CLASS Matters:

Increasing Quality in Louisiana Early Childhood Programs

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Findings from Data Analysis, Stakeholder Interviews, and National Research

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Louisiana Policy Institute for Children
The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children is a non-partisan, non-profit, independent source of data, research and information for policy makers, stakeholders and the public at large around issues related to young children in Louisiana. The Institute develops policy proposals informed by research, best practices and the experiences of other states and performs educational and outreach activities around these recommended policy solutions.

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OVERVIEW

Research shows human brain development is most significant from birth to age three, producing more than one million neural connections each second[1]. Given the importance of this time in a child's development, efforts to increase access to and quality of programs serving children from infancy through pre-kindergarten, often referred to as early care and education programs, are more prevalent than ever before. These investments in early care and education benefit more than just the participating children. Return on investments for communities and states for quality early care and education programs range from up to $7 to $13 for every $1 invested, and include savings related to decreased rates of special education, remediation, and involvement in the criminal justice system[2].

In Louisiana, early care and education providers include school districts, Head Start and Early Head Start, child care centers, and home-based programs. Programs in school districts typically serve 4-year-olds in pre-kindergarten, while other provider types serve children from infancy through pre-kindergarten. Child care center, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs are subject to licensure in Louisiana, and Louisiana's licensure system includes three tiers — Type I, Type II, and Type III. Child-staff ratios differ between Type I and Type II/III, and only Type III centers can receive public funding[3].

Publicly funded early care and education programs in Louisiana include the LA 4 Early Childhood Program (LA4), Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development (NSECD) Program, Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Pre-K Expansion Grant, and Early/Head Start. LA4, NSECD, and Pre-K Expansion are pre-kindergarten programs for 4-year-olds. Head Start serves children ages three to four, and Early Head Start serves children from six weeks to two years old. CCAP funds children from 6 weeks to 13 years old. Per child funding varies by program, ranging from $3,239 for CCAP (not including bonuses or the School Readiness Tax Credits) to $4,580 for LA4/NSECD to $7,438 for Head Start to $14,119 for Early Head Start.[4]

The Early Childhood Education Act of the 2012 Louisiana Legislative Session (Act 3) mandated that the state unify all early care and education programs for children birth through age four — including all Head Start/Early Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and publicly funded child care programs — into one aligned system. As part of the Act 3 reforms, a new accountability system was implemented across programs in 2015-16. The new unified accountability system is centered around the CLASS tool, an observational assessment, which looks at three broad domains — emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support — that are further broken into three or four specific dimensions, depending on the age being assessed. There is one CLASS assessment for pre-kindergarten classrooms

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[1] Zero to Three. Accessed from https://www.zerotothree.org/early-development/brain-development

[2] The Heckman Equation. (2016). *Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy*. Accessed from https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2013/07/F_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Generic_052714-3-1.pdf

[3] Type II centers may receive funding from federal food and nutrition programs, but only Type III centers may receive funding from the Child Care Assistance Program and participate in the School Readiness Tax Credits. Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Louisiana must be licensed as Type III centers. However, school-based programs serving only 4-year-olds do not need to be licensed, and home-based programs of six or fewer children are not licensed in Louisiana. See LA Revised Statutes 17:407.33-.36.

[4] Louisiana Department of Education, 2017. CCAP number reflects an average across all age levels. Accessed from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/ecce-ac---presentation-slides---2-21-18.pdf

(children ages three and four) and one for toddler classrooms (children ages 15 to 36 months). Overall ratings for early care and education providers or sites in the Louisiana accountability system are derived by averaging all dimensions of CLASS together equally.[5]

The Louisiana Department of Education creates an annual Performance Profile for each publicly funded site that includes informational data, as well as CLASS scores. This informational data includes the quality of the curriculum being used, the ratio of children per teacher, teacher degrees and certification, and the number of the publicly funded children receiving a child assessment. Note, these informational data, unlike the CLASS data and scores, are self-reported by programs and not included in the computation of the ratings.

Louisiana, now in the third year of implementing the new early care and education accountability system, possesses two full years of data and practitioner experience with CLASS. These data and experiences provide opportunity not only for reflection and analysis, but also modifications to policy and practice that support increased improvement and growth in early care and education.

To support these efforts, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children conducted analyses of the first two years of Louisiana CLASS data, interviews with stakeholders across the state, and a review of national research around improving teacher practice, child outcomes, and CLASS scores. Information and findings from each component are included in this report, along with recommendations based on those findings for state and local policymakers, early care and education providers, and stakeholders.

ANALYSIS OF LOUISIANA DATA

Data regarding Louisiana early care and education program performance and characteristics from the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years provided by the Louisiana Department of Education were analyzed for trends in program performance and certain program characteristics. Specific analyses focused on program performance by child age, provider type, curriculum, assessment, child-teacher ratio, teacher qualifications, and geography. A summary of these analyses is included. For the full findings, see Appendix A.

Age & Provider Type

Overall, CLASS scores in Louisiana improved by 0.14 points from 4.70 in 2015-16 to 4.84 in 2016-17. Scores for pre-kindergarten programs improved at the same rate (0.14 points), while toddler program scores improved by 0.08 points. Programs of all types tended to score lower in instructional domains, and growth in instructional domains was lower than in non-instructional domains.

Among provider types — school-based programs (predominantly pre-kindergarten programs), Early/Head Start, and child care — school-based programs scored the highest on CLASS each year. Child care, however, experienced the most growth from 2015-16 to 2016-17. Child care and Early/Head Start programs experienced larger gains in pre-kindergarten classrooms, while school-based programs had slightly larger gains in toddler classrooms.

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[5] However, the negative climate dimension is excluded.

CLASS Scores by Program Characteristics

	Characteristics	2015-16 Score	2016-17 Score	Change
Child Age	Toddler	4.31	4.39	0.08
	Pre-Kindergarten	4.75	4.89	0.14
Provider Type	School-Based	5.16	5.24	0.08
	Early/Head Start	4.65	4.74	0.09
	Child Care	4.35	4.51	0.16

Curriculum, Assessment & Child-Teacher Ratio

Although child-teacher ratios and assessment use seemed related to CLASS score performance and growth, the relationship between curriculum quality and CLASS scores was less clear.

Looking at child-teacher ratios, 15% of programs improved their child-teacher ratios across 2015-16 and 2016-17, while just over 15% of programs decreased the quality of their child-teacher ratios. On average, programs that improved the quality of their child-teacher ratios saw a 0.26 score increase, double the average score increase for programs that did not change the quality of their child-teacher ratios. Programs that decreased the quality of their child-teacher ratios experienced no change in CLASS scores.

For assessments, 22% of programs improved the number of children assessed from 2015-16 to 2016-17. On average, programs that improved their assessment usage experienced a 0.24 score increase, which was slightly higher than the score increase experienced by programs that did not change their assessment usage, 0.20. Note, many of the programs maintaining their assessment usage already assess most of the children in their program (considered three out of three stars). Programs that decreased their assessment usage saw no change in their CLASS scores.

From 2015-16 to 2016-17, almost half of toddler programs (42%) and almost one-third of pre-kindergarten programs (31%) improved the quality of their curriculum. On average, toddler programs that improved their curriculum saw a slight increase in CLASS scores (0.07), while pre-kindergarten programs that improved their curriculum experienced no change in scores. Toddler programs that did not change their curriculum experienced a 0.11 score improvement, and pre-kindergarten programs using the same curriculum saw scores improve by 0.20. Toddler programs that decreased the quality of their curriculum saw scores decline by -0.18, while pre-kindergarten programs that decreased the quality of their curriculum experienced score improvements of 0.23.

Relationship of Program Characteristic Quality Change and CLASS Scores, 2015-16 to 2016-17

Characteristics		Quality		
		Declined	**No Change**	**Improved**
Ratio	Overall CLASS Score Change	-0.01	0.13	0.26
	# / % of Programs	255 / 16%	1145 / 70%	242 / 15%
Assessment	Overall CLASS Score Change	0.02	0.2	0.24
	# / % of Programs	148 / 9%	1133 / 69%	359 / 22%
Toddler Curriculum	Overall CLASS Score Change	-0.18	0.11	0.02
	# / % of Programs	26 / 4%	411 / 55%	311 / 42%
Pre-K Curriculum	Overall CLASS Score Change	0.23	0.2	0.16
	# / % of Programs	81 / 6%	932 / 63%	458 / 31%

Teacher Qualifications

Analyses found a positive relationship between teachers' education levels and CLASS scores. For both toddler and pre-kindergarten classrooms, programs with teachers who had higher levels of education tended to experience higher CLASS scores, although this trend did not continue for education beyond a bachelor's degree (e.g., either a master's degree or early childhood certification). This relationship was stronger for pre-kindergarten programs than toddler programs.

