CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING IN A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM: WHAT’S YOUR ROLE?

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Topics

- The state of the states: Relevant state policy benchmarks
- Curriculum decision-making framework: Components to consider
- Other considerations for state decision-makers
- Systems to support curriculum implementation & CIS
The Curriculum Trifecta

- Comprehensive, developmentally valid and coherent early learning and development standards (ELDS) aligned with assessment
- Strong curriculum implemented with fidelity to meet ELDS
- Continuous improvement system is used to adapt and fine-tune policies and practices
Early Learning and Development Standards Benchmark

- ELDS should be specific to preschool-aged children and vertically aligned with state standards for younger and older children so that children’s experiences at each stage build on what has gone before.

- ELDS also should be aligned with any required child assessments, and sensitive to children’s diverse cultural and language backgrounds.

- Finally, the state must provide some support for those charged with implementing the ELDS so they understand them, such as professional development and additional resources.
NIEER Curriculum Benchmark

- A strong curriculum that is well-implemented increases support for learning and development broadly, and includes specificity regarding key domains of language, literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional development.

- To meet the benchmark for curriculum support, states must provide:
  
  (a) guidance or an approval process for selecting curricula, and

  (b) training or ongoing technical assistance to facilitate adequate implementation of the curriculum.
Continuous Improvement System Benchmark

- An effective CQIS operates at local and state levels to ensure that information is gathered regularly on processes and outcomes, and that this information is used to guide program improvement.

- To meet this benchmark, policy must, at a minimum, require that
  1. data on classroom quality is systematically collected at least annually, and
  2. local programs and the state both use information from the CQIS to help improve policy or practice.

- The use of a cycle of planning, observation, and improvement has characterized highly effective programs.
State Policies that Meet Benchmarks

- 7 states did not meet ELDS benchmark
- 52 of 60 state programs met Curriculum benchmark
- 34 of 60 programs met Continuous Improvement System benchmark
“The National Research Council (2001) warns that . . a piecemeal approach to curriculum can result in a disconnected conglomeration of activities and teaching methods, lacking focus, coherence, or comprehensiveness.”

(NAEYC/NAECS-SDE Position Statement)
Curriculum Decision-making Framework*

- Theoretical orientation/coherence
- Comprehensive/integrated domains of learning
- Methods for differentiated instruction
- Coherent assessment system
- Research base
- Professional development model
- Specific materials and space
- Related services

* Frede & Ackerman (2007)
http://nieer.org/policy-issue/policy-brief-preschool-curriculum-decision-making-dimensions-to-consider
Theoretical Orientation/Coherence

- Clear theoretical framework to guide intentional teaching and teachable moments
- Objectives, activities, daily routine, and environment logically flow from the theory as well as consistent PD & coaching
- Consider the definition of playful learning and the teacher’s role in supporting learning during play
Domains of Learning

- Comprehensive or focused?
- Integrated or specific activities by domain?
- Emphasis on oral language development, higher order thinking, and problem solving or on discrete skill learning (unconstrained vs constrained skills)?
- Aligned with state standards and content-rich?
Methods & Supports for Differentiated Instruction

Curriculum embedded strategies:
- Age/developmental range
- Home or heritage language
- Challenging behaviors
- Inclusion
- Other context-specific characteristics of children and families
Coherent Assessment System for Continuous Improvement at Child and Classroom Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD</th>
<th>CLASSROOM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent with learning objectives</td>
<td>Measures fidelity of curriculum implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide insight into individual children</td>
<td>Provide insight into individual teacher/team practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inform teachers' practice</td>
<td>Inform teacher self-evaluation, coaching and PD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents and later teachers</td>
<td>Used to inform program improvement</td>
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Research Base

- Based on best knowledge of children’s learning and effective teaching
- Research on effectiveness of this model for specific population
- Research of this model replicated at scale
Implementation Issues

- Evidence of scaling and sustainability
  - Local models are available for observing
  - Effective replications show that model is palatable to educators, parents and others
  - Professional development model has evidence of effectiveness
  - A system for measuring and improving fidelity is developed
- Costs are manageable (specific materials and space, PD costs, training of trainers approach available to reduce long-term dependence)
- Related services
  - Consistent materials for family engagement in education of child
  - Transition materials
- Coherence with local K-3 approaches
- System for adaptation is manageable
Considerations for State Decision-Makers on Curriculum

- Should/could the state mandate, recommend or incentivize specific models?
- Contextual factors to consider
  - Program constraints (half-day, new program, limited PD time)
  - Children served (mixed age, DLL, inclusion)
  - Teacher preparation and need for scaffolds
  - K-3 settings and expectations
Considerations on Support for Implementation and Continuous Improvement

- Support for implementing the ELDS, aligned PD and assessment: Curriculum specific or statewide?
- Methods for ensuring fidelity of implementation with a system for coherent local adaptation
- Monitoring or improving? How to measure and use data on classroom quality – avoiding unintended consequences