Title (12):
Ensuring the Sustainability of Systemic Change: The Early Childhood Systems Model

Abstract (50):
With increased accountability and emphasis on program quality, preschool administrators and leadership teams are continually faced with how to approach program improvement. This session will present results from a one-year study on the implementation of the Early Childhood Systems Model developed to ensure sustainability of systemic change.

Key Words (2-3):
improvement, systems, leadership

Session description (750):
In the face of accountability and with the increased emphasis on program quality, preschool programs are entering a time in which they must demonstrate improvement. An emerging understanding of what quality programming entails and what supports children’s progress is challenging early childhood programs to consider to what extent their programs have such practices in place. Current initiatives, national and local requirements, and emerging research have brought increased attention to the importance of outcomes children are achieving within their early childhood experiences. Additionally,
various systems are being put in place across the nation to rate and assess the quality of programs serving young children. With recent recommendations from such reports as the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force’s *Taking Stock; Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality* (2007), requirements and attention to the quality of early childhood programming will only increase. As a result, programs are finding that they must take immediate action to address requirements from various governing agencies that are trying to keep programming up to date with current recommendations. Programs, therefore, are in a position where they must react quickly, often without time to plan for sustainability of their efforts or to ensure and support program improvement over time. In response to the need for supporting the efforts in place, the Early Childhood Systems Model was designed to assist with the development and implementation of improvement efforts, in addition to helping programs manage the many requirements placed on them. The model is intended to provide guidance on organizing and systematically addressing program improvement in a way that supports sustainability.

Research on school improvement practices identifies the need for development and implementation of comprehensive systems in order to support sustainability of program advancement and innovation (e.g. Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995; Kotter, 1996; Knoster, Villa, & Thousand, 2000). In a review of 58 sources on organization development and school improvement, five key features emerged that must be in place to support the development of a system; we have defined the elements as 1) representative leadership team, 2) collaborative planning process, 3) data-based decision making, 4) ongoing professional development and support, and 5) a comprehensive curriculum framework. These five elements were adopted as the components of the Early Childhood Systems Model and are believed to be the necessary practices that teams need to have in place to ensure improvement is possible.

The purpose of the proposed session is to highlight a yearlong study where eight preschool programs teams were followed as they implemented the Early Childhood Systems Model. The session will include a rationale for the inclusion of the five components of the Early Childhood Systems Model by highlighting a common set of criteria found through a review of the literature on effective systems change efforts. The session will also detail the development and progress of participating preschool teams. Summaries of findings will include internal and external data collected during the study to measure the change in the early childhood system and illustrate how the teams evolved over time during the implementation of the model. The challenges and successes that teams encountered will also be shared. Participants will be provided with the Early Childhood Systems Rating Rubric in addition to other resources utilized by the participating preschool teams during the project. The rubric provided the preschool teams with a process for assessing the current system that was in place at the beginning of the project and to monitor their development throughout the study.

The session will support an urgent need for a systematic means of implementing quality improvement in early childhood. Participants will leave with a better understanding of the key elements of a quality early childhood system and how these elements support change efforts that are sustainable over time. The session will provide participants with a model they can implement with local leadership teams and support efforts to consistently meet early childhood requirements and mandates.

References


**Session Type:** Conference Session

**Strand:** Administration/Policy

**Age Group:** 3-5

**Target Audience:** Administrators