Geography

No major patterns were found across resource and referral agency regions, although scores in northeast Louisiana tended to be lower than average state scores. Scores in southeast Louisiana were typically higher. Overall parish trends are as follows:[6,7]

- **Highest overall average:** Jefferson Davis Parish
- **Highest pre-kindergarten:** Assumption Parish and Washington Parish
- **Greatest overall improvement:** Red River Parish (+0.66), Cameron Parish (+0.65), St. Bernard Parish (+0.65), St. Tammany Parish (+0.54), and Bienville Parish (+0.47)
- **Lowest overall average:** Concordia Parish, Grant Parish, and Orleans Parish
- **Lowest pre-kindergarten:** Concordia Parish, Grant Parish, and Orleans Parish
- **Lowest toddler:** Ascension Parish and DeSoto Parish
- **Greatest overall decline:** Madison Parish (-0.73), East Carroll Parish (-0.55), Franklin Parish (-0.45), Richland Parish (-0.42), and Catahoula/La Salle Parish (-0.28)

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2018 with 18 stakeholders across Louisiana from all geographic regions. Interviewees included staff from child care providers, lead agencies, and resource and referral agencies.[8,9] Interview questions focused on implementation of CLASS, beginning with the Learning Year in 2015-16. Participants were asked about their experiences with implementing CLASS, including successes and challenges, as well as suggestions for improvement.

Common trends and themes are present across respondent types and geographies. Major takeaways from interviewee responses center around perceptions of CLASS, factors impacting CLASS scores, challenges facing early care and education, and additional supports needed.

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[6] Highest and lowest are defined as parishes that were either the five highest scoring or five lowest scoring parishes, respectively, across both 2015-16 and 2016-17. No parishes were among the five highest scores for toddlers across both years. Greatest improvement and greatest decline are defined as the five parishes with the greatest growth or greatest decline in scores.

[7] Number of providers with CLASS scores varies by parish, from two in West Feliciana to 151 in Orleans.

[8] Interviews of providers intentionally focused on private child care, as child care providers typically receive less funding than Early/Head Start and school-based pre-kindergarten programs.

[9] Lead agencies coordinate the duties and responsibilities of early care and education community networks, which are typically organized by parish. School districts are the most common lead agency, and may also operate pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs. Resource and referral agencies are contracted by the Louisiana Department of Education to provide services and supports to child care providers in a specific region, typically comprised of multiple parishes.

Perceptions around CLASS

Overall, respondents viewed CLASS positively, especially its focus on teacher-child interactions rather than just classroom environment. At the same time, a number of respondents — mainly from resource and referral agencies, but also one lead agency and one provider — did suggest incorporating some sort of classroom environment tool or checklist into the accountability system to assist with quality assurance. Some suggested incorporating this into the licensing process or incorporating a tool like ECERS into the system. Other concerns focused on observer reliability, especially between Picard Center and local observers, the time necessary to sufficiently train teachers on CLASS, and the challenge of moving from Proficient to Excellent.

Factors Impacting CLASS Scores

More than half of respondents cited staff training of some type as the effort that had the largest impact on CLASS scores, particularly coaching of teachers. Coaching programs varied across respondents, with most using a locally developed, job-embedded model, while some used top-tier models, like MMCI, My Teaching Partner, and myTeachstone, often in conjunction with a locally developed model. Coaching programs varied in length, with some lasting one day, while others spanned many weeks. On average, coaching for an individual teacher lasted at least a month. Coaching programs provided by resource and referral and lead agencies largely targeted lower scoring child care sites, but not always. Those that used myTeachstone and other virtual trainings outside of a coaching program mentioned difficulty with implementation, largely due to teachers not having time to utilize tools on their own.

Coaching was more likely to be cited as having the largest impact on CLASS scores by participants with CLASS scores in the lower Proficient range, while familiarity with CLASS was a more common response for participants with higher CLASS scores. Training was a common response for participants with both lower and higher CLASS scores, with over one-half of each group mentioning it. Responses around curriculum and accountability were provided by participants in the lower Proficient range, while respondents with higher CLASS scores mentioned teacher quality as having the largest impact on CLASS scores. Participants from lead agencies and providers were more likely to mention staff familiarity with CLASS. At least one-half of participants from lead agencies, resource and referral agencies, and providers mentioned training as key to improving CLASS results.

Overall Challenges

In terms of overall challenges affecting early care and education, almost half of respondents cited funding. This included funding specifically for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), as well as funding for staff wages, training, curriculum, and materials. Over one-third of respondents also mentioned staff turnover, and almost one-fifth mentioned teacher quality.

Respondents at both the higher and lower ends of Proficient/Excellent spoke to common themes, although participants with lower Proficient CLASS scores were slightly more likely to mention staff turnover, and participants with higher scores were more likely to mention teacher quality. Participants from lead agencies, resource and referral agencies, and providers all mentioned staff turnover and funding. Only providers mentioned teacher quality, and only providers and lead agencies mentioned staff wages.

CLASS-Related Challenges

For challenges related specifically to CLASS implementation, responses were more varied. Over one-third of respondents cited teacher retention/turnover as a major challenge. Other responses included observer reliability, teacher understanding of CLASS, the time necessary to train teachers, and teacher wages/salaries.

Responses around observer reliability were provided by participants in the lower Proficient range. Teacher retention and understanding were slightly more common responses for participants with higher Proficient CLASS scores. Respondents with higher CLASS scores also mentioned the time necessary to train teachers. One-third of providers mentioned teacher retention, teacher understanding, and/or the time necessary to train teachers. Respondents from lead agencies and resource and referral agencies were more likely to mention teacher retention, observer reliability, and staff wages.

Additional Support Needs

Looking ahead, respondents spoke about several additional supports they believe are needed. More than three-quarters of respondents cited the need for additional coaching and/or training. Almost one-third said providing more of currently available services (including coaching and training) would benefit providers, and almost one-quarter mentioned access to additional materials, especially for child care centers. Respondents also mentioned CLASS certification trainings, curriculum, facility improvement, training designed explicitly for center directors, and training infant teachers on CLASS.

Participants with lower Proficient CLASS scores were more likely to mention coaching, providing more of available services, facility improvement, and training designed explicitly for center directors. Participants with higher CLASS scores were more likely to mention CLASS certification training and materials. Over one-third of respondents from both groups mentioned training, with those with higher scores slightly more likely to mention it. Participants from lead agencies and resource and referral agencies were more likely to mention coaching and providing more of available services. Training was a common response for participants from lead agencies, resource and referral agencies, and providers, with more than one-third of each group mentioning it.

NATIONAL RESEARCH

A review of national research on best practices related to curricula, assessments, and professional development interventions provides additional insights into opportunities for improving teacher practice, child outcomes, and CLASS scores. The review included research on curriculum and assessment quality and implementation, components of effective professional development, and specific professional development models. A summary of this review is included. For the full review, see Appendix B.

Curriculum & Assessment

Research indicates that the quality and implementation of curricula and assessments matters. Using curricula and assessments that are aligned, developmentally appropriate, and implemented with fidelity supports children's growth and learning. To maximize curricula and assessments, programs and providers should:

- Use an evidence-based curriculum that supports the knowledge, skills, and abilities across all the domains of early childhood development to help young children achieve goals that are educationally significant;
- Ensure curriculum is implemented as intended to achieve expected results;
- Train teachers on curriculum content and use, including onsite coaching, to ensure curriculum is implemented as intended; and
- Use ongoing observational assessments to monitor children's progress and adjust instructional practices as needed.

Professional Development

Effective professional development supports improve teacher practice and children's learning, especially when connected to curricula, assessments, and student learning needs. Elements of effective professional development include the following components:

- Is content focused, including teaching strategies specific to content areas
- Incorporates active learning that engages teachers in designing and trying out teaching strategies
- Supports collaboration and creates spaces for teachers to share ideas with one another
- Uses models of effective practice to provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like
- Provides coaching and expert support, focusing directly on teachers' individual needs
- Offers feedback and reflection to help teachers thoughtfully move toward expert implementation of practices
- Is of sustained duration that allows adequate time for teachers to learn, practice, implement, and reflect on new strategies

For professional development systems, the National Institute for Early Education Research recently revised its quality benchmarks for professional development to include:

- At least 15 clock hours per year for lead and assistant teachers, with the majority of hours focused on topics other than health and safety
- Written, individualized annual professional development plans for lead and assistant teachers
- Required coaching for all lead teachers or classrooms

Coaching for teachers is becoming a critical component of professional development systems when implemented effectively. A 50-state scan of coaching and technical assistance initiatives identified features of state coaching programs, based on recommendations from national policy organizations including Child Trends, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Education (OPRE). The elements of a statewide coaching system include:

- Professional standards, competencies, and role definitions for coaches
- Career pathway and system for credentialing coaches
- System of ongoing training support for coaches
- State advisory body that provides oversight for coaching initiatives
- State data system for tracking and monitoring coaching

Efficacy of Specific Professional Development Models

Researchers reviewed specific professional development models, including My Teaching Partner (MTP), Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI), Early Ed U, Head Start REDI, and Every Child Ready. Models were selected based on demonstrated impact on instructional quality, comprehensive evidence, and/or cost efficiency.

MTP is a web-based professional development and coaching program aligned to the focus areas of CLASS, including video exemplars and web-mediated consultation on specific CLASS dimensions. In one study of MTP, teachers who participated in the online consultation and received feedback targeted to their interactions showed greater increases in ratings of the quality interactions than teachers who only received access to a website with video clips. While effect sizes were small, scores in all CLASS domains improved, especially for teachers in high-poverty settings. Findings from the study indicated the consultation with teachers as a key factor in score improvement.

