
Evaluation Report

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Five Special Education Administrative Unit (AU) teams comprised of 2 – 4 individuals were identified through an application process. AUs identified a team lead and 2 – 3 additional team members who participated in the PLC activities and individualized technical assistance. Three State Level Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings were held over the course of the 2015-2016 school year. The meetings provided information about topics related to social-emotional development of preschoolers and enabled the teams to engage in cross-AU networking and learning.

Individualized TA focused on building capacity within the AU and community to effectively evaluate, determine eligibility, assess, and serve preschool aged children referred to special education/child find due to concerns about social-emotional development, including behavior.

AU teams were expected to accomplish the following over the 2015-16 school year:

1) **Attend three State Level Professional Learning Community (State Level PLC) sessions in the Denver metro area.** Sessions were held on November 13, 2015, January 22, 2016 and April 8, 2016. The meetings focused on engaging AU teams in developing action plans that allowed them to identify and address AU needs related to supporting young children’s social-emotional development and learning, develop or strengthen connections to relevant community resources, refine relevant local referral, evaluation and eligibility processes, and develop purposeful connections with local initiatives and community partners.

2) **Participate in at least 4 one hour individualized contacts with a State Level PLC Facilitator.** Contacts were interspersed between the PLC meetings in the Denver metro area and were conducted by phone. AU teams also received individualized support at each of the three PLC meetings.

3) **Participate in an online learning community.** Team members were asked to review, respond to, and share information related to PLC activities throughout the course of the project.

4) **Facilitate a Local Professional Learning Community (Local PLC) for at least six hours spread across the school year.** AU teams selected and designed local PLC activities that met the needs of their communities and, in most cases, embedded activities in already existing team meetings and structures.

5) **Present related content to at least one early childhood community and/or cross-systems meeting.** AU Teams presented information from state and local PLC work to community partners and improved systems and workflows based on feedback from community partners and internal stakeholders. Team leads
presented at the annual CDE State meeting and had the opportunity to share the work to date with attendees.

6) **In collaboration with the technical assistance providers, develop and implement a local action plan.** Team members used data to inform action plan activities, implement the action plan, and communicate activities and accomplishments to relevant stakeholders.

7) **Evaluate Local PLC efforts throughout the year and provide ongoing input and evaluation of State Level PLC activities.** Evaluation was used to inform and create ongoing activities and provide support at the desired level in addition to documenting learning and accomplishments including action plan progress.

**Pre-PLC Evaluation**

Five Administrative Units from districts across the state (Cherry Creek, Fountain/Ft. Carson, Adams 27J, Canyon City, and Windsor/Weld RE4) were selected to participate in the PLC activities over the course of the year. Teams completed applications that involved identifying team members and specifying roles and describing activities AU teams attended three day-long PLC meetings, received individualized technical assistance and support, and engaged in local PLC activities throughout the 2015-2016 academic year.

Professionals on the AU teams came from a variety of disciplines/roles including early childhood general and special education, psychology, social work, allied health professions (e.g., occupational therapy), administrators, and mental health. Most had worked with preschoolers for more than 5 years and had Master’s degrees. Nearly 50% reported that they spend a lot of time working directly with preschoolers.

The chart below shows the various roles that the participants have in their work with preschoolers with social emotional difficulties.
Q9 To what extent do you feel confident working with social/emotional challenges in the preschool population in the following areas?

Answered: 21  Skipped: 5
Q8 How much information about preschoolers with developmental needs including social/emotional challenges do you receive through the following:

Answered: 22  Skipped: 4
At the start of the program, most PLC participants reported that they were comfortable with a variety of activities including assessment, developing IEPs, and intervention. A few respondents said that the areas where they didn’t feel as comfortable were assessment and identification of social emotional delays and developing IEPs and providing support to their teammates. Participants also identified a number of challenges in working with the population. These included: resources (e.g., having enough time for assessment and IEP planning), tools, consistency across settings in which they were working, difficulty identifying when social emotional issues were problematic enough to meet eligibility criteria, and stigma and negativity associated with behavior problems in the preschool population. Participants reported wanting to identify and implement strategies around: working more effectively as teams to support social emotional development in preschoolers, improving the services and supports available to families with young children, and understanding more about the available tools and resources for assessing and intervening with preschoolers in need of services. Finally, participants expressed an interest in understanding available assessment tools, identifying services and supports, and working with preschool staff to ensure healthy social emotional development.

