

Systems Change in EI/ECSE Sample Syllabus

Course Description

This doctoral-level course focuses on systems change in early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE). Students will explore frameworks and strategies for designing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive state systems that support high-quality services for young children with disabilities and their families. Emphasis is placed on governance, finance, personnel development, data systems, accountability, and quality standards.

Course Learning Objectives

As a result of active participation and successful completion of course requirements, students will be able to:

1. Analyze the components of state-level EI/ECSE systems and identify gaps that impact service quality and child outcomes.
2. Apply national frameworks and evidence-based strategies to design governance, finance, and personnel development structures that support sustainable systems change.
3. Develop comprehensive plans that integrate pre-service and in-service personnel development, data systems, and accountability measures to improve program quality.
4. Evaluate system performance using logic models, quality indicators, and data-driven approaches aligned with federal IDEA requirements and best practices.
5. Advocate for policies and practices that promote equity, stakeholder engagement, and continuous quality improvement in early childhood systems.

Readings:

- Bruder, M. B., Gundler, D., Stayton, V., & Kemp, P. (2021). The Early Childhood Personnel Center: Building Capacity to Improve Outcomes for Infants and Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families. *Infants & Young Children*, 34(2), 69-82. doi: 10.1097/IYC.0000000000000191
- Corr, C., Spence, C. M., Chudzik, M., Connor, S., Bentley, B., Sawyer, G., Kern, J. L., Griffin, R., Ruiz, A. B., & Jackson, A. (2023). Ethics in the Early Intervention System: A Mixed Methods Exploration. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 43(3), 187-202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02711214231182117> (Original work published 2023)
- Greenwood, C. R., Walker, D., Hornbeck, M., Hebbeler, K., & Spiker, D. (2007). Progress Developing the Kansas Early Childhood Special Education Accountability System: Initial Findings Using ECO and COSF: Initial Findings Using ECO and COSF. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 27(1), 2-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02711214070270010101> (Original work published 2007)
- Kahn, L., Hurth, J., Kasprzak, C. M., Diefendorf, M. J., Goode, S. E., & Ringwalt, S. S. (2008). The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center Model for Long-Term Systems

- Change. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 29(1), 24-39.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121409334039> (Original work published 2009)
- Kasprzak, C., Hebbeler, K., Spiker, D., McCullough, K., Lucas, A., Walsh, S., Swett, J., Smith, B. J., Kelley, G., Whaley, K. T., Pletcher, L., Cate, D., Peters, M., Ayankoya, B. C., & Bruder, M. B. (2019). A State System Framework for High-Quality Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 40(2), 97-109.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121419831766> (Original work published 2020)
- Kasprzak, C., Hurth, J., Rooney, R., Goode, S. E., Danaher, J. C., Whaley, K. T., Ringwalt, S. S., & Cate, D. (2011). States' Accountability and Progress in Serving Young Children With Disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 32(3), 151-163.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121411408119> (Original work published 2012)
- Roy, S., Lindly, O. J., Berardinelli, M., & Martin, A. J. (2021). Cross-System Communication in Early Childhood Settings in the United States: An Exploratory Study Using the National Survey of Children's Health. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 44(3), 289-298.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10538151211012779> (Original work published 2022)
- Traube, D. E., & Mamey, M. R. (2021). Relationship Between State-Level Developmental Screening and IDEA Part C Early Intervention Rates. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 44(3), 299-310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10538151211028232> (Original work published 2022)
- Vinh, M., Strain, P., Davidon, S., & Smith, B. J. (2016). One State's Systems Change Efforts to Reduce Child Care Expulsion: Taking the Pyramid Model to Scale: Taking the Pyramid Model to Scale. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 36(3), 159-164.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121415626130> (Original work published 2016)

Accommodations

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 require the institution to provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking academic adjustments or accommodations must self-identify with the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities on the appropriate campus.

Attendance

Since many of the classes involve activities, videotapes, discussion, etc., regular attendance is vital to gain maximum benefit. Because this is an 8 weeks course, each class member needs to make every effort to be in attendance at each class. Anyone who misses more than one class will lose 5 points for each class missed after the first absence. Significant tardiness or early departure beyond 15 minutes will count as an absence. If you know ahead of time you will not be in class, please contact the instructor the day before the class.