MMCI is a 10-session, targeted professional development model designed to be delivered to groups of teachers. Georgia conducted a three-year study of MTP and MMCI with pre-kindergarten teachers. The study found both programs to positively impact teachers, however, MMCI was more effective in certain areas. Teachers who participated in MTP improved scores on the emotional support domain at a higher rate than teachers in the control group while teachers who participated in MMCI improved scores in the emotional and instructional support domains at a higher rate than teachers in the control group. Teachers who participated in MMCI also had greater knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions than those who participated in MTP or were in the control group.

Summary of Georgia Study Evaluation Findings

Component	MMCI vs Control	MTP vs Control	MMCI vs MTP
Emotional Support	MMCI > Control	MTP > Control	No difference
Classroom Organization	No difference	No difference	No difference
Instructional Support	MMCI > Control	No difference	No difference
Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions	MMCI > Control	No difference	MMCI > MTP
Perceived Value of the Professional Development	MMCI > Control	MTP > Control	No difference
Relationship with the Coach/Instructor	Not applicable	Not applicable	MTP > MMCI

Early Ed U is a program developed by the University of Washington for Head Start teachers, as Head Start also uses CLASS as an assessment as part of its accountability system. The program includes research-based video courses and a coaching companion, where videos are viewed together to identify areas to improve practice. Early Ed U is offered to institutions of higher education and state professional development networks. Membership in the Early Ed U Alliance is free.

Head Start REDI is a professional development program for Head Start teachers that includes four days of workshop training and weekly in-class support from a mentor teacher. A randomized control trial of the program found the program significantly improved classroom practices for participating teachers. Teachers in the program talked with children more frequently, established a more positive classroom climate, and used more preventative behavior management strategies.

Every Child Ready is an instructional model developed by Apple Tree, a non-profit research and development institute operating charter schools in Washington, DC. The model includes a research-based curriculum, differentiated professional development, and a developmentally appropriate assessment tool kit to measure the quality and effectiveness of instruction. The professional development component includes in-person workshops, online courses, and targeted virtual and in-class coaching and feedback. Results indicate that teachers who use the model outperform other teachers on all instructional support dimensions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on findings from the data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and national research, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children recommends the following actions to drive continued quality improvement for early care and education programs and providers across the state.

System Level

Separate the Proficient rating category into two categories to distinguish differences in quality for higher-performing providers

To do this, create a new category rating of "Advanced Proficient" between the Proficient and Excellent ratings. The current Proficient rating includes CLASS scores between 4.5 and 5.99. In a revised five-tier model, the Proficient rating would include CLASS scores between 4.5 and 5.24, and the Advanced Proficient rating would include scores between 5.25 and 5.99.

> *Rationale:* An analysis of providers scoring Proficient showed providers with overall CLASS scores above 5.25 typically scored higher across all domains than providers with overall scores between 4.5 and 5.24. With almost two-thirds of providers receiving overall ratings of Proficient, without a distinction between scores in this range, it can be challenging for families to differentiate quality. And with such a high bar for the Excellent rating, it can be challenging for providers to move from Proficient to Excellent. A number of interviewees cited this as a concern with CLASS and suggested some sort of recognition for providers and teachers with close to Excellent scores.

Add infant classrooms to the rating system, ensuring adequate support, and increase the infant reimbursement rate

Begin by phasing in use of the CLASS tool in infant classrooms and incorporate infant classrooms into the early childhood accountability system. To do this, the state must first inventory the number of infant classrooms in the state to better understand the amount of support that will be needed across the state. Then staff at all levels must be trained on the infant CLASS tool, from infant teachers to center directors to coaches to observers, including staff at lead agencies and resource and referral agencies. Once trained, teachers and providers should have at least one full year of practice with the tool before formal observations are conducted and scores incorporated into the accountability system. With this increase in quality, the state should increase the infant reimbursement rate at the same time to support quality access.

> *Rationale:* Babies' brains begin developing on day one and more than double in size in the first year of life. And yet, in Louisiana, not much is known about the quality of infant classrooms across the state. Just under half of publicly funded infant seats are in programs receiving Unsatisfactory or

Approaching Proficient ratings on CLASS for toddlers and/or pre-kindergarten. However, without using an infant-classroom specific tool, families, teachers, and the state have no information about the quality of those infant classrooms. Interviewees also mentioned the need for CLASS in infant classrooms, provided teachers and directors receive training on the tool and support with implementation. Some participants also mentioned the cost of providing infant care to be prohibitive for many programs. Infant child-teacher ratios are one-third of pre-kindergarten classrooms, however, child care reimbursement rates for infants are only a few hundred dollars more per child per year than for pre-kindergarten slots.

Provide additional targeted support to providers with Approaching Proficient ratings, including providers at both the low- and high-end of the range

Support quality improvement by assisting directors/administrators of providers with diagnosing areas for improvement, developing an action plan, and providing supports related to that improvement plan (e.g. director-specific coaching, CLASS certification training). These supports ideally would be available to providers at both the low- and high-scoring ends of the Approaching Proficient range, using an 80-20 ratio.

Rationale: From the first to the second year of CLASS implementation, 11 providers (85%) improved their rating from Unsatisfactory to Approaching Proficient after receiving targeted supports from the LDE. During that same time, 227 providers (42%) improved their rating from Approaching Proficient to Proficient, while 302 providers received Approaching Proficient ratings both years. Given the success of the interventions provided to sites with Unsatisfactory ratings, a similar strategy for providers with Approaching Proficient ratings could deliver the boost needed to move these providers up to Proficient.

Provide additional one-on-one, job-embedded coaching and ensure quality coaching based on best practices by:
- **Establishing minimum requirements for coaching programs and coaches**
- **Increasing access to coaching**
- **Reviewing available coaching models and organizing into recommended tiers**

Increase access to effective, individualized coaching for teachers of all skill levels — not just lower performing teachers — to support teacher development and growth, especially around instructional practices. Preferably, coaching programs include proven effective coaching programs, like MMCI and My Teaching Partner, but they can also be entirely locally developed. Regardless of who develops and delivers the coaching program, it should be individualized to each teacher, be conducted at the teacher's work site, use data to analyze efficacy, and include the following components:

- Is content focused, including to the age level of the teacher's classroom

- Incorporates active learning, including practices that are immediately applicable to the teacher's classroom

- Uses models of effective practice, including in-classroom modeling by coaches or videos of teachers modeling best practices

- Offers feedback and reflection, including both coach and teacher

- Is of sustained duration, allowing teachers time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect on new strategies

These components are based on research of effective professional development, as well as feedback from interviewed stakeholders. The LDE should use these components to establish minimum coaching program requirements and review local coaching models to ensure alignment. Coaches should also be LDE-approved, CLASS-reliable observers for the age band they coach, and have recent experience in early childhood classrooms/sites, ideally within the last five years. Coaching can be provided by center/provider staff, resource and referral agencies, lead agencies, and/or outside organizations. To assist lead agencies, resource and referral agencies, and providers with adopting a coaching model, the LDE could review available coaching models and organize them into recommended tiers of quality, similar to what they have done around curriculum.

> *Rationale:* Over half of interviewed stakeholders cited coaching for teachers as having an impact on CLASS scores, and half of interviewees expressed the need for more coaching. Most resource and referral agencies in the state are only able to provide individualized coaching to teachers at the lowest performing centers, per their contracts. Some network lead agencies are able to provide coaching to higher performing centers, however, not all networks offer this or offer it to child care centers. Interviewees from resource and referral and lead agencies both cited more demand for coaching services than they were able to provide. Further, many interviewees indicated resources like myTeachstone were not used well by teachers when responsible for using on their own – teachers often didn't have time to watch videos and respond to prompts on their own. Those who used myTeachstone as part of a coaching program saw more benefit.

Increase training for center directors/principals on CLASS, including CLASS observer certification training

Develop director/administrator-focused trainings around CLASS that includes how to support teachers with CLASS, tips on managing instructional and operational responsibilities, and, if possible, observer certification for CLASS. To inform how many directors/administrators may still need CLASS certification training, a survey should be conducted as part of the state's early childhood strategic planning process.

> *Rationale:* Many interviewees observed noticeable benefit when site directors/administrators received training on CLASS and became CLASS reliable observers, as well as the overall need for more CLASS reliable observers to conduct local observations. Many of the CLASS-related trainings offered by resource and referral and lead agencies focus on teachers, and site directors/administrators do not always participate. Some networks provide mini-trainings to site directors/administrators at network meetings, however, not all directors/administrators are able to attend meetings (e.g. they also teach during the day, do not have anyone to take over their duties). For CLASS certification training, interviewees cited the cost and the availability of the training as barriers to more agency staff, site directors/administrators, and teachers becoming CLASS reliable observers.

Develop a state professional development plan based on a gap analysis of current opportunities

Conduct a gap analysis of Louisiana's current professional development and coaching system and recommended, research-based features and practices. From the gap analysis, create a state early care and education professional development plan, engaging a cross-sector leadership team. Pilot any new coaching models or professional development systems with a variety of provider types and across age levels.

> *Rationale:* Louisiana currently does not have a comprehensive, statewide vision for development of all early care and education educators. Research clearly indicates a strong professional development system impacts early care and education educators' instructional practice and, under some conditions, improves child outcomes. With an abundance of information available, Louisiana can draw on best practices in effective professional development and coaching models, as well as lessons learned from state and local models, to develop a robust statewide professional development and coaching system to further support educator efficacy and child outcomes.

