Early Learning Design Implementation Evaluation

PSESD STAFF DISCUSSION GROUP RESULTS

Spring 2018

HEARING FROM STAFF TO INFORM AND IMPROVE THE DESIGN

What are PSESD Early Learning staff experiences within the new design?

Facilitated role-specific discussion groups

All but three invited staff participated

Questions focused on clarity of roles and structures

Rigorous data analysis process

Note from the authors: Many of the discussion group results shared in this report are about opportunities for improvement and growth. This is a reflection of what staff collectively shared. This report is intended to support prioritization and action, knowing that everything can not be addressed simultaneously, and addressing some areas of growth may help create improvements elsewhere.

The quantitative results on page two are intended to be understood in partnership with the qualitative data in the rest of this report. The counts of responses in each area can give the reader a sense of how many comments may have contributed to each bullet point theme reported in the qualitative results. For example, a bullet point theme could be based on five comments, or twenty-five. This gives a sense of the magnitude of the issue as reported by staff during these discussion groups.

More information about the evaluation, including past reports, can be found at http://bit.ly/EL_Evaluation

Authors: Nathalie Jones and Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg, with support for evaluation design and data collection from Dr. Laura Lynn. Gratitude to Pâmêla Raya-Carlton for conducting statistical tests of inter-rater reliability.

Thank you to the Early Learning program staff, including the Evaluation Advisory Group, for their openness and candor, and clear commitment to the well-being of staff, sites, children, families, and communities.
Staff focused most on Coordination and Collaboration and FTE/Capacity/Coverage.
REPLACING OLD SILOES WITH NEW
Staff highlighted the promise of the interdisciplinary approach to site support, but emphasized the need to connect “role-alike” groups and extend the interdisciplinary structure to include other roles like consultants, monitors, and operations. Staff, particularly those not on site support teams, feel isolated.

TEAMWORK
Staff emphasized the importance of modeling and valuing work as a cohesive Early Learning team, backing each other up, and developing understanding of how roles relate to one another.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERTISE
Staff note the need for specialized expertise and qualifications to support a high-quality program and meet the needs of children and families.

CONNECTION TO PREVIOUS STRUCTURE
The previous structure informs role clarity today. Staff whose roles didn’t change have more clarity. In some cases, staff are reverting to previous responsibilities or supervisors due to a lack of clarity.

Staff identified the need for improved coordination across roles, such as:
- Structures for role-alike groups (e.g. content-area coaches, consultants, Operations and data roles) to meet, communicate, and support one another
- Consistent expectations and procedures for teams and role-alike groups
- Structures to connect interdisciplinary work of site support teams with Monitors, Consultants, Operations, and content expertise of Program Managers. This includes building understanding of these roles among staff (and sites).

Staff identified the need to clarify areas of gray and overlap between roles, particularly:
- Areas where more than one person share a responsibility
- Expectations for monitors, coaches, data staff, and consultants in collecting data and following up with sites, including expectations for different types of support (TA, coaching, training)
- Responsibilities and relationship among Team Managers, Program Managers, and Directors
- Structures and supports for coverage across roles

Staff note a shift toward broader roles and big picture thinking, at the expense of specialized expertise and qualifications. This shows up in several ways:
- Qualifications for certain responsibilities – e.g. RD or RN for Health and Nutrition responsibilities, post-secondary degree for classroom coaching - need to be clarified in job descriptions
- There is a need for content expertise and visionary leadership for Program Managers to support staff and their growth. Expectations for depth of expertise across multiple areas need to be realistic
- In some cases, there is a lack of alignment between job descriptions and people’s day-to-day work
- Staff are concerned about risk, including using licenses that are not part of their job description and securing insurance to cover themselves as trainers
- There is also a flip side, where some staff have underutilized expertise, capacity and do not feel like they are using their skills to their full potential.

