All Our Kin Technical Assistance: Three Case Studies

Introduction

All Our Kin (AOK)—a national nonprofit organization dedicated to training, supporting, and sustaining family child care (FCC) providers—contracted with Child Trends, a research organization focused on improving the lives of children and youth, to highlight exemplars of their technical assistance (TA) approach. The purpose of this work was to describe the experiences of TA participants; what they have learned from AOK, how they have used the information and resources gained through their participation in AOK's TA, and with whom they have shared the information and resources to help AOK understand their reach across different communities. AOK offers TA on several topics or "strands," including Business Development, Educational Coaching, Licensing Support, Network Development, and Policy Advising. Each strand is described below:[iii]

- **Business Development.** AOK's Business Series Train-the-Trainer Institute (referred to in this report as the "Business Institute") was first offered in 2017. The Business Institute includes five days of training (about 5.5 hours per day including lunch and breaks), ongoing coaching, and support to prepare staff at early childhood organizations to become trainers for others. Specifically, Business Institute participants are trained to lead the Business Series, a comprehensive, 10-week course designed to build FCC educators' knowledge and practice as business owners. The Business Series covers a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, creating contracts and policies for use with families, using marketing strategies to increase enrollment and earnings, and developing program budgets and tracking expenses.

- **Educational Coaching.** AOK "mentor coaches" (coaches that train other coaches) and educational leaders work closely with cohorts of staff and supervisors at participating agencies (e.g., Child Care Resource & Referral agencies, Departments of Education, FCC networks, etc.), to provide one-on-

> **Box 1. Child care provider terminology**
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> Organizations and agencies use different terminology to describe individuals who provide child care in home-based settings. They include:
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> **Home-based child care (HBCC)** which can be "divided into two main categories: providers who are listed and providers who are unlisted … Listed providers are paid directly by families or through subsidies and can be licensed, certified, or registered with a state …" Unlisted providers are typically not known to state and local systems and can be paid or unpaid.[i]
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> **Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care** which is "provided in the child's or caregiver's home by a person who is a relative, friend, or neighbor, or a babysitter or nanny. These providers are typically exempt from licensing and regulations."[ii]
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> Throughout these case studies we primarily refer to those providing paid home-based child care as **Family Child Care (FCC)** and refer to those offering paid care as **Family Child Care educators** or simply "**educators**", which is the preferred language of AOK.
>
> HBCC and FFN are used less frequently and appear within quotes or in other contexts where it is necessary to distinguish the different individuals these terms describe.

one and peer group training and support. The support focuses primarily on strategies for delivering strengths-based coaching and relationship building with FCC educators. This strand began in 2017.

- **Licensing Support.** This strand was piloted in 2019-20 and will formally launch in 2023. The strand provides training, resources and examples, and advising to those who are interested in learning from AOK's relationships-centered approach to supporting providers as they complete the FCC licensing process.

- **Network Development.** Since 2021, AOK has provided tailored support to agencies and communities to develop and launch staffed FCC networks, as well as other supports to strengthen the viability, quality, and sustainability of FCC. A staffed child care network provides supports to FCC educators to promote professional development and connections among educators.[iv] This strand leverages AOK's decades of experience with direct implementation of staffed FCC networks as well as research to provide coaching paired with tangible resources centered around AOK's Family Child Care Network Framework.

- **Policy Advising.** AOK provides individualized consultation and support to state and local leaders who want to implement FCC-friendly policies and practices in their communities. Through the Policy Advising TA, teams of state or local partners and FCC educators participate in a FCC Policy Cohort or teams where they identify an issue or issues related to FCC in their community, and work toward progress on that issue. The first policy advising cohort began in 2020.

In this report, we highlight the experiences of TA participants from three sites—Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas. Each of the sites is described below:

- **Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R):[v]** Iowa CCR&R is a program that supports quality child care throughout each of the 99 counties in Iowa. Through this program, child care consultants from across five regions in the state provide on-site consultation to licensed preschools, child care centers, non-registered FCC educators, and registered FCC educators. Iowa CCR&R also supports FCC educators in complying with state regulations and provides training and other professional development opportunities to FCC educators on a variety of topics. In November 2020, Iowa CCR&R began to send staff from across their five regions to the Business Institute. Since then, Iowa CCR&R has been offering the Business Series, in both English and Spanish, to FCC educators across the state.

- **Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC)[vi]:** Through community support, business resources, and FCC educator training, NECC provides opportunities for strong, healthy relationships between parents and FCC educators in Nebraska to facilitate consistent care and quality education for children. From 2019-2020, NECC partnered with AOK on a site-based project[1] that included the design and provision of the Business Development and Licensing Support strands (hereafter referred to as the "Licensing Toolkit") to reflect the Nebraska child care landscape. Since then, NECC has been offering the Business Series, in both English and Spanish, to FCC educators across Nebraska, and has adapted AOK's Licensing Toolkit to develop their own product, known as the NECC Licensing Toolkit Program.

- **Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas:** The Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas site is a collaborative of five individuals who are focused on supporting FCC educators. These individuals belonged to one

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[1] Site-based projects consist of intensive TA focused on, and in collaboration with, a specific location or partner. These projects often involve some tailoring to the location/partner and/or layering of multiple TA strands.

of ten cohort teams[2] that participated in AOK's Inaugural FCC Policy Cohort, which was launched in March 2020. Later, two of the Policy Cohort members participated in AOK's Business Institute and Network Development TA.

