizational structures and cultures; and changes in systems, policies, and relationships among the various partners and stakeholders (Metz, Blase, & Bowie, 2007). Effective implementation efforts increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. The findings from this study shed light on successes, challenges, and lessons learned in the process of building and implementing this new vision and system for professional development. This information can be used to inform and improve ongoing implementation, as well as professional development policy and practice.

II.   Research Questions and Methods

A. Research Questions:

The study addressed two broad questions:
- How does EEC, along with its six newly-funded Regional Partnerships, implement a new professional development system to serve the diverse set of educators and providers in each region?

- How is the system-change implemented to develop a consistent and stable infrastructure with common goals and expectations shared by EEC and the six regional partnerships?

Within these two broad questions, the study addressed several sub questions, listed below.

At the statewide system level:

1. What strategies for alignment and coordination are needed to build this statewide workforce development system? What strategies do EEC and the Regional Partners implement?
2. How does the system address known barriers to professional development and educational progress?
3. In what ways are professional development system goals and expectations communicated and understood?
4. What implementation strategies have worked? Not worked? What are the implementation challenges and promising approaches for overcoming these challenges?

At the regional level:

1. What are the unique characteristics and the common elements of the regional partnerships?
2. How are professional development service providers experiencing the change?
3. How do partners positively contribute to change? How do partners make sense of the change process?
4. What implementation strategies have worked? Not worked? What are the implementation challenges and promising approaches for overcoming these challenges?

B. Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study was collected between August 2010 – June 2011.

During October-May 2011, the research team conducted a total of 55 interviews with regional leads/partners, 5 interviews with EEC staff members, observed 27 regional and statewide meetings, and reviewed regional and state system documents. In addition, we conducted an online survey of our regional interview participants. The data collection protocol we used was approved by the University of MA Boston Internal Review Board for the protection of human subjects.

Documents
We reviewed several key documents, including the proposals submitted to EEC from the regional partnerships, the FY11 and FY12 Requests for Proposals for EPS Grants, and the meeting documents from the monthly and quarterly statewide professional development meetings (minutes, agendas, and PowerPoint presentations).

Interviews
Interviews with Lead Agents/Partners in six Regions: In November-December 2010, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with lead agents and members of the steering committee/lead partners in each region. We contacted a sample of five key partners in each region, selected to include representatives from various sectors (i.e. higher education, Head Start, public school, out-of-school-time, family child care, and diverse geographic areas within each region). Several individuals we interviewed were partners in more than one region. We asked these individuals to speak primarily to their experience in the region they were representing for these interviews, but also welcomed their comparative observations and insights across the regions with which they were involved.

We were able to successfully complete interviews with most of those we contacted (an average of 4-5 people/region). The interviews consisted of ten questions focused on the regional partnership and perceptions about governance, collaboration, communication, priorities and goals, and the system change process (see Interview Protocol 1, Appendix A). In April-May 2011, we conducted a second set of interviews with the same key partners from the fall interviews, using a similar but modified interview protocol that included a focus on change and growth over the year (see Interview Protocol 3, Appendix B.) We attempted to interview all those interviewed in the fall, and were successful in all regions except one.

Interviews with EEC Staff: In April 2011, we interviewed five EEC staff members who work with the professional development system, including members of both the central office and the regional offices. These interviews focused on similar areas to the regional partner interviews: governance, collaboration, communication, priorities and goals, and the system change process (see Interview Protocol 2, Appendix C)

We obtained informed consent from all interview participants. Our IRB-approved protocol protects the confidentiality of participants, and therefore we do not indicate specific individuals by name or connect individuals with specific identifying data.   No incentives were offered for participation other than the knowledge that participation may contribute to increased knowledge about the new professional development system. Interviews were conducted either in person, or in some cases, by phone.   Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed with consent of

the participant.

Meeting Observations
The research team observed a total of 27 state and regional meetings of the professional development partners, collected meetings documents (i.e. agenda and handouts), and took detailed field notes.

The following table provides a summary of the interview and observational data collected during October 2010-May 2011.

Region	# of interviews	# of meetings observed
1	13	2
2	11	2
3	8	1
4	10	4
5	7	1
6	6	3
Cross-Regional or Statewide	--	13
EEC Staff	5	--
TOTAL	**60**	**27**

Online Survey
We conducted an online survey in February-March 2011 to gather feedback from the regional partners and lead agents about the preliminary analysis of data in our December interim report. Seven out of 29 participants responded to the survey. The brief survey included questions about what was important or accurate in the report, what was missing or inaccurate, and any other perspectives on the study.

C. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis methods were used with all data from interviews, written documents, and observations of meetings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Atlas ti qualitative analysis software was used for our analysis. For this final report, we conducted an initial analysis of the data with a coding strategy based on the following descriptive codes: governance, collaboration, communication, priorities and goals, change, and alignment. We then conducted a second level of analysis to identify common and unique themes that emerged from the data. Data from each region were analyzed separately before cross-regional comparisons were made. Results of this analysis are presented below.

III. Findings and Discussion

The study findings are presented below as follows: a brief summary of key findings is listed, followed by detailed explanations and discussion of those findings with supporting data.

As noted previously, this first year represented a developmental year in which the infrastructure for the new system was designed and developed. Our findings are presented below, organized

according to key components of the system infrastructure, processes, and professional development services:

- ➢ Governance
- ➢ Communication
- ➢ Professional Development Services
- ➢ Alignment
- ➢ The Change Process
- ➢ Use of Data to Inform Regional Practice

A. Governance

This section presents the findings about the governing structures and processes that are evolving within the individual regions, with a focus on decision-making, power and autonomy, and collaboration. This is followed by findings about central governance exercised by EEC and its relationship with the regional partnerships.

Key Findings:

- **Regional partnerships engaged professional development partners from diverse sectors, resulting in an increased alignment of the professional development delivery system.**

- **Regional partnerships evolved from an initial focus on partnership development to a more broad focus that included service planning and delivery.**

- **EEC and regional partners worked to achieve clarity regarding both parties' scope of authority and decision-making. Progress was made toward a shared understanding of each party's role.**

Regional Governance

Developing an effective regional governance system was a major task in the first year, and one that required an extensive commitment of time, energy, and resources. While many regions drew upon prior collaborative efforts among some key partners, all the regions had to create a new cross-sector partnership and governing body that would be responsive and accountable to EEC, and would respectfully engage a diverse set of partners. Each partnership identified a lead agent (or in one case co-lead agents) and developed some type of executive or steering committee structure, either inclusive of all partners or with representatives of various sectors or geographic areas within the region.

To some extent, the regions that immediately began to build upon and adapt their existing infrastructure seemed to advance more rapidly than those that attempted to build a brand new infrastructure. Because the most common barrier to effective governance structures was reported earlier (Douglass, Heimer, & Hagan, 2010) to be the lack of planning time and funding to support planning, it is logical that utilizing some version of a familiar structure enabled regions to be 'up and running' in less time than regions who did not.

