Using the Systems Change Framework to Create Intentional Change with and for the ECE Workforce: Follow-Up Q&A

This document provides answers to questions asked during the National ECE Workforce Center's April 22 webinar, "Using the Systems Change Framework to Create Intentional Change with and for the ECE Workforce," some of which we were not able to answer live. To access the webinar recording and slides, click here.

1. ## Are the primary drivers listed in any order of importance?

The primary drivers in the Change Framework are not listed in any particular order of importance. Rather than following a fixed sequence, the Change Framework encourages change leaders to start in an area where there is momentum, feasibility, or a need that can be addressed to achieve their specific goals.

2. ## How does sustainability show up in the Change Framework?

Sustainability is included in the Change Framework as one of the primary drivers. The Change Framework helps leaders anticipate and plan for long-term change by aligning promising practices (such as wage scales) with supportive policies and funding models, enabling implementation efforts to take root and grow over time. This includes building the structures needed to ensure initiatives can continue beyond temporary funding streams like the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

One example is Minnesota, where prior to the pandemic, no mechanisms existed to distribute public funds to private child care programs beyond subsidies. During the pandemic, emergency funding created a new structure to support early childhood providers. Minnesota's Great Start Compensation Support Program began as pandemic relief and was made permanent in 2023. Today, the state continues to allocate state funds to sustain those investments, demonstrating that structural sustainability is possible when infrastructure is deliberately built.

3. ## How does the Change Framework support bringing educators and system-level decision makers together in change efforts?

The Change Framework addresses this through two primary drivers. First, the Multi-Sector and Multi-Partner Collaboration driver emphasizes the importance of building strong, cross-sector partnerships that bring together educators, system leaders, higher education institutions, and advocacy organizations to work toward shared goals. It calls for shared leadership and explicitly recognizes early educators as equal decision-making partners in shaping policy and systems.

Second, the Engaging Educators in Systems Change driver reinforces the need for intentional structures and processes that ensure educators are meaningfully involved from the start—not only giving feedback, but co-designing initiatives and helping lead systems change efforts. Together, these drivers ensure that educator voice is central, sustained, and respected in driving effective change.

4. **How are proximal components of the system (e.g., licensing, legislature) included in the Change Framework?**

   The proximal components of early care and education (ECE) workforce systems are included in several secondary drivers, which are found in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

5. **Did the development of the Change Framework include international examples? Are there key learnings or distinctions to be made in international settings or across contexts more broadly?**

   The development of the Change Framework did not include international examples; it focused on United States-based research, policies, and state and community initiatives. While many of the systems change principles are broadly applicable, we recognize that international contexts may present different governance structures, funding mechanisms, and workforce conditions.

6. **Are health care, sick days, and retirement benefits included in competitive and fair compensation?**

   Yes, health care, sick days, and retirement benefits are included in competitive and fair compensation. These benefits are considered essential components of a comprehensive compensation package that aligns with K-3 teacher pay. Those benefits are also included in positive working conditions, highlighting how compensation and the work environment are interrelated and mutually reinforced.

7. **Is there a specific state or agency that is doing this the "right" way that you would recommend one to explore when doing systems change work in other states?**

   While there isn't a one-size-fits-all model or one "right" approach to practice the systems change work, promising practices have emerged. For example, New Mexico delivered direct payments to the workforce as a pandemic relief strategy and allocated ARPA funds for a $3/hour wage increase for all early childhood staff in recognition of the low pay across this field—an example of "Policy Specific Promising Practices" within the "Practice" driver. The state also secured the annual funding for early childhood education through the Land Grant Permanent Fund and used the state's cost model to increase subsidy rates—examples of dedicating funding and leveraging cost models that fall within the "Infrastructure" driver. Additionally, the state centered educator voice through regular open phone calls by the Eary Childhood Education and Care Department during the pandemic—an example of the "Principle" driver. By collectively targeting all three drivers, New Mexico serves as a helpful example for systems change work.

8. **Could you share an example from another field of when shifting the cultural narrative has been successful? What lessons or strategies could we learn to influence our own work?**

   Massachusetts' Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) provides paid parental leave in the state to both parents. This is a program designed to help people in Massachusetts take paid time off from work for family or medical reasons. One of the qualifying reasons for this leave is "bonding with your child during the first 12 months after birth, adoption, or placement (up to 12 weeks of paid family leave)."

