Introduction to the ECFE 2014-2019 Enhancement Areas: Five-Year Plan

Three years ago the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) began a project to identify needs among ECFE programs. During this time, we surveyed programs, held meetings with ECFE programs and other stakeholders and created a group called ECFE 2.0 that was tasked with identifying and addressing issues impacting ECFE. As a result of this work, and work within Early Learning Services here at the department, we have created a five-year plan that will help guide MDE's work over the next five years.

The plan includes the following 12 goals within four enhancement areas:

I. ECFE STRUCTURE AND FOCUS
1. Focus on Parent and Family Education, the Purpose of ECFE, and Work to Advance the Practice of Parenting Education
2. Establish ECFE as the Central Program in P-3 Systems
3. Position ECFE as a Hub for Early Learning and Family Services, Connecting Schools and Communities
4. Improve Coordination of Services, Partnerships and Collaborations
5. ECFE Programming Must Be Universal and Targeted

II. TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR EFFECTIVENESS
6. Identify, Strengthen and Support ECFE Administration and Leadership at Multiple Levels
7. Prepare a Larger and More Diverse Pool of Parent and Family Educators throughout the State

III. PROGRAM EFFECTIVESS
8. Focus on Data-Driven Improvement
9. Assist Programs with Outreach and Marketing
10. Identify and Design Appropriate Environments and Spaces for Services

IV. PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS
11. Enhance Home Visiting as a Parenting Education Delivery Strategy
12. Define What "At-Risk" Means for Families and Develop Programming/Services to Mitigate Potentially Negative Consequences

Notes:
- Note the intentional use of terms parenting and parent and family education.
- Numbers were used to list the enhancements. They are not ranked by importance or priority.
- Each enhancement area contains **Guiding Principles** and **Strategies** (this is considered a working document, so **we** will continually be revisiting and possibly adding strategies).
- The strategies are possible ways of enhancing programming or services in each area. Details regarding responsibilities and the implementation of the strategies will be included in future documents and/or correspondence.
- A note on the "**we**" of this plan. While this is an MDE plan that shows programs what the department will be focusing on over the next five years, it is very important to understand that any progress towards the enhancements is dependent upon the strengths and productivity of our partnerships and collaborations (e.g. districts, MNAFEE, MCEA, Head Start, MCFR, etc.).
- There are many strategies that you will be able to incorporate into your program as you make enhancements (e.g. as a part of your Program Enhancement Process).

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
2014-2019 Enhancement Areas

I. ECFE STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

1. Focus on Parent and Family Education, the Purpose of ECFE, and Work to Advance the Practice of Parenting Education

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Learning about parenting is a universal need.
- Parents and caregivers need knowledge, skills and support to effectively raise children.
- Parents and caregivers seek information about parenting from a variety of sources, including friends, family, neighbors, books, experts, medical providers, etc.
- Parents and caregivers of young children, regardless of life circumstance, benefit from education and support in their role as parents.
- Schools are more effective in educating children when parents/families are involved and engaged.
- If parents/families are involved in their children's early education and development, then they are more likely to continue their involvement in subsequent years.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Stress to programs the purpose of ECFE: "The purpose of the early childhood family education program is to provide parenting education to support children's learning and development" (Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.13, subdivision 1).
- ☐ Define and create common understandings on core definitions like parenting education, family education, family engagement, family involvement, etc.
- ☐ Identify and work with programs and organizations that provide parent and family education.
- ☐ Focus on pre-service and professional development. Build parenting education capacity statewide.
- ☐ Provide training on effective and diverse ways of delivering parenting education.
- ☐ Reestablish the Parent Education Institute in order to provide relevant, high-quality professional development.

2. Establish ECFE as the Central Program in P-3 Systems

ECFE is uniquely positioned because it is a two-generation program that works with families in a variety of contexts. Since ECFE works with and builds relationships with families (sometimes before birth), parent and family educators are able to work with families over a number of years through a number of transitions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Early childhood programs are often parents and families' first experience with the school district.
- ECFE focuses on building and sustaining positive relationships with children, parents and families.
- Trust is built when children and families have positive, rewarding experiences in early childhood programs.
- Learning opportunities and experiences are maximized when they occur in aligned, coherent systems.
- Family engagement over the lifespan is an essential element to a child's growth, development and success in life.
- Parents and families experience changes, new developmental tasks and new responsibilities throughout time.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Provide guidance on how ECFE fits into the broader picture, not only within Community Education and K-12 but also within state and community.
- ☐ Ensure ECFE plays a significant role with family engagement and involvement efforts.
- ☐ Provide guidance on the parent education transition program legislation.
- ☐ Encourage programming that involves parents and families through time.
- ☐ Examine alignment between ECFE and teacher preparation programs.
- ☐ Include information about ECFE's potential role in the World's Best Work Force legislation.

