
IOWA Task Force on Professional Levels and Competencies

Final Report to the Iowa
Department of Education

December 18, 2009

IOWA TASK FORCE ON PROFESSIONAL LEVELS AND COMPETENCIES

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**Iowa Task Force on Professional Levels and Competencies
Final Report to the Iowa Department of Education**

Submitted by Stacie G. Goffin, Consultant and Facilitator
December 18, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Iowa Department of Education (DE) convened the Iowa Task Force on Professional Levels and Competencies (PLC Task Force) in Winter 2009 in response to concerns raised by the Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) Professional Development Steering Committee. The first concern related to discrepancies between the Departments of Education's and Human Services' requirements for teaching personnel. Second, clear career transitions between roles in care and education settings overseen by the two departments were missing.

When the task force was officially approved, membership and specific responsibilities were developed by the DE in partnership with the ECI Professional Development Steering Committee, who together issued the Charge to the PLC Task Force. DE also issued an RFP to identify a consultant and facilitator knowledgeable of early care and education issues and experienced with supporting systemic-oriented work. DE Early Childhood Consultant Penny Milburn took responsibility for overseeing this process and also assumed responsibility for overseeing the work of the PLC Task Force.

In late December 2008, Stacie Goffin (Consultant), Goffin Strategy Group, a nationally recognized early care and education consultant and facilitator, was identified for this role through an anonymous, peer review process. She began her work in January 2009 by conducting 13 interviews with DE identified state leaders for the purpose of gathering information about the state's work to date in professional development system building and learning what interviewees saw as necessary for ensuring the task force's success. Soon thereafter, Molly Luchtel, a graduate student at Iowa State University, joined the facilitation team as Recorder.

OVERVIEW

The first PLC Task Force meeting was held on March 20, 2009. The 17 members¹ convened by the DE were selected to represent a cross section of the state in terms of geographical representation, engagement with early care and education, and diversity of

¹ Note: Two of the 17 members resigned from the task force due to job responsibilities and were not replaced.

viewpoints. (See Figure 1 for a list of task force members and Appendix A for full biographical information.) Although initially convened for five meetings, the task force ultimately met a total of eight times between March 20th and November 3rd, 2009. The task force concluded its deliberations with the approval of seven recommendations that identify performance levels and associated essential competencies for early care and education teaching staff (teachers and assistant teachers) and that address next step uses for these recommendations as part of statewide efforts to create a comprehensive, early care and education professional development system. The recommendations also include documents created to facilitate consistent interpretation of the task force's work.

Figure 1 – Members, PLC Task Force	
Name	Position
Mary Ann Adams	Consultant Department of Education Des Moines, Iowa
Mary Airy	Early Childhood Consultant Grant Wood AEA 10 Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Michael Cavin	Consultant Board of Educational Examiners Des Moines, Iowa
Dawn Collins	Child Care Resource and Referral Professional Development Program Manager Department of Human Services Des Moines, Iowa
Delora J. Hade	Early Childhood Instructor Des Moines Area Community Colleges & President, Community College Early Childhood Alliance Ankeny, Iowa
Sally Hartley	Early Childhood Special Education Consultant Northwest AEA 12 Sioux City, Iowa
Susan Hegland	Associate Professor Human Development & Family Studies Iowa State University Ames, Iowa
Penny M. Lingle	Director ECCA Head Start Moorhead, IA
Geri McMahon	Consultant Board of Educational Examiners. Des Moines, Iowa
Barbara Merrill	Executive Director Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children Des Moines, Iowa
Judith Bowstead Nye	Interim Dean Luther College Decorah, Iowa
Carol Rainforth	Training Coordinator Child Care Resource & Referral of Central Iowa Des Moines, Iowa

Jill Uhlenberg	Department Head Curriculum & Instruction University of Northern Iowa Department of Curriculum and Instruction Cedar Falls, Iowa
Terry Wangberg	Director, TriUMPH Early Childhood Program Southwestern Community College Creston, Iowa 50801

BACKGROUND

The PLC Task Force was not the first step in the state’s professional development system building efforts, however. Moving from a history of efforts to advance the status and competence of Iowa’s early care and education workforce, approximately a year earlier the DE convened 25 stakeholders from the Departments of Human Services, Education, Management, and Public Health, plus Area Education Agency (AEA) Directors of Special Education and Instructional Services, AEA early childhood consultants, community college and college/university faculty, Child Care Resource and Referral staff, and Iowa State University Extension. The meeting was organized to develop statewide consensus around an early care and education professional development system tied to personnel standards.