Increase access to low/no-cost education training programs for non-lead teachers to help address teacher talent pool shortages

Increase availability of Child Development Associate (CDA) and Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate program subsidies for non-lead teachers to help support development of a lead teacher pipeline. Increase availability of the Early Childhood Education Jump Start pathway, which would increase the number of high school students graduating with a CDA and who would be able to step directly into a teaching position (lead or assistant).

> *Rationale:* Analysis of the first two years of CLASS data show teacher credentials matter, and programs with teachers holding CDAs or higher tend to perform better than programs with non-credentialed teachers. For interviewed stakeholders, the majority mentioned teacher turnover and a lack of quality applicants for teacher positions as issues, especially for child care providers. Many cited the amount of time it takes to train new teachers on CLASS and other requirements, as well as applicants' lack of understanding around higher standards. CDA programs include instructional practice and often focus heavily on CLASS. High-quality CDA programs also provide coaching to students while in the program, which further supports CDA students' development and instructional practice. By opening subsidized opportunities to non-lead teachers, who often cannot afford to pay for a program out of pocket, providers would have access to a larger candidate pool for lead and assistant teachers with at least introductory knowledge of CLASS.

Incorporate classroom environment checklist (e.g. ECERS) to guide teachers in classroom setup and organization

Adapt a classroom environment checklist (e.g. ECERS) for teachers and site directors/administrators to use to help with classroom environment basics. This could begin as an optional tool available to early childhood providers and coaches, and later incorporated into the rating system after a pilot period.

> *Rationale:* Interviewees consistently cited their appreciation of the CLASS tool's focus on instruction and teacher-child interactions; however, some observed an increase in teachers needing help with setting up classrooms in a way that better supports instruction. The CLASS domain around

classroom organization focuses more on teacher actions, lesson format, and student behavior, rather than what classrooms should look like or how they should be organized.

Fund additional grants for high-quality materials

Provide additional grants for purchase of high-quality materials, including consumables and other items subject to wear-and-tear (e.g. books, toys). This is an especially acute issue for private child care centers.

> *Rationale:* Given reimbursement rates and providers' trying to remain affordable for families, many lack the financial reserves to purchase high-quality curriculum and continuously purchase high-quality materials.

Increase uniformity of CLASS observation procedures across regions, including notification, local observer, and observation windows

Introduce more uniform protocols around local observations. This could include requiring local observations being done by someone outside site staff (e.g. center directors/administrators conduct observations for other sites), and mirroring the notification process the Picard Center uses for observations (month-long observation window with providers notified the month before). Excluding the first few weeks of the school year from the observation schedule, as Early/Head Start programs do, would allow classrooms to establish routines with students.

> *Rationale:* Procedures around local CLASS observations vary by network. Local observations are conducted by the site's director/administrator, lead agency staff, and third-party contractors. When site directors/administrators conduct the observation for their site, some networks require a shadow observer every time while others do not (beyond standard shadow requirements). Additionally, some networks inform providers and teachers of the exact date of the local observation in advance, others provide a window, and some give no advance notice. This is in contrast to K-12 classrooms, where teachers typically receive one announced and one unannounced observation. A few interviewees also mentioned observations occurring in the first few weeks of school, which seemed unfair to teachers, especially new teachers. The variance in local observation practices between networks at minimum leads to a perception of bias, especially for site directors/administrators conducting their own observations.

Reduce maximum child-teacher ratios for child care centers

Phase in reductions to maximum child-teacher ratios for child care centers in Louisiana licensing regulations.

> *Rationale:* National studies on child-teacher ratios and group sizes indicate lower ratios and group sizes result in higher cognitive development and pre-literacy scores, decreased behavioral issues, and increased positive verbal and nonverbal interaction between children and adults. In *Caring for Our Children* (CFOC)[10], the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and

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[10] American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011). *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs*. Accessed from http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/ CFOC3_updated_final.pdf

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education recommend child-staff ratios well below what is common in most U.S. states[11], as well as required ratios in Louisiana:

Age Range	CFOC Recommendation	Most Common Nationally	Louisiana	
			Type II/III	Type I
Infants	3:1	4:1	5:1	6:1
1-year-olds	4:1	6:1	7:1	8:1
2-year-olds	4:1	8:1	11:1	12:1
3-year-olds	7:1	10:1	13:1	14:1
4-year-olds	8:1	10:1	15:1	16:1

Analysis of the first two years of Louisiana CLASS data show providers who reduced child-teacher ratios experienced an average increase in CLASS scores that was greater than providers who did not change their child-teacher ratios.

Lead Agencies & Resource and Referral Agencies

Schedule trainings at times teachers from all provider types – child care centers, Early/Head Start, and schools – can attend, including evenings and weekends

Not all early care and education teachers' schedules are the same. While some providers, namely school systems and Early/Head Start programs, may be able to provide teachers with planning time and/or breaks during the day, many early childhood teachers only receive a lunch break. If teachers do not receive a planning or break period during the day, they are not able to attend off-site trainings or meetings. To accommodate teacher schedule realities and increase participation in trainings, trainings by lead agencies, resource and referral agencies, and any other organizations should be offered at different times of the day, including evenings and weekends. This may require organizations to offer the same training multiple times or conduct more on-site trainings to minimize teachers' time away from their classrooms.

Establish relationships with providers of all types, and continuously check in with providers throughout the year, regardless of performance level

While lead agencies and resource and referral agencies try to develop relationships with all providers in their areas, it can be a challenge to connect with everyone, especially if resources are stretched. This can sometimes cause agencies to focus on lower performing providers or providers new to the area, leaving less bandwidth for checking in on higher performing and/or more established providers. To combat this, lead agencies and resource and referral agencies should reach out to all providers regularly, even if just to remind the provider of the services available should they need them. Other examples include regularly communicating with providers, holding regular network meetings, and continuing to reach out to non-responsive providers.

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[11] National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, National Association for Regulatory Administration. (2015). *Trends in Child Care Center Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2014*. Accessed from http://www.naralicensing.org/assets/docs/ChildCareLicensingStudies/2014CCStudy/center_licensing_trends_brief_2014.pdf

Survey providers and teachers to inform the types of services and trainings offered each year

With finite resources, regular surveys of providers to identify trending needs and interests will help lead agencies and resource and referral agencies develop training schedules that maximize resources by addressing providers' and teachers' needs. For example, if a number of providers are struggling with implementation of a specific curriculum, the agency could offer a training on that specific curriculum rather than a series of trainings on curriculum in general, which will not be as applicable to providers. Surveys could be administered during regular community network meetings and/or via regular network communications.

Analyze data to determine efficacy of services, including CLASS scores for teachers receiving services and attending trainings to identify trends and adjust practices as needed

Lead agencies and resource and referral agencies provide a multitude of supports to providers. To track the efficacy of these supports, especially targeted services like training and coaching, lead agencies and resource and referral agencies should identify, track, and analyze key data related to the supports they provide. For example, if providing intensive coaching to teachers using a specific model, the agency could use the teachers' CLASS scores pre- and post-coaching to see if the coaching program is supporting improvements on CLASS, overall and/or on specific domains or dimensions.

APPENDIX

FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF CLASS DATA IN LOUISIANA:
Program Improvement, Program Characteristics, and Geographic Variation

Introduction:
Using data provided by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) regarding early childhood program performance and characteristics, we analyzed trends in performance in 2015-2016 (i.e., the Learning Year) and 2016-2017. This memo provides an overview of findings from analyses in each of the individual years, compares trends across both years, and analyzes program improvement.

Program Performance:
- During the Learning Year (2015-2016), the average overall program CLASS score across the state was 4.70, a low Proficient score. In 2016-2017, the average overall program CLASS score rose to 4.84, continuing the statewide average as Proficient. This indicates a growth on the statewide average of 0.14 CLASS points.

By Age:
- Prekindergarten programs on average scored in the Proficient range (2015-2016: 4.75; 2016-2017: 4.89) while Toddler programs on average scored Approaching Proficient. (2015-2016: 4.31; 2016-2017: 4.39). Unsurprisingly, this also means that a higher proportion of Toddler programs are rated Unsatisfactory or Approaching Proficient compared to Prekindergarten programs.
- The average Prekindergarten CLASS scores increased by 0.14, and the average Toddler CLASS scores increased by 0.08 CLASS points.
- Programs tended to score lower in dimensions related to instruction, and they experienced lower growth for dimensions related to instruction. This was true for both Toddler and PreK programs.

By Program Type:
- During the Learning Year (2015-2016), school-based programs scored higher (5.16 – Proficient) than Early/Head Start programs (4.65 - Proficient), which performed better than child care programs (4.35 – Approaching Proficient). All program types improved the following year (2016-2017). School-based programs continued to score higher (5.24 – Proficient) than Early/Head Start programs (4.74 - Proficient), which performed better than child care programs (4.51 – Approaching Proficient).
- Child care programs saw the greatest gains (0.16) from the 2015-2016 to 2016-2017. Improvements among school-based programs (0.08) and Early/Head Start programs (0.09) were approximately half that of child care programs.
  - Most of the improvement among child care programs occurred for child care Prekindergarten programs, which on average improved 0.17 CLASS points. School-based Prekindergarten programs improved 0.07 CLASS points while Early/Head Start Prekindergarten programs improvement 0.09 CLASS points.
  - Improvement among Toddler scores was lower. Early/Head Start programs showed virtually no change in average Toddler CLASS score improvements at

0.01 CLASS points. Child care toddler programs improved 0.05 CLASS points while school-based toddler programs improve 0.08 CLASS points.