State Level PLC Meeting Evaluations

Below are the session descriptions and evaluation results from the State Level Professional Learning Community meetings. Sessions involved a mixture of presentations, AU exchanges, action planning activities, and individual technical assistance and support to each AU team.

November 13, 2015

The first PLC meeting focused on introducing each of the AU teams, reviewing the work that was completed during the 2014 – 2015 academic year, having each of the AU teams present their current work related to social-emotional development to the PLC and engaging in a dialogue around the individual and collective work being done, and action planning (see Appendix for action planning documents).

All of the participants reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the presenters conveyed information clearly and effectively and had comprehensive knowledge of the topic. All participants also agreed or strongly agreed that: the topics were relevant to their work, the training met their needs for information on the topic, they felt prepared to take action and implement things based on the training, and they were aware of resources and supports as a result of the training.

Below are selected responses to questions about actions steps participants would take as a result of attending the training and anticipated impact on their work:
• Our team is making some changes to more effectively utilize the skills of the MHS and take advantage of other resources to address S/E needs of young children.

• My entire team are using the information and discussions to go back to our EC team and provide more supports in the Social and Emotional Dev of young children. It is also helping us learn from others in the State which is very helpful to our team because we are learning from those with different experiences and that allows for us to figure out what may or may not work in our district.

• I have selected the following questions 2. Why has your practice changed? Why not? 9 'What will be different by the end of the school year. Other action steps are the ACEs awareness outreach to several groups and including it in our LAUNCH Together Grant; training for ASQ - SE with the new pathway document, and a written protocol for identifying children with social and emotional issues. Also working on behavior plan development for our community based sites.

• The training helped me walk away with a lot of new information to share with my para. I am fortunate enough to have a para that loves to learn and is always wanting me to share new information with her. Therefore I am using what I learned to help support her. I am also taking new knowledge and using it for my future as an educator by expanding my own learning. I really enjoyed the meeting.

January 22, 2016

The second session focused on AU presentations and an in depth look at social-emotional assessment tools. AU teams were asked to address the following in their presentations:

• If you were teaching another team what you do in your assessment of S/E development, what part of your process would you teach/share/highlight.

• Present the component of social emotional assessment that your team does well.

• What is something that you have done to build community capacity around social emotional well being as part of your PLC.

At this session, we also introduced the reflective questions (see Appendix) and asked each participant to select a question and respond to it during the meeting. Participants were asked to share the question they answered and their response to the question with the group if they felt comfortable. Participants also wrote down their questions and answers.

Lastly, participants engaged in action planning with their teams (see Appendix) and received individualized TA from the facilitators.

All of the participants reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the presenters conveyed information clearly and effectively and had comprehensive knowledge of the topic. Between 85 – 93% of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that the content
was of high quality and relevant and appropriate for adult learners. All participants reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that: the topics were relevant to their work, the training met their needs for information on the topic, they felt prepared to take action and implement things based on the training, and they were aware of resources and supports as a result of the training.

Below are selected responses to questions about actions steps participants would take as a result of attending the training and anticipated impact on their work:

• We are looking into additional social emotional measures to assist our evaluation process.
• Looking at trier 2 social emotional supports Look at adding a social emotional screening tool to our process
• We have looked at several of the assessment discussed in the training of SIED.
• We are beginning to look at ways to implement some of the additional social emotional screening tools and theories provided in the training. The connection to Nadine Burke-Harris’ work and website is proving to be very helpful. Not sure exactly how we may begin to implement them, but the discussion has begun!
• I believe that we are raising awareness of adverse childhood experiences. Case Managers are taking this to heart. I think this is our first step toward gathering community stakeholders together to begin to imagine an intervention model. This work is helping our day to day challenges in planning the best use of scarce resources (mental health intervention/consultation). Once our protocol is established it will be much easier to assure comprehensive evaluation. I particularly want to assure that we use and document informal methods of data collection such as observations, parent report, information from childcare, etc.
• I feel that the information received will help with planning of our social skills lessons as well as what to take a look at when evaluating children. Certainly helped me to think about other ways to provide for the evaluation.
• Devoting an entire day on this subject and learning about other districts approaches, successes and challenges is a wonderful gift. It helps us focus with expert guidance and is moving our work forward. Also I am familiar with ACE and we even featured a presentation at our Legislative Symposium. Listening to Nadine five time has given me ideas about how we could use this awareness right now in our work and then collaborating with the ECHO and Family Center Council Agencies begin to build a system to screen and refer. This will take time, but the LAUNCH Together Grant might be a perfect opportunity to take this on as one of our basic projects.

April 8, 2016

The final PLC meeting focused on adverse childhood experiences, AU team accomplishments, and action planning for the work moving forward. After responding to
the reflective questions as part of the introduction to the day, AU teams participated in a “paper dolls” activity that required them to engage with members of other teams and examine how adverse experiences impact young children and their families. Facilitators presented on ACEs and provided tools for ACEs screening. AU Teams were asked to present on their accomplishments as a result of participating in the PLC over the course of the academic year and to develop action plans for next steps. One of the AU teams did not participate in the final meeting.

All of the participants reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the presenters conveyed information clearly and effectively and had comprehensive knowledge of the topic. All participants also agreed or strongly agreed that: the topics were relevant to their work, the training met their needs for information on the topic, they felt prepared to take action and implement things based on the training, and they were aware of resources and supports as a result of the training.

At this session, which was the last cohort meeting, participants were asked to describe the action plans and next steps. Below are verbatim comments:

- Continue to work on connecting our community-based centers to get the various staff involved in improving their own and other's work.
- I will continue to meet with community preschool directors and build a cooperative plan for addressing challenging behaviors that meets time, resource, and legal needs for preschool teachers, families, and children. We will keep moving to share information about toxic stress and aces in the community, especially the school district.
- Our team will continue to develop some professional development opportunities. We will also continue to work with preschool directors to work on more manageable and streamlined development of behavior plans and will work to support them in their development of peer to peer supports.
- We are continuing our work regarding identifying and serving children with social emotional needs. Next year our team will continue to work our community based preschool and childcare providers serving children in special education to develop behavior plans. We will meet with the childcare/preschool directors to discuss their needs and together identify a protocol that involves parents very early. That is discussing concerns when behavior first begins with parents and offering support to them from our EC Mental Health Specialist at home if they desire it. The team will outline and support pyramid strategies from the pyramid that help promote positive behavior. (we think these two steps have been neglected by our team and teachers/directors) We think that by supporting parents and teachers we can promote positive behavior. We then work together to try to streamline the behavior plan writing process. We will document our work, We will continue ACEs awareness and have included in our LAUNCH Together
Grant. We are taking into account ACEs risk factors when we complete Family and Health Histories.

When asked how the training would impact their work, participants responded as follows:

- Personally, it helped direct my own work as it applies to the various areas I encounter obstacles in processes. It has reinforced my desire to continue my work in informing and advocating for trauma informed practice in all areas. ACES matter. :)
- Behavior plans will be completed in a timely manner, so that the are in place and with supports the better part of the year, instead of haphazardly by the end of the year.
- It has already changed our approaches. We have a documented referral pathway for children who only have serious social and emotional delays. We need to continue to work on effective transitions into kindergarten for these children.

Taken together, the evaluation results from the three state level PLC sessions in combination with the comments and feedback provided at the sessions and during individual TA sessions suggests that PLC participants were satisfied with the structure of the sessions, the content provided, and the amount of time allocated for the various activities. At each session, time was spent having the AU teams present on their work. Sessions also included time for introductions and reflections on the work. AU teams had the opportunity to hear about other models and programs and ask each other questions about how activities were selected and completed and how programs were run.

