



RUTGERS
Graduate School of Education



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Best Practices in Early Learning Governance

Today we will:

- Share the key takeaways/lessons learned from a recent study of Effective State Offices of Early Learning
- Discuss the implications for the early learning workforce- at all levels, from state agency staff to the classroom
- Offer perspectives on a strong state agency- legislature partnership to achieve goals the state sets for children
- Discuss your state's experiences and your questions
- Share additional information and resources

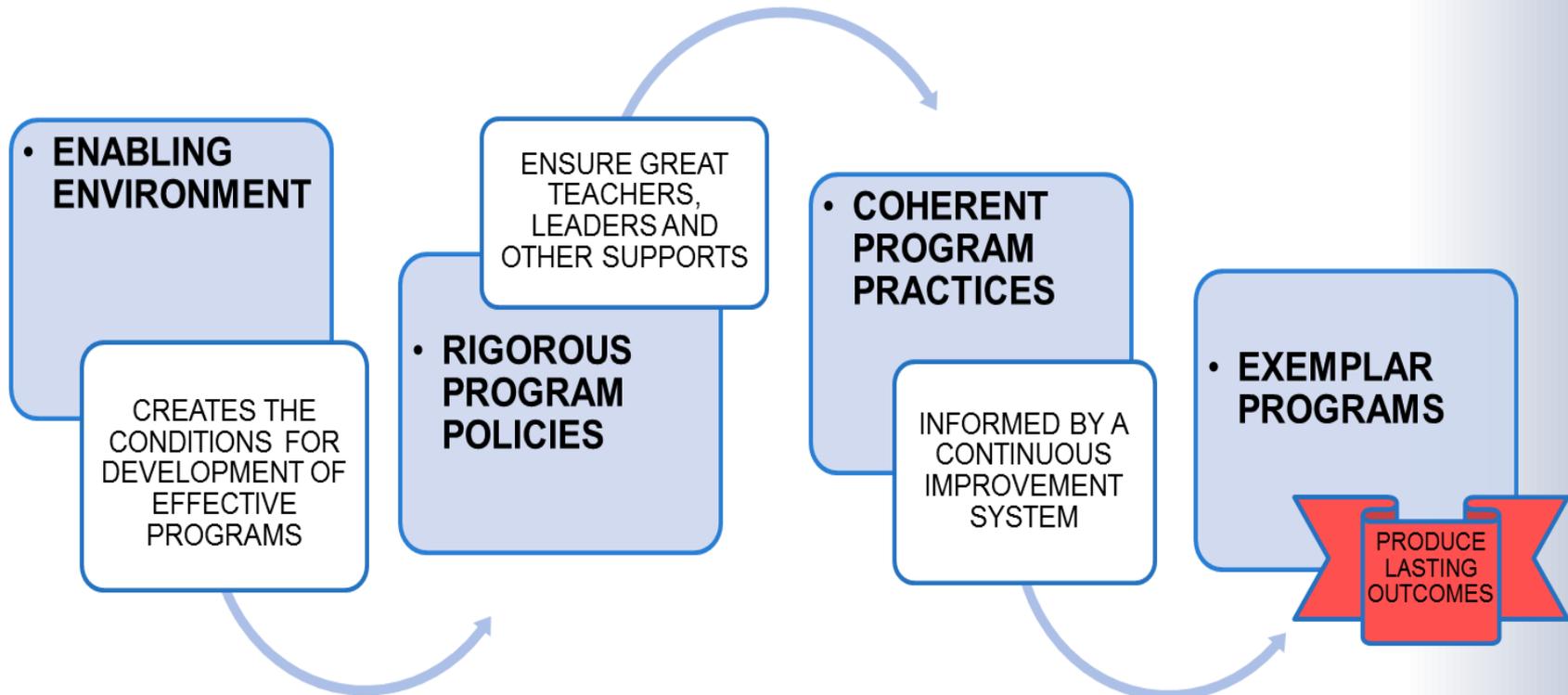
Effective State Offices of Early Learning: A Case Study in Four States

Why: State agencies (and their staff) administer more than \$40 billion dollars in federal funding, not including recent ARP funds, plus more than \$8 billion in state funding, to provide services to young children, birth through age 5. State Offices of Early Learning (SOELs) are responsible for setting policy, distributing funding, and ensuring accountability for these funds.