- Staff without significant changes to their roles report high level of clarity, particularly for “what” their role entails. In these cases, there is still need for more clarity in the “how” of their roles
- Some staff are reverting to their roles in the previous structure, particularly where there is not clarity re: new roles and expectations, or training or other support to transition into the new roles
- In some cases, staff are going to their old supervisors for support; in other cases, staff appreciate new supervisory structure and support.
FTE/CAPACITY/COVERAGE
Staff note the challenges of doing high-quality work within the allocated FTE. This includes reduced or insufficient FTE of individual positions, reduced number of staff working in a given area, increased volume of workload, time taken up with administrative and emergent tasks, and responsibilities that have been absorbed given vacancies and departures. Staff also noted the need for structures and supports for coverage across roles.

Impacts of this include:
- Feelings of frustration and resentment, because of inability to be successful within available FTE
- Insufficient time to spend on strategic or programmatic work, because of time spent on administrative tasks
- Hesitation to bring needs or ideas forward to colleagues or Leadership given the lack of time and space to address them
- Sense that jobs are unpredictable and staff are working “at will” based on emergent needs
- Absorption of additional responsibilities given departures or vacancies, without a clear plan to sustain this work long-term

Some staff noted the need for flexibility and assessing workload across roles to be able to back one another up, supporting coverage across roles that have specialized expertise or qualifications, and more capacity for administrative/program support work to distribute the workload of overextended roles. Some staff also note challenges in accurately assessing needed capacity, given on-going vacancies.

MORALE AND CLIMATE
Staff note that negative morale and climate are an ongoing challenge, and highlight the need for healing, teamwork, accountability for Leadership, and celebrating successes.

Staff note a number of morale/climate challenges:
- A feeling of “Us” and “Them” between staff and Leadership, and the need for accountability from Leadership
- The relationship to decision-making challenges: that decisions are made without expertise of those doing the work, lack of follow-through
- Staff feeling overwhelmed, and that they can’t be successful in their roles
- Ongoing negative feelings about the rollout of the design, and how that impacted staff and their colleagues

Staff also note the need to move forward as a team, attend to healing, and celebrate successes. There are some staff who have had a positive experience, typically related to strong collaboration and leadership within their teams.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION
Staff highlight the importance of regular and transparent internal communication within and across teams, and consistency and clarity in external communication with sites.

Regular and transparent communication should include:
- Supporting staff to be in the loop, on the same page, and working toward a common goal. This includes being clear about the “why” of decisions and processes.
- Structures for internal communication within and across teams. There are communication processes from interdisciplinary teams from which to build to improve communication within and across roles and teams.
- Clear and consistent deliverables, expectations, and processes for sites.
- Where the program is in implementation of the design, what has changed, and why
**TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
Staff note the training and supported needed to be successful in their work and successfully transition into their roles and the new design.

**SUPERVISION**
Staff emphasized the importance of supervision to provide guidance and content expertise and the need for structures to support consistent expectations, reflective supervision, and professional growth.

---

Training and professional development needs include:
- Coaching approach and practices, including how coaching relates to each content area
- Onboarding protocols for new staff
- Integrating racial equity into daily work - some site support teams are working on this, creating a place from which to build

Staff note a number of needs related to supervision:
- Access to a supervisor or Manager/Director with relevant expertise is critical for growth and development, problem solving, and assessing and supporting performance. This is needed in content areas as well as Operations/Data.
- Reflective supervision practices and structures to support professional growth

A sign of progress is ongoing planning with supervision group to improve supervisory structures and supports in the 2018-19 program year
Support to Sites

SUPPORTING SITES TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Working in partnership with sites is a cornerstone of the Early Learning design, and this work includes building relationships, coaching, monitoring, and addressing the unique strengths and needs of sites.

COACHING AND MONITORING
Staff celebrate those instances where coaching is happening, though these are so far the exception rather than the rule. There is a need for clarity, training, and collaboration to fully adopt a coaching approach across content areas.
Staff also note the need to strengthen the monitoring system, including collaboration among monitors, coaches, data staff, and consultants and how monitoring can inform improvement.

