Pathways to Quality

Charting the Course for a New Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System

A working paper from the Texas Early Learning Council
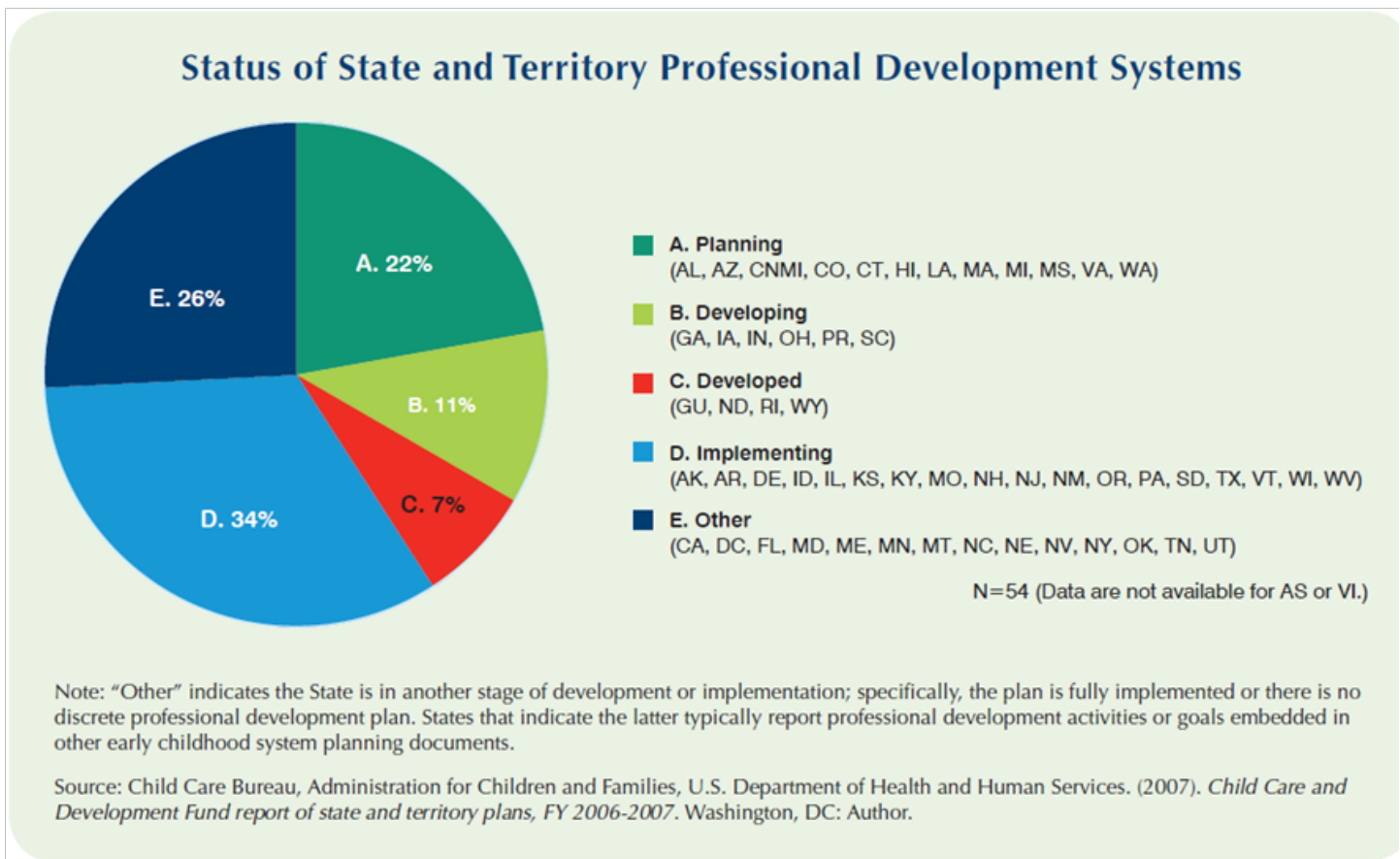
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Introduction

Quality early care and education begins with a highly qualified early childhood workforce (NAEYC, 2009). Professional development systems assist individuals who are interested in joining the field understand what knowledge and skills are needed to provide high quality early care and education to young children. These systems also support seasoned professionals in accessing professional development resources to further their careers and strengthen their knowledge of content in early childhood by staying connected with best practices and new research.