Respondents described an evolving process of governance in each region that is developmental in nature. Regional teams reported both needing and wanting to be as inclusive and democratic as they could possibly be from the outset. As one regional partner[2] described,

> *"The unified message going out to the field has come a long way. People believe in what the grant is designed to accomplish and it has become a closer partnership. Decisions that can be made within the region include much discussion and are given a lot of time and attention – there is a call-in option for people who can't physically be there. People can listen and be heard."*

There was a need to develop the engagement and trust of all partners in the regions. Both the existing relationships, which had been established during the Community Partnerships for Children era, and new relationships brought about by the EPS system, were described as central to the evolving governing systems within the regions. These adapted governance structures are somewhat flexible and organized to be dynamic and responsive to the field. For example, one region used an all-inclusive steering and advisory committee at the outset to make changes. Now they are shifting to a smaller representative steering committee that works in conjunction with subcommittees focused on particular areas. A partner in another region described a similar evolution:

> *"Building trust has been a main theme. The decision-making process had to be highly inclusive. Now we've built the trust and our structure can change to a steering committee and subcommittees."*

Bringing together stakeholders from diverse settings to work jointly together to build a new system is no easy task. It makes sense that effective partnerships started with a strong investment in building trust and inclusivity. These regions recognized the value of this investment. Once that trust was established, at least some regions have found that a strong steering committee, or a structure of several working committees that make recommendations to a steering committee or to the whole partnership, is a more effective and efficient way to do business.

In most regions, partners perceived this strong collaborative approach and evolution of governing structures very positively. Partners also reported they were very supportive of lead agencies. One partner articulates a common response,

> *"Our partnership is strong. We work together and there is a lot of helping out and support… Reliance on community partners is important."*

A similar perspective was shared by another partner:

> *"Some people know the parts that I don't know, but the coordination of those parts is key. We need to know what each other does and respect it, and I think certainly within our region, we do very much respect one another…".*

Some of the partners we interviewed who work in multiple regions commented that different regions have different strengths when it comes to governance and that these strengths could be

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[2] We use the term "regional partner" to refer to all those we interviewed from the regional partnerships – both the lead agents and the members of the steering committees.

shared across regions. While effective regional partnerships share some common characteristics, each partnership is unique with distinct strengths. For example,

> *"Region [X's] hub model works well and is effective as a clearinghouse…. Decision-making in Region [Y] is very inclusive - there's a voting process… they have a lot of partners at the table and a strong infrastructure…"* (Regional Partner)

Some leaders reported a more hierarchical, centralized decision-making structure in their regions. One region felt forced by EEC to move away from collaborative leadership toward a more centralized governance structure in order to strengthen accountability.

> *"We used to be more inclusive and collaborative, bringing both subcontracted and unpaid partners to the table but in the re-bid process we decided to centralize some decision-making in the name of clarity and consistency…. There's a dilemma between inclusivity and the ultimate need to make decisions."* (Regional Partner)

Another region identified itself as highly collaborative, but expressed concern that EEC's push for them to move to one central lead would interfere with this and conflicted with the language of "collaboration" and "co-creation" used in many statewide meetings.

> *"There is confusion about the language of partnership being used at the regional level, and of collaboration and co-creating a system that is at odds with our experience of a single lead agent mandate [from EEC]."* (Regional Partner)

Efforts to develop a shared understanding of governance between EEC and the EPS grantees are discussed in the next section on Central Governance.

Another important finding this year was success in increasing cross-sector involvement in the regional partnerships. All regions reported that more partners from diverse sectors were involved in the regions and sectors were working together more so than previously.

> *"The new governance strengthens the capacity of folks previously left out – aligning schools and community programs; school age child care…"* (Regional Partner)

Particularly significant to this broader base of partners are the school age and higher education sectors, which many of the interviewees reported had been previously (unintentionally) left out or worked independently from other professional development sectors. This suggests stronger cross sector alignment may be developing as a result of the new professional development system.

Some of the ways that regional partners have collaborated include jointly hosting trainings and sharing more data and information within their regions now than they were at the beginning of this year. Early engagement in coalition building was reported within regions to facilitate a needs assessment process inclusive of diverse partners and sectors.

Central Governance

Regions initially had many questions about EEC's expectations of them and the scope and extent of regional decision-making power in designing the regional system. The committed efforts of both EEC and the EPS grantees led to improved clarity by the end of the first year.

During the first round of interviews (Fall 2010) many regions reported frustration with communications from EEC and a lack of perceived clarity on roles and expectations. Many recognized these challenges as an expected part of such a major change process. The second round of interviews (Spring 2011) showed improvement in communication and in the relationship between EEC and the regional partnerships, as well as continued efforts to clarify the scope of authority.

By spring 2011, across all six regions, interviewees emphasized EEC staff members' responsiveness to their requests, questions, and feedback. They gave examples of support and availability as evidence of this outreach and reinforcement. Many of the regional partners we interviewed also referenced a relationship with EEC Commissioner Killins. They commented on her leadership and her accessibility. Many people felt as though they knew the Commissioner personally and that she was accessible to them.

> *"Sherri has a vision for EEC… She's a woman who does her homework… you have to respect her…."* (Regional Partner)

A few regional partners reported difficult feelings regarding EEC's leadership of the change process, and either described anger with the process or opted not to answer our questions related to EEC. Interviews with EEC staff members suggested that the shift to "tighter" accountability of regions to EEC might explain these reactions and feelings.

Over the course of the first year, there was increasing clarification from EEC regarding roles, responsibilities and expectations between regions and EEC, although perceptions continued to vary regarding how much autonomy EEC allows for the regional partnerships as described below. Regions expressed a need for further clarification from EEC regarding what local control specifically means and whether or not state goals or mandates must be prioritized over local needs.

> *"It would help if EEC could tell us what they want us to include - if there is a plan they want to see, be clear. I don't want to feel like I have autonomy and then be told, "That's not going to work, we want x instead'. If EEC knows that in advance, just tell us. EEC can share their reservations with us - comments such as "That's not necessarily what we want" … well what is? Share your vision so we can help put that into place!"* (Regional Partner)

Interviewees reported not wanting to believe they are free to make certain choices if in fact they are not. If particular choices are not available, regional leaders wanted EEC to identify this clearly and unmistakably.

> *"EEC asks the regions to make certain choices but then turns around and says those are not the right decisions. … It seems that collaborative decision-making is not valued by EEC and more top down decision making, which requires more of an accountability role for the lead agent … having oversight of partners and telling partners and sub-contractors what is expected of them. … EEC is inserting itself more and controlling the regional governance processes. EEC is saying*

who can and cannot be at the decision-making table and that the lead agent needs to make more decisions on its own, not bringing decision-making to the partnership." (Regional Partner)

Another partner described her experience coming to understand the power dynamics between EEC and the regions as follows:

"Regions are autonomous within boundaries- in other words they can design training to meet educator and provider needs but they actually have limited power and authority to do so. They are required to follow state direction and have little input on some things."

EEC exerted more authority over the regional partnership governance structures in some regions as the year went on.

