

WHY A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM?

Understanding the impact of quality programming on child outcomes and the role practitioners play in achieving quality leads to the question of how to best prepare and provide ongoing professional development for the early childhood workforce.

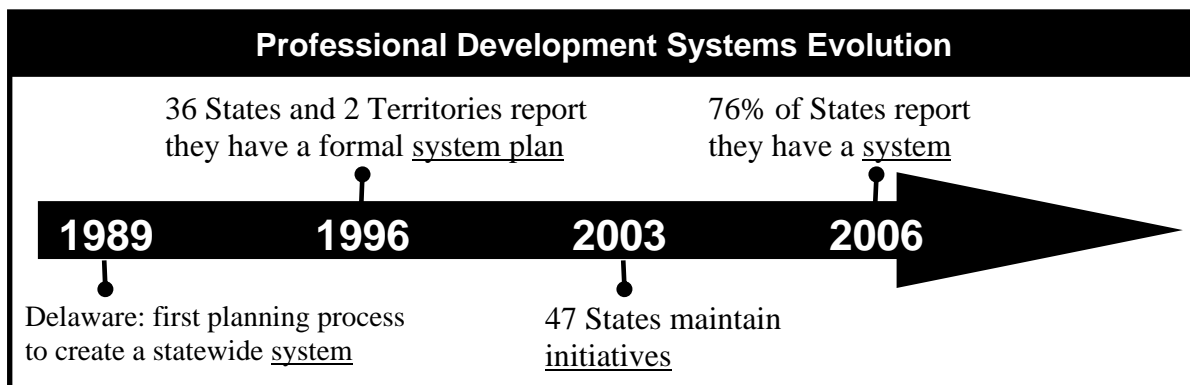
Systems Evolution

Over the last 20 years there have been declining numbers of early childhood staff with formal degrees, an increase in training participation, and a gradual demand for more advanced training and ongoing professional development that leads to credentials or degrees. Much of the early childhood workforce entered the field with no preservice training or education. Yet, while engaged in direct service work, many were eager to improve practices and hungry for camaraderie with their peers. Many practitioners sought out local trainings, conferences, and networks. Practitioners who participated in workshops over a number of years frequently found themselves with hundreds of completed training hours, but no way to plan progressions, validate or document expertise, acknowledge professionalism, or receive increased compensation. There has also been growing pressure for increased training and education through Head Start mandates, the public prekindergarten movement, and the profession itself.

Responding to both participant demand and mandates, States and Territories funded multiple professional development activities often offered by community colleges, extension services, Head Start, Community Coordinated Child Care organizations (4-Cs), and child care resource and referral agencies. These agencies became the critical link to professional development opportunities in communities across the country. Formal preparation systems also began to respond, given that most of their students were not engaged in preservice professional development activities but were taking classes and workshops while teaching or directing.

As more opportunities were provided, the need to provide an organized approach to preparing for and supporting a profession became evident and evolved into a systems approach. Today, nearly all States have developed or are working on some type of professional development system. Systems can help stakeholders organize existing efforts, help practitioners enter the workforce and continue to grow professionally, and help accomplish other specific goals.

The following graphic provides a snapshot of the evolution of professional development systems across the country.



Why a Professional Development System?

Though more than 76 percent of States now report having a professional development system, every system may not serve the workforce needs of all early care and education sectors—child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and early intervention programs. Each sector has particular roles and corresponding requirements. Therefore, staff professional development needs and strategies to meet them vary across sectors. Policy-makers have started crafting cross-sector professional development systems that coordinate strategies to support the entire workforce—likely one of the biggest challenges the field will face over the next 20 years. Some of these approaches involve unique infrastructure, governance, and financing strategies, described further in Section 3.

A Simplified Framework

An ideal, comprehensive professional development system for early care and education personnel is accessible and based on a clearly articulated framework; includes a continuum of training and ongoing supports; defines pathways that are tied to licensure, leading to qualifications and credentials; and addresses the needs of individual, adult learners. Enhancing a spirit of life-long learning is one goal of any professional development system. Similar to this goal, a professional development system itself is never a finished product and should continually evolve and be refined to best meet the needs of the population it serves.

While each professional development system is unique to the needs of the local workforce, professional development systems can be categorized in five broad interconnected *elements*, growing from the “roots” of funding to the extending “leaves” of access and outreach to the overarching system-level issues of infrastructure, governance, and financing. Each of these broad elements is made up of specific *components* to support the workforce. This simplified framework will help stakeholders form a basic understanding of professional development systems. The following table, which will be included throughout the toolkit, includes general questions readers may have and the corresponding system elements that will provide further information.

<i>System Question</i>	<i>System Element</i>
What is it?	Core knowledge
Why does it matter and what is available?	Access and outreach
How can we work toward it?	Qualifications, credentials, and pathways
How can we afford it?	Funding
How do we ensure and measure achievement?	Quality assurance

This framework can help policy-makers ensure they are addressing all aspects of their professional development systems; if one element of a system is being addressed, there will be ramifications for another part of this living, interconnected system. The following pages provide a graphic of the simplified framework and example components that fall under each of the five elements.