Important decisions resulted from this meeting. Participants, comprised of the state’s early care and education leadership, agreed that the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) guidelines for preparing early childhood professionals² should form the foundation for the state’s professional development system building. These leaders also concurred that this work should move forward with funds available from the Iowa Empowerment Office and in partnership with the ECI Professional Development Steering Committee.

Shortly thereafter, DE was awarded a grant to facilitate next steps in this work, and in July 2007, Dan Haggard was brought to Iowa. The Early Childhood Services Deputy Director of New Mexico’s Office of Child Development and widely recognized for his efforts to develop New Mexico’s early care and education professional development system, Haggard facilitated a broader stakeholder group of individuals to craft a vision and framework for an early care, health, and education professional development system in Iowa.

² National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2003). *Preparing early childhood professionals: NAEYC’s standards for initial licensure, advanced, and associate degree programs*. Washington, DC: Author.

CHARGE TO THE PLC TASK FORCE

The Charge to the PLC Task Force (Charge; see Appendix B) was issued by the Iowa Department of Education and the Early Childhood Iowa Professional Development Steering Committee. The Charge assigned the task force with responsibility for (1) identifying performance levels for teachers and assistant teachers in early care and education settings for children from birth through kindergarten and (2) developing essential competencies for each of the identified performance levels. The decision to concentrate on the roles of teacher and teacher assistant emerged from role priorities identified during the Consultant's interviews and in recognition that a tight focus was important to producing a successful outcome.

The Charge clearly identified eight results for the task force's work. These eight expectations were integrated into the task force's work and used as a filter for ensuring that the task force fulfilled its mandate. Specifically, the performance levels identified by the task force and associated competencies were to:

- Address all teaching staff in the State's early care and education system, regardless of program type or auspice;
- Ensure teaching staff had the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet required quality program standards and State early learning standards;
- Address the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals need to know and be able to do to be recognized as early care and education teachers or assistant teachers for children from birth through kindergarten;
- Update/revise the State's 2004 Core Body of Knowledge for Best Practices for teaching staff who work with children from birth through kindergarten;
- Identify levels of professional development and recommend competencies associated with each of the professional development/performance levels identified;
- Ensure that the recommended proficiency/performance levels and essential competencies considered required program standards and teacher preparation requirements;
- Ensure that the recommended competencies aligned with the Iowa Core Curriculum essential concepts and skills kindergarten to grade 3; and,
- Ensure that the recommended performance levels and competencies advanced the State's efforts to create a cohesive early care, health, and education professional development system.

PLC TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

An overview of the PLC Task Force's seven recommendations and work process follows. The recommendations in full can be found in Appendix D. By way of this final report, the task force is submitting its recommendations to the Iowa Department of Education. The Iowa Department of Education approval process that now begins is outlined in Appendix C.

Approved at the final meeting on November 3, 2009, the PLC Task Force recommendations were forged through small and whole group work, review of the growing literature on competencies for early care and education teaching staff and on professional development system building, extensive debate, and public input. The PLC Task Force voted separately on each of the seven recommendations, each of which it unanimously approved. Appendix E lists the wealth of documents provided in support of the task force's work. Many of these documents can be found at the PLC Task Force web site (<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecpd/>).

The first three of the seven recommendations respond to the Charge to identify performance levels for teachers and teacher assistants, accompanied by the essential competencies associated with each level. Recommendations four through seven address the steps needed to ensure that the performance levels and essential competencies become the backbone of ECI's professional development system for early educators. Each of these four recommendations is accompanied by a Rationale statement.