Methodology

The data informing this report comes from a variety of sources and was primarily collected by Child Trends with one exception.[3] When available, Child Trends reviewed site-specific documentation such as initial applications to AOK and site meeting notes to understand issues such as a sites' overarching goals for participating in their respective TA strands and the progress made during the TA process. We also conducted virtual focus groups and/or interviews with TA participants from each site. For the Iowa CCR&R and NECC sites, an interview and focus group were held with their leadership team staff. Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection method, applicable TA strand[s], and number of individuals participating in data collection activities in each site.

Table 1. AOK Case Study Data Collection Methodologies by Site

Site	TA strand(s)	Data collection method	Number of participants
Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral	• Business Development	• Focus groups • Interview • Document review (application)	7
Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative	• Business Development • Licensing Support	• Focus groups • Interviews	6
Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas	• Policy Advising • Network Development • Business Development	• Focus group (conducted by AOK) • Interviews[4] • Document review (application and meeting notes)	5

Once data collection was complete, Child Trends reviewed the available data for each site. Applications and meeting notes were used to develop site-specific summaries, including their respective goals for participating in AOK's TA. Focus group and interview notes were analyzed to identify patterns across

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[2] Teams were comprised of a mix of individuals interested in supporting FCC, such as advocates, funders, FCC providers, policy makers, and researchers.

[3] AOK conducted focus groups with the Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas site as part of an already existing effort to follow up with participants in the Inaugural FCC Policy Cohort. To reduce burden on these individuals, Child Trends conducted one-on-one interviews with two members of the Tarrant and Dallas Counties team. Child Trends utilized the AOK-collected data rather than conducting additional focus groups with this site, although the focus group questions differed from the other sites.

[4] The two team members who Child Trends interviewed were selected given their participation in multiple AOK TA strands, which would allow them to speak to any similarities/differences in their experiences across strands.

participants' responses and summarized into two key categories: strengths and suggestions for improvement.

Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)

Iowa CCR&R's partnership with AOK is part of a state-wide strategy to fill a gap in the business trainings available to FCC educators. In previous years, Iowa CCR&R offered an in-person training known as the "Business Basics." According to key stakeholders in Iowa, the training was not consistently offered, and the content varied from one session to the other. The in-person format of the training also made it difficult to connect with FCC educators in rural areas, where communities are spread out and the number of FCC educators is limited. As a result of these challenges as well a lack of resources and content knowledge to rewrite or create a new business training, Iowa CCR&R decided to identify an external business training that could be offered virtually. This strategy would help to address the previously identified challenges, including facilitating better access to business training for FCC educators across the state. After being referred to AOK by one their partners—Early Childhood Iowa—and connecting with staff from the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (these individuals had recently begun implementing the Business Series statewide), Iowa CCR&R began sending staff to the Business Institute in order to build the capacity of staff to offer the Business Series to FCC educators across Iowa.

With the financial support of Early Childhood Iowa and the Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa CCR&R began their partnership with AOK by sending five of their internal staff (one representative from each of the five regions in the state) to the November 2020 AOK Business Institute training. Each region was included to ensure there was a clear understanding of the curriculum across the state and so that each region could support future trainers. In total, AOK has trained 13 staff—both internal and external (i.e., independent contractors)—from Iowa CCR&R, representing each of their five regions. [5] As of the time of data collection for this report, not all of the 13 staff have had the opportunity to teach the Business Series. However, those who have taught it have been able to provide the training to 120 FCC educators across the state.

Moving forward, Iowa CCR&R plans to continue sending staff to the Business Institute. Their goal is to consistently have 10-12 staff across Iowa trained to teach the Business Series, which they intend to continue offering over the next several years. Iowa CCR&R has also conceptualized a new Financial Management Consultant position, which will be available to FCC educators across the state. A total of 13 Financial Management Consultants will be hired to provide support to FCC educators on operating their business and to encourage them to enroll in the Business Series. Thanks to a technology grant, Iowa CCR&R will be able to provide FCC educators with computers to access the Financial Management Consultants.

Through all of these efforts, Iowa CCR&R aims to increase educators' knowledge about the business aspects of child care. The state believes this strategy may increase the interest and willingness of others to pursue child care as a profession by showing that FCC can be a profitable business option. By continuing to offer the Business Series across Iowa, Iowa CCR&R also hopes to train more FCC educators in rural areas, a population that historically has had less access to resources including professional development. Ultimately, Iowa CCR&R believes the more educators there are in rural Iowa, the better the outcomes will be for the children and families in these communities.

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[5] Iowa CCR&R has also sent staff to AOK's Business Institute in May 2021, June 2021, and January 2022.

Case Study Participants

In total, we spoke to seven participants—six were TA participants and one was a member of Iowa CCR&R's leadership team. Participants held positions as a Child Care Consultant (n=3), Regional Training Specialist (n=1), Regional Director (n=1), Child Care Provider (n=1), and Contracted Trainer (n=1). Of the six participants who completed the Business Institute, four had taught the Business Series at least once at the time of data collection.

Findings

This section highlights the perspectives of the seven participants who participated in focus groups and interviews. It sheds light on strengths and suggestions to strengthen the Business Institute and the Business Series.

