



QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS TO CONSIDER: STIMULATING QUALITY AND HEIGHTENING STANDARDS FOR INFANT AND TODDLER SERVICES

Questions for State-Level Leaders to Consider is a tool designed to help state leaders assess policies and practices that can serve to build a system that will advance the quality of infant and toddler early care and education services in their State. Such state-level initiatives will facilitate the development of local-level service delivery systems.

Systems Change

Across the nation, state leaders are addressing the challenge of ensuring an affordable and accessible supply of high-quality care for infants and toddlers. Many have realized a need to work collaboratively among different agencies, each providing a piece of the “puzzle,” to move toward a cohesive and seamless system that provides services to infants and toddlers from low-income families, and pregnant women and their families. These leaders recognize the benefits of adopting a comprehensive approach through systems change in order to improve services across programs. Such systems:

- Provide full-day, full-year care that meets working families’ needs;
- Make available a full array of medical, dental, nutrition, mental health, and family support and education services;
- Promote higher standards for teacher and provider qualifications and skills;
- Enhance classroom and in-home care curricula and learning environments, including literacy practices;
- Develop common outcomes for children and families; and
- Assure continuity of relationship-based, nurturing care for the child and family.

State Regulations, Policies, and Requirements

1. What State efforts have occurred to systematically compare standards and requirements across programs?
2. If there are different standards governing each of the State’s infant and toddler programs and services, how do these different standards and requirements compare? For example:
 - ◆ What State regulations and requirements address staff:child ratios?
 - ◆ What are the ratio requirements for infants and toddlers?
 - ◆ What are the group size requirements for infants and toddlers?
 - ◆ What are the teacher and family child care (FCC) provider qualification requirements for each of the State’s programs?
 - ◆ What are the space and square footage requirements for classrooms or FCC homes and outdoor play areas?
 - ◆ What are the requirements for funding care that is not regulated in the State?

3. If standards and requirements differ between the State's infant-toddler (child care, early intervention, and home visiting) programs and Head Start, what have State leaders done to resolve these differences?
4. What State systems monitor providers' services and compliance with requirements and standards for each of the State's programs?
 - a. Are there plans to merge or coordinate these monitoring systems and to coordinate with the federal EHS monitoring process? If so, how will this happen?
5. How do State leaders ensure that county administrators and decisionmaking bodies understand partnership issues to promote partnering at the local level?

Child Care Subsidy Policies

1. How has the State adjusted its child care subsidy (eligibility, reimbursement) practices and regulations to encourage partnering between local providers?
2. What financial incentives (Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) or tiered reimbursement) exist to encourage partnering between child care centers, FCC homes, and Early Head Start (EHS) programs?

State Incentives and Activities to Stimulate and Sustain Local Partnerships

1. How do state leaders acknowledge and spotlight local partnerships that successfully use multiple funding approaches to develop a comprehensive, high-quality agenda for children and families?
2. What state incentives (fiscal and others) encourage partnering focused on enhancing services for children and families?
3. Are there State policies that present barriers or disincentives to forging partnerships at the local level? What are they?
4. What mechanisms are there for state-level leaders to identify, examine, and address local barriers for partnering programs?
5. How have state-level leaders promoted and built on federal incentives and funding to encourage local partnership efforts (for example, QRIS, professional development and other quality improvement activities, EHS expansion efforts)?
6. How are training and technical assistance (T/TA) systems (for example, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, EHS T/TA projects, State-level projects) coordinated? What efforts exist to link state and federal projects?
7. How will state early education leaders combine efforts to further quality programming for children and draw on infant and toddler initiatives outlined by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to best serve infants and toddlers with disabilities?

Communication Among State-level Early Care and Education Leaders

1. How frequently do the State's key early care and education policymakers and leaders (child care, Head Start, Early Learning Advisory Council, for example) discuss specific partnership issues faced by their respective programs and address these challenges with other state leaders?
2. What state-level systems exist for sharing and analyzing data from program monitoring?
3. How do state-level leaders secure information from providers and parents concerning continuity of care quality issues and transition policies? How is this information used to stimulate change and further ensure partnership efforts?

State Vision on Partnerships at the Local and State Levels

1. What is the long-range and shared vision for partnership efforts within and across the State's early care and education programs for infants and toddlers—child care, FCC, state EHS, home visiting, and early intervention efforts?
2. How was the partnership vision shaped?
3. What systematic plan is there for moving the partnership vision and implementation forward over the next five years? How will this work be sustained by the State?
4. How is the partnership vision communicated to child care, FCC, and EHS stakeholders, programs, and policy leaders?
5. How is the vision communicated to state policymakers and the greater public?
6. How can the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (HHS/ACF) assist the State in achieving a partnership agenda to enrich the quality of early care and education?
7. What types of state-level planning mechanisms assist state leaders in establishing and acting on a shared early care and education agenda? How do these efforts link with HHS/ACF efforts to enhance partnerships and infant-toddler early care and education quality?

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