"… We wrote the new RFR [for FY12 EPS grants] specifically around making clear you can't have two co-leads. I want there to be a very strong lead agency presence…. One I want clear leadership, and secondly I'd like to see embracing more of the voices that are out there." (EEC Staff Member)

Some regional leaders questioned the authenticity of autonomy for their region. In some cases people reported a tension and dissonance between what educators in the field were saying they wanted and the goals and priorities of EEC. For example, one region conducted a needs assessment and found that educators wanted continuing education courses rather than higher education. Yet EEC mandated a minimum level of funding be dedicated to higher education, which was higher than the need reportedly determined by this region. This dissonance may highlight a tension between the national movement toward particular professional development goals and pathways and the desires and goals of some members of the workforce. EEC has communicated with EPS grantees about the federal context for the system change in an effort to build a shared understanding of the federal context and larger trends in the early education field.

Understanding the unique role of regions in building the new system has been an evolving process. Use of the terms collaboration, "co-creation" and also "adaptive leadership" appears to have led some regional leaders to have an expectation that worked at odds with their experience. These terms were often used in statewide EPS meetings. Some people had the impression that learning together and creating a professional development system as a group of adaptive leaders meant having more autonomy than was actually available to them. Questions such as "Are we willing, as a collective, to address the disparity between our promises and our practice? Are we willing to make the hard choices? Are we willing to ask our stakeholders to support us in engaging in adaptive work? Are we willing to do what we know is right for the children?" (http://www.cayl.org/EECSupport.), seem to have left some people with a sense of self-governing that was never going to come to fruition. Discussions of collective and adaptive leadership recurred in presentations on collaboration. While some people seemed to apply this to the relationships between funded and unfunded partners and lead agents within regions, others applied it to the relationship between EEC and the region. Understanding the meanings, applications, and nuances of these terms and concepts took time.

Interviews with some EEC staff offered the insight that perhaps the historical context of EEC's relationships with professional development providers contributed to some of the confusion. In the prior system, Massachusetts funded professional development through three different funding streams/programs (Building Careers, Child Care Resource and Referral Centers, and Community

Partnerships for Children), with less direct accountability to and central control by EEC. Understanding the balance between regional autonomy and accountability to EEC as the fiscal agency required ongoing dialogue. Recognizing this, the EEC staff leadership team worked with regional partnerships during this year to design a new system that balanced a coherent statewide system with some amount of regional autonomy. EEC leaders reported that striking this balance was both a moving target and a work-in-progress.

It became increasingly clear over the first year that the EEC-regional partnership relationship was not intended to be a collaborative relationship, and that regional partnerships did not have the extent of local autonomy some initially expected. Collaborations serve to build "relationships and processes that enable organizations to work together in different ways to produce creative or innovative solutions" (Hicks et al., 2008, p.454) in ways that "…share existing resources, authority, and rewards" (Selden et al., 2006, p. 414). Collaboration more accurately describes the governing structures at the regional level. The relationship between the regions and EEC is better described as a partnership between funder and grantees. Partnerships are commonly thought of as equals who come together to accomplish something that they would not accomplish alone. The grantee-grantor partnership is unique because of the inherent power differential: the grantor has the power to give and take away money. Regions are acutely aware of this, as is EEC.

As one member of the EEC staff described:

> *"They [regions] are not totally autonomous. And, there's a reason for that; the reason for that is that these people are receiving state funding; these partnerships are receiving state funding and there are requirements that they need to meet to get that funding. And, it's a monitoring process in place to ensure that that happens, that the state dollars are well spent… it's sort of a balancing act between the autonomy that allows them to respond to local and regional needs and keeping the whole system on mission and on track."*

The partnership terminology captures the ways in which EEC and the regions do come together to share feedback, to discuss challenges, and identify possible solutions options. These processes occur on a regular basis, for example during the monthly EPS grantee meetings with EEC. Regional partnerships have a sense of ownership and pride in the systems and services they are developing, and there is evidence that EEC respects and is investing in this role. In addition, all parties have invested in strengthening the EEC-grantee relationship. Thus, it may be most accurate to portray the relationship as a grantor/grantee partnership.

Where regional autonomy may offer the greatest value to the system is in the area of innovation. A key benefit of regional autonomy is the flexibility to design or pilot features of the regional system that might address known barriers or challenges to professional development in ways that are responsive to local needs. This has the potential to contribute new solutions to overcome persistent challenges in our field and achieve goals more effectively. EEC can promote this framework for understanding regional autonomy, and capitalize on its promising potential.

B. Communication

High quality communication structures and processes are a key component of effective governance and management systems. This section presents the findings regarding the role that

lead agents and partners play as the communicators in their regions. Next the importance of communication among the regional leaders and the ways this has manifested during the first year of the study are presented. The types of communication between the regions and EEC staff are described and finally, some of the outreach and communication challenges that were found to be common among all of the regions are offered.

Key Findings:

- **Developing and improving communication systems between EEC and the EPS grantees was a major focus this year.**

- **Regional partners played a key role in communication with the field about EEC policies, often functioning as "boundary spanners."**

- **The communication systems developed with EEC over the course of the year enabled regional access to timely, accurate, and high quality information that was critical for this boundary spanner role.**

- **These communication systems not only provided regional partnerships with information from EEC, but also established a continuous flow of information from the regions to EEC that enabled EEC to keep in touch with the implementation issues "on the ground".**

- **A generally supportive and mutually respectful relationship was established over the year between EEC staff and regional leaders.**

- **Regions reported a focus on outreach communications with providers and educators, and many identified outreach with diverse groups of educators (such as English language learners and family child care providers) as an area for improvement.**

Regional Leads and Partners

Regional lead agents, and in some cases the key partners, are in a "boundary spanner" role where they translate and mediate information from EEC to their region. Defined in the organizational studies literature, boundary spanners "collect, filter, translate, interpret, and disseminate knowledge from the external environment to members of their organization so that the organization is better able to monitor and adapt to changes emanating from the external environment"; in other words boundary spanners manage the flow of information between EEC and their regions (Gittell, 2003, p.286). In this boundary spanner role, lead agents and lead partners can influence the regional partnerships' (and ultimately educators' and providers') perceptions of the new system, EEC itself, and the changes taking place.

One role of the lead agents and key partners in each of the regions this year was to bring the message and translate the changes being made to the professional development system out into the field of providers and educators. We found that this necessitated a two-step process, as illustrated by the three quotes below from regional partners. The initial step was for the regional leaders themselves to develop a clear understanding of the changes first, in order to deliver a cogent and comprehensible message to the field. This took time. When lead agents were not as clear as they wanted to be, it created confusion for the field.

