



STATE POLICY TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE TEACHING THAT IMPROVES CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Policy Problem: Streamlining Accountability Structures that Impact Teaching Quality

Guiding Question

In what ways can the requirements of current early childhood accountability systems be better aligned so that teachers in school, community, and home-based settings have coherent and equitable expectations for effective practice?

Rationale

Numerous accountability structures impact early childhood teachers. Programs located in community-based organizations, homes, and public schools are subject to different accountability standards and monitoring procedures. The accountability structures for teachers who work with children before they begin kindergarten include child care licensing regulations; teacher certification and licensure requirements; Head Start program performance standards; state-funded prekindergarten program standards; states' Quality Rating and Improvement System frameworks; and the Office of Special Education Program's rules and regulations. Within the public school sector, accountability structures include teacher licensure evaluations that assess teaching practices based, in part, on students' progress.

As a result of the current accountability context, many early childhood teachers encounter multiple accountability demands that focus on different aspects of their practice. This challenge is particularly acute for the teachers in state-funded prekindergarten programs and in early childhood special education classrooms because the public school teacher evaluation frameworks may apply to them but the frameworks may not incorporate an adequate focus on teaching young children. When these varied accountability reforms are perceived as disjointed, teachers and other stakeholders may question their value, resulting in confusion and fatigue.

To support our goals for improved learning, our systems should become focused on the key indicators that reflect a shared definition of teaching quality. Streamlined accountability for early childhood programs is essential so that scarce resources – most importantly, teachers' and leaders' time – may focus on providing young learners with effective and individualized instruction.

Moving Toward Solutions

Questions about Evidence-Based Strategies: As policymakers streamline accountability approaches that successfully promote effective teaching practices, some important questions for state partners to consider include:

- Do state and local stakeholders have a shared vision for what young children should learn and the best strategies to support children’s progress toward those learning goals?
- Are there mechanisms for ECE and K-12 to learn from each other’s best practices, mistakes, and lessons to develop coherent support and accountability systems for early educators from 0-8?
- In what ways do accountability structures support teachers’ learning goals and ongoing growth and development?
Is there a mechanism to continue to plan, develop, and improve the accountability systems in each sector and track and align progress coming from each sector?

Questions about Capacity: In order to move from policy to practice, attention must be paid to the state and local capacity of programs and stakeholders to enact reforms. Some important questions for state partners to consider in this area include:

- Are there structures in place to promote collaboration among stakeholders responsible for designing and enacting accountability policies at the state and local levels?
- Are resources devoted to the implementation of coordinated accountability approaches across sectors or systems?

Questions about Coherence: New policy initiatives need to “fit” together with existing policies and practices in the birth to third grade sector. As policymakers consider how to install and sustain new evidence-based approaches, some questions to consider include:

- What federal, state, and local accountability policies are used to assess and support teaching quality – for what teachers in what settings?
- Are teachers’ voices included in decisions about accountability policies?

Some Useful Tools and Resources

- The Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University has conducted a crosswalk between the Danielson Framework for Teaching that Illinois is using for its public school teacher evaluation system and the CLASS early childhood observational assessment tool. This crosswalk, as well as resources from other states, are available at <http://teecc.illinoisstate.edu/companionresources/>
- The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research has developed a brief that provides guidance on connecting learning standards, multi-tiered systems of support, and teacher evaluation systems (Hayes & Lillenstein, 2015). *A Framework for Coherence: College and Career Readiness Standards, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and Educator Effectiveness* and can be found at http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Multi-Tiered_Systems_of_Support.pdf
- The Ounce of Prevention Fund’s paper argues that early care and education and public school sector accountability structures should set goals focused on effective teaching and provide necessary supports for achieving those goals. It describes existing accountability structures and offers guidance for moving toward common approaches (Regenstein & Romero-Jurado, 2014). *A Framework for Rethinking State Education Accountability and Support from Birth through High School*, can be found at <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/policy/policy-conversations>