Recommendation 1

Create three performance levels for teachers and teacher assistants working with children from birth through kindergarten, regardless of program setting. Embed the performance levels in ECI's Professional Development System.

The task force recommends that performance expectations for teachers and for teacher assistants be organized by three levels of proficiency: Progressing Professional, Skilled Professional, and Mastery Professional. The roles of teacher and teacher assistant should be viewed as independent of each other. Each role's three performance levels and their associated essential competencies should be embedded in ECI's Professional Development System. The level of performance associated with each of these tiers can be found in Appendix D, Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 2

Ensure that each performance level for teachers is associated with essential competencies that articulate performance expectations.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that each performance level for teacher assistants is associated with essential competencies that articulate performance expectations.

Honed through repeated internal and external review and editing, the essential competencies associated with each of the three performance levels are based on NAEYC's standards for teacher preparation for initial licensure, advanced, and associate degree programs. Importantly, for the purposes of this work, the NAEYC proposed relationship between their standards and level of formal preparation was ignored and postponed as a task for later work (see below). When more than half-way through their work NAEYC issued an updated position statement on standards for professional preparation programs,³ the task force reviewed and revised its work to reflect the addition by NAEYC of a new national, teacher preparation standard. See Appendix D, Recommendations 2 and 3 for presentation of the essential competencies recommended for teachers and teacher assistants.

In addition to being organized by performance level, the recommended essential competencies are arranged by the child's age from birth through kindergarten: Infants; Toddlers and Twos, Preschoolers, and Kindergarten. The competencies encompass educating and caring for typically developing children and those with special needs. Ensuring that the competencies addressed the developmental and learning needs and interests of each and every child was a strong value that undergirds the task force's work.

Recommendation 4

Create a Single Teaching Endorsement for Early Childhood Educators Based on the Essential Competencies for Early Care and Education Teachers.

Rationale

The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) has multiple teaching endorsements for early childhood educators. Feedback from institutions of higher education indicates that the presence of multiple endorsements causes confusion among educators. Further, these endorsements are not comparable and as a result may inadvertently endorse uneven levels of performance among early educators. (See Appendix D, Recommendation 4.)

Recommendation 5

Align Iowa's Paraeducator Certification with Current Best Practices in Early Childhood Education.

³ NAEYC. (2009). NAEYC standards for early childhood professional preparation programs. A position statement approved by the NAEYC Governing Board. Washington, DC: Author.

Rationale

The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) has an approved, voluntary certification for paraeducators working with children in public school settings. With stronger early childhood program standards requirements being advanced by state and national organizations, such as Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, NAEYC's (National Association for the Education of Young Children) Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, and requirements outlined in the most recent reauthorization of Head Start, demand is growing for better prepared early care and education teaching staff. These increasing expectations provide an opportunity to review the current paraeducator certification as it relates to early childhood education and the essential competencies for teaching assistants. (See Appendix D, Recommendation 5.

Recommendation 6

Link Teacher and Teacher Assistant Performance Levels with Early Childhood Education Certifications, Degrees, and Endorsements.

Rationale

The PLC Task Force identified three performance levels for the teacher and teacher assistant teaching roles: Progressing Professional; Skilled Professional, and Master Professional. To ensure that an accessible career ladder is created for these two teaching roles, the recommended performance levels should be coordinated with current early care and education program requirements and associated with state and national teaching staff certificates, credentials, degrees, and endorsements. For the purposes of this recommendation, teaching staff is inclusive of teachers and teacher assistants in all early care and education settings. (See Appendix D, Recommendation 6.)

Recommendation 7

Create an Assessment Tool to Promote Use of the Early Learning Performance Levels and Essential Competencies by Teaching Staff and Their Supervisors.

Rationale

The performance levels and essential competencies were developed to promote appropriate and consistent performance expectations for teaching staff working with young children from birth through kindergarten. To ensure achievement of this outcome, a widely distributed implementation tool for use by teaching staff and their supervisors is needed to ensure wide spread use of the new competencies.