Nearly all states have created or are building professional development systems that include strategies to help practitioners grow professionally (Child Care Bureau, 2007). Below is a breakdown of state systems that are being planned, are in development, are currently implemented, and are being revised.

Figure 1. Status of State and Territory Professional Development Systems

Status of State and Territory Professional Development Systems

A. 22%
E. 26%
B. 11%
C. 7%
D. 34%

A. Planning
(AL, AZ, CNMI, CO, CT, HI, LA, MA, MI, MS, VA, WA)

B. Developing
(GA, IA, IN, OH, PR, SC)

C. Developed
(GU, ND, RI, WY)

D. Implementing
(AK, AR, DE, ID, IL, KS, KY, MO, NH, NJ, NM, OR, PA, SD, TX, VT, WI, WV)

E. Other
(CA, DC, FL, MD, ME, MN, MT, NC, NE, NV, NY, OK, TN, UT)

N=54 (Data are not available for AS or VI.)

Note: "Other" indicates the State is in another stage of development or implementation; specifically, the plan is fully implemented or there is no discrete professional development plan. States that indicate the latter typically report professional development activities or goals embedded in other early childhood system planning documents.

Source: Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *Child Care and Development Fund report of state and territory plans, FY 2006-2007*. Washington, DC: Author.

According to the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC), a professional development system consists of a "dynamic arrangement of interdependent elements." These elements are (NCCIC, 2009):

- Core Knowledge or Core Competencies

- Quality Assurance

- Access and Outreach

- Qualifications/Credentials/Pathways

- Funding

These complementary elements provide the support needed to continuously improve the quality of the state's early childhood workforce. A professional development system that utilizes these elements can be used to create strategies for addressing early childhood workforce issues, such as retention and access to high quality professional development (Child Care Bureau, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to share the vision of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) and its components under each of these five elements. The TECPDS is being developed through a partnership between the Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) and the TECPDS Council [formerly Texas Early Care and Education Career Development System (TECECDS) Council].

The Need for an Early Childhood Professional Development System

Across the nation, the demand for early childhood teachers has increased greatly. Some surveys estimate that 50,000 additional prekindergarten teachers will be needed by 2020 (Clifford and Maxwell, 2002); therefore, the projected demand on training systems for these new teachers is enormous (Pianta, 2009).

In Texas, there were 9,810 prekindergarten teachers in 2010-2011 (Texas Education Agency, 2011), all of whom had to complete 30 hours of annual continuing education in order to maintain their Teacher Certification. In the child care sector, Texas has 46,050 child care providers (NACCRRA, 2011), all of whom, as of September 1, 2011, will need to complete at least 24 hours of annual training. As for Head Start/Early Head Start, the total number of classroom teachers for 2009-2010 was 5,406 (PIR, 2010). Head Start/Early Head Start programs must also comply with a minimum of 24 hours of training a year, and, as of 2013, at least 50% of all Head Start/Early Head Start teachers must have a bachelor's degree (Head Start Act, 2007). Clearly, there is a growing need in Texas for a cross-sector professional development system that will support professionals from all early childhood sectors.

Texas' early childhood professionals work in a range of programs throughout the state, such as Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care (home and center based, non-profit, for-profit and faith-based), Title I Pre-Kindergarten, Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities, home visitation programs, and Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Because the Texas early childhood landscape is comprised of such a diverse collection of agencies, organizations, and programs, professionals experience significant differences in how they are trained and prepared for their critical work educating and caring for young children.

