



2007 OSEP National Early Childhood Conference

Marriott Crystal Gateway Hotel | Arlington, VA | December 2-6, 2007

Final Report

The 2007 Annual OSEP Early Childhood Conference was held at the Crystal Gateway Marriott Hotel in Arlington, Virginia with approximately 570 participants in attendance. A pre-conference workshop on Strategies for Measuring Child and Family Outcomes was held on Saturday, December 1st with over 120 participants. Several pre-conference events were offered on Sunday, December 2nd for different constituency groups: ICC Chair/Staff; the IDEA Infant and Toddler Association (ITCA) for Part C Coordinators and staff; a 619 Coordinators Meeting and an orientation for first time conference attendees.

The Opening Plenary and evening reception on Monday featured multimedia tributes to and memories of Dr. Pascal Louis Trohanis, former director of NECTAC who died in June 2007. This was the first opportunity for the members of the early childhood community to gather to recognize his significant contributions to the network. The Infant and Toddlers Association hosted a reception on Sunday evening for invited guests, where they established and presented the first annual Trohanis Leadership Award posthumously to Pascal Trohanis, late director of NECTAC.

The main conference featured 3 plenary sessions and four rounds of concurrent sessions on topics of critical importance to the work of participants. Meetings were scheduled for states to interact with their OSEP project officers on Tuesday. Constituency group meetings (Part C, 619, Parent/family members) on Wednesday morning allowed participants to debrief and share their impressions of the conference.

Post-conference activities included a luncheon and meeting for representatives from the Pacific Basin and 3 post conference workshops on Wednesday afternoon on: Supporting Early Childhood Transition, General Supervision, Monitoring and Accountability, and Supporting Young Children with Challenging Behavior. See Appendix A: Evaluation Report for further description and participant evaluation of the Conference.

Planning Process

The conference agenda was the result of the efforts of an OSEP appointed planning committee supported by NECTAC staff. On May 29-30, 2007 the planning committee met at the same facility that housed the conference. The committee included representatives of the different constituency groups who usually attend the Annual Conference, namely Early Childhood Project director, Part C and 619 Coordinators, Parent Organization representatives, Regional Resource Center staff, OSEP and NECTAC staff. See attached list of OSEP Conference Planning Committee Members (Appendix B).

Needs assessment and suggestions from Part C, 619, EC Projects and parent representatives were compiled and analyzed by NECTAC and provided to the committee. During the planning meeting, the committee generated the agenda structure deciding on the number of plenary sessions, concurrent sessions and other activities. Speakers and topics were suggested for plenary and concurrent sessions. Committee members volunteered to plan individual sessions and contact the potential presenters. The committee members toured the facilities and were informed about registration and display arrangements.

Following the planning meeting, NECTAC drafted the agenda assigning sessions to different rounds making sure that topics were balanced. A NECTAC staff person was assigned to each committee member. These staff liaisons supported the planning in several ways at the request of the committee member. As necessary, they offered alternative presenter suggestions, planned session content, help to draft session descriptions for presenters. In a few instance, committee members asked the liaison to take on the planning of a session, either because a suggested presenter was not available or because of other pressing needs. An email list was used to keep the committee informed and to solicit their input as sessions and presenters were confirmed, adjusted or cancelled and as deadlines or other questions arose.

The NECTAC Conference team continued to use a meeting database, which tracked agenda content, presenters, AV requests, and status of the planning process. Many different meeting reports were generated to track various aspect of planning. The database was programmed to generate the program agenda, participant lists, confirmation and thank you letters for presenters.

During the conference, NECTAC staff acted as hosts to each session. Host responsibilities included: introduce and help presenters as needed, troubleshoot any logistical concerns, and collect session evaluations, session handouts and electronic files of presentations. The conference website features electronic handouts, URLs and/or links to other documents and photographs taken during the conference.

<http://www.nectac.org/~meetings/national2008/splash.html>

Evaluations

Overall, the meeting and location received high ratings on the evaluation. Approximately 200 participants responded to an online evaluation opportunity after the conference sharing feedback on the overall conference, the pre-conference and post conference workshops.

The mean rating for overall quality was 4.5 for the pre and post conference workshops with ratings ranging from 4.0 to 4.9. In addition to this on-line conference evaluation, concurrent sessions were also evaluated. The sessions were rated very well in overall quality, most receiving a rating of 4.3 or higher on a 5 point scale. All presenters were sent the results of their plenary or session evaluations along with a thank you letter from NECTAC. Participants were very complimentary about the friendliness, helpfulness and responsiveness of NECTAC staff throughout the conference. Please refer to the Evaluation Report (Appendix A) and the Evaluation of Concurrent Sessions chart (Appendix C) for complete ratings and further details.