Strengths of the Business Institute

Participants shared that the Business Institute exceeded their expectations, noting that the training was informative and "well-rounded." Most stated that while a one-week commitment seemed overwhelming initially, the knowledge gained was worth the effort. Data indicated the following as most helpful to participants: 1) supports provided by AOK, 2) content areas covered in the Business Institute, and 3) structural components of the Business Institute.

AOK supports. Participants identified specific supports that facilitated their learning, such as:

- "Tips and tricks" to effectively facilitate an engaging virtual Business Series. Some examples included doing icebreakers, adding music throughout the training, and providing multiple ways for participants to share their thoughts (e.g., white board on Zoom, chat box), especially for participants who may be joining the training on their phone as opposed to a computer.
- Modeling from AOK trainers on how to facilitate the different modules of the Business Series, based on principles of adult learning and development.
- Business resources, such as the Tom Copeland blog – an online resource to help FCC educators run their business.
- AOK's accessibility to answer questions or provide support, both during and after the one-week Business Institute.

Content areas. In general, participants reported that that the Business Institute prepared them to teach the Business Series, which resulted in better support to the FCC educators with whom they work. Key Business Institute content areas that were particularly helpful included:

- **The time-space percentage module.** Participants reported that understanding the time-space percentage concept (the proportion of an FCC provider's home that is used for business purposes)[vii] is challenging for them and FCC educators to understand. The support participants received from AOK, however, was noted to be helpful for assisting them with comprehending the concept, feeling comfortable teaching it to FCC educators, and/or supporting educators with whom they work. As one focus group participant shared:

    > "The hardest part that home [educators] have in my area is dividing the space, and how to figure that out for taxes and other purposes. I even struggle with that myself. I finally understood it after the training because they really broke it down."

- **Organizational strategies.** Participants consistently discussed the value of the organizational strategies presented during the training to help FCC educators better manage their business, noting how they have been able to use some of the strategies to support FCC educators. For example, one participant stated:

  > *"So many times, I visit an [educator's] home and there's paper everywhere, or I'll say, 'Let's help you organize your files,' and they have to rummage through a bunch of stuff. For me, what I took away was that there are simple methods and ways that [educators] can improve. There are simple organizational ideas. We even talked about using empty shoeboxes to file away receipts—you don't even have to go buy fancy stuff!"*

- **Contracts and policy handbooks.** Some participants noted how the training modules on contracts and policy handbooks strengthened their capacity to support FCC educators. For example, one participant shared a story about their work with a new educator:

  > *"She [the new educator] had a situation where a family wasn't paying her, and she let it go for quite some time and didn't know how to go about it. I asked if she had anything in place as a policy and she actually had never wrote up anything. She had no policy, no handbook. She actually didn't even have any contracts with the families that showed that they're even in her care. So, we started from the very scratch … how to write a policy and how to get a handbook."*

Structural components. Participants identified two structural components of the Business Institute that they found particularly valuable, including:

- **Opportunities to interact with each other.** Participants reported having ample opportunities to interact with other Business Institute participants through whole and small group discussions. These discussions not only provided a space to share ideas and receive feedback, but also resulted in post-training connections such as individuals supporting one another as they prepared to teach the Business Series. One participant shared that they were able to shadow another trainer from their cohort who was teaching the Business Series. Through this opportunity, they observed the trainer explaining the curriculum to participants, which helped them feel more comfortable when it was their turn to teach the Business Series.
- **Opportunities to practice.** Participants also noted that having multiple opportunities to practice facilitating the Business Series as an instructor helped them feel comfortable and prepared to deliver their own training, especially in a virtual format.

Suggestions to Strengthen the Business Institute

Participants were highly satisfied with the Business Institute and the support they received from AOK. As such, only one suggestion for improvement was offered—include additional time for sharing ideas. The participant who shared their perspective, noted:

> *"It was too short of time to interact with everybody. I wanted more time to share ideas. I understand with a [Train the Trainer] (they have to keep it moving, but I would have loved extra time to share ideas. "*

Strengths of the Business Series

Participants shared that the Business Series has been helpful to FCC educators, with some noting that they wished it was a licensure requirement for all FCC educators in their state. One participant shared the following:

> *"I wish this training would be a prerequisite for becoming a licensed [educator]—that way they don't get ten years down the road and realize they never put things like contracts in place or haven't been paying themselves. Knowing this all at the beginning would be so good."*

Participants also provided examples of how the Business Series has been helpful to FCC educators. For instance, one of the participants shared that most of the FCC educators in their Business Series class have been in the profession for over five years. For these educators, the Business Series has served as a refresher that has allowed them to reevaluate their practices to better manage their program. This includes activities such as finding new ways to organize their receipts and rethinking the staff they employ to support their business. One participant spoke about an FCC educator who participated in the Business Series and changed their accountant after completing the training. Another participant spoke about how the Business Series has shifted the mindset of FCC educators, explaining:

> *"It used to be that the idea of running your child care was just making sure that you didn't answer the door in pajamas. Now, it's all about having a budget, making a plan, and utilizing community resources/programs that could apply to you. They're really more aware that there's more out there. And just being aware of that they have rights as business owners too ... child care is a business; it's not just babysitting."*

In addition to increasing FCC educators' knowledge and capacity to run their businesses, participants shared that the Business Series also allowed educators to build relationships and bonds with each other. Participants provided various examples of educators remaining in touch after the Business Series was over which has allowed them to continue exchanging ideas with each other. One participant shared the following:

> *"When we created the WhatsApp group for them to submit their homework, they actually stayed in that group. Whenever they have questions, they'll actually text the group. It's really nice to see them have those continued conversations."*

Suggestions to Strengthen the Business Series

Participants who have taught the Business Series provided some suggestions for improving the experiences of FCC educators in Iowa and more broadly.