Program Characteristics:

Curriculum:

- In 2015-2016, almost half of Prekindergarten programs used a top-tier curriculum program while only one-quarter of Toddler programs did.[1] By 2016-2017, the proportion of programs using top-tier curricula grew. In 2016-2017, almost three-quarters of Prekindergarten programs reported using a top-tier curriculum program while over half of Toddler Programs did.[2]
- From 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, 31.1% of Prekindergarten programs improved the quality of their curriculum, and 41.6% of Toddler programs improved the quality of their curriculum. 5.5% of Prekindergarten programs actually decreased the quality of their curriculum while 3.5% of Toddler programs decreased the quality of their curriculum. Improvement in the quality of programs' curriculum was largely associated with no change (i.e., improvement) in CLASS scores.
  - Prekindergarten programs that improved their curriculum on average saw no change in their CLASS scores (-0.03). Prekindergarten programs that experienced no change in the quality of their curriculum on average increased their CLASS scores by 0.20 points. Prekindergarten programs that decreased the quality of their curriculum on average improved their CLASS scores by 0.23 points.
  - Toddler programs that improved their curriculum on average saw a slight increase in their CLASS scores (0.07). Toddler programs that experienced no change in the quality of their curriculum on average increased their CLASS scores by 0.11 points. Toddler programs that decreased the quality of their curriculum on average declined their CLASS scores by -0.18 points.

Assessment:

- In 2015-2016, over two-thirds of all programs assessed most of their children with approximately 20% of programs mentioning that they assessed only a few of their children. By 2016-2017, over three-fourths of all programs used a top-tier assessment with only approximately 11% of programs mentioning that they do not use an assessment at all (or use an unrated one).
- 21.9% of all programs improved the number of children being assessed while 9.0% actually decreased the number of children assessed. On average, programs that improved the number of children assessed saw a CLASS score increase of 0.23 CLASS points. This was similar to the program improvement among programs that maintained consistency in the number of children assessed: 0.20 CLASS points.[3] Programs that

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[1] The vast majority of Toddler programs reported not using a curriculum at all or using an unrated curriculum. Almost half of Prekindergarten programs did not use a curriculum or used an unrated curriculum.

[2] One-third of Toddler Programs reported not using a curriculum at all or using an unrated curriculum. One-quarter of PreK Programs did not use a curriculum or used an unrated curriculum.

[3] Most programs that that maintained their assessment quality were already using 3-star assessments.

decreased the number of children assessed saw no change in their average CLASS scores (0.03 CLASS points).

Ratio:

- In 2015-2016, over half of all programs had top-tier ratio ratings. However, 20% of programs reported a 1-star level ratio, and approximately 10% of programs did not report their ratio rating at all. By 2016-2017, although over half of all programs continued to have top-tier ratio ratings, the number declined slightly by 3 percentage points. However, 11% of programs reported a 2-star level ratio, and the proportion of programs reporting a 1-star ratio grew to approximately 25%. Approximately 6% of programs did not report their ratio rating at all.
- From 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, 14.8% of programs improved the quality of their teacher-child ratio while 15.5% of programs decreased the quality of their teacher-child ratio. Programs that decreased the quality of their teacher-child ratio experienced no change in average CLASS scores (-0.01). Programs that did not change their teacher-child ratio experienced on average a 0.13 CLASS point increase, and programs that improved the quality of their teacher-child ratio experienced on average a 0.26 CLASS point increase.
- Programs that improved the quality of their teacher-child ratio saw greater CLASS score increases from one year to the next than those that did not. However, programs that decreased the quality of their teacher-child ratio were not necessarily adversely affected on their CLASS scores.
    - Both Prekindergarten and Toddler programs that improved the quality of their teacher-child ratio experienced an average increase in CLASS scores. Prekindergarten programs that improved their teacher-child ratio experienced a 0.71 CLASS score increase while Toddler programs improved experienced a 0.38 CLASS increase.
    - Prekindergarten and Toddler programs that decreased the quality of their teacher-child ratio quality or that did not change their teacher-child ratio quality also on average experienced an increased in CLASS scores, though not as high as those programs that improved their teacher-child ratio.

Teacher Qualifications:

- In 2015-2016, almost 30% of lead teachers had no degree beyond a high school degree. Approximately 25% of lead teachers had a CDA or associate's degree, and 45% had a bachelor's degree or above. Programs with teachers who had higher education levels tended to do better than programs that did not although this relationship broke down once lead teachers had more than a bachelor's degree. (That is, programs with lead teachers who have master's degrees *do not* necessarily perform better than those who have a bachelor's degree.)
    - The relationship between teacher education level and CLASS scores differs for Toddler programs versus Prekindergarten programs. Toddler programs where a higher proportion of lead teachers had a CDA or associate's degree seemed to do better than those where more lead teachers had no degrees or bachelor's degree. For Prekindergarten programs, bachelor's degrees seem to be an important indicator of CLASS scores.

- o Having a master's degree (in addition to the Bachelor's) did not seem to make a difference for program quality. Having a certification specifically in ECE (in addition to Bachelor's) also did not seem to improve program quality.
- In 2016-2017, programs with teachers who had higher education levels tended to do better than programs that did not although this relationship broke down once lead teachers have more than a bachelor's degree. Unlike in 2015-2016, this was true whether looking at Toddler programs or Prekindergarten programs, though the relationship between teacher experience and Toddler program scores was weaker than that for Prekindergarten programs. Overall, this is consistent with relationships detected in the Learning Year (2015-2016). However, in the most recent year of data, Toddler program teacher experience seemed more closely related to Toddler program CLASS scores than in the Learning Year.

Geography:
- There are no major patterns across the Resource and Referral Regions. However, some interesting highlights include:
  - o Across both years, Volunteers of America Region 6 is the highest performing R&R region at all ages.
  - o Children's Coalition fell from the middle of the pack during the Learning Year to the bottom during 2016-2017. Their overall scores fell 0.26.
  - o Across both years, both of NSU's regions are in the lower half of R & R region performance.
- In 2015-2016, Assumption, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Red River, and Washington parishes seemed to be performing well both with Toddler and Prekindergarten programs. Community networks that needed assistance include Catahoula & Tensas, Concordia, Grant, Orleans, and Richland parishes. By 2016-2017, Cameron, Red River, and Washington parishes moved into the top five highest performing districts while St. James, Madison, and LaSalle fell out of the top 5. Catahoula and Tensas and Richland parishes dropped into the bottom five performing parishes while West Baton Rouge and Rapides climbed out of the bottom five.
- Red River, Cameron, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, and Bienville Parishes demonstrated the most rapid improvement from the Learning Year (2015-2016) to 2016-2017. Madison, East Carroll, Richland, Franklin, La Salle, and Catahoula Parishes also experienced the greatest decline.
- Jefferson Davis was the only parish in the overall Top 5 across both years. Washington and Assumption Parishes were in the Top 5 across both years for Prekindergarten; no parishes were in the Top 5 for Toddler scores across both years.[4]
- Grant, Orleans, and Concordia Parishes were in the overall Bottom 5 across both years. Ascension and DeSoto were in the Bottom 5 for Toddler scores, and Orleans, Concordia, and Grant Parishes were in the Bottom 5 for Prekindergarten scores across both years.

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[4] Six districts do not have Toddler CLASS ratings: Assumption, Cameron, Catahoula & Tensas, East Feliciana, LaSalle, and West Carroll.

Summary and Implications:

- Programs across all ages and types are improving. However, most of their improvement is occurring in the non-instructional domains, so programs continue to need support in improving instruction.

- Prekindergarten and Toddler programs have both improved the quality of their curricula since the Learning Year. However, these quality improvements have not necessarily been associated with an increase in CLASS scores. This may be because programs still need to become accustomed to and supported with implementing new curricula. (It could also be that curricular quality is not associated with CLASS scores.)

- The number of children assessed by programs *does* seem to be associated with CLASS scores as are teacher-child ratios. Interestingly, though low-quality teacher-child ratios do not necessarily seem to be associated with lower or declining in CLASS scores, high-quality teacher-child ratios do seem to be associated with better CLASS scores. The role of teacher-child ratios in program quality deserves further exploration.

- Teacher quality seems to be associated with CLASS scores, though qualifications above a master's do not seem to result in program improvements.

- Jefferson Davis was the only parish that scored well across both years and for both Toddler and Prekindergarten programs. Network leadership and programs should be explored for insight into how other networks and programs could improve. On the other hand, Grant, Orleans, and Concordia Parishes were in the overall Bottom 5 across both years and need rapid intervention.
    - It might also be worth exploring programs that demonstrated greatest improvement from the Learning Year (2015-2016) to 2016-2017. Parishes that experienced the greatest overall improvement would be Red River, Cameron, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany. St. Bernard, Red River, and Cameron Parishes substantially improved their Prekindergarten CLASS scores while West Feliciana, St. Tammany, and Plaquemines improved their Toddler CLASS scores.

