

Hallie E. Ford Center

White Paper

Findings from the National Forum on Professional Development Systems for Parenting Education

Produced in partnership with Oregon State University, Linn-Benton Community College, and the National Parenting Education Network

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Introduction

This White Paper is the result of the National Forum on Professional Development Systems for Parenting Education held at Oregon State University (OSU) in May 2011. The National Forum was a step in the ongoing effort to advance the field of Parenting Education. It is a follow-up to the Parenting Education Summit held in May 2007 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which was sponsored by Families First and Wheelock College.

The National Forum specifically focused on one of the key recommendations from the Parenting Education Summit: “Continue to work on developing plans to institute credentialing, certification and content knowledge and skills for parenting educators” (Fiore, L., 2008, March, *Envisioning, Energizing and Empowering Relationships—Findings from the Parenting Education Summit*). To this end, parenting education leaders from around the country were invited to share the most current thinking and efforts in professional development and recognition.

This Forum was initiated by the three coauthors of this White Paper. Sally Bowman and Denise Rennekamp, faculty members in the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families at Oregon State University, were working with parenting educators around the state of Oregon. Sally Bowman received the 2009 OSU L.L. Stewart Faculty Scholar Program Award to initiate this work. Jerri Wolfe is the Chair of the Parenting Education Department at Linn-Benton Community College and the co-Chair of the Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee of the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN).

The National Forum on Professional Development Systems for Parenting Education was a two-day event attended by 27 Oregon participants, 6 participants from neighboring Washington state, and 15 individuals representing other states and the United Kingdom.

This White Paper reflects the discussions of the two-day Forum. Major issues, lessons

learned, and recommendations are summarized.

Efforts to Advance Parenting Education

This Forum was developed to address two goals:

- To continue to define and provide guidelines for parenting educator professional development and the recognition systems that promote that development as part of the work of the Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee of the National Parenting Education Network
- To support Oregon's parenting educators and enhance the delivery of parenting education in Oregon

The objectives of the Forum were:

- To examine the concept of core competency and begin to develop consensus around a set of core competencies for parenting educators
- To provide information about a spectrum of professional preparation and recognition systems which promote the development of parenting educator competencies
- To promote interaction and exchange of ideas among Forum participants from Oregon and across the United States
- To determine the application of professional development standards and recognition systems to support Oregon's parenting educators and to enhance the delivery of parenting education in Oregon
- To explore the development of a national parenting educator recognition system
- To produce and disseminate a white paper that documents the proceedings of the Forum

The Forum included the following presentations:

- National Parenting Education Network (NPE): National Effort to Advance the Field of Parenting Education, Betty Cooke, Ph.D., NPEN Chair

- Core Competencies: What Do Parenting Educators Need to Know and Do? Dana McDermott, Ph.D., DePaul University
- State Models: Professional Preparation and Recognition Systems
 - Texas, Sandra McClintic, Ph.D., Texas Women's University
 - North Carolina, Stephanie Jones, M.S., North Carolina State University
 - Connecticut, Pam Langer, M.A., Connecticut Parents as Teachers State Leader
 - Louisiana, Pam Wall, M.S., West Feliciana Parish Schools
 - Minnesota: Betty Cooke, Ph.D., University of Minnesota
- National Models: Professional Preparation and Recognition Systems
 - Mary Crowley, OBE, President, International Federation for Parent Education, England
 - Dawn Cassidy, National Council on Family Relations, Certified Family Life Educator, Director of Education, National Council on Family Relations

The richness of the presentations, combined with the opportunity for sharing and questions, provided a backdrop for the work sessions that followed. PowerPoint presentations, handouts and resources provided at the Forum can be found at the NPEN website: www.NPEN.org

National Effort to Advance the Field of Parenting Education

NPEN Chair Betty Cooke focused on two aspects of NPEN in her presentation:

- (1) providing an overview of the National Parenting Education Network and
- (2) highlighting and explaining the work of the NPEN Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee and how their work relates to the purposes of the Forum.

The overview of NPEN included information on their history, mission, purpose, vision, goals, and principles. The ways in which the NPEN listserv and website are central to the work of NPEN were described. Explanations of member involvement and the organizational structure of NPEN were provided.