- **Offer flexibility with the Graduation module**. While some participants noted that they made the Graduation module of the Business Series into a celebration for the FCC educators who completed the training, others felt that this module should be optional or that educators should be given the flexibility to decide what to do with the time dedicated for that module. Specifically, participants noted that FCC educators in Iowa only need 24 hours of professional development every two years, which means the three hours they gain attending the graduation module are "extra."
- **Solicit feedback from and provide support to FCC educators who are unable to finish the Business Series.** Some participants noted that completion of the entire Business Series is difficult for some FCC educators. For instance, one participant shared beginning a Business Series with 10 educators but ending with just four. While the reasons educators were unable to continue were not fully captured in current data, prior research has noted the challenges FCC educators experience when participating in professional development activities. These challenges include but are not

limited to an inability to afford the fees associated with professional development, the inability to take off the time to participate in professional development, and difficulties finding, hiring and trusting substitutes to work in the place of staff who are attending external activities.[viii] While we are not sure if participants in the Business Series are experiencing similar challenges, AOK may want to consider surveying or directly asking educators about their completion challenges, which would then provide information that can be used to brainstorm solutions and ways to support participants with completion of the entire Business Series.

- **Offer the Business Series in other languages.[6]** Given how beneficial the Spanish series has been to Spanish-speaking FCC educators in Iowa, some focus group participants shared that it would be helpful to provide the Business Series in other languages. Participants noted the increase of refugees providing child care in their region, who they believe would benefit from the Business Series. Suggested languages included Burmese and Somali. They also noted attention may need to be given to translations for the various dialects of these languages.
- **Ensure FCC educators are compensated for participating in the Business Series.** Some participants shared that the time commitment of the Business Series training could be a barrier to FCC educator training participation, particularly if they are losing income to attend the training. Suggestions were made to provide an educator stipend of $100 per day, which is close to the stipend that the Iowa CCR&R provides through their Business Investment Program, which pays providers $20/hour to participate in activities that improve their quality. AOK may consider adding a question to their Business Institute application to confirm that organizations are capable of compensating educators for their time participating in the Business Series. Additionally, it may be helpful to provide organizations with resources to help them secure funding for these purposes.

Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas

Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas was one of ten cohort teams from across six states and four communities that participated in AOK's Inaugural FCC Policy Cohort. Their team sought to focus on changes in policy and practice at the local level with partners from both Tarrant and Dallas Counties. Specifically, they hoped to increase the number and sustainability of quality-rated FCC homes serving infants and toddlers in high-need areas. However, to meet the immediate needs of FCC educators affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the team's goals shifted to elevating the voices of FCC educators in policy conversations related to child care. To accomplish this goal the team hosted an Advocacy/Policy 101 training for FCC educators. In addition to elevating FCC educator voices, the training aimed to strengthen collaboration between educators across Tarrant and Dallas Counties; build the capacity of educators as leaders and advocates; and create Provider Advisory Groups that could be proactive about planning for advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels.

During the Policy Cohort, the Tarrant and Dallas Counties team successfully hosted an Introduction to Advocacy training for FCC educators which provided them with information around how to advocate for themselves, talk to legislators, and think through what it looks like to partner and collaborate with others. It was an empowering training for FCC educators that communicated the message that "their [FCC educators'] voice is important." Given the valuable information the training provides to FCC educators, one member of the Tarrant and Dallas Counties team partnered with an organization and offered the training six more times to both FCC educators and child care centers.

Since their time in the Policy Cohort, the Tarrant and Dallas Counties team have noticed a 1) increased visibility and attention to FCC in programmatic, policy, and funding discussions; 2) improved capacity to advocate for the needs of FCC educators; and 3) strengthened connections between the two counties. This has allowed them to continue engaging in work that supports FCC educators in their communities, including:

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[6] As of this publication, AOK also offers the Business Institute and Business Series in Mandarin.

- Partnering with Home Grown[7] to overturn a 42-year-old ordinance in the city of Grand Prairie, Texas that kept FCC educators from expanding their business. With the reversal, FCC educators are now able to care for more children in their homes, resulting in opportunities to increase their income.
- Meeting with the Office of Child Care, Texas Workforce Commission, and all of the FCC educators who participated in the first Introduction to Advocacy training.
- Participating in the National FCC Panel, a federally sponsored workgroup comprised of FCC educators and other key stakeholders nationwide that aims to elevate the voice of FCC educators by giving them the opportunity to speak on FCC topics on national platforms.
- Supporting the creation of a new division in the Early Learning Alliance[8] that is specifically dedicated to FCC.