3. Position ECFE as a Hub for Early Learning and Family Services, Connecting Schools and Communities

ECFE is 40 years old and is a part of almost every school district in Minnesota. Importantly, this means that an infrastructure currently exists.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- The fields of parenting and family life education are much larger than ECFE.
- Since many programs, organizations and occupations provide some type of parenting education, ECFE should work to collaborate, support and align with others offering parenting education.
- Parenting educators in a school district are in an especially unique role to help meet the challenges of families and education in the 21st Century.
- Since ECFE is a dual-generation program, and a part of the school district and Community Education, it is in a position where it can connect parents and families to other services and resources.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Expand the meaning of family education to include family systems issues and topics beyond the parent-child dyad.
- ☐ Describe advantages of an expanded role for ECFE.
- ☐ Promote the message that high-quality child care/early childhood education must include parent and family education.
- ☐ Ensure that parent and family educators have more flexibility to work with:
    - Other school programs (School Readiness, SPED, Title I, etc.).
    - Other providers that work with families (e.g. Head Start, child care, health care, FFN, etc.).
    - Community programs (cities, YMCA, etc.).
    - Parents of school-age children (especially important because of alignment and P-3 models)
    - Other learning or educational programs that may benefit parents/families (libraries, workforce, arts, etc.).
- ☐ Provide guidance on how districts can create cross-sector committees (or similar governing entity) with responsibility for making decisions about coordinating and collaborative efforts.
- ☐ Provide examples of hubs, including structure, roles and responsibilities.

4. Improve Coordination of Services, Partnerships and Collaborations

Some programs have highly effective collaborations and partnerships. Models need to be developed, replicated and tailored to other communities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- ECFE programs can improve their programming and services by learning about other programs that serve parents and families.
- Collaborations allow programs to avoid duplicating services and ultimately maximize access to services and options available to parents and families.
- Partnerships/collaborations are needed in order to best meet the comprehensive needs of parents and families.
- Collaborations with community-based programs allow ECFE programs to expand access and increase overall quality of programming and services.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Define essential terms like: coordination of services, cooperation, collaboration and partnership.
- ☐ Promote collaboration and partnerships to provide services tailored to family needs.
- ☐ Encourage ECFE programs to work with community partners to develop common indicators or measures that demonstrate how families are doing in the community.
- ☐ Create and distribute list of potential partners.
- ☐ Provide guidance on collaboration.
- ☐ As a part of the community needs assessment, recommend that ECFE programs identify services and resources for young children and families in the community.
- ☐ Document and share other promising efforts happening in Minnesota and nationally.
    - Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) model in Minnesota.
    - Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE).
    - The Northside Achievement Zone's (NAZ) Family Academy.
    - Parent University, Boston Public Schools.

5. **ECFE Programming Must Be Universal and Targeted**

While ECFE is considered a universal program, most programs offer a range of targeted services and classes tailored to specific audiences. For example, ECFE programs have offered targeted services or classes to fathers, incarcerated parents, parents of multiples, divorced parents, grandparents, families of children with special needs, culturally-specific classes, adoptive families, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families, age-specific classes, teen parents, family literacy, etc.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Minnesota's population is more diverse than ever before, which means that parenting educators must learn culturally appropriate ways of providing parent and family education.
- ECFE programs must adapt to best meet the needs of parents and families, especially since families, family structures and functions are more diverse than ever before.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Develop partnerships with people and organizations that represent or serve diverse cultures.
- ☐ Assist programs in developing and conducting community needs assessment.
- ☐ Provide or coordinate professional development opportunities for parent and family educators.
- ☐ Develop guidance on best/promising practices that includes the recognition and provision of a continuum of aligned programming and services.

II. TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR EFFECTIVENESS

6. **Identify, Strengthen and Support ECFE Administration and Leadership at Multiple Levels**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- At every level, from the classroom to the state, the quality of leadership and administration greatly influences the quality of programming and services.

STRATEGIES

6.1 Provide State-Level Communication and Strengthen and Support Regional Networks
- ☐ Engage in ongoing communication with program coordinators and Community Education directors.
- ☐ Establish new regional networking groups that align with the Governor's Economic Development Regions and the Centers of Excellence.
  - ▪ The department will re-create and oversee the regional networks, fostering connections among different service providers (e.g. parenting education, home visiting, etc).

6.2 Increase Program Administration Knowledge, Skills and Expertise
- ☐ Develop standards, core competencies and guidance for the effective administration of ECFE programs.
- ☐ Provide professional development for administrators.
  - ▪ Continue providing and expand new coordinator trainings.
  - ▪ Provide professional development information and in-service opportunities for program and school district staff.
  - ▪ Create online modules for early childhood administrators.
- ☐ Establish and support administrator mentor program.
- ☐ Support enhancement of ECFE advisory councils.
  - ▪ New language to reinforce this in 2014 statutes.
  - ▪ Tie to community needs assessment.
- ☐ Examine ECFE funding and assist programs with budgeting
  - ▪ The ECFE coordinator is responsible for developing a budget that is fiscally responsible, supports the program philosophy, and aligns community needs with the use of resources
  - ▪ Provide guidance and training on budgeting.
  - ▪ Support cost study on effective parent and family programming and services tailored to meet the needs of families with high needs.
- ☐ Identify and disseminate best/promising practices in ECFE programs.
  - ▪ Identify the high-quality practices taking place in ECFE programs and disseminate through multiple venues, including professional development, social media and practice updates.
  - ▪ Identify expertise at the district level, allowing programs to utilize each other as resources.
- ☐ Discuss creation of Early Childhood administrative license.

6.3 Improve Staff and Program Evaluation

- ☐ Improve statewide data collection (participant and program information) and ongoing evaluation efforts.
  - ▪ Ensure that programs are aware of current tools that offer community-level data that can provide foundational information for program evaluation, needs assessments or crafting grant requests to funders.
- ☐ Create parent and family education evaluation tool for performance reviews and evaluations.
- ☐ Assist programs in utilizing the *Quality Indicators* for program planning and evaluation.
- ☐ Periodically assess program needs for support and identify opportunities for low- or no-cost evaluation capacity building.
- ☐ Align the community needs assessment with the ECFE Program Enhancement Process.
- ☐ Provide program administrators with information to effectively use data to improve their programs.
  - ▪ Conducting community needs assessments
  - ▪ Tracking involvement and outcomes
  - ▪ Evaluating teacher performance

7. Prepare a Larger and More Diverse Pool of Licensed Parent and Family Educators throughout the State

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- • The diversity of licensed parent educators should reflect the diversity of families in Minnesota.
- • Increased diversity of parent and family educators would result in different abilities, interests, attitudes and values amongst parent educators, thereby building strengths and increasing the capacity and effectiveness of the field as a whole.

STRATEGIES

- ☐ Partner with higher education institutions to address this issue, particularly the shortage of parent and family educators in rural Minnesota and the lack of parent and family educators from diverse backgrounds.
- ☐ Provide support to parent and family education licensure students through completion of program, particularly students from diverse backgrounds and rural areas.
- ☐ Strengthen statewide network of professionals to provide supervision for teaching candidates.
- ☐ Identify loan forgiveness programs and financial aid for parent education licensure.
- ☐ Investigate reasons why more students of color are not pursing parent education teaching licenses.

III. PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

8. Focus on Data-Driven Improvement

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- • At every level, from the classroom to the state, data plays a critical role in program design, evaluation and the improvement process.

STRATEGIES

- ☐ Review what data is collected at the state level.
- ☐ Improve statewide data collection, analysis and reporting.
- ☐ Work with districts to identify gaps and problems with data collection and reporting.
- ☐ Provide guidance on what types of data programs should be collecting.
- ☐ Provide guidance on how data drives program improvement.
- ☐ Support training and ongoing reflection for data processes.
- ☐ Work with districts to determine data gathering and reporting for community needs assessment.
  - ▪ Population data and analysis.
  - ▪ Data that show how children are doing in the community.
  - ▪ Data that show how families are doing in the community.