Historically, leave policies in the U.S. centered almost exclusively on maternal leave, reinforcing the idea that paid time off for bonding and caregiving was not needed for fathers. Over time, advocates, researchers, and community leaders began to challenge this narrative by emphasizing the importance of *parental* leave, regardless of which parent, and framing caregiving as a shared societal value.

Through this example, we can learn the importance of elevating the voices of all caregivers and how to build strong cross-sector coalitions with the shared goal of supporting families and children (see the Multi-Sector and Multi-Partner Collaboration driver). In our work, the same applies when we want to reframe how our society views early educators and ensure they are seen as trained professionals who deserve the same degree of importance, benefits, and support as other educators.

9. **Are there examples of using this systems change approach to address the funding issues that are needed to increase wages and benefits for the ECE workforce?**

The Change Framework has been based on evidence and efforts to increase compensation in various states across the country. For example, Washington, DC established the Early Educator Pay Equity Fund, which is a first-in-the-nation program aimed at achieving pay parity between early educators and their K-12 counterparts. This is an example of a policy-specific promising practice to ensure competitive and fair compensation of early educators.

The Early Childhood Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force created a salary scale with graduation based on role, credentials, and experience across home- and center-based programs to attain funding starting in FY2023. DC also allocated funds to cover early educators under HealthCare4ChildCare, ensuring access to health insurance benefits for the ECE workforce.

Please refer to the following resources for additional details and examples:
- Bold on Early Educator Compensation Learning Community 2022 Brief
- Toward Pay Equity A Case Study of Washington, DC's Wage Boost for Early Childhood Educators
- 2020 REPORT Early Educator Preparation and Compensation Policies: Voices from 10 States

10. **When promised supports (e.g., planning time) are inconsistently provided, it can lead to downstream challenges with educators' communication with staff and families, a more chaotic classroom, and a frustrated and exhausted educator. How can a systems change approach prevent or address this experience?**

We acknowledge the frustration that occurs when decision making that intends to support educators does not result in the intended outcome due to reality-based challenges. A systems change approach helps change leaders ensure they have a full understanding of the context, using knowledge of all nine drivers to make decisions about where to focus their efforts.

For example, a team aiming to implement dedicated paid planning time across ECE programs starts by reviewing the primary and secondary drivers for working conditions in the Change Framework. They gather data on planning time and engage educators in discussions who reveal that the actual issue is lack of coverage, driven by high turnover in their programs due to inadequate compensation. The team then shifts their efforts towards addressing competitive and fair compensation. The Change Framework helps change leaders think about the full system, illuminates root causes, and guides them towards more targeted and sustainable change.

11. **What incentives are in place for the family child care workforce to seek higher education knowing that there is no pay increase for attaining higher degrees?**

The second aim of the Change Framework is "Clear and Accessible Career Pathways." To achieve this aim, it is important that policies are designed to ensure that educators who hold or attain higher credentials and degrees earn higher wages. This can be accomplished through practices such as developing a wage/salary scale. A salary scale sets benchmarks for clearly differentiated salary increments based on qualifications and years of experience, which provide guidance for salary increases over time.

Below are other incentives in place for early educators to attain higher degrees:
- **Scholarships and financial support**: Programs like T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® provide scholarships that cover tuition, books, and sometimes travel or paid release time, reducing the financial burden of pursuing a degree. Some states offer early educator scholarships for family child care (FCC) providers to cover tuition, fees, and other costs of taking college courses and pursuing degrees.
- **Professional recognition and credentials**: Earning higher degrees or credentials can help FCC providers meet licensing or quality rating improvement system (QRIS) standards, leading to increased recognition, better licensing status, and eligibility for higher-tier reimbursements.

12. **Many educators feel hopeless after constantly completing surveys but see no changes due to budgetary or compliance requirements. Many have given up and are just trying to survive. How can a systems change approach help us to gain their trust so that they will engage again?**

We view educator engagement in systems change efforts as critical. It is not surprising that asking educators to complete surveys, without involving them in decision making, has not resulted in systems change. Educators should not be consulted by a group who is trying to make systems change; educators should be **part of the group** who is trying to make systems change.

If you look at the primary driver "Engaging Educators in Systems Change" and its associated secondary drivers, you'll see that we have offered several ideas for engaging educators meaningfully in the process. We hope change leaders will be able to gain educator trust by 1) ensuring educators are active leaders in designing and implementing the vision and plan for change; 2) ensuring that outreach strategies, capacity-building efforts, and information related to change initiatives are appropriate, available, and accessible to support educator engagement; and 3) that educators have substantial influence and decision-making power in shaping and guiding change initiatives.