Eager to continue expanding their knowledge about FCC, and highly satisfied with their experiences in the Policy Cohort, two members of the Tarrant and Dallas Counties team went on to participate in AOK's Network Development and Business Institute TA. As part of the Network Development TA, the two team members were brought into an application led by Dallas College, a public community college in Dallas County, Texas, to identify and launch an FCC network. Through the Business Institute, the participating team member is working toward incorporating the Business Series into her organizations' FCC curriculum and offering it to FCC educators.

Case Study Participants

Child Trends and AOK spoke to the five members who made up the Tarrant and Dallas Counties Policy Cohort team. These participants had experience working directly with FCC educators and on FCC policy issues. Participants held positions as an FCC educator, Child Care Associate, Early Childhood Policy Consultant, Child Care Contract Manager, and Program Officer.

Findings

This section highlights the perspectives of the of participants from the AOK-led focus group with five cohort team members, and the Child Trends-led one-on-one interviews with two cohort members. It sheds light on strengths and suggestions to strengthen the Policy Cohort, Network Development, and Business Institute technical assistance strands.

Strengths of the Policy Cohort, Network Development, and Business Institute

Overall, participants were highly satisfied with AOK's support and delivery of the Policy Cohort, Network Development, and Business Institute. Across the three TA strands, participants identified the following as TA strengths: 1) the supports provided by AOK, 2) the content of the TA, and 3) the structure of the TA provision.

AOK supports. The supports provided by AOK that facilitated participant learning and enhanced their experiences included:

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[7] Home Grown is a national collaborative of funders committed to improving the quality of and access to home-based child care (https://homegrownchildcare.org/about-us/).
[8] The Early Learning Alliance is a collaboration of over 50 organizations working together to help children in Tarrant County (Fort Worth, TX) achieve success in school and in life (https://earlylearningntx.org/about-us/who-we-are/).

- **AOK's accessibility.** Participants praised AOK's availability to answer questions and provide support, both during and after their cohorts, noting that having access to AOK staff makes AOK unique from other TA organizations they have worked with in the past. One participant shared:

    > "[AOK staff] are available. Not just by computer but you have access to them. [For other organizations] sometimes you call people, and you have to go through a chain of commands [to get to someone]."

- **Help in keeping cohorts on track.** Participants shared that AOK helped them stay on track and hold them accountable the goals they set for themselves, which was which was valued by the teams. While participants did not provide specific examples, evidence from our review of the Policy Cohort meeting notes indicated AOK staff facilitated check-ins about the progress of "to-do" items that had been assigned in previous meetings and initiated discussions at the end of each meeting about next steps.

Content. Overall, participants reported that the content they learned from their respective TA cohort, including resources and examples of best practices, helped deepen their knowledge about FCC and the opportunities and challenges in the field. As one of the participants described:

> "[The] powerful thing about AOK is they are giving the recipe to people like me [FCC educator] so they can be successful because that is what is missing... The handouts and resources that AOK provides are a huge help for someone without those resources."

Some participants provided specific examples of content they found useful. For instance, in the Policy Cohort, participants noted it was helpful for them to learn about what advocacy work looks like; the power of connections and partnerships; and the importance of knowing who their legislators, state representatives, and city councils were. For Network Development, participants shared that it was valuable to learn about the basics of an FCC network and helpful to work with AOK to think through what an FCC network might look like for Dallas College. Finally, for the Business Institute, a participant pointed to the value of the fiscal content, stating that she was previously unaware of what a budget should look like for an FCC business because that type of information is typically not readily available to FCC educators and businesses.

Structural components. Participants also identified the opportunities to interact with each other as valuable. This was especially so in the Policy Cohort, where the opportunity to work together and collaborate with other cohort teams during full cohort meetings allowed them to learn from other communities, including understanding best practices that were being used to accomplish their goals.

One participant also discussed the overall impact that AOK's TA has had on her and FCC educators with whom she works. She noted that the knowledge gained from the various TA strands has allowed her to better support FCC educators by 1) providing them with the resources and tools that they need to advocate for themselves and 2) opening doors for them to use their voice and confidently "take charge of their profession." This participant described being asked to participate in a panel that she was unable to attend, and then encouraging an FCC colleague to take her place. Although her colleague had been active in the field for over 20 years, they had not been afforded the opportunity to discuss FCC issues in a national platform, and the opportunity proved to be an ideal space to begin doing so. After the panel, the two brainstormed about additional steps to grow her voice and capacity, including applying to Early Care and Education - focused fellowships that provide support and opportunities to continue to elevate FCC.

Suggestions to Strengthen the Policy Advising Cohort, Business Institute, and Network Development

Participants were highly satisfied with their experience in the Policy Cohort and Business Institute and did not offer any suggestions for ways to improve it. However, the two Network Development TA participants had a few suggestions. For instance, compared to their experience in the Policy Cohort, they reported wanting more guidance from the Network Development TA. One of the participants said:

> *"In the Policy Cohort, I felt like we had a roadmap. We knew what worked and overall were just in better shape, whereas with the Network Development, I left feeling like we were still trying to figure out how to make it work."*

Participants also shared that they did not achieve the Network Development TA goals that they set for themselves—to launch an FCC network with Dallas College—a contrast from the goal attainment successes they achieved in the Policy Cohort.[9] One participant noted:

> *"I feel a little personal frustration because I was hoping, you know, probably a little unrealistically that we would finish this, and we would have a whole network set up and we'd be ready to go and we're not there."*