This fragmentation in the requirements for workforce development and training is due, in part, to multiple early childhood state and federal policies. Disparate policies lead to varying initial credentials and on-going professional development requirements for the various types of early childhood professionals in the state. Thus, the key challenges in building an effective early childhood professional development system are identifying common professional development opportunities and developing adequate career pathways for all early childhood professionals in the state. Despite their differences, the sectors are connected in one sense; ongoing professional development should be based in the same set of core knowledge and skills areas, regardless of the sector.

Texas needs a cross-sector early childhood professional development system that integrates policies across the various types of early childhood programs and builds on the state's existing assets and infrastructure to satisfy the needs of all types of early childhood professionals. The system should support the entire workforce while avoiding duplication of efforts.

Over the past two decades, significant efforts have taken place to support a statewide early childhood professional development system. Chief among these is the second edition of *The Texas Plan: Statewide Early Education and Development System*. This critical policy document, conceptualized by a statewide collaborative of researchers, practitioners, consumers, and other stakeholders, outlines seven policy recommendations for teaching standards that include specifics for training, utilization of core competencies, and well-articulated educational pathways (TECEC, 2005). It is envisioned that these policy recommendations will be fulfilled by the new Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS).

Additionally, the Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office (THSSCO) has provided professional development resources in Texas since the early 1990's. The THSSCO has provided these resources through the Texas Early Care and Education Career Development System (TECECDS). Among its accomplishments, the TECECDS developed the first and most commonly used set of core knowledge and skills areas for practitioners, administrators, and trainers in Texas, as well as the Texas Trainer Registry, a voluntary trainer approval system. Both of these accomplishments provide a strong foundation for the new TECPDS.

A well-developed professional development system will ultimately enhance the quality of the workforce as a whole, supporting school readiness outcomes for young children throughout the state. The ideal professional development system will serve anyone working in the field of early childhood, regardless of their role, sector, or level of experience. It will also act as a guide for mapping out individual professional development needs and goals.

The Role of the Texas Early Learning Council

The Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) is the designated State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care for Texas, under the federal *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*. Texas Governor Rick Perry established the 19-member Council in late 2009. As stipulated in its application for funding under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, the TELC will take critical steps and expend significant resources to support the development of a new, robust early childhood professional development system for Texas.

The TELC has identified "Early Childhood Workforce and Professional Development" as one of its four priority need areas and has developed the following workforce and professional development objectives to support school readiness outcomes in the state:

- Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood education and care professionals in Texas

- Assess the capacity of 2-year and 4-year public/private institutions of higher education

- Support the professional development, recruitment, and retention of the early childhood workforce

Through collaborative efforts between the TELC and the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) Council, new, specific workforce development components for Texas will be created in order to satisfy these priority objectives. The new components to be developed are:

- Revised and enhanced Core Knowledge & Skills Areas (to be renamed Core Competencies)

- Career Ladder

- Workforce Registry

- Statewide Professional Development Calendar

- Job Board

- Professional Development Planning Tool

- College Directory of Early Childhood/Child Development Programs

- Compensation Study and Retention Report

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Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System

Under the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, the **Administration for Children and Families** managed the establishment of and funding for the Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office and the Texas Early Learning Council.

The **Texas Early Learning Council** (TELC), appointed by Governor Perry in 2009, and the **Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office** (THSSCO) are housed within the **Children's Learning Institute** at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. TELC and THSSCO support the development of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS).

CHILDREN'S LEARNING INSTITUTE

TEXAS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

Texas Head Start
State Collaboration Office

TECPDS is an initiative under the TELC **Workforce and Professional Development Subcommittee**. Professional development is one of TELC's four priority areas.

THSSCO and the **Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System Advisory Council** work together to manage the cross-sector TECPDS, and its predecessor, the Texas Early Care and Education Career Development System (TECECDS).

The **Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System** is housed at the Children's Learning Institute. TELC and THSSCO fund the development of TECPDS. THSSCO manages and maintains TECPDS. Two groups, the **TELC Workforce and Professional Development Subcommittee** and the **Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System Advisory Council**, provide guidance for the development of TECPDS.

Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System

The completed Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System will be the product of old and new efforts, interconnected elements, and important components. For more information on the TELC and TECPDS, visit earlylearningtexas.org.