Appendices:

- A. Overall Evaluation Report
- B. Planning Committee
- C. Evaluation of Concurrent Sessions

THE OSEP NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

December 3-5, 2007

EVALUATION REPORT

Number of Respondents= 155

JANUARY 31, 2008

Introduction and Overview

The 2007 OSEP National Early Childhood Conference was held December 3-5, 2007 in Arlington, VA, with pre-conference meetings held December 1-2, and post-conference meetings held in the afternoon of December 5, 2007. The conference involved approximately 570 participants representing 60 States and jurisdictions including the Department of the Army in Europe. The conference was intended for a variety of audiences involved in planning and delivering services to young children with special needs (birth through age 8) and their families. Participants included State Part C coordinators and staff such as CSPD coordinators; State Section 619 coordinators and staff; State ICC chairs, members and staff; Early Childhood Projects staff; National/regional/state technical assistance (TA) providers; OSEP and other federal agency staff; Parents of children with disabilities and/or special health care needs who have knowledge of IDEA and are serving in leadership positions (e.g. parent representatives on local and state Interagency Coordinating Councils, Special Education Advisory Panels or other advisory boards and representatives from Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), and Regional Parent Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs); and partners from the early childhood community, including child care, Early Head Start, Maternal and Child Health, and Social Services.

The December 2007 OSEP National Early Childhood Conference had the following goals:

- To gain knowledge and appreciation of the current requirements under IDEA for Part C and Section 619, and for Part C, the possible implications of the new regulations.
- To gain a better understanding of research findings and the use of successful evidence based practices related to U.S. Department of Education goals and initiatives.
- To acquire resources that will support the use of data to improve practice and accountability in the implementation of the IDEA.

- To build relationships and acquire strategies for strengthening and expanding collaborative partnerships with and among families and others in policy development and systems improvement at the federal, state and local levels.
- To gain a sense of confidence, energy and achievement for continued work on behalf of young children with disabilities and other special needs and their families.

Plenary and general sessions included invited speakers, federal and national updates, and special interest meetings and updates. Individual and concurrent sessions included presentations and discussions on such topics as supporting early childhood transition, general supervision and monitoring, coaching, inclusion, early identification, personnel preparation, using data to improve systems, measuring child and family outcomes, and building effective finance systems. Sessions introduced new ideas and strategies from current research and evidence based practices. A pre-conference workshop was held on child outcomes data, and pre-conference meetings for constituency groups included the National Meeting of ICC Chairs/Members/Staff, the Part C Coordinators Meeting held by Infant and Toddler Coordinator Association (ITCA), the Consortium of Section 619 Coordinators Business Meeting, and an Orientation for First-Time Attendees. Post-conference workshops were held on the topics of General Supervision, Monitoring, and Accountability, Supporting Early Childhood Transition, and Supporting Young Children with Challenging Behavior within Inclusive Programs: Adopting the Pyramid Model. In addition, a post-conference meeting for the Pacific jurisdictions was held.

Methods

After the conference, participants were asked to complete an online evaluation of the overall conference when they returned home. (See Attachment for a copy of the evaluation form.) One hundred fifty-five (155) of the 570 participants responded to the overall evaluation of the conference. This resulted in a total return rate of 27%. The majority of respondents were State Part C Coordinators/Staff (24%) and/or State Section 619 Coordinators/Staff (16%). Participants/Respondents self-identified their role as one or more of the following:

Participant Type	Total Participants	% of Respondents
State Part C Coordinator/Staff	134	24%
State Section 619 Coordinator/Staff	74	16%
Higher Education Faculty	34	5%
Direct Service Provider/Teacher	89	5%
Family Member of a Child with a Disability / Family Organization Representative	75	13%
National, Regional or State TA Provider	78	14%
OSERS/OSEP Staff	54	4%
Other	139	18%

Summary of Evaluation Results

Overall Quality of the Conference and the Plenary Sessions

Participants were asked to rate the overall quality of the conference and the overall expertise of the presenters on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing 'poor' and 5 representing 'excellent.' Both aspects were highly rated, with means at 4.1 and 4.3 respectively (see mean ratings in Table 1). Participants also provided many additional positive comments reinforcing the conclusion that the conference was successful. Members of NECTAC staff were acknowledged for their “*responsiveness*” as well as their “*friendly*” and “*helpful*” support throughout the conference.