THE PLC TASK FORCE'S WORK PROCESS

The PLC Task Force was scheduled to meet five times. When it became evident to the task force that additional, deliberative time was needed, more meetings were added, for a total of eight meetings. All meetings were held in Des Moines and ranged in length from half-day to two days.

Beyond its Charge from the DE and ECI Professional Development Steering Committee, the task force's work was driven by three documents:

1. *Guidelines for Working Together*, behavioral norms and decision-making rules approved at the task force's first meeting on March 20th (See Appendix F);
2. A *Work Plan*, also approved on March 20th (See Appendix G; note that this work plan was approved prior to the addition of three more meetings and the decision to incorporate a more elaborate process for seeking external input); and
3. *NAEYC's teacher preparation guidelines*, a copy of which was provided to each member.

One week prior to each meeting, members received

1. The meeting agenda (All meeting agenda and meeting notes, including PLC Task Force decisions, may be found at the PLC Task Force web site [<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecpd/>]).
2. Briefing materials carefully selected to represent current thinking and viewpoints on early care and education teacher competencies and professional development systems. (See Appendix E for a list of briefing documents.)
3. The option to participate in Optional Orientation Calls or speak individually with the Consultant. These calls were organized to review the meeting agenda, pose questions to help participants organize their thinking, and respond to questions.

Meeting agenda were crafted to be results-oriented and sequenced to ensure that the PLC Task Force fully met its Charge. Members were organized into five work groups, each representing one of NAEYC's teacher preparation standards (prior to the addition of a sixth standard in July 2009; see above). A range of facilitation techniques were implemented to allow members from different groups to interact with, critique, and assist one another in reaching consensus on the final recommendations.

Each work group was facilitated by a PLC Task Force member who also assumed responsibility for convening an external work group to broaden the input and expertise available to the task force. These external work groups met between task force meetings two, three, and four; a list of work group members is found in Appendix H. To ensure consistent understanding across work groups, each chair was provided with briefing documents and an annotated agenda for the first meeting. All work group meetings took place via conference calls.

To ensure that its work reflected the most current knowledge base and was well conceived, the PLC Task Force participated in two additional out-reach activities, both of which contributed significantly to the competency development process. First, the PLC Task Force identified individuals with expertise in early childhood care and education to review the task force’s emerging essential competencies for teaching staff. Four of the selected individuals would be from in-state; an additional four individuals were to be recognized external experts on teacher competencies.

With input from the ECI Professional Development Steering Committee, DE approved a list of eight reviewers, using selection criteria approved by the PLC Task Force. The eight reviewers (see side bar next page) were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Are there any glaring omissions?
- Are the proposed essential competencies clearly articulated and practice-oriented?
- Do the proposed essential competencies identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by teaching staff to facilitate children’s learning and development so they will be prepared to succeed in school and beyond?
- Are the proposed competencies truly *core* to the effective practice of teaching staff?

At a more technical level:

- Do the proposed essential competencies align with the rubric/indicator with which they are associated?
- Are the proposed essential competencies aligned with the child’s developmental level, the teaching role, and performance level with which they are associated?
- Do redundancies or overlaps exist that could be eliminated?

External Reviewers

In-state Reviewers

- Kristine Croatt, School Improvement Facilitator for Early Childhood & Elementary Reading
Keystone AEA
Dubuque, IA
- Susan Maude, Associate Professor
Human Development and Family Studies
Iowa State University
Ames, IA
- Kathie Readout, Early Childhood Program Director
Mid-Iowa Community Action, Inc.
Marshalltown, IA
- Kevin Ryan, Principal
Fillmore Elementary School
Davenport, IA

National Reviewers

- Marquita Davis, Commissioner
Department of Children’s Affairs
Montgomery, AL
- Dan Haggard, Deputy Director for Program Early Childhood Services
Division
Children, Youth and Families Dept.
Santa Fe, NM
- JoAn Herren,
Senior Fellow
James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership
University of Maryland
College Park, MD
- Peter Mangione,
Co-director,
Center for Family and Child Studies
WestED
Sausalito, CA

Then, following draft approval of the teaching staff performance levels and essential competencies in August, 14 public Stakeholder Input sessions were scheduled to gather input from across the state (See side bar, next page.) Often taking advantage of pre-existing meetings, the sessions were widely publicized via task force members and others' list serves; information also was provided on the PLC Task Force web site where readers could download the draft performance levels and essential competencies for review prior to attending a Stakeholder Input session.