As part of the description of the work of the NPEN Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee (PPRC), co-chaired by Jerri Wolfe and Pam Langer, results of a study conducted by NPEN Council Member Heidi Stolz and her colleagues at the University of Tennessee on professional preparation systems for parenting educators, were summarized. Findings from the study generated a list of professional preparation systems and indicated interest in developing a national parenting education credential. Significant interest in obtaining such a credential by professionals across all levels of formal education was also demonstrated.

Additional PPRC activities included the *Framework for Understanding Parenting Educator Professional Preparation and Recognition*, the work of Dana McDermott on examination of core competencies of parenting educators, and Stephanie Jones' work on the characteristics of professional preparation and recognition systems. The committee also had an important role in planning and presenting at the Forum.

Core Competencies: What Do Parenting Educators Need to Know and Do?

Dana McDermott reviewed several state, national, and international efforts to identify competencies of parenting educators. She developed and explained a chart of 10 areas of competencies evident within different professional development systems. The

participants could see the convergence on core areas used by various systems. These areas included:

- Child and life span development
- Dynamics of family relationships
- Guidance and nurturing
- Health and safety
- Diversity in family systems
- Professional practice/best practices in adult learning
- School and child care relationships
- Community relationships
- Assessment and evaluation
- Organizational and public policies/laws

Forum participants discussed parenting education case studies in small groups and evaluated which competencies within these core areas would need to be utilized by the parenting educator in each case. In doing so, participants became more aware of the challenge of identifying which competencies all parenting educators should possess and which were needed by those at a more advanced level.

Lessons Learned in Creating Professional Development Systems

Representatives from Connecticut, North Carolina, Minnesota, Louisiana, Texas, and the United Kingdom shared lessons learned during the creation of professional development systems for parenting educators in their locations. In addition, the National Council for Family Relations' Director of Education offered insight from the organization's development of Certification for Family Life Educators.

Be inclusive. Several states discussed the efforts they made in the beginning stages of their planning to include parenting educators from a variety of professional backgrounds in the design of the systems. They identified the need to make a distinction between paraprofessionals and professionals, while being as inclusive as possible of those who

identified themselves as parenting educators. They spoke of the importance of recognizing training that is not necessarily formal education, realizing that many of the people providing parenting education and support do not have a college degree or a high level of professional training. They also recognized that many parenting educators serve in part-time positions. States sought a balance between inclusiveness and distinction: a professional development system needs to serve the continuum of individuals who identify themselves as parenting educators.

Provide mentor leaders along the way for program sustainability. Many of the panelists were founding members of the movement to professionalize parenting education within their states. They understood the time and dedication it took to develop their systems. They were concerned that no one would have the passion and commitment to take on leadership roles when the core leaders retired or resigned.

Leaders wanted to ensure there were more than one or two people who understood the system and could carry it forward. They spoke of the importance of recruiting new and younger people into leadership roles. College students were targeted as potential recruits. Providing both formal and informal mentoring opportunities for the new recruits was a priority.

Communicate with the membership of the professional development system beyond the credentialing process. Panelists emphasized the importance of being responsive to the needs of the members. They recognized, however, the challenges in reaching all members, especially paraprofessionals. Inadequate funding dictated their communication methods. The methods most often mentioned were webinars, emails, and user-friendly websites.

Involve universities as the professional development system is designed. Several states worked with institutions of higher education, including community colleges. They sought research and advice as they established their core competencies from schools of social work, early childhood programs, and the Extension Service of land-grant

universities. Some of the state professional development systems were integrated into existing systems within universities. These institutions provided an infrastructure for implementation.

Develop an infrastructure to support the professional development system. States emphasized that professional development systems do not support themselves financially. Having an entity that can subsidize the program through paid staff, office space, and other resources is helpful. If the system is not integrated into an existing infrastructure, states should start with some basic structural elements. These include establishing clear procedures for decision making, as well as maintaining and disseminating detailed minutes of every meeting.

Cultivate key champions for the professional development system. Identify state agency staff, politicians, and business leaders who can be advocates for parenting education and influence policy. Panelists underscored the importance not only of explaining the programs to these audiences but also of taking them to visit classes and introducing them to parents. In Minnesota, the only state with a licensure program for parenting educators, a state senator was their policy champion.