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TO: MELANIE BRONFIN AND HEATHER COPE, LOUISIANA POLICY INSTITUTE FOR
              CHILDREN
FROM: LORI CONNORS-TADROS, NIEER/CEELO
              SARAH DAILY, CHILD TRENDS
SUBJECT: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
              SETTINGS
DATE: JANUARY 10, 2018
CC: NASHA PATEL, LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I. Introduction

CEELO and Child Trends were asked to review national research on best practices that have been shown to improve results on the CLASS assessment, with a specific focus on research that impacts instruction, and is applicable to teachers in school and community based settings.

This memo builds on the November 3, 2016 memo to Jenna Conway on "ECCE accountability system performance rating recommendations" produced by Child Trends and CEELO. Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) took important steps forward to address the 2016 recommendations, for example, by implementing "A Child Care Curriculum Initiative" which includes guidance, funding and technical assistance to Type III child care centers to purchase Tier I (research-based) curriculum, and to access training on implementation of the curriculum from local Resource and Referral Agencies. In addition, LDOE implemented new opportunities for early childhood child care teachers to achieve the "early childhood ancillary certificate" to increase professional learning and access to School Readiness Tax Credits. Notably, LDOE recently released a comprehensive online reporting system detailing how well child care centers and schools statewide are preparing students, birth through grade 12. The interactive system, called the Louisiana School Finder, details the first-ever early childhood performance profiles and the annual school performance scores, among other information valuable to families.

LDOE and early childhood stakeholders are continuing to seek ways to strengthen and unify the early childhood system so that all children have access to high quality educators and programs. This memo provides additional information and research on the recommendation included in the 2016 memo to implement job-embedded professional development, as well as recommendations on curriculum implementation training and fidelity for all early education settings since the current curriculum initiative only reaches child care settings. This memo focuses specifically on research on effective professional development models that improve instructional practice and makes suggestions for strengthening the implementation of the curriculum, assessment, professional development feedback loop. The memo includes the following:

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- Brief review of the research on curriculum implementation and effective professional development interventions;
- Summary of selected examples of promising approaches to professional development and coaching; and
- Next steps and considerations for LA policymakers and stakeholders

II. Brief Review of the Research on Factors That Impact Improved Instruction and Child Outcomes

Research has indicated that the quality of teacher-child interactions, the quality of instruction, and the effective use of developmentally-appropriate curriculum and assessment practices have the greatest impact on children's outcomes during the preschool years.[1] [2],[3] When the curriculum, instructional and assessment practices are aligned, developmentally appropriate, and implemented with fidelity the two practices can work together to support the growth and development of individual children and their needs.[4] These constellations of factors - teacher-child interaction, quality of instruction, and use of an evidence-based curriculum and assessment - when considered together as the focus of teacher preparation and professional development are most likely to result in improved child outcomes and the best bets for improving teacher practice.

Better education and training, including ongoing support, for teachers can improve instructional practices related to curriculum and instruction and the interactions between children and teachers, which in turn affects children's learning.[5] Research suggests that professional learning and continuous coaching are instrumental for supporting teaching practices related to high quality experiences for children.[6] Good teachers are actively engaged in their continuing professional development.[7] Recent research indicates that coaching focused on improving interactions with children based on feedback from direct observations of teachers can lead to significant improvements in classroom practices and children's outcomes.[8]

How do Curriculum & Assessment Practice Influence Children's Development?

In addition to specific professional development and training on the CLASS, consider the strengthening the supports provided to teachers related to curriculum and assessment practices. When curriculum and assessment practices are aligned, developmentally appropriate, and implemented with fidelity the two practices can work together to support the growth and development of individual children and their needs.[9]

- ✓ *Use of an evidenced-based curriculum is an important element of instructional practice that supports children's growth and learning.* An evidenced-based curriculum that supports the knowledge, skills, and abilities across all of the domains of early childhood development can help young children achieve goals that are educationally significant.[10]

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✓ ***Ensuring the curriculum is implemented as intended can assure expected results.*** When a developmentally appropriate curriculum is implemented to fidelity and in a way that supports children's conceptual understanding, children are most likely to achieve the intended goals and outcomes of that curriculum approach.[11]

✓ ***Teachers often need training on the use of the curricula to ensure the model is implemented as intended.*** Training teachers on the use of specific curricula and providing onsite coaching has been found to increase the likelihood that curricula are implemented to fidelity.[12]

✓ ***Effective teachers use ongoing assessments to check each child's progress and adjust instructional approaches as needed.*** The use of ongoing authentic observational assessment practices to plan and guide instruction with young children is widely acknowledged as a key component of a high-quality early care and education program.[13]

What are the Components of Effective Professional Development (PD)?

Effective PD practices is designed to provide differential support to the knowledge, learning styles and goals of adults and within a system of continuous quality improvement in order to improve teacher practice and children's learning. Additionally, effective PD is tightly coupled to curricula, assessment and student learning needs.

According to a recent report [14] effective professional development incorporates most, if not all, of the following elements:

✓ *Is content focused***:** PD that focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content supports teacher learning within teachers' classroom contexts. This element includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in areas such as mathematics, science, or literacy.

✓ *Incorporates active learning:* Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students. Such PD uses authentic artifacts, interactive activities, and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning. This approach moves away from traditional learning models and environments that are lecture based and have no direct connection to teachers' classrooms and students.

✓ *Supports collaboration:* High-quality PD creates space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts. By working collaboratively,

teachers can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school and/or district.

✓ *Uses models of effective practice:* Curricular models and modeling of instruction provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like. Teachers may view models that include lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching.

✓ *Provides coaching and expert support:* Coaching and expert support involve the sharing of expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused directly on teachers' individual needs.

✓ *Offers feedback and reflection:* High-quality professional learning frequently provides built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating reflection and soliciting feedback. Feedback and reflection both help teachers to thoughtfully move toward the expert visions of practice.

✓ *Is of sustained duration:* Effective PD provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.

Zaslow et al (2010) conducted a review of features of effective professional development, specifically for early childhood educators.[15] In addition to the above features, the authors noted additional characteristics of effective professional development that are salient for Louisiana's context and purposes of professional development for educators of young children. These are:

✓ *There is collective participation of teachers from the same classrooms or schools in professional development.* Joint participation can help to support a professional culture and ensure the sustainability of new techniques and skills. Professional development that includes administrators helps to assure that early educators do not receive contradictory messages about what practices to implement or emphasize. Likewise, including teachers of different age groups or grades can foster continuity in the children's experiences as they move through classrooms in the future.

✓ *Educators are prepared to conduct child assessments and interpret their results as a tool for ongoing monitoring of the effects of professional development*. Assessments can help early childhood educators view their knowledge and skills as contributing to improvement in children's outcomes, and can serve as a source of feedback for how to target instruction overall and xiv for individual children

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What are Policy Standards for State Professional Development Systems?

Louisiana offers some supports for continued professional learning, including a guide to curriculum, assessment and professional development, online courses, and other training available through the Resource and Referral System.[i]

The National Institute for Early Education Research, *2016 State Preschool Yearbook*, identified new Preschool quality benchmarks for the first time since 2002 to reflect the more recent research on quality indicators in preschool.[16] The new NIEER quality benchmark on professional development includes the following:

Professional Development Quality Benchmarks

- At least 15 clock hours per year (or the equivalent) of approved professional learning activities for:
    o Lead teachers
    o Assistant teachers

    (Note: The majority of these hours should be on topics other than health and safety)

- Written individualized annual professional development plans for:
    o Lead teachers
    o Assistant teachers
- Coaching is required for all lead teachers (or all classrooms)

Louisiana did not meet this new benchmark for the three preschool programs it operated in 2016.[17] While this benchmark is specific to state funded preschool programs, they may serve as an important quality benchmarks in strengthening the professional development and support to early childhood teachers in Louisiana. The next sections explore effective models and approaches in more detail.

III. Continuous Improvement Models of Professional Development

In a review of high quality preschool programs that showed great impacts on child outcomes, Minervino noted the following, "*…high-fidelity to curriculum can only be achieved through deep training, continuous monitoring, and the provision of actionable feedback directly to teachers. Ongoing professional development (PD) regarding standards, curriculum, child assessment, and improving the quality of instruction are important parts of the mix.*" [18]

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[i] For more information see http://www.louisianabelieves.com/early-childhood/continuing-professional-development

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Effective implementation of curricula is characterized by intensive professional development that often involves coaching at least twice a month, in which an expert teacher provides feedback and support for in-classroom practice, either in person or in some cases through observation of videos of classroom teaching.[19] For professional development to impact child outcomes, teacher quality and specifically instructional quality must be improved. We identify models that merit further consideration -"promising models" because they have demonstrated impact on instructional quality and could be cost-effective. "Additional models" are noted because they have evidence that the professional development model is comprehensive, relatively cost-effective, and implemented in community based settings; however may not be as feasible to implement given current structure of LA's early childhood system. As most of the research on professional development models has not been conducted in child care settings, the final section reviews the research on coaching in child care.