Texas' Future – The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS)

As stated previously, a professional development system typically features five interconnected elements. The new Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System will be designed with these elements in mind: Core Knowledge, Quality Assurance, Access and Outreach, Qualifications, Credentials and Pathways, and Funding.

Core Knowledge (Core Competencies)

Each early childhood professional needs certain knowledge and the ability to demonstrate certain competencies in order to make a positive impact on the lives of young children and their families. Core knowledge refers to specific, basic concepts that early childhood professionals should learn and understand. Core competencies refer to an individual's demonstrated skills and abilities. Core knowledge and competencies are the foundation of a professional development system and are often aligned with state early learning guidelines (ELGs), which describe what children should know and be able to do. The TELC is updating and enhancing the current Texas Core Knowledge & Skills Areas (CKAs) into new Core Competencies to reflect current early childhood research and support the development of the TECPDS.

Core knowledge and competencies are generally categorized for professionals by the age and/or developmental range of children they care for and educate (e.g. adults working with children birth to age 8, all adults working with children birth to age 13, etc.) and level of knowledge and observable skills of the professional. These competencies should: serve as the basis for approval and tracking of training; establish requirements for credentials, such as Child Development Associate (CDA); define Career Ladder levels; and, serve as a foundation or pathway to articulation with institutions of higher education. Finally, the core knowledge and competencies adults acquire should be associated with positive child outcomes and improved program quality (NCCIC, 2007).

Significant thought and research has gone into the development of core competencies nationally. For instance, in 2009, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) revised their position statement on Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs. The new position includes the perspectives of many varied stakeholders, including the Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ACCESS), the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC/

DEC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). NAEYC's new position includes standards that are relevant across a range of roles and settings. These standards are: (1) promoting child development and learning; (2) building family and community relationships; (3) observing, documenting, and assessing; (4) using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families; (5) teaching and learning; and (6) becoming a professional (NAEYC, 2009).

NAEYC's standards are used in higher education accreditation systems, in state policy development, and by professional development programs and systems (NAEYC, 2009). Regardless of the role, setting, or degree level, the NAEYC standards emphasize the essentials of professional preparation for careers in the field of early childhood. NAEYC standards influenced the development of the current Texas Core Knowledge & Skills Areas (CKA) for Practitioners, and, the TELC will use the NAEYC standards, with other resources, to guide the revision of the CKAs and the development of the new core competencies.

Because of the various roles that exist in early childhood settings, the TELC will develop unique core competencies for the following groups: practitioners, administrators, trainers, and coaches/ mentors. Most states have competencies for practitioners, while other states have competencies for both practitioners and administrators. However, as illustrated in figure 3, very few states have competencies for all four groups.

Figure 3. Number of States with Core Competency Lists by User
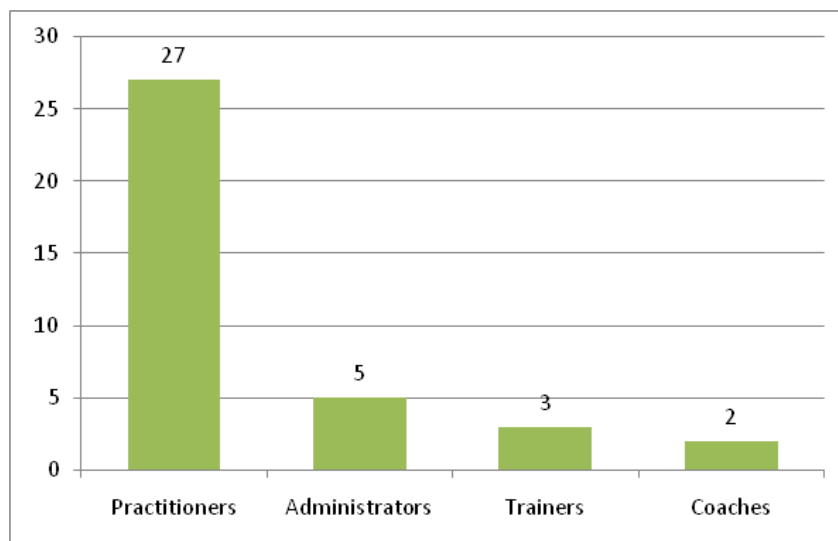
Core Competencies for Practitioners - Practitioners are those professionals who provide direct instruction and/or care to young children. Common job titles for practitioners include: Teacher, Assistant Teacher, Provider, and Caregiver. The current Texas Core Knowledge & Skills Areas for Practitioners are: (1) child growth and development; (2) health, safety, and nutrition; (3) professional practice, methods, and curriculum; (4) guidance; (5) family and community relationships; (6) cultural and individual diversity; (7) observation and assessment; and, (8) professionalism and ethics. The TELC will: enhance the current list: categorize each competency into introductory, intermediate, and advanced level competencies; and, include a self-assessment tool to assess the competency level of practitioners.