Be visible to increase the likelihood of sustainability. States talked about the importance of promoting their networks to potential advocates and to all parenting educators, not just those who are already part of the professional development system. They encouraged others to focus on outreach and recruitment, especially among college students. Panelists also discussed the importance of members of professional development systems taking the lead to conduct research and sharing their discoveries about parenting education. This can lead to increased visibility as well as new funding opportunities.

Collaborate across systems to identify parallel systems in other professions such as health care, social work, and early childhood. The review of parallel systems can aid beginning parenting education systems in determining their own requirements and formats. Some professional development systems have elected to link their systems. For example,

in Minnesota the parenting education license is tied to teacher requirements. A collaborative effort creates a network that facilitates communication and knowledge exchange across disciplines, even though the different systems may not merge.

Define competencies in order to guide training both for the organization and for individuals. Although states differ somewhat in their approaches to competencies required for parenting educators as part of their professional development systems, most states used the National Extension Parent Educator Framework (NEPEF) as the foundation for their competency development. Their state networks felt that NEPEF covered the essential elements necessary for the successful development of a parenting educator. NEPEF is used as a guide for documenting education, training, and experience. It is also used as a professional development tool with parenting educators. It raises individuals' awareness of competencies, and allows them to reflect on where they are in each domain.

Provide training and support to members and recognize member achievements.

States stressed that an important function of their professional development systems was the provision of training and other support for members. The state systems raised the bar for both the quantity and quality of trainings for parenting educators. Access to training and professional development materials was improved through the development of online modules, listservs, websites, and resource libraries for practitioners.

States also made efforts to ensure those working in parenting education had other supports to keep people current in the field. An example cited by panelists was the formation of regional networks. The regional groups met monthly to share information and participate in training. This approach has been especially beneficial for parenting educators in rural areas. Public recognition of members through local press releases and the media promotes the importance of parenting education within communities and acknowledges the individual achievements of members.

Outcomes of Work Sessions

After hearing from state and national leaders about their efforts to develop professional recognition systems, these leaders, plus individuals representing other states, met to determine ways the field might move forward by developing standards for professional recognition systems, gauging interest in creating a national professional development recognition system, and considering NPEN's role in moving forward. The Oregon and Washington participants worked in groups to discuss the application of professional development systems to their states. They developed recommendations and/or next steps as a result of this Forum.

National Parenting Education Network Work Session

The work session included state and organizational leaders from 10 states, and Mary Crowley, President of the International Federation for Parenting Education. A summary of the participants' responses to questions posed, follows:

What have you heard that excites you?

- Commonalities among state models
- Wealth of information shared by participants
- Close to defining a core set of parenting educator competencies
- Relationships developed at the forum and willingness of individuals to share resources
- A state model where the credentialing system is staffed with volunteers
- Positive commitment to professional development
- Inclusiveness of models—differentiation of levels of professionalism, including paraprofessionals and peer parenting educators
- Agreement that people should be properly trained to work with parents
- University involvement in professional development systems
- Application of core principles of practice of family support are evident

What have you heard that you have questions about? What do you have concerns about?

- If we create a national movement, do we focus on identifying entry, mastery level, both? Who are we targeting?
- Are parenting educator core competencies big ideas? How will we measure and use competencies? Are there sequences or prerequisites?
- Depth and timing of state initiatives versus national effort. Will multiple systems cause conflict? How will these systems work together? How can we recognize existing state systems? Can there be reciprocity?
- What is the role of NPEN?
- What liability issues are involved in a credentialing system? If we only verify a person meets the requirements and not indicate that they are competent, do we skirt the issue?
- Do states have a grievance plan?
- Have states turned down anyone who has applied for recognition in their system?
- Affordability of national standards
- What is the appropriate recognition system (i.e., licensure, credential, certification) to develop for parenting educators?
- What is the incentive to become credentialed if it is not required for a job? Is recognition, professionalism, and credibility enough?
- If we don't create a system someone will do it for us.

What is in place that supports developing a national standard for professional development recognition systems?

- Research supporting development of systems. "Professional Preparation for Systems for Parenting Educators: Identification, Perceived Value, and Demand for a National Credential," Stolz, H. et.al. (2010, December) Journal of Extension.
- State expertise and systems as a starting point.
- Higher education programs available in parenting education.

