



# Questions for State-Level Leaders to Consider

## A Focus on Early Education Partnerships That Stimulate Quality and Heighten Standards

### High-Quality Early Education Partnerships

Across the nation, partnerships at the state and community levels are addressing numerous programming and service challenges. Many of these partnerships successfully share facilities and professional development opportunities, but stop there. Others, however, blend funds from various state and federal early education funding streams to adopt a more comprehensive approach to partnering in order to improve services for children and their families across programs. These partnerships:

- ◆ Provide full-day/full-year care that meets working families' needs
- ◆ Make available a full array of medical, dental, nutrition, mental health, and family support/education services
- ◆ Promote higher standards for teacher qualifications and skills
- ◆ Enhance classroom curriculum and learning environments including literacy practices
- ◆ Develop common outcomes for children and families
- ◆ Assure continuity of relationship-based, nurturing care for the child and family

In the pages that follow, we provide a series of questions to help state leaders assess the policies and practices that can serve to advance the quality of early education services in their state. Such state-level initiatives will assist local early education programs in building and sustaining high-quality partnerships.

### State Regulations, Policies, and Requirements

1. What state efforts have occurred to systematically compare standards and requirements across programs?
2. If there are different standards governing each of the state's early education programs, how do these different standards/requirements compare? For example:
  - ◆ What state regulations/requirements address staff/child ratios?
  - ◆ What are the ratio requirements for infants, toddlers, three-year-olds, and four-year-olds?
  - ◆ What are the group size requirements for infants, toddlers, three-year-olds, and four-year-olds?
  - ◆ What are the early childhood teacher qualification requirements for each of the state's programs?
  - ◆ What are the space/square footage requirements for classrooms and outdoor play areas? How do these requirements differ by age groups?
3. If standards/requirements differ between the state's early education programs and Head Start, what have state leaders done to resolve these differences?
4. What state systems monitor providers' services and compliance with requirements/standards for each of the state's programs? Are there plans to merge or coordinate these monitoring systems and to coordinate with the federal Head Start monitoring process?



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5. How do state leaders ensure that county administrators and decision-making bodies understand partnership issues and promote partnering at the local level?

### Child Care Subsidy Policies

1. How has the state adjusted its child care subsidy/reimbursement practices and regulations to encourage partnering between local providers?
2. What financial incentives exist to encourage partnering between child care centers, family child care homes, state-funded prekindergarten (preK) programs, and/or Head Start programs?
3. Has the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agency acted on the Policy Interpretation Question (PIQ) issued by the Child Care Bureau on 2/08/99 on the length of child care eligibility for children in collaboratively-funded slots? Please explain.

### State Incentives and Activities to Stimulate and Sustain Local Partnerships

1. How do state leaders acknowledge and spotlight local partnerships that successfully blend funding and develop a comprehensive, high-quality agenda for children and families?
2. What state incentives (fiscal and others) encourage partnering focused on enhancing services for children and families?
3. Are there state policies that present barriers and/or disincentives to forging partnerships at the local level?
4. What mechanisms are there for state-level leaders to identify, examine, and address local barriers for partnering programs?
5. How have state-level leaders promoted and built on federal incentives and funding to encourage local partnership efforts (e.g., CCDF quality enhancement funding, Head Start expansion efforts)?
6. How are training and technical assistance (T/TA) systems (e.g., Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Head Start T/TA projects, state-level projects) coordinated? What efforts are there to link state and federal projects?
7. How will state early education leaders combine efforts to further quality programming for children and draw on preschool initiatives outlined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 2001?

### Communication Among State-level Early Education Leaders

1. How frequently do the state's key early education leaders discuss specific partnership issues faced by their respective programs and address these challenges with other state leaders?
2. What state-level systems exist for sharing and analyzing data from program monitoring?
3. What specific efforts link with public school preschool initiatives and promote partnering with schools? How do public school leaders (e.g., superintendents, school boards, principals) receive information about participating in local partnership initiatives?
4. How do state-level leaders secure information from providers and parents concerning continuity of care and quality issues? How is this information used to stimulate change and further partnership efforts?





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### State Vision on Partnerships at the Local and State Levels

1. What is the long-range and shared vision for partnership efforts within and across the state's early education programs—child care, family child care, preK, public school preschool, state Head Start efforts?
2. How was this partnership vision shaped?
3. What systematic plan is there for moving the partnership vision forward over the next five years?
4. How is the partnership vision communicated to child care, family child care, preK, Head Start, and public school preschool stakeholders and program leaders?
5. How is the vision communicated to state policy makers and the greater public?
6. How can the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families (DHHS/ACF) and U.S. Department of Education (ED) assist the state in achieving a partnership agenda to enrich the quality of early education?
7. What types of state-level planning mechanisms assist state leaders in establishing and acting on a shared early education agenda? How do these efforts link with DHHS/ACF and ED efforts to enhance partnerships and early education quality?

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