"There is a process of learning for the partners about the new system, about alignment across systems, and leads and partners have to educate themselves in order to go out to the field and educate the field about these changes in ways that won't further confuse people." (Regional Partner)

*"The effort has been to try and get the message that EEC wants out there, and squelching misinformation. Sometimes my role as a communicator is hampered by not knowing what EEC is going to do next." (*Regional Partner)

"We definitely had to be in the network meetings, we had to try to kind of decipher things for people and explain to people how things are changing. We had to explain to people about the QRIS, try to demystify that. … We also had to let people know, it's absolutely essential that teachers get degrees. That's the way it's going, and we'll help you with that … I think that the community has accepted that. There's more kind of recognition. That is what women have to do." (Regional Partner)

Those we interviewed also often reported trying to protect educators and providers from some of the more acute stresses they themselves were experiencing as a result of the rapid changes in the professional development landscape. As the quotes above suggest, many new initiatives, changes, or expectations, were rolled out by EEC over the course of the year. Regions were asked to implement the changes, often with little preparation time. In their boundary-spanner role, regional leads and partner often buffered the stress. One EEC staff member validated the importance of this role in the change process:

"I think that our lead agents are specific positive forces for change, because they're the ones that have to go out there with a smile on their face, even if they're not smiling on the inside." EEC Staff Member

Access to timely and high quality information supported the boundary-spanner role, and its absence was a barrier. EEC's responsiveness to the regional leaders' requests for information increased over the course of the year. For example, regions had requested some level of access to information about which educators in their regions were/were not registered in the Professional Qualifications (PQ) Registry. At the June 2011 meeting EEC informed the regions that some access to information in the PQ Registry would be made available to the Lead Agents. Also, some partners described accessing publicly available information on the EEC website to help them to understand the direction EEC is moving, and as one interviewee said, "kind of watch what they are thinking". Regional partners reported that the monthly EPS meetings, and the quarterly CAYL Institute-facilitated meetings provided an opportunity to share information in depth, and to clarify questions, confusions, and conflicting information. EEC staff were readily accessible to regional leads, providing yet another channel of information.

Across regions and with EEC

EEC expected that laying down a new pathway in a relatively short period of time would be difficult, and established communications systems to support the change process. Three formal forums for cross-regional and system-wide communication were put into place this year: monthly EPS grantee meetings, quarterly grantee/partner meetings facilitated by the CAYL Institute, and conference calls among regional lead agents.

Communication among the six regions was reported to be highly valued. Lead agents were able to dialogue, share and learn from one another as they managed the changes. They could assess the way the agenda for the meetings was set and led together. Regularly convening all six of the regions was something that the interviewees' thought should continue in some form moving forward into the second year. Regions found the sharing of effective strategies, innovations, and collective problem-solving particularly valuable. This dialogue was viewed as a way of expediting positive change through 'tried and true' processes.

Very strong communication and relationships between regional leads and the EEC staff were reported in the study. The regional partners interviewed characterized EEC communication as responsive, supportive, dialogic and helpful. EEC staff members were described as empathic. Some of the interviews with EEC staff reflected this empathy for the difficult work of the regional partners, and acknowledged efforts to strengthen communication. As one EEC staff member described,

> *"... it [the process] sort of transitioned from a sense of loss of the old system to some excitement and positive outlooks on what the new system could provide. I think that it [the meetings] was a place where we could work through a lot of stuff... I think that the relationships between the EEC staff and the lead agencies in the regions have grown and progressed as well. I think we have better relationships. I think that some of this has to do with figuring out the respective roles and responsibilities and boundaries."*

Challenges to communication sometimes occurred when EEC made unanticipated changes. Regional leaders reported that they were not always clear about why changes were being made, but some did express a growing awareness of the federal context as an important influence in changing professional development policy and practice. All of the regions said they would prefer to have clear information up front about EEC expectations and new initiatives in order to be able to plan most effectively.

Formal communication in the form of monthly meetings was highly valued by the regions. This enabled an ongoing dialogue with EEC staff and included responsiveness to issues as they arose. Problem solving in real time was facilitated by this structure. This was very valuable to the regions.

One of the challenges that was reported by some regions was the need for greater communication regarding statewide and cross-regional professional development services. For example, several respondents described a need to maximize the use of EEC's online trainings across the state, and to address how regions could more fully collaborate to share professional development offerings between neighboring regions.

> *"Coordinating trainings with EEC and other regions has been a challenge. There have been conflicts and overlap. The same training being offered in one region for a fee and free in another region. Better coordination would be great - for the entire PDS - getting EPS region partners, plus EEC plus any agencies doing this type of work for EEC to the same table would be beneficial and more efficient."*
> (Regional Partner)

The suggestion that EEC could take the lead in organizing collaborative professional development services such as online training across regions was made several times by regional partners interviewed in the study.

> *"Take the elements that are working best in the regions and start sharing them across regions or designating certain regions as the clearinghouse for that area, like [Region X] and on line offerings… We need a systematized clearinghouse that can be moderated and outreach across regions possibly if it is accessible on line."* (Regional Partner)

Statewide monthly meetings were used this year to raise issues such as the one above, and to jointly problem-solve, clarify EEC policies when applicable, and to identify potential further plans to address the issues and problems arising.

Outreach

For most of the regions it was reported that the focus of communication has broadened from outreach efforts to bring in a broad range of partners to outreach to educators in the field. This shift represents another area of evolution in the development of the regional partnerships this year.

In terms of outreach to build their partnerships, several regions reported having established or strengthened solid and committed partnerships, and that there has been an uptick in prioritizing ways in which they might work with the Coordinated Community and Family Engagement (CFCE) grantees in order to connect with educators and create a more expansive network.

Outreach to educators and providers was an area of focus this year and one that brought with it both successes and many challenges. One regional partner reported that "*… the frontline workers are very engaged in opportunities- they are taking advantage, for example Region [x] does very well with distance learning and on line coaching and mentoring.*"

Regions recognized the importance of outreach and engagement of educators in Priority A programs, the programs serving the highest percentage of children most likely to face multiple risk factors. However, regions reported some difficulty in outreach and engagement of Priority A programs/educators and with family child care providers and educators with a primary language other than English.   Outreach to rural and out of school time educators, especially in family childcare, was also a challenge.

In addition, interviewees reported that there exists a digital divide in some areas where educators have limited or no internet access, making outreach and engagement a challenge. Interviewees also indicated that outreach should be increased to public school systems, particularly with paraprofessional teachers in early childhood classrooms.

C. Professional Development Services

As defined in the grant, EPS Grantees focus on three core areas of professional development services: educator and provider planning, coaching and mentoring, and competency development. This section presents findings about how regional partnerships approached the implementation of service delivery.

Key Findings:

- **Engaging diverse groups of educators, including Priority A providers/educators, and educators who speak a primary language other than English, was considered an important focus and an area for improvement.**

- **Many regions reported that scarcity of resources in the current economic climate, combined with the demand for more training, caused some educators to question whether or not they can afford to stay in the field. This is based on their need for further compensation to be tied to professional development and degree attainment.**

- **Through their involvement in building this new system, many regional partners expanded their own perspectives on professional development, pointing to the important ways that the new system contributed to engaging and advancing change in the field.**

- **Some regional partners were unclear about how to identify and assess individual pathways and core competencies, and about how to plan professional development services in response to this assessment.**

- **Many higher education institutions were engaged in regional partnerships. Partners articulated goals for working more closely with higher education to support success for educators seeking degrees. Most regions identified engagement and collaboration with higher education institutions as a key strategy for achieving the goal of degree attainment for diverse educators.**

Initial Implementation of Educator and Provider Services

The regional partnerships moved from an initial focus on partnership development and decision-making structures to a broader focus on professional development services and goals during this first year. All regions reported working to shift professional development to competency-based offerings that would provide educators with professional development choices that align with various pathways. In addition, they discussed the time and energy needed to assist educators in understanding this shift in the professional development system, and in connecting educators with the Professional Qualification (PQ) Registry.