Core Competencies for Administrators - Program administrators are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating early childhood programs. Common job titles include: Center Director, Site Manager, School Administrator, Program Manager, Early Childhood Coordinator, and Principal. Though an administrator's title may vary by program type, the same core competencies apply to all, regardless of setting. The current Texas Core Knowledge & Skills Areas for Administrators are: (1) maintaining an effective organization; (2) financial management; (3) personnel management; (4) maintaining a healthy and safe environment; (5) implementing a developmentally appropriate environment and curriculum; and, (6) instituting family and community-centered programming. The TELC will: enhance the current list; categorize each competency into introductory, intermediate, and advanced level competencies; and, include a self-assessment tool to assess the competency level of administrators.

Core Competencies for Trainers - Early childhood trainers provide in-service and ongoing professional development for practitioners and administrators. Though trainers may be proficient in one or more of the core competencies for practitioners or administrators, there are unique core competencies that all trainers should know and be able to demonstrate in order to facilitate high quality adult learning. The current Texas Core Knowledge & Skills Areas for Trainers are: (1) adult learning and development and its impact on training design; (2) training methodology, techniques, and presentation skills; (3) group process skills; (4) topic selection and training preparation; and, (5) evaluation and training outcomes. The TELC will enhance the current list to ensure it encompasses all core competencies trainers need to possess.

Core Competencies for Coaches & Mentors - Coaches and mentors provide guidance and support to early childhood professionals on an individual level. In Texas, there are a number of programs that offer coaching and mentoring services to practitioners and/or administrators. Although each program is different, there are overlapping core competencies that all coaches and mentors need to possess to effectively serve the early childhood professionals they support. Because of this, the TELC is developing a comprehensive list of core competencies for coaches and mentors to address the knowledge and skills needed for this professional sector.

Quality Assurance

The systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) will help maximize the probability that minimum standards of quality are being attained by each of its components. Quality assurance is essential to monitoring and evaluating the professional development opportunities available and the professional development system as a whole (Child Care Bureau, 2007). The components that address quality assurance are: (1) Approval Processes, (2) Evaluation Processes, (3) Monitoring Processes, and (4) Accreditation/Certification.

Approval Process - A trainer approval system has a defined set of qualifications and standards for qualifying trainers. The requirements include early childhood expertise and understanding of adult learning theories and principles. The training approval system also has a set of standards for trainings offered. Generally, these standards are linked to core knowledge and competencies, principles of adult learning, and other standards such as early learning guidelines. The TECPDS contains the Texas Trainer Registry, which is the only statewide system that approves trainers and their trainings offered to practitioners and administrators. The Texas Trainer Registry reviews the quality of early childhood trainers in Texas by collecting and verifying information on their education, credentials, and experience.

Evaluation Processes – Evaluations should be incorporated into every aspect of the professional development system. Evaluation data provided by training participants can improve the quality of trainers and the content of trainings offered. In addition, the TECPDS will feature an enhanced Texas Trainer Registry that includes an online evaluation tool, which will allow training participants to rate and evaluate each trainer/training. Evaluation data will allow for continuous monitoring of the system and the ability to make changes as necessary. The TECPDS will routinely solicit feedback from users and stakeholders in an ongoing effort to improve the usability and the quality of the system.