Who: We studied 4 states- Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey and West Virginia. These states were selected based on indicators of effectiveness and quality early childhood programs.

What: We conducted site visits to each state, and held over 15 interviews in each state with key state agency leaders, philanthropic and advocacy partners, and other stakeholders. We examined reports and data on the programs these states administered.

Theory of Change for Building Effective Early Learning Systems



About the 4 states- all had high quality PreK, but varied on governance

- ***AL's Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE)***, the only separate state agency in our study.
- ***MI's Office of Great Start (OGS)*** in the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) was the only SOEL we studied with responsibility for all major programs, including state funded pre-K, child care, early childhood special education and early intervention, Head Start, and family engagement.
- ***NJ's Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE)*** was established in response to the court-ordered Abbott Preschool program.
- ***WV's Early and Elementary Learning Services (EELS)*** is distinctive for including the entire pre-K through fifth grade (P–5) continuum in its SOEL and offering universal access to preschool for 4-year- olds.

Research Question: *Regardless
of governing body...*

What are the structural
characteristics, organizational
competencies, and
programmatic functions of
effective SOELs?

6 Functions of an Effective SOEL

- **Promote Program Quality**
- **Guide Instructional Quality**
- **Support Educator Competence**
- **Use Research and Data**
- **Strengthen the Continuum of Learning**
- **Efficiently Manage Public Resources**

Key Takeaways:

Organizational Structure

- **Lesson #1:** Emphasize an SOEL governance structure that provides sufficient authority.
- **Lesson #2:** Focus on the horizontal and vertical aspects of child well-being and early childhood education.
- **Lesson #3:** Identify a set of priorities, with quality at the core, and pursue them relentlessly.
- **Lesson #4:** Regularly assess whether SOEL performance is meeting its goals.

Organizational Capacity

- **Lesson #5:** Create a data culture that improves decision-making and influences funding.
- **Lesson #6:** Use organizational capacity to replace a program mentality with a systems approach.
- **Lesson #7:** Build on the expertise and experience of leaders and staff.
- **Lesson #8:** Ensure adequate SOEL capacity.

Enabling Environment

- **Lesson #9:** Build collective capacity within and across sectors and systems.
- **Lesson #10:** Authorize SOEL leaders to cultivate political will.
- **Lesson #11:** Gather diverse perspectives to augment effectiveness and build sustained collective support.
- **Lesson #12:** Establish a coalition of key champions and unlikely allies.

SOELs Role in Supporting Educator Competence

- ***The leadership of senior state agency staff*** is critical for implementing policy, and in effective agencies they are well supported with professional development and authority/autonomy.
- Effective SOELs focused a lot of their efforts- policy, resources, funding- on ***increasing educator competence***- they see this as the “linchpin to effective programs”.
- ***Teacher shortages*** are requiring new ways of recruiting and supporting teachers, and principals.
- Effective SOELs are working to ***align credentials/licensing PreK-Grade 3***, however, incentives and supports to engage diverse providers are needed to ensure equity.
- Due to limited state staff capacity, SOELs ***provide professional learning*** through master teachers, online, podcasts, social media

Clayton Burch, Supt of WV Department of Education

- What does it take to have a strong relationship between state agency staff and state legislators so that goals for children can be achieved?
- What role should the state agency play in supporting effective early childhood programs and a high quality workforce?
- What are the top 3 things you tell district leaders about how to support the early childhood workforce?
- What do you believe is the most important thing legislators can do to ensure that the early childhood workforce is well compensated, well prepared, and diverse?

Breakout Discussion:

- Do you think the current structure of governance of early learning programs in your state is effective? How do you know?
- Are there conversations about changing this model? If so, what “different result” do you want to achieve?
- What best practices or elements of early learning governance would you be interested in learning more about?
- Did you identify any governance strategies related to workforce that you would like to see in your state?

For More Information

- See the full report of [Effective State Offices of Early Learning](#)
- Or for a quick read, see the [Executive Summary](#)
- [Legacy 2030-](#) study of state specialists and pioneers in ECE
- [Sharpening the Focus](#) on Teacher Quality
- [Building Capacity to Enact Change](#) for Classroom Quality Improvement

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