Promising Models of Professional Development to Improve Instruction

My Teaching Partner (**MTP**) is a web-based professional development/coaching system aligned to the focus areas of the CLASS assessment that includes video exemplars and web-mediated consultation on specific dimensions of interactions with children. Teachers assigned to receive on-line consultation and feedback targeted to their interactions showed significantly greater increases in independent ratings of the quality of interactions than did those only receiving access to a website with video clips. Though effect sizes were small, the study found improvements in teacher practice on all three domains of the CLASS. Effect sizes translate into approximately .5 increase in scale scores on CLASS for all teachers in the study and about 1 point increase in scale scores for teachers in high poverty settings. Compared to other studies, generally a 1 point increase in CLASS scale scores in instruction or emotional domains have been shown in other research to be associated with increases in child outcomes.[20]

The positive effects of consultation were particularly evident in classrooms with higher proportions of children who experienced economic risks. Early research in 2008 on Pre-k teachers found significant effects on teacher quality of interaction of both the consultation and web-based video exemplars[21]; and numerous subsequent studies in Head Start and child care settings have found significant impact on teacher instructional practice and child outcomes in language and literacy.[22]

As noted by the authors of the study, "A key finding is that for teachers in the highest poverty classrooms, consultation support was associated with positive changes in their interactions while access only to the less-intensive non-individualized web-only resources did not produce positive

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increments in quality. …These findings suggest that coaching/consultation is a critical ingredient in improving instructional practices of teachers.

Making the Most of Classroom Interactions, (MMCI) a more targeted professional development model developed to be delivered to a group of teachers. This model could be more feasible for state-wide implementation, more cost-effective and aligned with the role of lead agencies in the Community Networks. Georgia conducted a three-year study of MMCI and My Teaching Partner (MTP) with Pre-K lead teachers, comparing impact of the MMCI and a control group, MTP and a control group, and MMCI vs MTP. Findings indicated that at the end of the year, MMCI teachers scored significantly higher on Emotional Support ($p < .001$; .36 effect size) and Instructional Support ($p < .05$; .24 effect size) than teachers in the control group. On Classroom Organization the two groups were similar, neither had a significant impact (p < .10). MTP teachers scored higher on Emotional Support (p < .05; .22 effect size) than teachers in the control group at the end of the year. No improvement was seen among MTP teachers on Classroom Organization (p > .10) or Instructional Support (p > .10) relative to teachers in the control group. Further, teachers who took part in MMCI had greater knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions after participation than did their peers in the MTP or control groups and thought their professional development was more valuable than did their peers in the control group. [23]

The chart below provides a summary of the findings.

Summary of Evaluation Findings

	MMCI vs. control	MTP vs. control	MMCI vs. MTP
Emotional Support	MMCI > control	MTP > control	No difference
Classroom Organization	No difference	No difference	No difference
Instructional Support	MMCI > control	No difference	No difference
Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions	MMCI > control	No difference	MMCI > MTP
Perceived Value of the Professional Development	MMCI > control	MTP > control	No difference
Relationship with the Coach/Instructor	Not applicable	Not applicable	MTP > MMCI

As noted above, there was no impact or difference in CLASS scores between the sample that participated in the MTP and the control group in classroom organization and instructional

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support. However, there was a positive impact of MMCI on emotional and instructional support. Researchers report the following: "The 10-session MMCI course, which used a cohort model to improve teacher-child interactions, was an effective means of increasing emotional and instructional support in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Further, teachers who took part in MMCI had greater knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions after participation than did their peers in the MTP or control groups and thought their professional development was more valuable than did their peers in the control group."[24]

The model has shown a significant impact on the instructional support domain of CLASS, and moderate impacts on classroom organization and emotional support domains. The authors report that the effect size for gains in Instructional Support (d = .82) was greater than for gains in Classroom Organization or Emotional Support (d = .56 for both). As a reference, researchers often consider an effect size of .50 as moderate and an effect size of .80 as large.   Costs of MTP-Further information about costs of materials are here. Information about costs of training, some of which are free can be found here here. Costs of MMCI can be found here. (Note: we can do further research with Georgia if interested)

Early Ed U developed by faculty at the University of Washington for Head Start teachers (formerly known as Head Start University). Early Ed U offers research-based video courses to institutions of higher education and state professional development networks. A unique feature is the coaching companion, a method to jointly view videos and comment/consult to identify areas to improve practice. Membership in the Early Ed U Alliance is free. LA is not currently a state partner nor is any institutions of higher education involved.

Additional Models of Professional Development to Consider

Head Start REDI -- A randomized controlled trial of the Head Start REDI program, a professional development intervention involving four days of workshop training and weekly in class support from a mentor teacher, significantly improved intervention teachers' classroom practices. Results suggest that those teachers that participated in the REDI professional development:

- talked with children more frequently and in more cognitively complex ways
- established a more positive classroom climate, and
- used more preventive behavior-management strategies

In turn, these changes in teachers' practice significantly improved children's executive functioning, academic, and social-emotional skills above and beyond their peers in the control group classrooms.[25]

    ✓ Implemented in Head Start programs.

Cost, if available: See here for information on costs. The social-emotional learning component of REDI is the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum which is available for purchase from Channing Bete Company, with prices ranging from $399 to $799 per classroom module.

Every Child Ready (ECR) - The ECR is Apple Tree's instructional model. Apple Tree is a non-profit research and development institute operating charter schools in Washington, DC. The ECR is an instructional model includes an affordable research based curriculum, differentiated professional development for adult learners (teachers and leaders), and provides educators with a developmentally appropriate robust assessment tool kit to help measure the effectiveness and quality of instruction. The curriculum is play-based and includes 10 thematic units; including a two year scope and sequence that differentiates instruction for three and four year olds. The ECR professional development program provides teachers and school leaders with targeted, differentiated professional development that trains and supports them in curriculum implementation and early childhood pedagogical best practices. ECR's PD model includes: (a) in-person workshops; b) online courses; and (c) targeted virtual and in class coaching with feedback. ECR Curriculum Specialists work with school instructional leaders' onsite to analyze data and develop differentiated professional development plans for teachers.

Results indicate that teachers who implement the Every Child Ready instructional model out performed non-ECR classrooms in the CLASS Instructional Support domain (b = 0.67, p < .001). This difference was present for all three Instructional Support dimensions (Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling), but was especially strong in the area of Concept Development (b = .78, p <.001). Findings suggest that classrooms who implement the ECR Instructional model are better equipped to encourage higher order thinking skills.

    ✓ Implemented in school-based preschool programs.

Cost, if available: See here for accessing Information on costs.

Coaching in Child Care and other Early Childhood Settings

Coaching in child care settings is a common approach to increasing the quality of care and providing professional development to early childhood educators.[26] The Head Start Performance Standards require coaching (within educator professional development) and define certain aspects of what coaching should entail. A growing body of research suggests that on-site coaching, when combined with professional development, can contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching and gains in children's learning, especially when it is focused on teaching

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practices that support growth in key domains of school readiness such as language, early math, and social-emotional development.[27] While research on specific coaching models that are effective within child care settings is less prevalent, the field is beginning to work towards identifying the effective elements of coaching systems for child care, which are typically incorporated in the state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).

A new initiative supported by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), called the *Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings (SCOPE)* is working to identify the critical coaching effectiveness factors that are utilized in early childhood settings. Though the reports from this initiative have not been published, this forthcoming work may be an excellent resource for Louisiana as it considers structuring a coaching and PD system for the state's early childhood programs.

Additionally, Abt Associates recently conducted a 50-state scan[28] of coaching and technical assistance initiatives in early education to inform the expansion of the state of Massachusetts's coaching model for early childhood educators (discussed further below). The scan was aimed at identifying features of states' approaches to the delivery of coaching, as well as the structures that states use to support and monitor coaching. Fourteen states[ii] (one of which was Louisiana) were selected from this scan for a more in-depth examination of the extent to which they met key elements of well-designed integrated statewide coaching systems, based on recommendations from national policy organizations such as Child Trends, NAEYC, and OPRE. These elements of a statewide coaching system include:
- ✓ professional standards, competencies, and role definitions for coaches;
- ✓ a career pathway and system for credentialing coaches;
- ✓ a system of ongoing training support for coaches;
- ✓ state advisory body that provided oversight for coaching initiatives; and
- ✓ state data system for tracking and monitoring coaching.

Only four of the states (AZ, CO, MN, and WA) have statewide coaching systems that reflect all five key elements. Louisiana was noted as having two of the five elements (#2 and #4). Most of the 14 states reported they have:
- ✓ connected their statewide coaching system to their Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS),
- ✓ clearly defined the features of their coaching cycle (needs assessment, planning, observation, reflection and feedback), and
- ✓ use a tiered coaching approach to provide different levels of coaching to programs based on coaches' content expertise and/or on educators' areas of need.

[ii] Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

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Only a few of the 14 states set guidelines or requirements for coaching dosage or coach caseload or required coaches to collect and use data as a way to monitor their progress.

State and Local Models of Coaching Supports

Local Models: A recent report, "Primetime for Coaching: Improving Instructional Coaching in Early Childhood Settings, identifies four selected models of coaching implemented in Head Start, Early Head Start and Child Care settings.[29] The models reviewed are: (1) Acelero, a Head Start grantee serving children in 4 states; (2) Southwest Human Development serving Head Start, Early Head Start and Educare settings in Arizona; (3) Ounce of Prevention, Chicago based organization serving programs throughout Illinois and other states; and (4) University of Florida Lasinger Center, Coaching Academy. The report offers a number of lessons learned regarding the implementation of these models that Louisiana could consider.