- Work of the NPEN Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee, including the Framework for Understanding Parenting Educator Professional Preparation and Recognition, Parenting Educator Credentialing System Matrix and the Core Competencies project headed by Dana McDermott.
- Work on ethics utilizing Minnesota’s “Ethical Thinking and Practice for Parent and Family Educators.” www.mcfr.net/Resources/ethical_thinking_and_practice.pdf
- Experience of National Council on Family Relations in development of the Certified Family Life Educator program.
- General demand for parenting education.
- Increasing awareness of funders of the need to adapt evidence-based programs to the audience.

What would a national professional development recognition system look like?

A recognition system should include:

- Common standards
- Enhanced professional identity
- Enhanced attitudes, knowledge, and skills of practitioners
- Inclusion of supervision and support
- Professional development plans and assessment
- A core set of competencies with levels (e.g., novice, intermediate, master)
- A credential that would include a set of standards and provide guidance to states and other institutions developing professional development and recognition systems.

At the conclusion of the session, the national participants agreed on the following next steps:

- Clarify the roles of peers and paraprofessionals. Establish a subcommittee of the NPEN Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee, whose purpose is to more clearly define the roles of peers and paraprofessionals in parenting education, while being inclusive and building a more professional field.

- Develop consensus around a set of core competencies for parenting educators.
- Create a set of standards for states that are developing professional development and recognition systems. Resources to include principles, essential elements, templates, and recommendations.

Oregon Work Session

Oregon participants represented 13 of 36 counties. They agreed on the following goals:

- Every family in Oregon has access to parenting education that meets its needs.
- Parenting educators have access to relevant quality training opportunities.

The major recommendations from the Oregon participants were:

- Form a statewide network or organization in Oregon with a website. For example, a chapter of NPEN, which might be called OPEN, might be established.

Participants identified these potential functions:

- Develop a common vision, mission, and desired outcomes.
- Establish a listserv for networking.
- Identify existing resources.
- Promote use of evidence based/promising/best practices curricula and approaches in parenting education.
- Link efforts to policy makers, stakeholders, and funders.
- Develop a registry of parenting educators and parenting education opportunities, which would include training opportunities for educators.
- Create a system of professional development for parenting educators. Adapt core competencies from another state and tie to training opportunities.
- Develop training opportunities, especially online modules. Training needs to be accessible and affordable since Oregon is a largely rural state, where the time and resources to travel to metro areas are training barriers.

Washington Work Session

Representatives from participating higher education institutions in Washington agreed to support the parenting education profession by leading professional development and establishing a State Training Structure for Parenting Educators. The Washington caucus developed these recommendations:

- Invite relevant organizations within the state to participate in the development of a State Training Structure for Parenting Educators and share information from the National Forum held at OSU in May 2011.
- Identify training opportunities and needs within the state by surveying constituents. Determine how parenting educators wish to obtain professional training (conferences, webinars, classes).
- Washington State University Extension Service will take the lead in providing training webinars during the 2011–2012 academic year and organize a one-day conference for parenting educators in Fall 2012. Trainings will offer CEUs and a certificate of completion.
- Organize a meeting with relevant organizations to begin the work of establishing a common language to discuss parenting educator training and identifying key competency/core areas. The Washington caucus examined the NEPEF, LA, and CT models and identified five potential areas of competency: (1) Lifespan Development, (2) Dynamics of Family Relations, (3) Guidance and Nurturing, (4) Health and Safety, and (5) Professional Practice.
- Consider how to use social networking such as Facebook to foster communication among Washington parenting educators.
- Connect with Oregon to share progress and align efforts, if feasible.

Conclusion

In 1996, Nick Carter wrote in *See How We Grow*. “Probably the most critical issue facing the development of parent education is that of how practitioners are trained, supervised, and supported in their work with parents.” The National Forum on Professional Development Systems for Parenting Education highlighted the progress that has been made in the past 15 years, as well as lessons learned, and identified areas for continued growth. In addition, Oregon and Washington benefited from the experiences shared by other states and the UK, who presented at this Forum. As a result, the two states moved forward in their efforts to develop parenting education professional development systems. It is the hope of the organizers of the National Forum that individuals and agencies come together to create opportunities to address the areas for continued growth and take the next step in advancing the field of parenting education.

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