Challenges from the state level sessions included variable attendance from team members and teams, differences in quality of the AU team presentations – it was apparent that some teams spent a great deal of time preparing to present and others did not, and management of side conversations and participation. AU teams had time built into the state level sessions to work with their TA facilitator to complete action planning documents and obtain support as needed. Again, there was variability in the extent to which the teams participated and utilized the TA support.

Among the challenges identified by AU teams were not having dedicated time between sessions to meet and/or work on their action plans, not having administrative buy in, team turnover as new processes were being implemented, and lack of resources to engage in the activities they wanted to perform. Access to mental health services emerged as a concern almost universally across the teams. AU teams also expressed an interest in learning about different assessment tools, particularly around screening for psychosocial and adversity factors that impact social emotional well-being in preschoolers. There was also an interest in sharing information about work flows and processes around conducting evaluations and developing IEPs. Teams were able to
share information and documents on the shared webspace. Presentation materials and action planning documents were also made available online.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Individualized Technical Assistance, Support, and Facilitation

**AU A:**

The PLC for this community spent the year focusing on developing a facilitated transition plan for children who are identified as having social-emotional needs during their IEP evaluations. The community has capacity and strong support to address social-emotional needs yet they identified a gap in their evaluation and transition to the classroom process. The PLC’s plan was to encourage and support a meeting between the evaluation team and receiving classroom teacher (and family, if the family was interested/able) in order to provide information about the child’s social-emotional needs as identified by the evaluation. The hope was that the classroom teachers would feel better prepared and educated about the needs of the child and therefore have an increased capacity to address social-emotional challenges in the context of the classroom. Additionally, this community’s PLC discussed how social-emotional delays/difficulties were getting identified during evaluations and considered adding a screening tool (such as the ACE-Q) to their evaluation process.

**Strengths:** The leader of the PLC this year is a school psychologist and is very passionate about social-emotional development in the preschool setting. She has district support to think about challenges in this arena. She is also knowledgeable about the topic yet open to learning more. Additionally, the Child Find evaluation team has positive relationships with the education staff across the district.

The AU team participated in three, 1-hour PLC meetings with the TA provider in addition to the three individualized TA times at the state level meetings. The first TA meeting consisted of all 4 individuals on the PLC team. However, the additional two meetings were not as well attended (3 people attended the second group and only one person participated in the final group).

**Challenges:** Although there is a great deal of passion by the leader of the PLC this year and a handful of other staff, this is a large district and there are many layers they have to work through in order to make changes to their current system. Additionally, leadership at the Child Find the district levels are very busy and demonstrated difficulties fully engaging in the PLC work this year. There seems to be an assumption in this district that they are already doing a great job addressing the social and emotional needs of preschoolers. While they are doing several wonderful things,
there is not a lot of time or energy dedicated to considering potential improvements or growth opportunities.

**Possible next steps:** The PLC is in the process of deciding if they can incorporate the use of the ACE-Q into their Child Find evaluations. They have already trained employees across their district on toxic stress and hope that implementing this specific tool or something similar will increase awareness further. The leader of the PLC also plans to begin to provide reflective supervision to the mental health staff in the district starting next school year with the hopes of expanding this to other staff across the district very soon.

**AU B:**

The PLC in this community was focused on encouraging their teachers to begin incorporating social-emotional lessons into their classrooms on a consistent basis. The PLC facilitated several groups with the district’s teachers and each teacher was required to research, write-up and submit one social-emotional lesson to the “library” of lessons the PLC was compiling. Then the teachers were encouraged to try at least one of the lessons between meetings and report back on how it went. The goal of this work was to increase awareness of social-emotional curriculum and encourage increased use of social-emotional lessons in classrooms. Two teachers participated in the state level PLC meetings and offered valuable insights from the classroom perspective.

The AU team participated in three, 1-hour PLC meetings with the TA provider in addition to the three individualized TA times at the state level meetings. The first TA meeting consisted of all 4 individuals on the PLC team. However, the additional two meetings were not as well attended (2 people attended the second group and only one person participated in the final group).