One key initial focus for most partnerships was enabling access to the system by helping educators obtain a PQ Registry number. Then the emphasis expanded to the larger goal of supporting educators and programs to move upward along pathways to credentials/quality. This included beginning to set up systems for professional development pathways and the development of an individualized professional development plan (IPDP).

Through their engagement with system implementation, many regional partners expanded their own perspectives on professional development, pointing to the important ways that the regional systems engages and advances change in the field. Embedded in this effort was the recurring emphasis on the need to provide pathways and services for educators in all settings and with unique needs, including those who speak a primary language other than English.

As reported by the CAYL Institute, during the first year the six regions accomplished the following in the three core areas of professional development services (July 2010-April 2011[3]):

- Helped 1,597 educators plan their professional growth with IPDPs
- Assisted over 800 programs plan to improve quality through accreditation or QRIS
- Offered 1,758 educators the opportunity to take a college course and 2,117 educators the chance to earn CEUs
- Provided 2,129 educators with the opportunity to benefit from coaching/mentoring

Educator & Provider Planning: Pathways and Career Advising

Regions described getting people started on a pathway as an important and high priority. Specific strategies to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities of educators and to use this information to plan professional development services that would further individual goals, were sparsely referenced or reported when we asked about professional development goals and priorities. The lack of feedback in this regard may indicate an important area for growth. Regions have to be able to assess the needs in the field in the context of core competencies and qualifications. They then have to be able to back map their professional development offerings based on their needs assessment in a continuing cycle. The fact that this largely did not come up in discussions of pathways seems significant. As one regional partner articulated,

> *"How do we apply the IPDP and pathways and build them into a system? ... Not sure how these fit in…"* (Regional Partner)

Many regions identified the need for a tool to assess competency. Some interviewees reported a lack of clarity about how to use the individual professional development plan (IPDP). There were many questions as to how the IPDP fits onto a pathway. This serves as an important data point moving forward because it is a core area of EEC's plan and further attention is warranted. Regions must develop a clearer understanding of the utility and application of the IPDP on the pathways.

In terms of engaging educators in professional development planning, regions reported that educators are making decisions about whether or not to stay in the field based on their need for compensation tied to professional development and pursuit of degrees. Leaders are challenged by this and thinking about how to support, incentivize and reward educators for professional development. There is alarm that regions stand to lose many educators and providers without this.

> *"...getting people to see professional development as important…. and that there is something at the end of it. I think… we have to … know people want more compensation, better compensation, or compensation tied to … [professional development]. And until we can sort of do that I think it's a hard sell."* (EEC Staff Member)

Program directors can play a critical role in providing a range of potential supports and incentives for the professional development of their staff. In this role, program directors can help regions effectively engage educators in professional development, reducing the number of

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[3] Data presented at May 2011 CAYL Institute-EPS meeting.

educators who might otherwise "opt out" of professional development. As expected, the study found that in many regions the Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) were not yet being used and that there is a need to develop greater understanding and utility of MOUs in year two. However, in other regions, some programs were beginning to use MOUs. The MOUs were a recommended component of the new system to begin in year two. They were designed to formalize the supports and commitments between educators and program directors regarding professional development. IPDP's and MOUs were areas of focus and importance in some regions this year, while others were still in the process of discerning how best to use these tools.

Competencies and Degree Attainment

Over the course of this first year, regional partnerships planned and offered professional development that was directly linked to competency development. All regions offered college coursework, as well as courses offering continuing education credits (CEUs).

The increased collaboration between professional development providers and institutions of higher education has been a significant success this year. In various ways, each region developed or enhanced collaborative partnerships with institutions of higher education to address ways to increase access and support progress toward college degrees. One focus was how to better meet the needs of educators who are English language learners and those who have been out of school for many years. Some regions with strong partners in higher education have succeeded in developing English proficiency courses with child development content to help address this issue. The Child Development Associate credential is now being accepted as "credit bearing" by a community college. Other regions are aware of this challenge and want to identify ways to move forward with changes that would support educators. These regional leaders found that strong higher education partnerships were essential to their progress in this regard. In one region, a higher education partner recently started a new bachelor's degree program for early educators, that is designed specifically to meet the needs of adult learners who are returning to school to obtain their degree. One experienced higher education partner who has served the field for decades articulated the following:

> *"Trainings that lead to college credit have been done in other states… we'll have to go outside the box to provide college credit bearing training to educators on their worksites. Program directors and executive directors have to engage in planning with colleges … we'll need more capacity to engage ESL groups and the school age groups and more offerings… There is a language and a cultural aspect to break through so people feel welcomed and empowered. We haven't worked out the transition steps yet … we're trying to crack the nut of taking college courses."*

Regions reported the importance of understanding how higher education systems work as a central starting point. This knowledge is viewed as foundational to building bridges that connect educators (who are not yet on the higher education spectrum as well as those who are already engaged in some way) to intentional and clear pathways that lead directly to degree attainment. Partners and leaders within higher education reported greater understanding of the ways that their systems have blind spots. Therefore, participating as partners with the regional partnerships has provided higher education and partners from other sectors with multiple lenses that could serve to move higher education and regional partnerships together toward adaptations and changes to accommodate and be more responsive to the professional development needs in the field of early education and care.

"Looking through multiple lenses has helped illustrate the need for change and adaptations [within higher education]. We have to develop an appreciation for things outside of higher education… Having a place for folks who may be non-native English speakers or lower skilled is important. Community colleges won't accept folks who can't pass the English proficiency exam." (Regional Partner)

As discussed in previous sections of this study, all of the regions reported an increased awareness of the needs of educators who have a primary language other than English. The barriers to entering higher education because of English-only policies and practices can prevent some educators who are English language learners from accessing competencies and credentials as early education and care professionals.

"We have to be able to adapt and change to offer more to English language learners in the field." (Regional Partner)

"One community college has circumvented the English proficiency issue on the front end. People have to pass it eventually but not at the beginning of the process. There is time and opportunity for providers to get excited and build confidence. We pair ESL offerings with degree program offerings and use bilingual coaches to support people. Another community college is open to moving in a better direction- they accepted our CDA as college credit, which had not been done before. A third community college in the region is getting there." (Regional Partner)

Finding ways to support educators and providers who speak a primary language other than English and advocate for changes in higher education and professional development coursework is perceived as an important change.

Coaching & Mentoring

Some regions expressed a need to better understand and integrate coaching and mentoring into professional development planning, while others have been providing coaching and mentoring in an integrated way for some period of time already. As one regional partner expressed, *"Connecting CEU training with coaching and mentoring is critical."* As with coursework, there was concern regarding improving strategies to provide coaching and mentoring to educators and providers who speak a primary language other than English. In addition, what to tell educators and providers about how coaching and mentoring fits into the individual plans and pathways remained unclear to some people. At the same time, regional leaders articulated that this is an essential component of creating the new system. As stated by a regional partner, *"The intensive commitment to coaching and mentoring is really, really important."*

D. Alignment between the Professional Development System and QRIS

Massachusetts is one of many states working to align professional development with its QRIS. The study found that across regions there are varying degrees of understanding about strategies for aligning professional development with QRIS. This section will discuss alignment as a work in progress identifying where the study showed confusion in the field and where it pointed to early successes.