9. Assist Programs with Outreach and Marketing

ECFE programs need to take an active role in defining who they are and what they do. Data and marketing play crucial roles in accessibility.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Programs must focus not just on reaching full attendance, but on reaching a demographic cross-section of the families living in the communities they serve.
- Programming and services should be tailored to those parents and families identified in the community needs assessment.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Market the value of ECFE to parents, professionals in other parent and family services, the general public, etc.
- ☐ Provide clear, consistent and accurate messages to community leaders and policymakers.
- ☐ Promote understanding of the continuum of needs and intensity and timing of programming.
- ☐ Add description of what ECFE is and is not to avoid inaccurate and inappropriate comparisons to other programs and/or models.
- ☐ Develop a marketing plan that includes the following:
  - ▪ Personnel needed
  - ▪ Implementation plan
  - ▪ Q&A document, Continuum of Services, and Definitions of Parent Engagement, etc.

10. Identify and Design Appropriate Environments and Spaces for Services

With the move to full-day kindergarten, some district early childhood programs have lost space. In some cases, ECFE space is neither adequate nor appropriate.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- The physical environment plays a critical role in the learning experience.
- Space is not limited to physical space or to district space. Parent and family education should be delivered in multiple locations, virtually and through various venues and media.
- Districts should carefully and intentionally plan appropriate learning environments and spaces that are accessible, engaging and welcoming, taking into consideration the needs and expectations of parents and families.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Gather information from parents and families regarding their experiences with early childhood and ECFE spaces/environments.
- ☐ Provide examples of optimal environments for child and family programming.
- ☐ Make programming more accessible to families with children 0-4.
- ☐ Offer programming through multiple means of delivery, including use of technology for reaching more families.

IV. PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

11. Enhance Home Visiting as a Parenting Education Delivery Strategy

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Home visiting is an important strategy and/or model for reaching and serving families experiencing multiple stresses.
- Because of advantages like building social capital and social learning, programs should encourage families to make a transition from home visits to site-based or group-based parenting programs.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Identify strong ECFE home visiting models and programs in Minnesota.
- ☐ Utilize the Minnesota Home Visiting Standards.
- ☐ Provide training and technical assistance on home visiting.
- ☐ Encourage partnerships and collaboration.
- ☐ Develop and/or inform programs of assessment strategies to measure effectiveness.
- ☐ Add home visiting competencies to the PE and EC licenses so that pre-service programs in higher education will include this in their programs.

12. Define What "At-Risk" Means for Families and Develop Programming/Services to Mitigate Potentially Negative Consequences

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Programs must be aware of parent, family, and community risk factors because they precede the manifestation of most child risk factors.
- In addition to child risk factors, ECFE programs must identify and evaluate parent, family and community risk factors. Some risk factors include:
  - A family member on a military deployment
  - A family dealing with mental health issues
  - A family with a parent or child with special needs
  - A family with a member with serious medical issues, acute or chronic
  - A family impacted by domestic violence
  - A family impacted by substance abuse or addiction
  - A family affected by unemployment or job related stress, or a change in financial status
  - A single-parent family
  - A family where the parents are divorced or going through a divorce
  - A family member who is incarcerated
  - A family impacted by a natural disaster
  - A family living in a high crime area
  - Homelessness
  - Family literacy or limited English proficiency
  - Adolescent parents
  - Family mobility
- Since communities and neighborhoods may also put children and families "at risk" for learning, health and social difficulties, programs should use established, research-based theories and models to ground their programming, services and practice. For example:
  - Ecological theory
  - Family systems theory
  - Family development theory
  - Empowerment models
  - Critical race theories
- ECFE programs must be aware of, and develop programming/services for, families impacted by situations/circumstances that may create vulnerabilities.

STRATEGIES
- ☐ Provide guidance on definitions of risk and examples of risk factors.
- ☐ Provide examples of how ECFE programs can identify risk factors through community needs assessments.
- ☐ Identify promising program components and models (e.g. two-generation or dual-generation) and align with educational system.
- ☐ Identify promising practices when working with parents and families with risk factors.
- ☐ Provide professional development to advance the practice of parenting education with diverse families, family structures and family circumstances.