Communicating with the Instructor

All correspondences from the instructor to the students by way of announcements, updates, assignments, and so forth, will be communicated via school email or online learning management system if not verbally in class. It is the student's responsibility to ensure their university e-mail is corrected, provided, and valid. Failure to do so may result in missing important information that could negatively impact your grade. Please be mindful of professionalism.

Course Outline

The following schedule is subject to change. For any course syllabuses posted prior to the beginning of the semester, the course instructor reserves the right to make changes prior to or during the semester. The course instructor will notify students, via e-mail or verbal announcements when changes are made in the requirements and/or grading of this course. ***The course instructor reserves the right to revise the schedule/assignments if needed.***

Week	Topics	Reading	Activities
1	Understanding EI/ECSE Systems	Kahn et al. (2008)	<p>In-Class Activity: Provide each group with a printed excerpt summarizing NECTAC's TA model. Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the conceptual framework, including the logic model approach and multi-level systems thinking. [files.eric.ed.gov], [archive.org] Extract at least five critical characteristics of successful systems change (such as leadership commitment, stakeholder involvement, cyclical evaluation). [files.eric.ed.gov], [archive.org] Summarize one state example of long-term systems change presented in the article (e.g., accountability system, monitoring compliance, IFSP quality).
2	Governance & Finance	https://ectacenter.org/s	In-Class Activity: Divide

		<p>ysframe/component-governance.asp</p> <p>https://ectacenter.org/ysframe/component-finance.asp</p>	<p>students into groups, each assigned one sub-component. Provide a short, realistic scenario related to that area. Each group must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Problems and pinpoint 2–3 potential issues in the scenario related to their sub-component. • Apply Quality Indicators using the ECTA definitions, list 2–3 quality markers that would address the identified problems. [ectacenter.org] • Propose Solutions by suggesting practical strategies to align the scenario with the ideal framework, such as data systems, stakeholder engagement, or revised fund policies.
3	Personnel/Workforce	Bruder et al. (2021); Vinh et al. (2016); Corr et al. (2023)	Building a CSPD Assignment
4	Data Systems	Roy et al. (2021); Traube & Mamey (2021)	<p>In-Class Activity: Divide into groups, each assigned one subcomponent. Provide a concise scenario.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify 2–3 issues in the scenario related to their subcomponent. • Select and describe quality indicators from the framework that address these issues.

			Propose 2–3 actionable solutions to align the system with best practices.
5	Accountability, Quality Improvement and Standards	Kasprzak et al. (2012; 2019); Greenwood et al. (2007)	TA for State Accountability Assignment
6	Systems Change – Strategic Planning 101	Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Status Report (2022)	In-Class Activity: Review the Strategic Planning Guide provided. Identify the major sections and their purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key features of strategic planning evident in this worksheet? • Why are these features critical for successful strategic planning in a professional or organizational context? • Which section do you think is most challenging to complete and why?
7	Readiness for Change		Systems Change Assignment – Part 1
8	Putting it all Together		Systems Change Assignment Part 2 & 3

Major Assignments

1. Building a CSPD

- a. In the first part of the assignment, students will analyze the case study example and identify three critical gaps across the subcomponents. They should explain how these gaps negatively impact the overall quality of early childhood services in the state.
- b. In the second part, students will develop a two-year improvement plan that addresses at least three subcomponents simultaneously. The plan should include alignment with the state’s vision and mission, strategies for engaging

stakeholders, considerations for funding and sustainability, and clear evaluation metrics to monitor progress.

- c. In the third part, students will propose one innovative strategy that connects pre-service and in-service development to improve workforce quality. They must justify how this strategy will also support recruitment and retention efforts.