Key Findings:

- **EEC introduced the goal of aligning professional development with the new QRIS. Systems alignment is a new and complex process for many. There remains some confusion in regions regarding how to approach and build alignment, and the specific pathways and connections between systems. This is an area for continued development in the second year.**

- **EEC provided information and resources to regional partnerships to support alignment efforts. EEC recognized the need for additional supports for regions for aligning these systems. This awareness and responsiveness to the needs of the regional partnerships was an important facilitator of learning and change.**

As regional partnerships were learning about and implementing the new professional development system, they were also introduced mid-year to the new Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). All sectors of the EEC field, including educators, providers, stakeholders, and professional development providers, were learning multiple new systems in 2010-11.

Regions reported that a process of learning about alignment across systems was necessary to determine how to approach alignment in concrete ways in their work. Leads and partners described having to educate themselves in order to go out to the field and educate the field about these changes in ways that served to clarify and not confuse. Many regions described themselves as having been strategic with alignment.

> *"Things have to fit together so that everything counts toward moving forward - connecting CEU training with coaching and mentoring is critical… We are looking at how our QRIS offerings will have people walk away with new knowledge that improves quality for kids."* (Regional Partner)

> *"…And we're building a frame for educators to be able to speak about what is of interest to them, what maybe they need to take, could be either their program requirements or an EEC requirements, or QRIS requirements, or degree requirements, or licensing requirements."* (EEC Staff Member)

There is still confusion about what alignment means, and when we asked regional partners about their efforts to align professional development and QRIS many did not understand the question. Some saw alignment as designing a strategy for knitting together the broad range of trainings contributing to quality for children. Others responded by questioning whether or not the state is trying to align too many things. Alignment is viewed as a work in progress in all six regions.

> *"Anytime you turn around there's something else we're trying to align. We're aligning the preschool standards and the elementary standards. We're aligning the accreditation standards and the QRIS standards. We're aligning the pathways and the career ladder. All of this stuff."* (Regional Partner)

As another regional partner described,

> *"The challenges to alignment are money, time, linguistics and getting people to see they need to change."*

Interviewees consistently reported that there is still a lot of confusion about QRIS and clarity is needed around pathways for people who are just trying to move forward on competencies and QRIS. In some regions educators and providers have pushed back on regional leadership and acknowledged that they don't have the funds for QRIS or accreditation and they do not think they need to participate in these processes. Regional leaders reported that this perception results in a closed mindedness for some, which makes it difficult for lead agencies and their partners to engage these folks in changing. Some regional leaders have reframed the resistance as indicative of concern for the future and the stability of the system. Another partner articulated a need to help providers and educators better understand the deeper knowledge and practice called for at the higher levels of QRIS. It was suggested that at the moment the focus and attention is on the lower levels of QRIS and getting educators into the pipeline for an associate or bachelor degree. Aligning compensation that will be sustainable for educators reaching the higher levels of QRIS was presented as a dilemma.

Interviewees in the study reported that the field has made progress in learning about QRIS, new approaches to professional development, and the alignment between these two systems. EEC recognized the need to work together with regions on alignment with QRIS, and focused time on this topic during several of the spring 2011 monthly EPS grantee meetings. Many of the regional leaders and EEC staff members we interviewed recognized that learning to implement new statewide systems is a major task that takes time, and requires many to learn new systems and new ways to support educators and providers in these systems. It is important to understand that many of the challenges identified in this report, such as the confusion about alignment, are a normal and expected part of a major systems change process.

E. Change Process

As an implementation study, all of our findings touch upon change in one way or another. This section highlights perspectives and shifting views specifically about the process of change during this year of system-building. A repeating sentiment from the regions was the importance of prioritizing 'lessons learned' and sharing new frontline knowledge across regions. They cited this as a key to developing and implementing a consistent and stable infrastructure that works across the state. Another key support in the change process, as identified by at least some partners in each region, was the respectful relationship that developed this year between EEC staff and the regional partnerships.

Key Findings:

- **Regional partners expressed a commitment to the new system.**

- **The cost and time commitment to create and implement the system in 'real time' has required patience and diligence of all stakeholders.**

- **There is a threat of "burn out" in the field if recognition is not forthcoming, both in the form of compensation and acknowledgement of effort and achievements.**

Positive Indicators

There were multiple positive influences and perceptions of change thus far. Perceptions of change improved measurably over the course of the year. The regional partnerships and EEC largely shared a vision for a strong, intentional, cross-sector professional development system. Increased trust with EEC was reported by many of the interviewees to have been a significant source of support. This relationship, and improved communication, helped regions promote QRIS and engage many providers and educators across their regions. Regional leaders described this as positive engagement, which was very satisfying and an important positive result of their work with the field.

One sentiment that persists with the regions is the strong hope that EEC will continue its investment in this new system. Many regional partners recognized that their grassroots investment, which went into building the new system, took time, patience, and perseverance. The anticipated payoff is an improved and transformed professional development system.

In addition, the investment in the EEC partnership with regions may result in system transformation at multiple levels. The quote below points to the potential that this unique EEC-grantee partnership that is the foundation of the professional development system can transform the professional development landscape at both the policy and the practice levels:

> *"I'm really hoping that something that we can do is map the next step in this process of developing the system… there are going to be successes and failures along the line and shifts that come with the territory but I often wonder, if you spend this time trying to build this relationship within a partnership or between partnerships or between the agency, the funder, what is the impact of that?"*
> (EEC Staff member)

The relationship that developed between EEC and the regional partnerships was mutually reported to be a value-adding asset to the change process. Continual care and investment in this relationship will be important moving forward. Continued study of the system development and transformation will reveal the impact of this partnership, showing how this partnership may contribute to lasting change and improvement.

Cautionary Tales

While across regions interviewees reported some acceptance of the changes, there were significant challenges reported as well. Implementing the multiple components of the new professional development system meant slow and incremental change in many regions. In the fall, regions reported great frustration with the lack of a funded planning period before initiating service delivery.

Regions reported challenges communicating the many and rapid changes to the field. Some attributed new cost factors as a disincentive to professional development participation.

> *"…Programs weren't given a heads up about this at all. We used to provide training for free. So they didn't even know that they should put money in their budgets to pay for teachers to attend training because they were used to getting it for free."* (Regional Partner)

Regional leaders reported that many educators and some providers in the field expressed surprise about QRIS. Some reported that educators still think QRIS and accreditation will 'go away,' because the politics of change is constant and therefore, this too shall pass.