She went on to say,

> *"I feel like I finished the Policy Cohort in such a place that we could leapfrog into new arenas, while in Network Development, we are still finding our way"*

To address these issues participants made the following recommendations:

Encourage applicants to conduct background research on entities before starting the cohort.
In general, participants felt that their partnership with Dallas College was not the right match, noting the students at Dallas College reported that FCC was not a topic of interest for them during an initial survey. This made it difficult to move forward with their original plans, since the team was not on the same page. While they were not sure if this was truly a lack of interest from the students or lack of understanding about FCC, participants believe that some initial research on the team would have helped them start at a better place and make more progress. As one participant shared:

> *"I'm going to take personal responsibility and even for our cohort. Perhaps we should have done some more initial research before we jumped into it. If we were at a better place, I think maybe we would have gotten more out of it. You know, if we had had identified some of these challenges, work through them and then started the cohort, you know, rather than spending our time during the cohort thinking we had a plan and then it didn't really work so well."*

Form teams with similar expertise.
Participants felt like the teams in the Network Development TA were not as cohesive as the ones in the Policy Cohort. Specifically, they reported that the varied levels of knowledge and expertise about FCC made it difficult for them to be on the same page and move forward. One person shared:

> *"The policy cohort was just so positive and the groups we were learning from were more on the same page. I feel like these groups [Network Development] were a little bit in different places and so it*

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[9] During the time of the Network Development TA, the state funded other entities to develop an FCC network. Therefore, Dallas College determined they would not proceed as the lead for the network in Dallas.

wasn't as applicable to each other. During the meetings it was kind of 'you're doing this' 'well, that doesn't really apply to us,' versus really zoning in…"

Offer examples of lessons learned and challenges.
Participants noted that they would have liked AOK to provide them with examples of other communities that worked on building FCC networks. In particular, they were interested in understanding lessons learned and challenges to anticipate. One participant stated:

"I think I was hoping we would have lessons learned from other places. The lessons that we had to learn, if that makes sense at all. And I don't even know if that's fair. I don't know if those lessons were available, but I would have loved to go into it with the knowledge of these are the challenges…If any other community had gone through that already, it would have been helpful to know that."

Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC)

NECC partnered with AOK on a site-based project that included the design and provision of the Business Development and Licensing Support TA (hereafter referred to as the Licensing Toolkit) to reflect the Nebraska child care landscape. The end goal was to build NECC's capacity to deliver these TA strands on their own.

The partnership with AOK grew out of NECC's familiarity with AOK's history of working with FCC educators, as well as an interest from an NECC philanthropic donor to introduce the AOK Business Development model to Nebraska. This later expanded to also include development of a Licensing Toolkit after discussions within NECC about the opportunities and challenges experienced by FCC educators in Nebraska. The partnership with AOK also aligned with NECC's strategic goals to expand the types of trainings being offered to FCC educators in Nebraska and the desire to strengthen NECC's comfort level and ability to serve FCC educators, particularly those who speak languages other than English.

Since the site-based project concluded, NECC has successfully implemented the Business Series and expanded AOK's Licensing Toolkit—both of which are offered in English and Spanish[10]—to support FCC educators across Nebraska.

Business Series. NECC has continued to send staff to AOK's Business Institute to ensure that all their staff are capable of teaching the Business Series. This has allowed them to offer the Business Series at various times throughout the year. The online format has also been beneficial for enabling the Business Series to be provided across the state, resulting in expansive reach to FCC educators. In total, about 375 FCC educators have graduated from the Business Series through NECC.[11]

Licensing Toolkit. NECC adapted AOK's Licensing Toolkit to create the NECC Licensing Toolkit Program.[ix]At the time of data collection for this report, NECC's Licensing Toolkit Program (hereafter referred to as the NECC Toolkit Program) was being implemented with just over 25 FCC educators. Through this program, NECC offers the following supports:
- Providing TA on a range of topics, including licensing regulations, food program connections, child care subsidy linkages, and supporting participation in child care initiatives like the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS);
- Connecting educators to state resources and professional development in support of meeting their annual training requirement goals;

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[10] Through the AOK's Business Series and Licensing Toolkit, available in both English and Spanish, NECC was able to offer TA in Spanish for the first time.
[11] Approximately 75 educators started the Business Series but were unable to complete it due to competing circumstances.

- Working with FCC educators through their provisional year [12] and until they are fully operational, including helping them obtain startup grants; and
- Providing technology (through monies NECC has been able to secure) to FCC educators in rural areas and child care deserts.

NECC has been able to secure both public and private funding to continue supporting educators through the Business Series and the NECC Toolkit Program. Therefore, moving forward, NECC hopes to:

- Continue offering the Business Series to FCC educators;
- Expand the Business Series into child care center-based programs given that the current series, geared towards FCC educators, has sparked so much interest;
- Develop a Train-the-Trainer program for the NECC Toolkit Program; and
- Translate the NECC Toolkit Program into other languages, such as Arabic.

Case Study Participants

Participants for this case study represented two different groups from NECC: strategy and implementation. The strategy group consisted of members from NECC's leadership who worked closely with AOK at the beginning of the partnership to design and oversee implementation of the site-based project. This included facilitating conversations between AOK and NECC's philanthropic donor, determining AOK's scope of work, and executing the contract. The implementation group consisted of staff from NECC who were trained by AOK to deliver the Business Series and/or Licensing Toolkit to FCC educators in Nebraska.