**Strengths:** The leader of the PLC has a lot of passion and dedication about increasing social-emotional awareness and education in the district. She has a lot of support from her colleagues, both peers and other staff in the district. The process this PLC was undertaking was innovative. The teachers had given feedback that they did not want to implement a specific social-emotional curriculum because they did not want to be tied to one type of lesson. The PLC heard this feedback and developed the plan to have the teachers develop social-emotional lessons (with support from the PLC team) and practice implementing the lessons into their classrooms. The PLC also created opportunities for reflection and feedback about specific lessons that all teachers could benefit from.

**Challenges:** The biggest challenge in this community (and likely in all communities) was time. Despite passion, dedication and energy around this topic, it was difficult for the PLC participants to find even 1-hour blocks of time once per month when
they could all meet with the PLC TA provider. The sessions varied in terms of how many PLC participants were available to participate. All members of the PLC wore multiple hats (e.g. the teachers were also participating in IEP evaluations) and this contributed to their lack of time. This made providing TA a bit of a challenge.

Possible next steps: We discussed expanding their social-emotional lesson “library” and explored the possibility of making the lessons available online. We also discussed the feasibility of creating an online mechanism for teachers to provide insights, reflections, or feedback about each lesson that other teachers could read before implementing in their own classrooms. Additionally, the PLC would like to create social-emotional “tool kits” that teachers could “check out” that would contain supplies and materials needed to implement the social-emotional lessons.

AU C:

The PLC in this community was focused on a couple of different goals. One goal was to reach out to referral sources, such as pediatric offices and child care centers, to provide education and guidance about making referrals to the Child Find team, with specific focus on making social-emotional referrals. Additionally, the community began working on plans for a “transition classroom” for children who are identified as having social-emotional delays during evaluation. This classroom would be a place where children identified as having social-emotional delays but had not previously been in a preschool setting would be placed for a short time (at least 2 weeks, more if necessary) in order to determine the needs and best fit for the child in a longer-term classroom. This last plan was disclosed at the very end of the PLC time and was not discussed in detail with the community.

The PLC in this community participated in three, 1-hour PLC meetings with the TA provider. The first TA meeting consisted of all 4 individuals on the PLC team. However, the additional two meetings were not as well attended (2 people attended the second group and third groups).

Strengths: The leader of the PLC in this community is confident in her skills and is thoughtful about social-emotional development in the preschool setting. The community is very efficient in their evaluations and is already incorporating some social-emotional components in their evaluations. They are considering implementing the ADOS and are planning on becoming trained on this measure.

Challenges: This community is unique because they are small and are often overlooked to receive additional resources because of their size and perceived lack of need. This has been frustrating to the members of the PLC. Additionally, the scarcity of resources has led the members of the PLC to have to be more productive with smaller amounts of time. This was even an issue within the PLC. It was a challenge getting all
of the members of the PLC to participate in a meeting at the same time. The PLC members stated that lack of time was the biggest barrier to their success this year. Finally, communication among PLC members seemed to be lacking. Most of the calls were with the PLC leader and another member of the evaluation team. Their reports of the plans for the PLC different from the Child Find director’s reports and this led to some confusion about the PLC’s specific goals for the year.

**Possible next steps:** This community was encouraged to continue being a resource for referral sources in their communities. They were encouraged to connect with the early childhood consultants in their communities, especially when they have concerns about child care centers that are referring children and clearly have a lack of social-emotional knowledge or sensitivity. The TA provider connected the PLC members with a large pediatric office that refers many families to them for evaluation and they plan to create working relationships with this practice to support their referral efforts.

In terms of the “transitional classroom” this community is considering, brief reflection and discussion occurred with the community to explore possible challenges with this plan (e.g. will a temporary classroom actually be an ideal setting for children who are likely to have difficulties with transitions?). The community was encouraged to think through this plan and to make decisions about this type of classroom based on the social-emotional knowledge that they posses and learned during the PLC this year.

**AU D:**

The PLC in this community had proactively identified target areas on which they wanted to focus during the school year. In their community, they struggled with creating access to enough behavioral health resources and around ensuring a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten for children with social emotional and behavioral needs. They also experienced an over-referral to their behavioral health specialist working in one of their programs. Together, they decided to allocate time and effort to developing a referral algorithm that would help them identify those children who were most in need of behavioral health and home-based services for social emotional difficulties.