> *"I think people are aware that the state changes priorities from time to time…. Priorities shift from the CDA, which was what we were pushing ten years ago, to the direction now with different funding sources towards college degrees. …I try to explain to people that dollars are attached at the state and federal levels and we don't have a choice…"* (Regional Partner)

The sense that the changes will fade away suggests that additional work could be done by EEC to communicate the sustainability plan and long term vision for these changes. Efforts to build trust between those regional partners who are unconvinced and EEC remains the task in the new system. A small number of those we interviewed expressed strong negative feelings about how EEC has managed the changes this year, as reflected in this quote from a regional partner,

> *"I am more disheartened than encouraged this year… by the way people are being treated, abused and disrespected… the stress is fueling burnout and retention problems."*

The workload this year for the regional partnership was often described as "unrealistic" both by regional partners and by some EEC staff. There was the sense in the regions that too many different initiatives came out of EEC this year. For example, one lead agent described how numerous ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act)-funded initiatives sometimes skewed leadership effectiveness because they resulted in a mad scramble to write a proposal and start up a new project. Another discussed how the incremental unfolding of unanticipated changes resulted in the expending of energy to deal with partners' reactions to these changes. These diversions sometimes made it difficult to simply get down to the business of designing and implementing professional development services. A third regional leader recommended that soliciting input from the field before launching initiatives would have helped to temper overwhelmed feelings and created a stronger sense of partnership and mutual respect with EEC.

Leading the Way Forward

Leaders suggested that beyond putting together a professional development system that works, EEC is facing the broader challenge of making it worthwhile for people to enter and stay in the field. Interviewees discussed the innovation and creativity of EEC leadership, even as they recognized that there is not enough money currently dedicated to the financing component of the professional development system. They talked about all of the volunteer time that people have invested, and some questioned how long they or educators in the field could keep donating their "life blood". They described the contrast between on the one hand an enormous effort and commitment to quality for children, and on the other hand, the reality of low wages and little respect for their time and expertise.

> *"Criticism can be helpful, though there is the importance of understanding that people are very committed, have been for decades, and are working well beyond the limitations of their salaries. We are all in this to make it work."* (Regional Partner)

There was frequent discussion of the power of recognition and acknowledgement for sustaining change and growth, and the need for the EEC Commissioner to play a clear leadership role in this regard.

Regional leaders are trying to deliver assurances to educators that EEC will continue to invest in this new system. They recognize that they must continue to have time and resources to develop the system so that this work will lead to the achievement of a highly effective early childhood workforce in Massachusetts. Interviewees expressed the feeling that if EEC could offer this explicit assurance to them, they could confidently carry the message into the field. This was viewed as EEC making an investment in the change alongside the regional leaders in the trenches.

Emotional Climate

How do we, as a system, care for one another in ways that nurture growth and sustain our efforts? Various versions of this question were repeated throughout the course of interviews conducted in this study. Many people reported feelings of discouragement and being overwhelmed. Several articulated the sense that the field is listing away from tolerable stress and into the toxic stress zone. Regional leaders expressed serious concern:

> *"Programs and providers have really been patient about as much as they can be… we can't just keep piling more and more pressure to get better and better, when there is no light at the end of the rainbow - that is a real worry. We can talk about how important the field is but people are sweating their life's blood."*
> (Regional Partner)

Regional leaders described a sense of responsibility to protect providers and educators in the field from this stress. Several suggested that EEC promote its compensation initiative as an antidote to the toxicity of this stress.

F. Use of Data to Inform Regional Practices

This section presents findings about what regions want to know in order to assess the effectiveness of their services, as well as how regions have monitored and assessed their progress this year.

Key Findings:

- **Regions requested improved access to EEC data that could inform their work.**

- **People reported an interest in knowing whether their professional development services led to improved engagement and improved outcomes for educators, for classroom and program quality, and for child and family outcomes.**

- **Confidentiality issues should be clarified because it is an important factor in providing data to regions.**

What Regions Need to Know

All six regions expressed a desire for access to EEC data regarding the professional qualifications registry and the EPS monthly reports. Each region reported to EEC monthly on a required set of reporting elements. The inclusion of qualitative data in these monthly reports was viewed as an important missing evaluative piece, and EEC agreed to add this to the reporting form starting in FY12. This feedback was viewed by all of the regions as critical to their being able to move forward in an informed and strategic way. Many regions emphasized the need for these data in order to identify areas for improvement.

In terms of evaluating their efforts, regions articulated several key evaluation questions of interest to them:

- What data have we captured at the regional and state level and what does it mean?
- How will we know if we are making a difference in educator and program quality?
- How will we know if we are making a difference for children and families?

Interviewees talked about the significance of having a means to measure the partnerships and the effectiveness of the partnerships in terms of their actual progress in the field.

> *"People are coming [to trainings], but I want to know are they learning from what they're getting? Do they buy into wanting to get more? And are we moving in the general direction of this idea that everybody in the field recognizes them as being a professional, and having continuous training?"* (Regional Partner)

EEC staff members discussed wanting more qualitative data regarding how the system has impacted the quality of services and what goals have actually been achieved. EEC staff members expressed that knowing who is actually moving along the pathways toward a degree and QRIS would be very helpful:

> *"...of the people that are touched by this grant have they improved their practice? Have we motivated people to think about a degree path and…. CDA? … And in coaching and mentoring …Have we moved those directors in being effective leaders within their programs? … do they go back to their programs and do individual development plans with their staff? ...talk to their staff about their next steps? Do they suggest CEU classes that they've seen on the EEC calendar for staff? "*

Many interviewees discussed wanting to have more data on the courses, training, coaching and mentoring that show results with children, measuring the extent to which professional development transfers into classroom/program quality increases. Regional leaders want some way of documenting the organic process of educators' progress in their clinical classroom skills. As one regional partner expressed,

> *"I would love to see a competency based system that really looked at what people know and can do and made decisions about whether they were qualified and competent on that basis."*

Many regions have focused a great deal of time on some of the challenges of supporting educators and providers on the pathways to higher quality and increased competency. Understanding the strategies that were effective in this process matters. A systematic way to

assess the needs in the field and directly connect these needs to offerings in a continuous cycle will be important moving forward.

Some EEC staff members said they thought it was too early to measure success accurately. At the same time, they too wanted ways of knowing that educators are getting what they need. Implementation science supports this view that measuring outcomes during initial implementation is premature (Fixsen et al, 2005). Evaluating the implementation of the system can document progress, lessons learned, and identify areas for improvement. Educator and provider access to the system and engagement can be measured during this time as well. As the system matures, and as each key component of the system is fully and effectively implemented and developed, we can then expect to see the anticipated outcomes and can measure them to assess the system's success.

How Regions Measure Progress

A wide range of progress monitoring and evaluation strategies were reported by regions and these strategies are listed here:

- Online surveys of educator needs
- Tracking the IPDP and family engagement practices of providers
- Site visits to programs
- Informal dialogue and opinion polls at all trainings, meetings, site visits
- Reflective dialogue at meetings: taking time to reflect and listen to multiple perspectives
- Telephone interviews and problem solving discussion with partners
- Training evaluations to solicit participant feedback
- Tracking attendance and participation in services
- Tracking retention in relation to professional development (who is remaining in programs following provision of services over time)

It appeared that two regions were intentionally using multiple progress monitoring strategies. One region is piloting the development of a data collection system designed to assess the access, engagement, and progress of educators and providers in order to inform the work of the partnership. Other regions reported that evaluation was still a question, or that they felt unsure about how to authentically measure progress.