Participants rated the four plenary sessions on the same scale from 1 to 5. The opening and closing plenary sessions, both invited speakers on important topics, received the highest ratings, with means of 4.1 and 4.4 respectively (see Table 2). The opening plenary, focusing on the importance of and strategies for translating research into practice, received praise for his important message. Some participants expressed appreciation for OSEP and NECTAC updates, with specific appreciation for Renee Bradley’s remarks. The closing plenary speaker was recognized by many participants commended for her inspiring presentation as one of the key strengths of the whole conference. Some of the comments provided by participants about the plenary sessions included:

Dean Fixen's presentation was excellent and for me supported a "disconnect" between what Congress is expecting states to demonstrate for progress and the time lines for doing so!

I loved Dean Fixen

[strength] The first plenary session by Dean Fixsen and his follow-up concurrent session. I hope this will be repeated at future conferences.

Renee Bradley's presentation was excellent and I appreciated her remarks related to EC evidence-based practices and the efforts by the task force to identify what constitutes EB practices.

[strength] The key note message and the information that followed from the federal representatives. The underscoring of seeing outcomes at various levels and the evidence behind coaching/ consultation and support to sustain and change practices.

The OSEP session with Ruth Ryder and Renee Bradley was particularly strong compared with others over the years.

OSEP did a great job this year of providing updates. Very helpful.

The final plenary session was exceptionally strong; it is unfortunate that this section had the least participants. Ms. Fialka addressed some very real issues which need to be addressed by providers (i.e., that providers choose to be in this arena, whereas the majority of families do not choose to need these services/ supports, and the effect that has on relationships and partnerships).

The Dance of Partnership was great; OSEP update was very good. I was very happy to see that parents and the concerns about parents played such a big part in the conference.

The final plenary was the high light of the conference for me.

The very best part of the conference was the Dance Of Partnership: Why do my feet hurt? As a direct service provider it was useful to hear feelings/opinions from a family of a child with special needs. It is important to keep these things fresh when working with children and families.

Table 1. Overall Quality of the Conference

RATE THE CONFERENCE	MEAN RATING	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Overall Quality	4.1	155
Provider Expertise	4.3	155

Table 2. Quality of the Plenary Sessions

RATE THE PLENARY SESSIONS	MEAN RATING	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Implementation: The Missing Link Between Research & Practice	4.1	146
Greetings and Updates from OSEP	3.9	148
History and Vision: Serving Families and Young Children with Special Needs	3.5	133
The Dance of Partnership: Why Do My Feet Hurt?	4.4	118

Conference Outcomes

Participants were also asked to rate the achievement of five intended outcomes of the event which related to knowledge and appreciation of the current requirements under the IDEA; understanding of research findings and successful evidence-based practices; acquisition of resources for improving practice and accountability in the implementation of the IDEA; building or strengthening collaborative partnerships; and gaining confidence and energy for continued work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families. Participants rated the achievement of outcomes on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree.'

Intended outcomes and mean ratings for each are presented below:

RATE THE OUTCOMES	MEAN RATING	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS*
1. I gained knowledge and appreciation of the current requirements under the IDEA for Part C and Section 619.	4.2	61
2. I gained a better understanding of research findings and the use of successful evidence-based practices related to US Department of Education goals and initiatives.	4.1	61
3. I acquired resources that will support the use of data to improve practices and accountability in the implementation of the IDEA.	3.9	61
4. I built relationships gained strategies for strengthening and expanding collaborative partnerships.	4.2	61
5. I gained confidence and energy for continued work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families.	4.2	61

*Note: The number of respondents for the intended outcomes is lower than the other items on the survey due to an online error where these items were mistakenly left off the online survey.

The highest ratings of outcome achievement were given to the outcomes of knowledge and appreciation for the requirements of IDEA, building relationships and expanding collaborative partnerships, and gaining confidence and energy for continued work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families (all three with mean ratings of 4.2). Many participants commented on the accomplishment of these outcomes, for example:

I heard an enormous amount of information that helps me to better understand the larger system challenges and new directions.

The conference was very focused on its stated goals, and I came away with a much clearer idea about necessary discussions, planning, and actions that we need to be having in our state.

The conference was interesting and educational. I have learned more on the child outcomes.

The morning of the first day (Saturday) made it worthwhile to attend this conference. The rest of the conference was equally worthwhile. This was an excellent OSEP Conference. I got a ton out of it!!

I think that the conference accomplished all of its intended outcomes and I'm grateful to have had the chance to attend.