The AU team participated in four, 1-hour meetings with the TA provider in addition to the three individualized TA times at the state level meetings. All four members of the team participated in all four sessions with active engagement from each of the team members.

**Strengths:** Team members were engaged in this project throughout the school year both during and between meeting times. The team lead ensured that progress was being made on the various projects and the team had an opportunity to share and describe their progress at each of the state level sessions. The team was motivated to
develop and deliver local PLC trainings around adverse childhood experiences and did so with tremendous success. Additionally, the team developed and implemented a referral decision tree that help them determine who needed what types of services and how to most efficiently use the finite amount of behavioral health time they had available. Fortunately, their work is centralized and they have a significant amount of autonomy and decision-making power. They are also known to be good partners in the community and, therefore, are able to cultivate and sustain strong working relationships with key early childhood stakeholders.

**Challenges:** The small team in this community is tasked with working on numerous projects and initiatives. Although they work tirelessly to align the different projects, competing demands and deadlines make it difficult to put in place everything they planned to do. For example, a large, statewide grant initiative took time and effort away from this project during the submission phase.

**Possible next steps:** This community continued to set and achieve their goals over the course of the school year. They launched numerous training efforts that demonstrated their local PLC activities and built upon these training efforts as they made changes to their processes. Next steps included ongoing connection and training with other members of the community and with administrators and teachers at the various schools in which they work. They were working with preschool directors to help create smooth transitions to kindergarten with behavior plans in place for children who needed them and were trying to engage elementary school personnel in coming to transition meetings. The team was brainstorming ways to continually engage preschool staff (e.g., participating in teacher appreciation week activities).

**AU E:**

This community focused on teacher training and implementation of a new learning management system to track training and professional development opportunities and offer those to teachers, directors, administrators, and Child Find team members. One of the team members presented on the implementation of the Second Step curriculum in her classroom with support from the other team members. The team was engaged in learning from other AU teams and looked to add resources and tools to their assessment process.

The AU team participated in four, 1-hour meetings with the TA provider in addition to two individualized TA times at the state level meetings. Some members of the team missed some of the individualized TA time. No one from the team attended the final state level PLC in April.
**Strengths:** The team leader who was originally identified was unable to serve as the team lead. The person who was identified to take her place was already as an established

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**Technical Assistance Facilitator Reflections**

On the whole, the state level professional learning community focused on social emotional development in the preschool population was a success. Five AU teams participated across the 2015-2016 school year. The teams were engaged in three day-long sessions, individualized technical assistance meetings and support, and local activities that allowed them to expand their current practices beyond the immediate team. Teams worked with teachers, directors, administrators, mental health professionals, and other community stakeholders engaged in early childhood efforts in their communities. Teams were able to develop action plans and work toward achieving their goals. Accomplishments included developing and implementing presentations, adapting assessment practices and classroom supports, and modifying workflows.

Leaders from each of the five Administrative Units presented at the statewide annual meeting. It was apparent from the panel discussion and presentation that the AU teams appreciated the opportunity to participate in the work and that each local community had benefitted from the PLC activities and technical assistance.

There were a number of barriers and challenges identified over the course of the year. First, time limitations emerged as a significant barrier to further growing and fostering social-emotional capacity in communities across the state. Second, communities identified resource issues, including limited access to staff with in-depth knowledge and
capacity to provide support to preschoolers with social emotional difficulties, as an ongoing challenge. Finally, AU teams expressed appreciation for the activities and technical assistance provided but made use of only a limited amount of what was available to them. They were unable to commit additional time to utilize the resources available through this opportunity to the fullest extent because they were already working at full capacity and could not add in more work. Leadership in communities interested in participating in ongoing training and PLC opportunities must creatively think through ways to carve out time for staff that will be working on this particular priority. The work will not be successful if it is expected to occur without some adjustment to staff’s already-full schedules and demands. The work also requires administrative buy-in and engagement of leaders who have the authority to make changes, allocate resources, and support sustained modifications in practice. Ongoing technical support after implementation of changes would also be beneficial in maintaining gains and advancing further goals.