



Nourished and Active in Early Learning: Planning Focus Groups to Inform a Professional Development Training Curriculum

Anna Mowell, UW Nutritional Sciences Program | MPH Nutrition Student | Dietetic Intern

BACKGROUND

Many young children spend significant time in care outside of the home, offering early learning programs a unique opportunity to support children and families in leading healthy and active lifestyles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds state recipients to improve nutrition and physical activity in statewide early care and education (ECE) systems through the State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program.

Spectrum of Opportunities Framework for State-Level Early Care and Education Systems

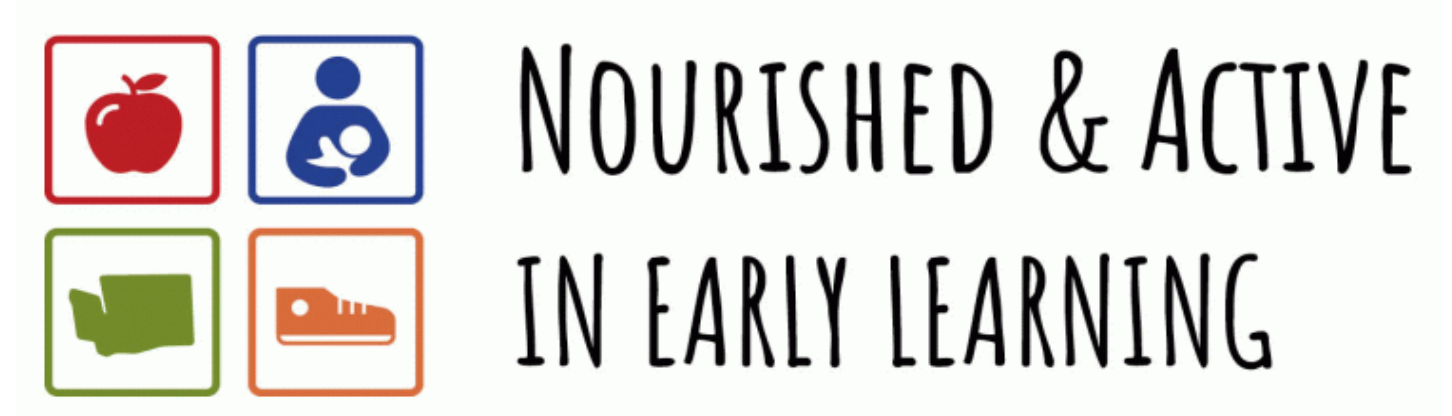


Professional Development Systems

Training Opportunities in Washington: Nourished & Active in Early Learning

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) collaborates with several partners to offer trainings and resources for early learning professionals on the following topics:

- Breastfeeding support
- Infant and child nutrition
- Child physical activity
- Media use (screen time)



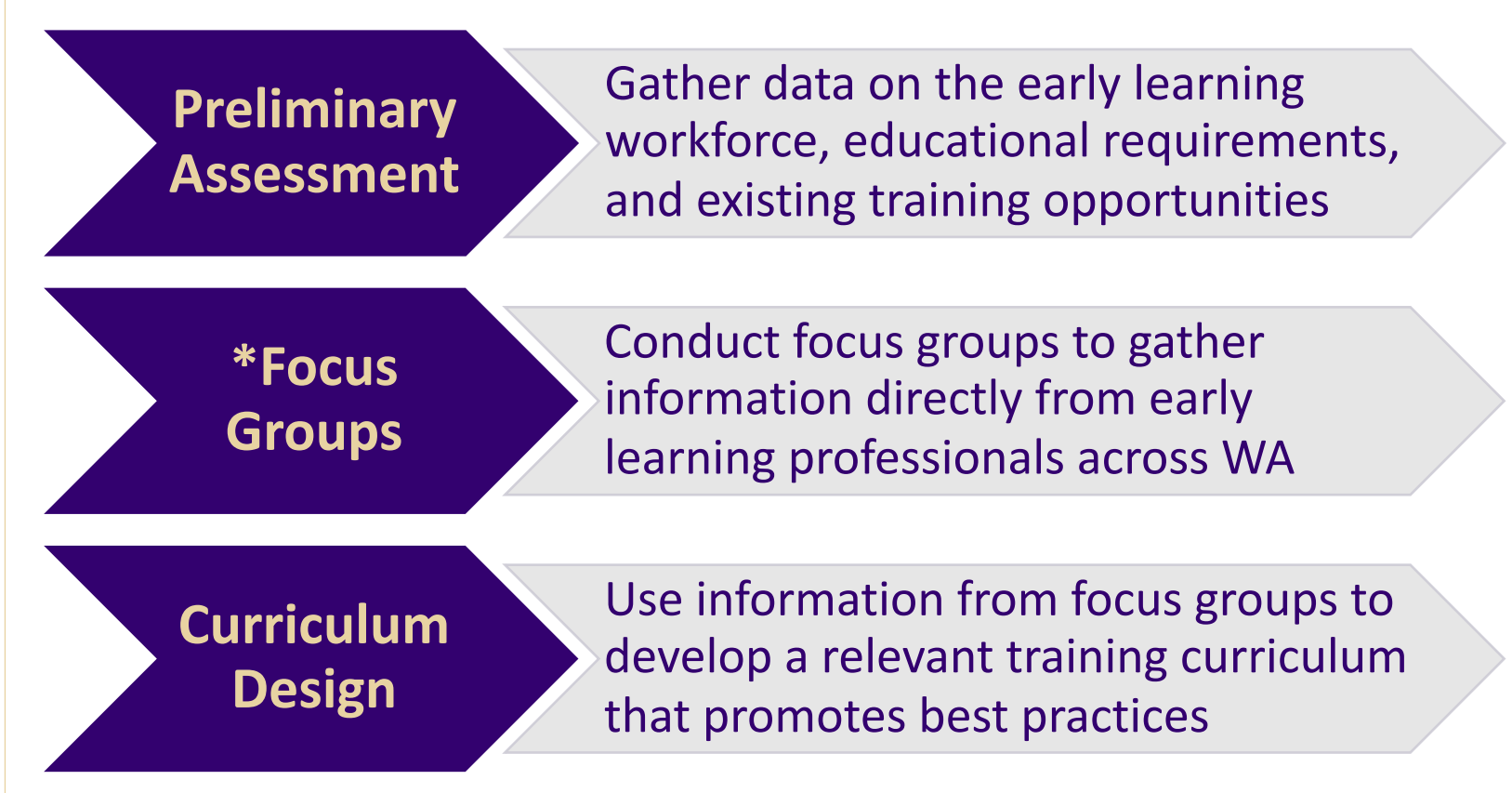
Statewide survey and training data suggest a need to support early learning professionals with further training opportunities.