Although ratings and comments showed most participants felt the goals were accomplished, there were a few participants who shared their concerns about the conference:

The outcomes may have been met by new coordinators for both Part C and 619; and I think parents really gain quite a bit from this event. However, for experienced coordinators the information has very limited usefulness.

I expected more applicable information instead of just information about new programs.

I actually thought the conference was lacking in information on how to impact family outcomes.

The individual sessions from states were not particularly helpful. They did not have much depth or any new information.

However, most participants provided positive comments about the accomplishment of the intended outcomes, and one participant summed it up by saying

I'd just like to tell you that of the three conferences I attended, this has been the best by far. Everything from the hotel to the presentations was top notch. This environment was super conducive to the exchange of ideas. In terms of intended outcomes - if the intent of the conference was to make me come away with a clearer direction, a renewed commitment, a sense of purpose, and inspiration to continue this work, then, - that's exactly what happened.

New Insights Gained

Respondents spoke to the new insights they gained from the conference. They reported that the conference increased their knowledge or provided new resources on general topics such as the intent of the law and reporting on the SPP/APR. Further, participants made many comments about specific insights gained about areas of research and evidence based practices such as transition, personnel development, analyzing and interpreting data, child find, CAPTA, child outcomes data collection, inclusion/LRE.

Better knowledge of the overall mission and vision of the bigger system.

Learned badly needed information on transitions.

Information from other states as to how they are responding to the APR/SPP

How to think about and talk about our data.

Hearing other states' strategies for supporting FAPE in the LRE and their goals.

The critical importance of how we make meaning of the data, reflect upon these, and frame our communications.

Fiscal verification visit information was helpful

I learned that ... one time training is not enough

I learned about Assistive Technology, and the internet network for family support. Both of these sessions are things that I will use as a parent and a provider.

I learned a great deal in the Autism presentation and plenary on "missing link."

Many respondents commented about the energy and confidence they gained from attending the conference, and the reassurance they felt hearing from and talking with others.

I gained confidence and energy for continuing work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families.

I was energized by the level of expertise at the conference and the opportunity to think about and talk about vision, evidenced based practices, family participation and best practices in EI.

As a parent whose child receives Early Intervention services, I learned that if you take the time to learn and then share, you can positively impact many lives.

My colleagues in other states are struggling as well with the accountability aspects

Most states are struggling with the APR requirements

Most states regardless of size or organization of services continue to have very similar issues, questions, difficulties, strengths, etc.

Throughout each session, I was reminded that all states are facing the same challenges.

I am not in this alone.

Helped confirm that the direction our state is going is in the right one. Also confirmed that the challenges we face are the same ones other states face.

The issues we are having are not unique to our state and we are on the right track.

Other respondents described their new insights as related to the realization or recognition that more or different work needed to be done. For example, when asked about new insights, participants wrote:

More work to be done in refining our system of accountability,

Training needs to be integrated into the support provided to service providers at all levels through coaching and mentoring.

We have all come a long way, but there is more work to do.

There were some participants who reported concerns when asked about insights gained. One individual commented that *"This conference is not as useful as in the past. With the limited projects and more readily accessible information from OSEP I think this conference as currently designed is obsolete."* Another participant felt *"That all over states are trying to do what is right but there are still many barriers."*

Strong/Useful Aspects

When asked about the strengths of the conference, participants described a number of different aspects and content areas. Most commonly mentioned were the plenary sessions and the messages that were delivered by those speakers.

All of the plenary speakers were wonderful! The sessions were fantastic!

Renee Bradley's presentation was excellent and I appreciated her remarks related to EC evidence-based practices and the efforts by the task force to identify what constitutes EB practices.

Dean Fixen's presentation also was excellent and for me supported a "disconnect" between what Congress is expecting states to demonstrate for progress and the time lines for doing so!

[Strength] The key note message and the information that followed from the federal representatives. The underscoring of seeing outcomes at various levels and the evidence behind coaching/ consultation and support to sustain and change practices.

The OSEP session with Ruth Ryder and Renee Bradley was particularly strong compared with others over the years.

The final plenary session was exceptionally strong... Ms. Fialka addressed some very real issues which need to be addressed by providers (i.e., that providers choose to be in this arena, whereas the majority of families do not choose to need these services/supports, and the effect that has on relationships and partnerships).

Plenary sessions were strongest aspect.

The Dance of Partnership was great; OSEP update was very good.

The plenary presentations were very good and varied enough to interest me. The pre and post conference sessions were also very good.

I loved the closing presenter. She was refreshing and gave hope. She is wonderful.