A number of the lessons learned focus on considerations related to implementation of a new coaching model. For example, the need to adapt staffing and leadership roles and schedules to accommodate for substantive coaching; establishing clear expectations at all levels of the coaching relationship; and providing training and ongoing support to coaches and administrators throughout the implementation of any coaching model.

One lesson learned from the Southwest Human Development (SWHD) model used in Head Start programs in Phoenix Arizona may be of particular interest to Louisiana. The SWHD model uses CLASS as a performance measure, but does not have an exclusive focus on CLASS in the coaching model. Instead, the model focuses on specific teaching practices in a variety of content areas, and has found that programs were able to improve CLASS scores without focusing exclusively on CLASS-specific coaching.

State Models. A number of states are implementing coaching models in their state funded prek programs. We describe two state models here that may offer insights to Louisiana.

> **Alabama's First Class Reflective Coaching Model**. Alabama's prek program, First Class Voluntary PreK, is implemented in mixed delivery settings. The state has developed a "reflective coaching model". Implementation of the curriculum is embedded into the Alabama Reflective Coaching Model that includes effective teaching practices, curriculum content based on early developmental learning standards, and professional development. Support for curriculum selection is provided by a team from the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. All curricula must promote appropriate instructional practice and be used to compliment the framework. Lead teachers and ancillary teachers participate in a continuous improvement cycle of coaching and professional development based on child assessment data (e.g. TSGold). See here for further information on Alabama's Reflective Coaching Model and other resources on coaching.

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> **Massachusetts Coaching Models.** Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care provides different models of coaching to educators in early childhood settings and afterschool programs. The state offers an "Educator and Provider Support Grant" to provide content coaches to teachers and administrators and a "Peer Assistance and Coaching Model" that utilizes a peer-peer approach. Massachusetts also offers a number of free technology based supports to educators and coaches, including a cloud-based video platform and a guide for a 5 step approach to a professional conferencing (coaching) model. See here for further information on these models.

IV. Next Steps and Considerations

The research clearly indicates that a strong professional development system impacts early childhood educator's instructional practice and under some conditions, improves child outcomes. There is an abundance of information that could inform Louisiana's next steps in enhancing the professional development and supports to early childhood educators. The key features synthesized in section two on features of effective professional development and coaching models, plus the lessons learned from state and local modes may help Louisiana to develop a robust statewide professional development (coaching) system.

Consider the following next steps:

- Conduct a gap analysis of Louisiana's current PD/coaching system and recommended features and practices based on the research reviewed in this memo. (*The Abt report has a good template for conducting the gap analysis.*)
- Develop a state of Louisiana early childhood education professional development plan. Engage a cross-sector leadership team to develop a 3-5 year pan to consider the highest priorities, most cost-effective, and most salient strategies, with specific goals for each sector that are targeted to the program and community collaborative performance profiles. (*The Bellwether report offers guidance for policymakers on coaching models in particular; the Abt report identifies specific recommendations for Massachusetts's state model, and New American has a new multi-media guide that offers resources for policymakers on implementing Transforming the Workforce report.*)
- Before launching any new coaching model or professional development system state-wide, identify a small group (i.e., 3-5) local networks to pilot such a system with a variety of child care settings and early childhood professionals that work with different age-groups.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the ideas presented in this memo further and collect additional research to inform your decision-making as needed.

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Appendix A: Excerpt from November 3, 2016 Memo related to Professional Development Recommendations.

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Currently it is our understanding that if at least one classroom in each age group is using a Tier I curriculum, then the age group for that program would receive "three stars" for use of a Tier I curriculum. These data are self-reported in GOLD by programs as of May 1. To strengthen this informational metric, consider examining data in the Community Network Plan related to Goal 2: Teacher Support. LDE may also consider the following:

1. **Training**. Similar to the training requirements for the assessment, count the percentage of teachers who have received training on the specified curriculum in use. Since teachers will have likely participated in a variety of trainings that may range from formal trainings administered by the developer to trainings developed by the school or child care center, if possible, it may be best to survey teachers about the types of trainings they have participated in, and the documentation, if any, they received certifying their participation in the training, to get a sense of what types of training LDE might want to require or encourage and how participation can be verified.

2. **Implementation support.** Consider collecting additional information about the ongoing support provided to early childhood educators around curriculum use and adaptation. For example, the provision of planning time to develop lesson plans, and implementation support, such as time to participate in a Professional Learning Community or participate in peer-to-peer/supervisor-mentoring around curriculum implementation

3. **Fidelity of implementation**. Assessing fidelity of implementation can become burdensome for programs to document and could be resource-intensive to monitor/measure on a large scale. Instead, consider some piloting on small-scale data collection strategies that may provide initial insights into fidelity of curriculum implementation or the extent to which supports are in place to help ensure fidelity of implementation. For example, assess the extent to which principals or program directors conduct classroom observations related to curriculum use and provide feedback to teachers. The frequency of these observations, and the quality of the feedback reports, could be analyzed. Teachers could also submit portfolios that include examples of lesson plans, and a narrative description of their process for individualizing instruction to meet student needs, which could be assessed against a rubric.

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These criteria are not currently assessed at the program or network level. Possible approaches to collecting this data and/or including these metrics in the performance profile are suggested below.

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1. Job-embedded professional development. Leaders who facilitate evidence-based job-embedded professional development for their teachers are more likely to see teachers improve compared to more traditional, ad hoc, offsite professional development. To yield these outcomes, this professional development must be planned, routine, collaborative, and data-driven. Possible approached might include coaching, team lesson-planning, or peer learning groups.[30] Job-embedded professional development, led by instructional leaders, administrative staff, or ongoing consultants supporting teachers, engages teachers in learning that is "grounded in day-to-day teaching practice" and addresses the real-world challenges faced by teachers through a continuous quality improvement approach.

LDE invests millions of dollars in federal funding and other resources in supports for teachers, including a resource and referral network which offers training and coaching, mental health consultants, scholarships for CDA coursework, unique child care teacher preparation programs and other professional development offerings. Teachers at publicly-funded early learning centers are eligible to participate in these programs free of charge or at a reduced cost.

The LDE also encourages community networks to create annual Professional Development Plans (e.g. "Program Partners should collaborate to create a comprehensive professional development plan that for their teachers by August 2015). A sample plan template is included in the Sample Professional Development Plans" (page 15 of *Louisiana's Early Childhood Guidebook*, 2015[31]). Additionally, Community Networks are encouraged in the "*District Planning Guide*"[32] to create aligned and seamless expectations of high-quality programs from birth through 3rd grade. Lead agencies are encouraged to develop strong collaborative leadership and coordination among programs and to develop an annual strategic plan, which, as noted in the Early Childhood Guide, is "instrumental to the success of Louisiana's Community Networks" (page 5). These activities are currently optional, and encouraged, rather than required of community networks. However, since these practices are considered important features of a high quality early childhood system, LDE could consider additional requirements for Community Networks in subsequent years. As a first step, LDE could gather information about the community networks that currently conduct these practices and examine the relationship to the informational metrics and ratings on the performance profiles.

A focus on job-embedded professional development provides alignment among Head Start, child care and school-based Pre-K to Grade 3 programs within the network. The NIIER state of preschool 2016 quality benchmarks will also include ratings of state-funded preschool programs are that provide coaching and professional development to teachers, including whether lead and assistant teachers are required to have written individualized annual professional development plans. Additionally, new CCDBG rules regarding the types of training that states provide to child care providers suggest that states develop a framework for professional development of child care providers that includes "professional development conducted on an ongoing basis, providing a progression of professional development," which captures the intent of job-embedded professional development.[33] The Every

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Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) also defines professional development as "sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused, activities." See Louisiana's ESSA draft framework.

Program-level metric: Count the percent of teachers with a complete annual professional development plan. LA could develop specific criteria to include in professional development plan to demonstrate that the professional development is planned, routine, collaborative, and data-driven. This includes activities such as coaching, team lesson-planning, or peer learning groups. See, for example, ExceleRate Illinois standards for job-embedded professional development for birth to 5 programs in the Awards of Excellence for Preschool Teaching & Learning and Infant & Toddler Services:

> Standard 7: Programs implement opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance to support teachers' ongoing learning, reflection and examination of practice, and improvement of practice. Peer-to-peer technical assistance may include protecting time weekly or biweekly for classroom teams to engage in lesson study and to design lesson plans collaboratively, and monthly for teachers from other early learning classrooms or kindergarten/primary grade classrooms, as well as with related support staff, to convene as a Community of Practice or Reflective Practice Group to discuss child progress and classroom quality data, observe and examine practice, and collaborate to further develop curricula and improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of learning environments and instruction."

Community Network metric: All Community Networks submit plans, could be a check or + on the rating. Verification process could conduct an analysis of a random sample of community network plans, could rotate by year, so that all each network would get a review every three years. [In addition to CLASS observation data, Program Partners should use child assessment data to inform teaching planning and instruction. Following each checkpoint, Programs Partners should review aggregate CLASS and GOLD data and work with each other and Lead Agencies to develop specific strategies for ongoing support for teachers.]

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