PARTNERING WITH SITES
Staff appreciate the focus on relationships with sites, and working together to address needs, though realizing this vision been mixed so far.

ON-BOARDING AND TRAINING
Staff note the need for on-boarding, training, and resources to support sites in serving children and families to address ongoing needs and changes associated with the new design.

Staff noted a range of needs to be able to implement coaching to sites:

- Define coaching approaches, strategies, and tools, customized to the needs of each content area
- Support collaborative and creative solutions to manage the load of coaches in Family Support, Education, and Health, Nutrition and Safety. Ideas include:
  - Shift ERSEA responsibilities to ERSEA Team, particularly in light of new ERSEA role
  - DLL coaches provide education coaching for majority DLL classrooms
  - Develop coaching approach and supports for Health, Nutrition and Safety, where time is spent on TA and monitoring
  - Monitors serve as “scouts” for coaches to identify and target issues, and collaborate on plans of support

Staff report a range of needs for monitoring:

- As above, develop structures, collaboration, and expectations to connect monitoring-related work across roles: monitors, coaches, data roles, and consultants
- Develop supports for DLL and HNS monitoring, including representation on the Monitoring Team
- Continue collaborative relationship-building with sites to support coaching and monitoring work

- Some staff report increased awareness of what is happening at sites, which is a strength. Others have not had the time to be out at sites, or not at all sites.
- PSESD staff have heard mixed feedback from site staff about how much they see and feel supported by PSESD staff - some feel supported by their PSESD teams, others report not having seen their team(s).
- One suggestion to build relationships at sites is to structure PSESD staff to focus on being at sites first and foremost, with other program needs (e.g. Team meetings, Program Planning, etc.) fit in around that.

Staff note the need for a range of training and resources for Center Directors and site staff, including:

- On-boarding protocols for new CDs and site staff, including resources that are useful given high turnover throughout the year
- Accurate and up-to-date policies and procedures in the Early Learning Program Manual (ELPM)
- Training that addresses site-specific and program-wide needs, goes beyond online courses, and incorporates adult learning principles
- Training on new processes, particularly for Child Health Plans and medication training. This support should be adapted for those sites with a school nurse and those without
FOLLOW-THROUGH
Staff shared experiences and frustrations with lack of follow-through by leadership. They shared examples of planning conversations beginning but not continuing to resolution, and a pattern of bringing concerns forward without concrete next steps. There was also concern about lack of response to email messages.

Several consequences result from lack of follow-through from leadership:
- Staff ask a question, don’t hear back, take action and hope it works out
- Staff ask a question, don’t hear back, don’t feel like they have the authority to act, so don’t
- Decisions take a long time to make, then staff have to rush to implement at the last minute

INPUT IN PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING FROM THOSE WITH RELEVANT EXPERTISE
Staff felt their expertise is not considered in decision-making.

Staff are asked to provide input and share their knowledge, but are not invited to the decision-making table, so the resulting decisions are less likely to create positive results. They shared that decision-makers may not have an on-the-ground sense of what is needed.

PUTTING OUT FIRES
The majority of staff time and resources are used in response to emergent tactical concerns, contributing to a sense of lack of progress and staff fatigue.

Staff feel they and others spend so much time on technical issues, compliance issues, and emergent safety concerns at sites and centers, that they don’t have time for planning and implementing best practices.

CLARITY ABOUT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS
There is significant confusion among staff about lines of authority, and how decisions that impact teams and the overall program get made.