2. Technical Assistance for State Accountability and Quality Improvement in Early Intervention

- a. You are part of a technical assistance (TA) team supporting a state that wants to evaluate its accountability system and implement quality improvement strategies for early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE). The state seeks guidance on how to use its data system to answer critical questions, meet federal accountability requirements, and improve outcomes for children and families.
- b. Part 1: Identify Priority Questions
 - i. Review the DaSy Critical Questions document.
 - ii. Select 5 essential questions and 2 aspirational questions that are most relevant for accountability and quality improvement.
 - iii. Justify your choices based on:
 - 1. Federal IDEA requirements
 - 2. State performance plan indicators
 - 3. Potential impact on child and family outcomes
- c. Part 2: Assess Current Capacity
 - i. Assume the state has a fragmented data system with limited linkage across child, practitioner, and program-level data.
 - ii. Using the DaSy Toolkit resources (e.g., Data System Framework Self-Assessment), outline:
 - 1. Which selected questions can be answered now
 - 2. Which cannot be answered and why (missing data elements, lack of integration, governance issues)
 - iii. Identify three critical gaps in the current system.
- d. Part 3: Develop a TA Action Plan
 - i. Create a 3-step plan for the state to strengthen accountability and quality improvement using data:
 - 1. System Enhancement Recommendations
 - a. What data elements or linkages need to be added?
 - b. How will governance and stakeholder engagement be addressed?
 - 2. Analysis Plan
 - a. Which priority questions will be analyzed first?
 - b. What methods will be used (e.g., trend analysis, subgroup comparisons)?
 - 3. Continuous Quality Improvement Strategy
 - a. How will findings be used to improve services?
 - b. How will progress be monitored over time?

3. Comprehensive Systems Change Proposal

- a. Students will develop a comprehensive systems change proposal for a state based on available state-level data which seeks to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families. The state has fragmented governance, inconsistent personnel standards, limited data integration, and weak accountability mechanisms. The proposal should reflect evidence-based practices and align with federal IDEA requirements.
- b. Part 1: Readiness Tool
 - i. Describe the current state of the EI/ECSE system in Bright Futures, identifying at least four major gaps across governance, finance, personnel/workforce, data systems, and quality standards.
 - ii. Use the ECPC Readiness tool to focus on personnel and workforce development.
 - iii. Explain how these gaps negatively impact child and family outcomes, referencing course readings (e.g., Kahn et al., Kasprzak et al., Vinh et al.).
- c. Part 2: Strategic Systems Change Plan
 - i. Develop a three-year strategic plan that addresses at least four subcomponents (e.g., governance, personnel development, data systems, accountability).
 - ii. Include:
 1. A logic model outlining inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.
 2. Strategies for stakeholder engagement and cross-sector collaboration.
 3. Funding and sustainability considerations.
 4. Integration of pre-service and in-service personnel development to strengthen workforce quality.
 5. A plan for reducing disparities and promoting equity.
- d. Part 3: Evaluation and Continuous Improvement
 - i. Design an evaluation framework aligned with the DaSy Critical Questions and ECTA System Framework.
 - ii. Identify five priority evaluation questions and two aspirational questions for monitoring progress.
 - iii. Propose methods for data collection, analysis, and reporting, including how findings will inform continuous quality improvement.
- e. Part 4: Reflection
 - i. Reflect on the challenges of implementing systems change in EI/ECSE.
 - ii. Discuss how leadership, policy, and technical assistance influence sustainability.
 - iii. Identify two lessons learned from course readings that shaped your proposal.

Course Grading

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the indicated date. Late assignments without previous written approval of the instructor will incur a 50% penalty for the first time and lost all points

beyond. This instructor and learners are required to adhere to the University's Academic Integrity policy. Any plagiarism will not be tolerated and referred to the Academic Integrity Office. And the learners will be given an "F" in the course and be recommended to the Student Conduct Office.

Learners will be evaluated based upon the assignments described below. The plus/minus grading system and scale is as follows:

Letter Grade	Grade Range
A	93 and above
A-	90-92
B+	88-89
B	83-87
B-	80-82
C+	78-79
C	73-77
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	59 and below

Course Grading Systems

Component	Weight for final grade
Course Design	30%
Mapping Syllabi	30%
Constructive Feedback	30%
Observations	20%

Resources

Resources to supplement the Syllabus:

- <https://ecpcta.org/part-c-part-b-staff/>
- <https://ecpcta.org/cspd/>
- <https://ectacenter.org/systems.asp>
- <https://qualitycompendium.org/>
- <https://buildinitiative.org/>
- <https://dasycenter.org/>

Journals in EI/ECSE

Below are examples of journals that publish topics about EI/ECSE. Faculty may want to explain how to use articles to support practice and to examine current research. Clarify the difference between practitioner-based journals and research-based journals.



Early Childhood Intervention
Doctoral Consortium

Creating Leaders in Intensive Interventions for Infants, Young Children and Their Families

- *Child Development*
- *Journal of Early Intervention*
- *Journal of Pediatrics*
- *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*
- *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*
- *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*
- *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*
- *Pediatric Research*
- *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*
- *Young Exceptional Children*

This is a product of the ECiDC 2020 Consortium and was made possible by Cooperative Agreement #H325B170008 which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.