Monitoring Processes – Monitoring focuses on verifying that staff qualifications and training requirements have been met and are adhered to. Monitoring processes can help support licensing regulations, accreditations, quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), and scholarship programs. Texas intends to the join the many states that are already utilizing workforce registries as a mechanism to gather and store this important data. A workforce registry is a web-based database where early childhood professionals can store and access their education and employment history, as well as the professional development hours they have accrued. This registry may also capture and report on the Career Ladder level of individuals and the qualifications suggested for the early childhood workforce by occupation, role, program, and funding source.

Accreditation – According to the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, accreditation is a voluntary process designed to improve the quality of early and school-age care programs. Accreditation systems require programs to meet certain standards that exceed minimum

state regulatory requirements (NCCIC, 2009). Many programs seek early childhood accreditations from third party organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association of Child Care Professionals (NACCP), the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), and others. An effective professional development system can provide guidance to programs seeking accreditations by helping them identify and compare accreditation options and recognize the professional development requirements of each accreditation. Additionally, there may be opportunities for programs who utilize the Workforce Registry to expedite the transfer of program-wide training records, which are often a critical piece of most accreditations.

> **The Workforce Registry will:**
>
> - Collect information and report on individuals working in the field and increase professional recognition
>
> - Provide a centralized, confidential, electronic storage system for professional development and employment records
>
> - Assist in professional development planning
>
> - Inform policymakers, state agencies, researchers, and the general public about the early childhood workforce

Access and Outreach

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) will combine existing and new infrastructure aimed at keeping early childhood professionals informed and up to date on important news, events, and professional development opportunities. Currently, visitors can access such resources as the Texas Trainer Registry, the College Directory, and the Statewide Professional Development Calendar. Below are descriptions of current and upcoming components addressing access and outreach.

Statewide Professional Development Calendar - Currently available, this calendar offers a listing of statewide early childhood-related conference dates and locations, along with other upcoming professional development opportunities, such as Training of Trainer sessions, regional workshops, and summits.

Compensation and Retention Information (in development) - The Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) will conduct an initial compensation study of the early childhood workforce in Texas, which the TECPDS will continue to build on, expanding this knowledge base with yearly compensation reports and recruitment and retention materials.

Job Board (in development) - A new job board will allow program administrators to post job openings. This online tool will be accessible to anyone visiting the website. Interested parties will be able to find early childhood job openings throughout Texas.

Professional Development Planning Tool (in development) - This web-based tool will assist in creating and implementing individualized professional development plans by helping professionals assess their knowledge and skills, prioritize specific areas for growth, identify resources to support their plan, and reflect on their progress.

Qualifications and Pathways

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) will offer tools and guidance on required qualifications and available pathways in the field. Below are key components that will be expanded or supported in this area.

Career Ladder (in development) - The Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) will support the development of a Career Ladder for early childhood professionals in Texas. This tool will identify levels of progression from entry level and upwards, based on an early childhood professional's education, experience, and ongoing training. The Career Ladder encourages professionals to attain credentials and degrees and to plan their educational pathway to support personal and professional growth.

Articulation Agreements (in development*)* - The TELC will develop and support agreements between 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education. These agreements will ensure seamless educational pathways from one program or institution to another, ideally without the loss of course credits. The TELC will gather examples of model articulation agreements between institutions and promote them in other institutions across Texas.

College Directory (in development) - The TECPDS will include an enhanced College Directory that will allow website visitors to search a database of colleges and universities in Texas that offer early childhood/child development certificates and/or degree programs. Users will be able to filter searches by different data fields, such as city, degree program, number of early childhood credits, and online course availability.

Scholarships and Financial Aid - The TECPDS will continue to offer information about available scholarships and financial aid opportunities for those interested in pursuing certifications/degrees in early childhood or related fields. Additionally, the TELC has committed resources to the identification and promotion of new and ongoing scholarships and financial aid opportunities for early childhood professionals, as well as prospective students seeking to enter the field.