- Staff don’t know who the decision maker is for decisions that are relevant to their work
- Staff don’t understand what the decision-making processes are
- Staff sometimes receive different direction from different members of the leadership team and don’t know how to proceed
- Staff need to better understand what they can make decisions about, what they need input from leadership on, and what can be an FYI to leadership
- The role of the Implementation Team is not clear to all staff
VISION FOR DESIGN (1 of 2)

STAYING GROUNDED IN THE "WHY"
Staff are deeply committed to the children and families served in the early learning program. They want to do right by children and families, and the vision for the design has the potential to help them do this.

FOCUS ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Staff are committed to keeping children and families at the center of their work.

- It was clear that staff committed time to participating in the discussion groups because they are committed to continuous improvement and want to support the learning that comes from the evaluation.
- Staff see site support structures, particularly the interdisciplinary teams, as the focus of the design and the way to impact services to children and families.
- With the focus on support to sites, some operations, data, and support staff feel left behind and unsupported in the new design. They need structures for collaboration and communication, and leadership focused on their work.
- There is a perception that children may be at risk because the shift of responsibilities to school district nurses happened suddenly without adequate preparation, and without sufficient support for sites without nurses.
- There is an opportunity to build stronger connections between parent leadership and family engagement staff.
- Racial equity is not embedded in all trainings and information disseminated to sites, which does a disservice to children and families.

SITE SUPPORT STRUCTURE
Staff highlight the interdisciplinary approach as a strength from which to build and improve, including around communications, expanding to include other roles, and clarifying the Team Manager role. They also experience inequities in structures across teams and sites.

- Many staff highlighted the interdisciplinary approach and site support teams as a strength of the new design. Teams sitting together supports collaboration and communication, there has been positive feedback from some Center leaders, and some teams are realizing this intent of the design.
- Staff see opportunities to clarify communication structures for site support teams, create structures to expand the interdisciplinary approach to other roles, and create more consistency across teams.
- Staff noted the need to better define the Team Manager role, with consistent expectations and responsibilities, and how it connects to other roles (Program Managers, Directors, and Tiered Team).
- Staff raised concerns about inequities in site support including Health supports for sites without a school nurse, allocating resources based on different needs across programs and sites, and inequities across site support teams and caseloads.
STAYING GROUNDED IN THE “WHY”
Staff are deeply committed to the children and families served in the early learning program. They want to do right by children and families, and the vision for the design has the potential to help them do this.

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER SUPPORTS
DLL supports are a positive part of the design.

RACIAL EQUITY
Staff have a desire for a strong racial equity lens throughout their work.

P-5 PROGRAM
There is a desire to build an integrated P-5 program.

DATA USE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
Staff want to intentionally use data to inform their work with sites and centers.

- Staff across the program believe having DLL coaches as part of site support teams is a positive outcome of the design.
- Some ESD staff are not clear how to work with the DLL coaches.
- There is an opportunity to clarify the vision for DLL within the Early Learning Program.
- Sites may perceive that DLL coaches are an “add on” because their roles have not been clarified.

- There are varied expectations about how racial equity should show up in staff’s day to day work.
- There is a lack of structure to support staff in addressing racial equity-related issues.
- Interpersonal issues rooted in racial inequities and staff stress and sense of overwhelm feed into each other, and there are not clear supports for staff to work through the issues.
- It is not clear to some staff how the Racial Equity Tool has been used to inform decisions that have program-wide impact.
- There are examples of innovative approaches to transparent racial equity leadership within early learning that could inform others.

- The EL program has staff with rich expertise in EHS who can help develop a P5 vision and program.
- There could be stronger links and clarity about the relationship between DLL, HNS, and EHS.
- There is a conceptual commitment to making every team P-5, and an opportunity to operationalize it.
- The status of the Infant-Toddler manager is unclear.

- Staff are proactively forging their own path for using data for continuous improvement.
- For many staff, data is used for compliance purposes, but they want to use data to reflect on their practice and guide decision making.
- Staff expressed concerns about the quality of data from sites, given limited capacity to review and follow-up.
EL has essentially adopted a matrix organization design. We recommend leadership and staff engage in learning, independently or with the support of a consultant, how to ensure success with this type of cross-functional organization design. Matrix organizations can increase collaboration and can also have high levels of role confusion. This article may provide helpful grounding: [https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/revisiting-the-matrix-organization](https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/revisiting-the-matrix-organization).