Current Efforts

Creating a New Training for Early Learning Professionals

The DOH and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) are creating a new professional development training that supports early learning core competencies with breastfeeding, nutrition, physical activity, and screen time best practice examples.

Phases of Training Curriculum Development

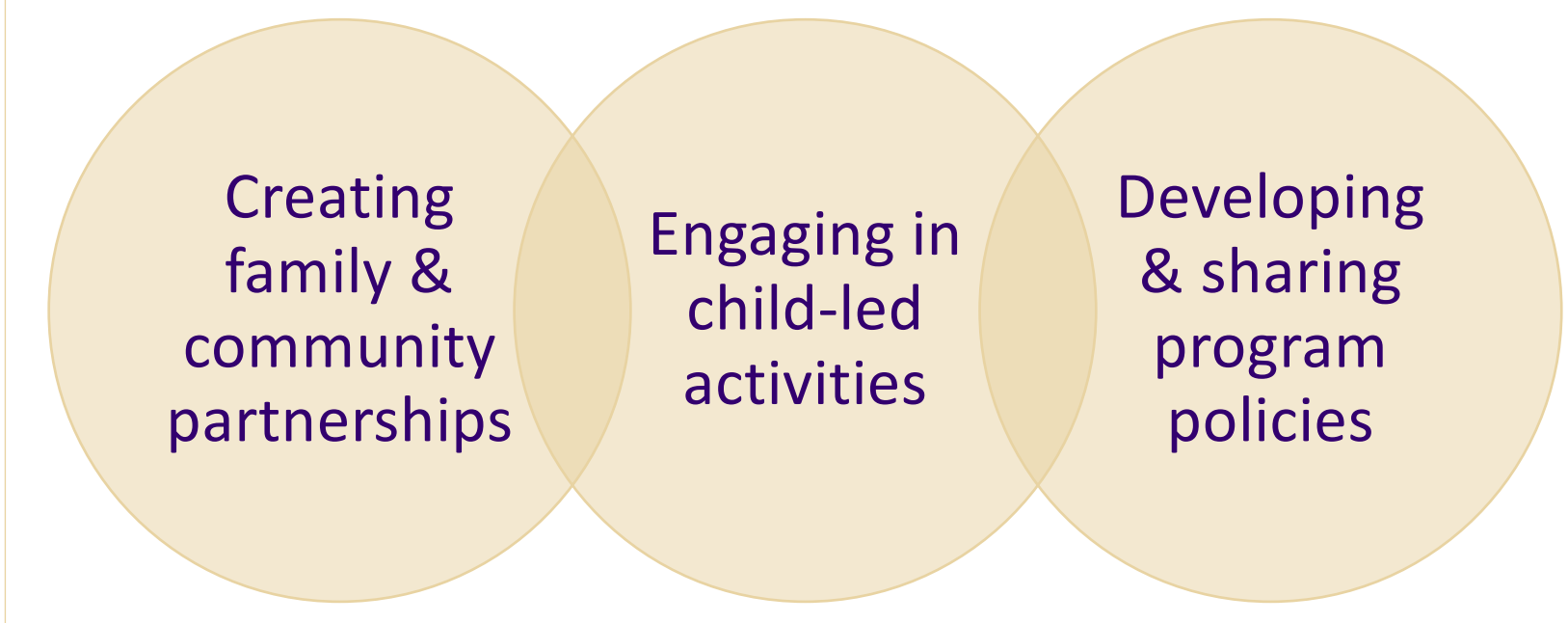


*Current phase of project implementation during my practicum experience

METHODS

Focus Group Planning

- > **Goal:** To gather stakeholder input and identify how to help elevate professional practice
- > **Objectives:** To learn about ideas, work experiences, challenges, and desired training opportunities related to DCYF core competencies



- > **Tools Developed**
 - Detailed project implementation plan
 - Recruitment materials (English and Spanish)
 - Facilitator script, focus group activity guide
 - Project one-pager for external partners
 - Memo & protocol for incentive procurement

Intended Implementation

- > Two English-speaking groups and one Spanish-speaking group held in spring 2020
 - > **Participants:** 10-12 early learning professionals (provider, center director, and/or family home program owner)
 - > **Locations:** King County, Yakima, & Spokane, WA
- Focus groups were not held due to the state of COVID-19. Alternate methods to gather input from early learning professionals are under consideration.

LESSONS LEARNED

- > The ECE system is a complex environment with several levers for change
- > Strong partnerships and continued communication are critical in project planning and implementation
- > Public health activities require patience, flexibility, and creativity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Chris Mornick, MPH, RDN for her support, guidance, and mentorship throughout this project. Special thanks to our DCYF project partners Michelle Roberts and Vasilya Mendybaeva, as well as the focus group facilitators for sharing their time and early learning expertise.