Many also commented on the quality of the pre and post conference workshops and concurrent sessions and the variety of topics that were addressed. There was appreciation for presenters who shared important research findings, evidence based practices, and experiences from different states as well as perspectives (state, local, family).

The session was well organized and each topic was covered in dept. Practical questions were answered and woven into the presentation for reinforcement

All excellent. Well worth coming for this Saturday session!!

I also appreciated the mix of administrative/policy topics along with more clinically focused topics.

Medicaid presentation and transition post conference sessions were both fabulous.

I enjoyed most of the workshops I have attended. The information was beneficial to my work.

The breakout sessions were all very beneficial.

All of the break-out sessions were very good (Medicaid, Coaching, and Natural environments).

There were several good concurrents; the sessions on inclusion were especially good.

Good assortment of state presentations

Respondents reported that they appreciated the opportunities to build new or better partnerships with others including the participation of all stakeholders (families, providers, state level admin, TA staff, OSEP).

Building relationships and gaining strategies for strengthening and expanding collaborative partnership with service agencies.

I greatly appreciated the participation of parent representatives. I want to learn more about those jurisdictions that have successfully nurtured parent participation.

I was happy to see some increased focus on parents, hope that will continue, and that there will be more done to have parents as presenters or co-presenters in the future.

Opportunities to meet and talk with people from other states, the TA providers, and OSEP staff; information on best practices.

I was very happy to see that parents and the concerns about parents played such a big part in the conference.

The family perspective is always good to include and the family/parent presentations were outstanding.”

Finally, participants commented on the overall tone and logistics of the conference as being very strong—the positive spirit, the variety of opportunities, the helpful staff, the organization and planning that was invested in the conference.

Great energy and spirit.

The organization of the conference was great. I appreciated that everything ran on time.

General client and responsiveness of NECTAC and OSEP staff.

I feel everything just went right as planned. The planning or hosting agency should be commended for the well done job.

Fantastic conference and speakers. Relevant topics - useful, informative.

Thank you to the planning committee for the thoughtfully designed program.

Thanks for another great NECTAC event!

The organization of the conference was outstanding. Everyone was very friendly and helpful.

Weak/Not Useful Aspects

When asked if there were aspects of the conference that were weak or not useful, there were a few themes across respondents that might inform future planning. Regarding the plenary sessions, there was concern about the limited time allotted for the opening plenary speaker (Dean Fixen); there were a number of participations who found the panel plenary that spoke on history to be weak or not useful; and there were suggestions that the closing plenary speaker might have been better as the opening speaker. Regarding the content of the conference, some found there was not a sufficient amount of research or content shared during sessions; others commented about specific topics that were not addresses sufficiently such as autism, CAPTA and diversity. Logistically, there were concerns expressed about the timing and length of the conference, the desire for more handouts during sessions, and the length of each sessions perhaps being too short.

Finally, there were various comments that related to family/parent participation, some relating to how the family experience and perspective should be included more in sessions and some suggesting more sessions geared toward the family as an audience. Comments suggested the need to “*promote collaboration between providers and families*”, increase the use of families as “*co-presenters*” and “*pull from the wealth of families*”. Other comments suggested the need for “*a real parent focus*”, “*more break-out sessions addressing their [families’] needs and concerns*” and improving the information about parents getting their registration waived to increase family participation. One participant’s suggestion was, “*I think there needs to be more on what the families’ role is and how they could be more involved.*”

Conclusions Overall

Overall, the mean ratings and qualitative feedback suggested that the majority of participants felt that the goals of the conference were accomplished, high quality and relevant information was included in the sessions, and that participants left the conference with new ideas, strategies, motivation, and resources to continue their work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families. A few participants summed up the overall conference with these comments:

The conference was very focused on its state goals, and I came away with a much clearer idea about necessary discussions, planning and actions that we need to be having in our state.

This was my first opportunity to attend this conference, so I felt that I heard an enormous amount of information that helps me to better understand the larger system challenges and new directions.

I'd just like to tell you that of the three conferences I attended, this has been the best by far. Everything from the hotel to the presentations was top notch. This environment was super conducive to the exchange of ideas. In terms of intended outcomes - if the intent of the conference was to make me come away with a clearer direction, a renewed commitment, a sense of purpose, and inspiration to continue this work, then, - that's exactly what happened.

I was energized by the level of expertise at the conference and the opportunity to think about and talk about vision, evidenced based practices, family participation and best practices in EI.

Pat's reception will always be carved in my heart. NECTAC is a caring, courageous, brave & brilliant group of professionals.