EL could consider a decision-making structure that allows for different subject matter expertise to move to the decision making table based on the issue at hand. This coupled with clarification of staff lines of authority to make decisions specific to their role could help reduce confusion about decision-making.

Clarifying what is considered a Tier Three/emergent issue and who should be involved in responding to it would help reduce disruptions and help staff focus on planful work.

Highlighting racial equity leadership practices happening in Early Learning could paint a picture of what could be and strengthen the racial equity lens throughout the program. For example, Team A has adopted several innovative practices such as using an interrupting racism log.
PSESD Staff Roles

- Structures for role-alike groups to meet, communicate, and support one another
- Responsibilities and relationship among Team Managers, Program Managers, and Directors
- Staff are concerned about risk, including using licenses that are not part of their job description and securing insurance to cover themselves as trainers
- Some staff have underutilized expertise and capacity and do not feel that they are using skills to full potential

Early Learning Staff Needs and Supports

- Morale/climate challenges
- FTE/Capacity/Coverage impacts
- Training and professional development for staff
- Supervision needs

Support to Sites

- Develop structures, collaboration, and expectations to connect monitoring-related work across roles: monitors, coaches, data roles, and consultants
- On-boarding protocols for new CDs and site staff, including resources that are useful given high turnover throughout the year

Decision-making and Planning

- Decisions take a long time to make, then staff are rushing to implement at the last minute
- Staff don't know who the decision maker is for decisions that are relevant to their work
- Staff sometimes receive different direction from different members of the leadership team and don't know how to proceed
- Staff need to better understand what they can make decisions about, what they need input from leadership on, and what can be an FYI to leadership

Vision for Design

- There is an opportunity to build a stronger connection between parent leadership and family engagement staff.
- Racial equity is not embedded in all trainings and information disseminated to sites, which does a disservice to children and families.
- Staff raised concerns about inequities in site support including Health supports for sites without a school nurse, allocating resources based on different needs across programs and sites, and inequities across site support teams and caseloads.
- Staff are proactively forging their own path for using data for continuous improvement
- For many staff, data is used for compliance purposes, but they want to use data to reflect on their practice and guide decision making
STAFF PRIORITY AREAS

Early Learning staff prioritized areas for action during their 6/6/2018 meeting. The Evaluation Team compared these areas (prioritized through dot voting at the meeting) with areas that were commented on most frequently during the staff discussion groups to identify priority areas for action. Those areas are listed below.

The topics below (IN CAPS) are those that were commented on most frequently during the EL staff discussion groups (with number of comments in parentheses). The specifics that follow are the points within each topic that staff prioritized through dot voting at the 6/6/2018 meeting. During the 6/6 meeting, staff requested more time and another session to work on action planning. An optional action planning meeting is scheduled for 6/28/18.

COORDINATING AND COLLABORATING ACROSS PSESD ROLES (161 Comments)
1. Replacing old silos with new: Staff identified the need for improved coordination across roles, such as:
   - Structures for role-alike groups (e.g. content-area coaches, consultants, Operations and data roles) to meet, communicate, and support one another
   - Consistent expectations and procedures for teams and role-alike groups
   - Structures to connect interdisciplinary work of site support teams with Monitors, Consultants, Operations, and content expertise of Program Managers. This includes building understanding of these roles among staff (and sites).

2. Teamwork: Staff identified the need to clarify areas of gray and overlap between roles, particularly:
   - Expectations for monitors, coaches, data staff, and consultants in collecting data and following up with sites, including expectations for different types of support (TA, coaching, training)

FTE/CAPACITY/COVERAGE (82 Comments)
- Feelings of frustration and resentment, because of inability to be successful within available FTE

PARTNERING WITH SITES (74 Comments)
- One suggestion to build relationships at sites is to structure PSESD staff to focus on being at sites first and foremost, with other program needs (e.g. Team meetings, Program Planning, etc.) fit in around that.