Funding

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Office of Head Start, and through program fees collected from those applying and renewing with the Texas Trainer Registry. In order to ensure the sustainability of the new TECPDS, user fees will also be collected from the Workforce Registry.

Benefits

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) will continue to serve as a needed and vital part of a robust Texas early childhood system. Furthermore, it will continue to benefit all sectors of the system. The Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) is investing resources and time in strengthening and expanding the new system, a critical vehicle in supporting positive early childhood outcomes in Texas. Creating more effective early childhood professionals is perhaps the most important strategy the TELC can take in its efforts to improve school readiness in Texas. On the following page is a thorough list of some of the benefits the new system offers to the early childhood field.

	Benefits

Practitioners	- *Specific to Child Care:*
	   Connect with professional development resources to fulfill licensing requirements
	
	- *Specific to Head Start/Early Head Start:*
	   Connect with schools offering degree programs in ECE/CD meet the minimum requirements for staff education qualifications
	
	- *Specific to Public School:*
	   Connect with schools offering degree programs in ECE/CD/Education in order to become a certified teacher
	
	- *Connect with organizations offering Alternative Teacher Certification Programs*
	   Applicable to All:
	   • Discover pathways for moving up the Career Ladder
	   • Access to professional development planning tools
	   • Connect with professional development resources in early care and education (i.e. registered trainers, conferences, online training, seminars, summits, etc.)
	   • Keep track of all employment, education, and professional development history online
	   • Access employment opportunities specific to the early childhood field
	   • Connect with colleges/universities offering ECE/CD degree programs offering classroom and online course options
	   • Discover available financial aid/scholarships

Program Administrators	- Ensure access to professional development opportunities for themselves and staff - Keep track of all employment, education, and professional development history online - Access to a Job Bank to post any openings within their agency - Access to resources to easily assess their own knowledge and skills and those of their staff
Developers and Providers of Training	- Access to core competencies to inform the development of trainings/workshops - Access to an online system for marketing their trainings/courses - Connect with professional development resources for trainers (i.e. TOT opportunities) - Access to conference presenter opportunities
Higher Education Faculty	- Access to core competencies to complement or support the development of coursework - Access to an online college directory for marketing their ECE/CD degree programs - Access to solicitations for Request for Proposals (RFPs) from agencies seeking quality trainers - Access to tools to facilitate the development and support of articulation agreements