Facilitated by PLC Task Force members, who were assisted by extensive support documents, attendees were asked six questions, listed below.

1. Are there glaring omissions in the essential competencies for teachers? For assistant teachers? If so, please be specific.
2. Are the essential competencies for teaching staff clearly articulated and practice-oriented?
3. Are the proposed essential competencies truly *core* to the effective practice of teaching staff?
4. Do the essential competencies align with the child's developmental level, the teaching role, and the performance level with which they are associated – for teachers? For assistant teachers?
5. Three performance levels have been identified:
 Progressing Professional
 Skilled Professional
 Mastery Professional
 How do you respond to these three performance levels? Do they adequately capture differences in the performance levels of teaching staff?
6. Are there any competencies of concern: If so, please explain.

Stakeholder Input Sessions

- Teach Iowa Advisory Committee, West Des Moines, Iowa
- ECI Council, Johnston, Iowa
- Child Care Resource & Referral Stakeholders, Urbandale, Iowa
- State Child Care Advisory Council, Des Moines, Iowa
- Bureau of Early Childhood Services, DE, Urbandale, Iowa
- Child Development Coordinating Council, Des Moines, Iowa
- Northeast Iowa, West Union, Iowa
- East Central Iowa, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- Eastern and Southeastern Iowa, Bettendorf, Iowa
- AEA Early Childhood Leadership Network, Urbandale, Iowa
- Iowa Head Start Board, Des Moines, Iowa
- Iowa Community College ECE Alliance at the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (IAEYC) Conference, Des Moines, Iowa
- Northwest Iowa, Sioux City
- IAEYC Annual Conference, Des Moines, Iowa

Following the last Stakeholder Input session in early October, responses from the 14 sessions were organized and synthesized for members. This input was given priority at the task force's next to last meeting in October.

Also guiding the task force's work were assessment criteria which members used to ensure that their recommendations fully encompassed their responsibilities to DE and the ECI Steering Committee for Professional Development, as well as to children's future well-being. (Guiding Principles for Task Force Recommendations and Criteria for Assessing the Essential Competencies can be found in Appendices I and J respectively.) To enhance consistent interpretation and future implementation of their recommendations, the task force created a Glossary of Terms (see Appendix K) and a list of Approved Verbs for Use in Essential Competencies (see Appendix L).

In accordance with Iowa's Sunshine Law, all PLC Task Force meetings were open to the public. To further promote transparency regarding the task force's deliberations and encourage public awareness of the work, all meeting agenda, Meeting Notes, and briefing materials were placed on the PLC Task Force web site (www.iowa.gov/educate/ecpd/).

In closing: Convening the Iowa Professional Levels and Competencies Task Force was one more step in the State's efforts to create a comprehensive early care, health, and education professional development system. Although not new work for Iowa's early care and education's leadership, it was a favorable moment in time, thanks to a growing appreciation across the State for the importance of a well prepared early care and education workforce.

PLC Task Force members recognized that the time had arrived to move beyond conversation and to engage in decision making. The sustained time commitment and focus exerted by PLC Task Force members demonstrated their commitment to this crucial next step in creating a comprehensive professional development system for early childhood care and education. Further, individual task force members and the DE Early Childhood Consultant have agreed to do what is necessary to ensure that the recommendations are carried forward. Notwithstanding current economic circumstances, the dedication exists to move forward. The seven recommendations needed to take this step are herein presented to the Iowa Department of Education for review and approval.