SITE SUPPORT STRUCTURE (71 Comments)
- Staff raised concerns about inequities in site support including Health supports for sites without a school nurse, allocating resources based on different needs across programs and sites, and inequities across site support teams and caseloads.
- Staff noted the need to better define the Team Manager role, with consistent expectations and responsibilities, and how it connects to other roles (Program Managers, Directors, and Tiered Team).

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION (65 Comments)
- Regular and transparent communication should include: Supporting staff to be in the loop, on the same page, and working toward a common goal. This includes being clear about the "why" of decisions and processes.

ADDITIONAL AREAS
We raise two additional topics for consideration as priorities, DECISION-MAKING AND PLANNING and RACIAL EQUITY. We coded discussion group data on decision-making and planning in a more detailed way, thus the number of comments on each related topic was less. Taken as a group, there 160 comments about decision-making and planning overall. Specific areas prioritized by dot voting were:

- Input in planning and decision-making (51 Comments): Staff are asked to provide input and share their knowledge, but are not invited to the decision-making table, so the resulting decisions are less likely to create positive results. They shared that decision-makers may not have an on-the-ground sense of what is needed.
- Clarity about decision-making process (40 Comments):
  - The role of the Implementation Team is not clear to all staff
  - Staff need to better understand what they can make decisions about, what they need input from leadership on, and what can be an FYI to leadership
  - Staff don’t know who the decision maker is for decisions that are relevant to their work
- Follow-through (23 Comments): Several consequences result from lack of follow-through from leadership:
  - Staff ask a question, don’t hear back, take action and hope it works out
  - Staff ask a question, don’t hear back, don’t feel like they have the authority to act, so don’t
  - Decisions take a long time to make, then staff have to rush to implement at the last minute

We raise racial equity as a priority topic given its foundational relationship to the Agency END. There were 20 comments about racial equity in the staff discussion groups, with specific areas prioritized through dot voting:

- There are varied expectations about how racial equity should show up in staff’s day to day work
- There is a lack of structure to support staff in addressing racial equity-related issues
Methods

The PSESD Evaluation team (Nathalie Jones, Dr. Laura Lynn, and Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg) conducted discussion groups and individual interviews with PSESD Early Learning staff in April-May 2018. To the extent possible, discussion groups were organized with staff in similar or related roles, with those staff in non-Direct Service roles (i.e. this did not include Early Head Start or FCC direct service staff at this time). In cases of unique roles, the Evaluation Team did individual interviews. All but three invited staff participated.

The Evaluation Team took notes throughout the discussion groups and interviews, which were projected for participants to see. We shared the notes with participants (including those members of groups who were not in attendance) for corrections or additions. We also accepted additional input in writing and via email.

For the analysis, each comment from the discussion groups/interviews were entered into a spreadsheet to be coded. Because of differences in note-taking, some comments were summary statements from the group discussion while others were detailed comments from individuals. The level of specificity of notes was consistent within groups but not across groups. With the large majority of data collected and entered, we identified a 20% random sample of comments to develop the coding structure for analysis.

With the codes developed, two members of the evaluation team separately coded a random sample of 25% of the comments. They calibrated their understanding of each code, what it means and includes, which supported a high-level of agreement in coding.

Cohen's Kappa is a statistic used to test interrater reliability for qualitative items that takes into account random guesses. Perfect agreement would be Cohen’s $\kappa = 1.0$. Reliability is considered statistically strong when Cohen’s $\kappa$ is at or above .80. For the coding of the discussion group data, Cohen’s $\kappa$=between .92 and 1, so there was a very high rate of interrater reliability.