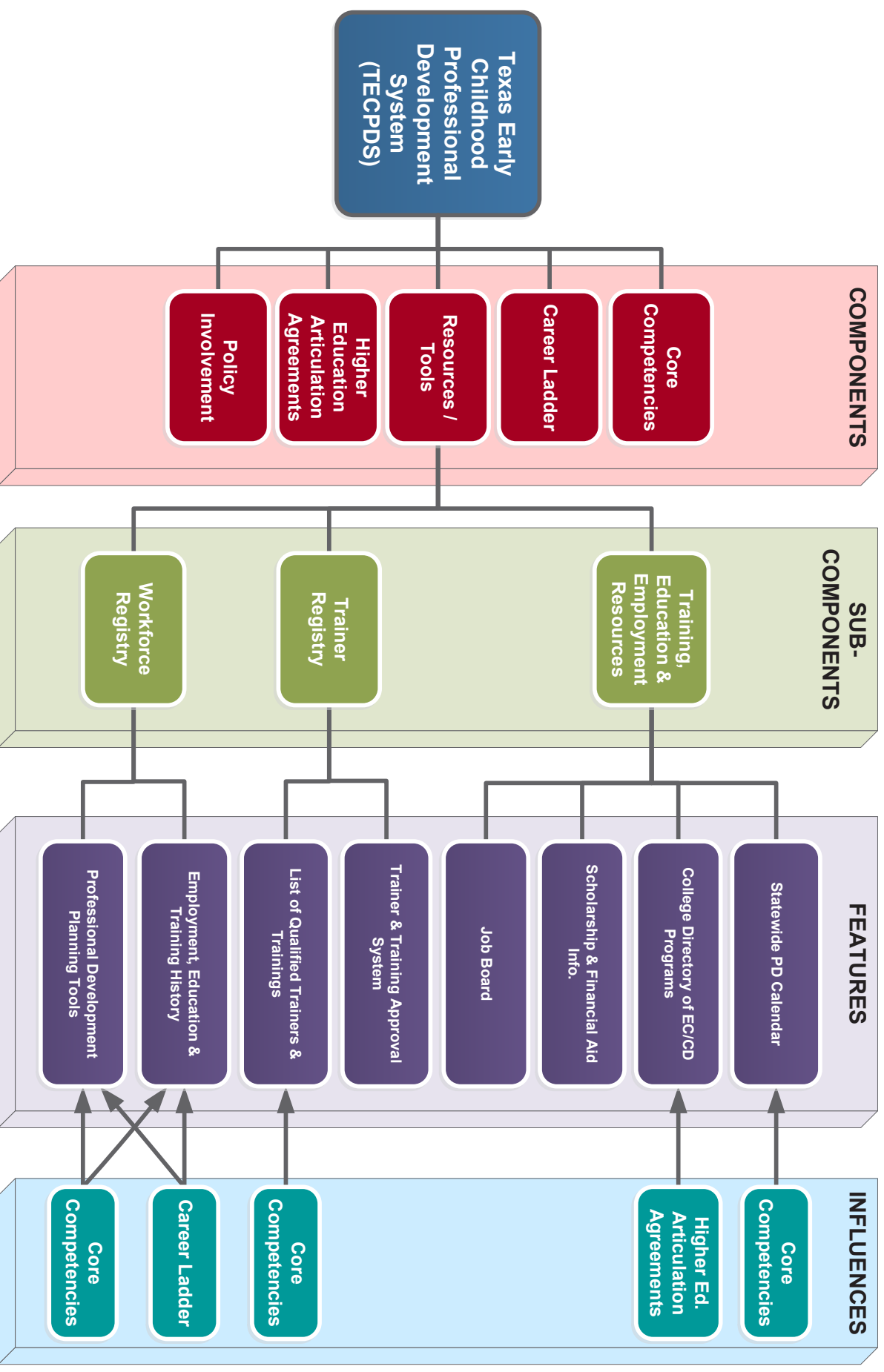| Researchers and Policymakers	- Access to data to improve program quality and child outcomes
	- Ability to implement research-based professional development standards based on data
	- Ability to coordinate early care and education professional development policies
	- Access to early childhood workforce data
Parents	- Knowledge that quality professional development resources are accessible to the caregivers/educators of their children
	- Access to data regarding career ladder levels of practitioners in Texas

Conclusion

School readiness can be defined as the capacity of early childhood programs to prepare children to enter or transition into kindergarten ready to succeed (NCCIC, 2010). The development of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) will positively shape the quality of early care and education programs because it specifically targets enhancing the quality of the workforce.

Building upon the work of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System Council, the Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) will commit significant resources to empower and strengthen the early childhood workforce in Texas and to build all of the components mentioned above in order to create a coordinated, cross-sector, and accessible early childhood professional development system.

On the following page is a graphic representation of the TECPDS. This graph outlines how the various components will connect to support a robust, cross-sector system. You can learn more about the TELC and TECPDS at earlylearningtexas.org.

Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS)

Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS)

COMPONENTS

- Policy Involvement
- Higher Education Articulation Agreements
- Resources / Tools
- Career Ladder
- Core Competencies

SUB-COMPONENTS

- Workforce Registry
- Trainer Registry
- Training, Education & Employment Resources

FEATURES

- Professional Development Planning Tools
- Employment, Education & Training History
- List of Qualified Trainers & Trainings
- Trainer & Training Approval System
- Job Board
- Scholarship & Financial Aid Info.
- College Directory of EC/CD Programs
- Statewide PD Calendar

INFLUENCES

- Core Competencies
- Career Ladder
- Core Competencies
- Higher Ed. Articulation Agreements
- Core Competencies

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