In total, six participants were interviewed, three from the strategy group and three from the implementation group. Because we spoke to members of two different groups from NECC, the findings are divided into two sections: Strategy Group and Implementation Group.

Findings: Strategy Group

This section reflects the perspectives of participants from the focus group with the strategy group. We cover the following themes: strengths and suggestions to strengthen the partnership with AOK.

Strengths of Partnership with AOK

Overall, participants reported being satisfied with their partnership with AOK. Three characteristics were identified as being particularly important to the partnership: passion, engagement, and flexibility.

Passion. Participants spoke positively about AOK's values, particularly their passion for FCC and their approach of "putting [educators] at the center." These characteristics were deemed to be especially important because NECC was a relatively new organization that aspired to embody these values, but that had not yet had prior experience effectively doing so. One participant noted:

> *"The passion and dedication for family child care was not something we had seen in Nebraska yet, so this impacted us a lot. In Nebraska, we don't have another organization that has that strategic focus on FCC."*

Another stated:

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[12] Provisional year includes the period of time during which FCC educators are providing care under a Provisional License, a permit that may be issued for up to one year to child care providers who fail to meet minimum licensing requirements (https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/C/center_chp7.pdf).

> *"AOK has a deep culture, and they are driving real social change. We were new and AOK had a rich demonstration of impact surrounding social change. So, it was cool seeing real change happen in FCC."*

Interviewees also shared that two recently launched initiatives (the Family Child Care Advisory Committee and the Parent Ambassadors program) were heavily influenced by AOK's values. One person reported:

> *"In many states, the Parent Ambassadors program is just parents, but in Nebraska we made the decision to have parents and child care [educators]. It is all focused on elevating their voices in early learning. That was the way that AOK rubbed off on us- by the importance of putting [educators] at the center of conversations surrounding things that are impacting them."*

Engagement. Participants found AOK's engagement to be helpful for facilitating the smooth design, launch, and implementation of their site-based project. Engagement occurred across multiple facets of the project including early conversations with NECC's leadership and philanthropic team; contract and scope of work negotiations; hiring project staff; and helping NECC navigate challenges. One participant shared their experiences drawing on AOKs expertise:

> *"In the early days, AOK had two dedicated team members helping get things up and running, so it made it effortless in the sense that they were very engaged and helped with anything we needed...Their level of engagement was appreciated from early on. I needed them as a crutch to get me up to speed. I leveraged their expertise and experience early on ..."*

Flexibility. Participants also noted that AOK's ability to be nimble and make quick adjustments to previously existing plans was valuable. For example, Nebraska participants reported that the original plan was to replicate both AOK's Business Development and Licensing Toolkit in their state. However, given the complexity and strictness of Nebraska's licensing regulations, NECC realized this strategy would not work for the Licensing Toolkit. In this instance, AOK quickly deviated from the prior plan and aided NECC with making adjustments to the Licensing Toolkit, ensuring that it met the needs of FCC educators in the state.

Suggestions to Strengthen Partnership with AOK

Recognizing that this was AOK's first time working so closely with an organization, participants offered some suggestions for future and similar partnerships:

- **Conduct a landscape analysis.** Having a more in-depth understanding of the community where one is working was suggested as a way to potentially anticipate and/or minimize some of the challenges AOK and NECC encountered as they partnered together in the TA process, including the aforementioned challenges with the Licensing Toolkit licensing regulations. Participants also identified challenges related to the promotion of the Business Series to unlicensed educators and undocumented residents– a strategy NECC did not feel comfortable with because they thought educators could be put in danger. One participant explained:

   > *"We had the same goals with AOK, we just had to navigate the political landscape in Nebraska to get us there a different way. ... to get to the same point."*

- **Provide tiered engagement.** Participants also shared that they appreciated AOK's engagement throughout their partnership, especially at the beginning, where they felt they needed more support. However, as the work progressed, participants felt like the same level of engagement was not necessary. One of the participants noted:

"Overall, [the level of engagement] was about right, but there were a couple of times where it started to feel like their intensity wasn't needed as much anymore. So, maybe it would be helpful for AOK to have more of an exit strategy - lower the intensity, more staggered, instead of intense [all throughout] then leave. It wasn't difficult for us to manage it when they dropped off, it felt more like it was overdue."

Findings: Implementation Group

This section reflects the perspectives of focus group participants from the implementation group. We shed light on the following themes: strengths and suggestions to strengthen the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit, and strengths of the Business Series and NECC Toolkit Program.

Strengths of the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit

Participants shared that the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit TA exceeded their expectations, with some noting that they would happily engage in other AOK offered TA. One participant shared the following:

"Right now, more than ever, child care is essential. We need to keep people in this field, invite people into it, and legitimize this field. I feel like the programs and the TA that we have gone through with AOK do those things. If [we] want to thoroughly support [educators], then this is the way to go."

When reflecting on AOK's TA delivery of the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit, focus group participants noted that both strands were:
- Delivered clearly and thoroughly, with ample opportunities to ask questions during and after the TA was over
- Led by AOK staff who had extensive knowledge on the topic, or who were joined by an expert in the content area
- Organized, with clear agendas and various opportunities to reflect and complete activities individually or with others in large and small groups

Participants also provided specific feedback about the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit. For the Business Institute, they identified the following strategies as being helpful: 1) the supports provided by AOK, 2) the structure of the TA provision, and 3) the TA content.