For the most part the study seemed to indicate that regions expected EEC to provide them with feedback on how they were doing, although many did collect some types of informal and/or formal data for their own purposes. Clarification and coordination regarding data collection systems at the state and regional levels could improve the capacity of regions to use data to inform their work. In addition, data regarding effective professional development strategies and approaches was widely seen as necessary to inform professional development service planning and delivery.

IV.   Recommendations

The key findings presented above suggest the following recommendations to the Department of Early Education and Care:

Governance

It took repetition and review, trial and error for regions to make sense of their role and EEC's expectations. This is consistent with theories of adult learning - adults need to see, hear, and engage with new ideas more than once before they internalize the knowledge (Belenky et al, 1986). Some people experienced the change to the new system as a loss and it took time to understand and adjust to it, and to move on with the new system. At the same time, many regional leaders saw the change as an opportunity to design something new and improve the prior professional development system. In regions where people reported understanding the new governance, there was also more innovation, creativity, and problem-solving. Evidence thus far shows that the more clearly regional leaders understand the scope of their authority and decision making capacity, the more they will develop regional innovations and responses to the field in alignment with EEC. Innovations, solutions and new strategies that are sourced from the field provide a renewable human resource that EEC can tap into for continuous development and improvements to professional development. Such innovations should be closely tracked, reported, rewarded and replicated where appropriate.

1. This year EEC invested in supporting regional partnerships to implement the new system. Continue to invest in and build a sustainable regional infrastructure. Nurture the continuing development of the regional governance systems.

2. Continue efforts to define the scope, limits, and purpose of regional authority and responsibility particularly as it relates to innovation. Promote, recognize, and value innovative local practices within regions that hold promise for advancing the field and overcoming challenges.

Communication

EEC's presentation of information and provisions of support did not necessarily translate into rapid understanding in the field. That is, just because EEC 'put it down' doesn't mean the field 'picked it up'. Repetition and review were, and continue to be necessary for thorough and widespread understanding, especially regarding the multi-faceted relationship between QRIS and professional development pathways. There is a complexity to the new system that requires continuing technical assistance.

3. Assure a timely, accurate and high quality information flow from EEC to regional partnerships. Assure that regions can access technical assistance needed to build a strong regional system.

4. Assess outreach efforts to Priority A, dual language and family child care educators.

5. Continue progress made to foster reciprocal communication, or communication loops, between EEC and regional partnerships to promote sharing of information and perspectives, and to mutually inform policy and practice.

Professional Development Service Delivery and Alignment

Many regional partners developed an expanded view of professional development and could see greater possibilities for advancing the field as a result of this effort. At the same time, scarcity of resources had regional leaders questioning whether and how they could sustain their efforts. The

demand for more training is causing educators to question whether or not they can afford to stay in the field. Financing for compensation must be tied to the new professional development system. EEC's current initiative in this regard should be more widely publicized. The implementation of MOUs is a promising practice that may contribute to professional development, and should be evaluated and the best practices shared. In addition, further supports for alignment can increase the capacity of regions to successfully align across systems.

6. Share efforts by EEC to address compensation issues and engage regional partnerships in initiatives and efforts focused on compensation and incentives.

7. Implement utilization of MOU's between educators and program directors, and collect/share data regarding MOU use to inform policy and practice development.

8. Advance the regions' understanding about specific strategies for aligning professional development with QRIS. EEC should continue to provide much needed support and technical assistance to regions in order to enable them to effectively implement the new system and achieve the desired outcomes. Regional partners can play a critical role in engaging providers with QRIS. Share best practices and effective strategies for effectively increasing provider participation in QRIS.

9. A long range recommendation is to increase regional capacity around effective practices for assessing educator competencies and individual pathways, and use educator/provider assessment in a continuous cycle to inform professional development service planning and delivery.

Use of Data to Inform Regional Practices

A barrier to sharing EEC data has been concern about the confidentiality of educator and provider data. These confidentiality issues should be resolved. Regional leaders expressed a desire for more data to inform their work and monitor their progress. Regional leaders want to know what services lead to improved engagement and outcomes for educators, and for classroom and program quality for children and families.

10. Continue efforts to provide lead agents with access to relevant and useful EEC data on educators and providers.

11. Assess options for increasing the use of evidence-based professional development approaches, and support regions in evaluating the effectiveness of professional development services. Develop a toolkit of resources regions can use to readily evaluate the quality of their professional development services, improvements in educator and classroom quality, and ultimately child and family outcomes.

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Appendix A: Interview 1 Protocol Fall 2010 Regional Leads and Partners

1. What are the unique strengths and challenges in your region in terms of early childhood professional development?

2. How does your regional partnership communicate with its members? What works, what could be better?

3. How does the governance or executive committee work in your regional partnership? What works, what could be better?

4. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for your regional partnership in the next 6-12 months?

5. Have you met any new partners as a result of being a part of your regional partnership? If so, please describe any changes/differences you see as a result of having new people at the table.

6. How satisfied are you with the regional partnership during this birth/early development phase? What is working? What could be better?

7. What have been the positive forces for change in your partnership?

8. How does the new system work in terms of allowing your region some control or autonomy over professional development in your region? How has your region used that control?

9. Is MA heading in the right direction with this change? Please explain.

10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol 3 Spring 2011 Regional Leads and Partners

1. How satisfied are you with your regional partnership now that we're nearing the end of the first year? What is working? What could be better?

2. How has your thinking about professional development been influenced by your participation in the new EPS system? (for example, how you think about what kind of professional development is needed, or about professional development pathways)?

3. If you have been in a position to explain or communicate about changes in the professional development system to others, please describe this role. (follow up: How do you feel about this role?)

4. What has EEC done that has been helpful in developing your regional system?

5. How do you think your region has input into designing the regional system in ways that best meet the professional development needs of the people within your region?

6. How are decisions made in your partnership, for example about the budget, the FY12 proposal, and subcontracts for professional development services? Are you satisfied with this process? Please explain.

7. In terms of providing services to educators and providers, what groups have been the most difficult to reach and why? What do you think needs to happen to more effectively reach them?

8. In terms of evaluation, what do you need to know in order to assess your region's effectiveness providing professional development services to educators and providers? (and How are you measuring success?)

9. The EPS system calls for an alignment between professional development offerings, the QRIS, and professional development pathways. How has your region responded to this call (and what specific changes have been implemented? What are the challenges you've faced)?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol 2 EEC Staff

1. How would you describe your role in the EEC professional development system? (what does your role involve; what is the unique contribution of your role in this system/system change process?)

2. Describe the ways you are engaged in outreach and communication with others about the professional development system? What have been the challenges and successes for you in this regard?

3. How are you measuring the success of (the) regional partnership(s)? How are you evaluating the progress and success of the educators and providers? (If needed, ask for ways beyond EEC's collection of data).

4. To what extent do you feel the regional partnerships have (or are exercising) the autonomy to design a system that is responsive to local needs?

5. In what ways has regional governance changed over the course of this year? What other changes have you seen in the regional partnerships?

6. What are the strengths of the new professional development system? What is the biggest challenge at this point?

7. How has the role of EEC shifted over the course of this system change process?

8. What positive forces for change have you seen in this first year of implementation?

9. What do you see as the key questions for research/evaluation of the EPS system for next year?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share?