AOK supports. Participants identified specific supports provided by AOK that facilitated their learning. These supports included:
- Business resources (e.g., the Tom Copeland blog)
- "Tips and tricks" to effectively facilitate the Business Series virtually, including how to help participants who may be having technical issues in Zoom
- Techniques on how to teach the different modules of the Business Series and keep participants engaged
- Check-ins with AOK staff after the Business Institute was over to see how things were going, including opportunities to receive feedback on their delivery of the Business Series. One person noted:

> *"After we went through the [Institute], they gave us an iPad to use, and we would record ourselves training. Then [AOK staff] could go back and review our trainings. We could make notations on the app and [AOK staff] could put notes in as well. It was awkward at first, but*

then it became a helpful tool. I have been a trainer for a while, but this helped me see some of the things I do as a trainer that I didn't know ...."

Structural component. Opportunities to practice facilitating the Business Series was also noted as being particularly valuable. This included role play activities which strengthened their confidence in teaching the course on their own by enabling them to receive real time and direct feedback from AOK and other Business Institute participants.

Content. Participants also reported that the content of the Business Institute sessions included helpful information that resulted in a better understanding of the business of FCC. The time-space percentage module, in particular, was identified as helpful. Some individuals shared that they had no idea what it was before the training, while others were familiar with the concept, but noted that the training helped them to better understand it.

For the Licensing Toolkit, participants articulated that they appreciated the way AOK worked with them to make the Toolkit relevant in Nebraska. One person stated:

> *"The licensing in Nebraska is a bit more strict [and] rigorous than AOK's usual operating areas. So, we had to spend some time dissecting [Nebraska's] regulations and seeing how we could support our educators in a timely and efficient manner based on that rigorous nature. AOK provides resources to educators in a binder and in boxes, but we were looking to make everything digital, so AOK was learning about how to transition everything to virtual along with us... sharing experiences with AOK about moving to virtual learning was helpful."*

Suggestions to Strengthen the Business Institute and Licensing Toolkit

Participants did not have any suggestions for ways to improve the Licensing Toolkit TA; however, they did have suggestions for strengthening the Business Institute. These included:

- **Offer the Business Institute in-person.** While participants understood that the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated moving to a virtual format, they recommend to the extent possible that AOK offer the Business Institute in-person. They noted that the move to a virtual format resulted in them missing out on side conversations between Institute participants that used to happen during in-person engagements. They also noted the challenge of being interactive during virtual TA.
- **Describe the time commitment.** Some participants shared that they were not aware that the commitment for the Business Institute included both time in and outside of the training (i.e., on their own time). They also shared that pre-Business Institute assignments sometimes made it difficult to take care of other responsibilities during their time off. While some noted the value of the assignments, they also shared concern that TA participants have various responsibilities, and everyone might not be able to complete them.

Strengths of the Business Series and NECC Toolkit Program

Although the activities for this case study did not include collection of data directly from FCC educators who completed the Business Series or NECC Toolkit Program, the three participants we spoke to shared their reflections about the effect of these efforts on FCC.

Participants discussed how well both the Business Series and NECC Toolkit Program complement each other. They noted that they follow the trajectory of an FCC educators' entry into the field (getting started, becoming familiar with state regulations, and learning how to effectively run a business). In fact, participants

shared that when they enroll FCC educators in the NECC Toolkit Program, they recommend that educators take the Business Series simultaneously or immediately after. They shared that this strategy aligns well with Nebraska's licensing regulations because the state requires FCC educators to attend to issues such as writing policies, creating handbooks, and communicating with families that are covered in the Business Series. They also shared that they want to ensure that educators start their businesses on a firm foundation including use of best practices.

In terms of the NECC Toolkit Program, participants feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Some noted that educators shared with them that Nebraska's licensing requirements were so rigorous they would not have been able to get licensed without the program. Participants were similarly positive about the Business Series, reporting an increase in the confidence of FCC educators regarding running their businesses. One participant noted that some educators who completed the Business Series suggested it replace the current state-required business training, sharing the following:

> *"We have had some educators write the state and ask if it [Business Series] can be taken instead of the state business requirement because they have learned more through this training than the regular state business training ... the Business Series is more thorough."*

Participants also provided specific examples of how the Business Series has been helpful to FCC educators. For instance, one participant indicated how beneficial the time space percentage module has been to educators, sharing an example of a provider who after taking the Business Series, realized their accountant was entering incorrect information for the time-space percentage when completing her taxes. Another participant shared that they heard from a provider, who has been in FCC for over two decades, who said that that they wished they had learned about the various bookkeeping techniques shared in the Business Series when they started. Finally, focus groups participants have heard from FCC educators that the Business Series was eye opening in a number of areas, including familiarizing them with how much they could get back in taxes and helping them think through issues such as the separation of handbooks and contracts.

Reach Measurement Framework

When speaking with participants from the three sites highlighted above, we paid particular attention to how AOK can conceptualize and measure the reach of their TA moving forward. This section presents a Reach Measurement Framework – a visual to help communicate the influence of AOK's TA.

Figure 1. Reach Measurement Framework
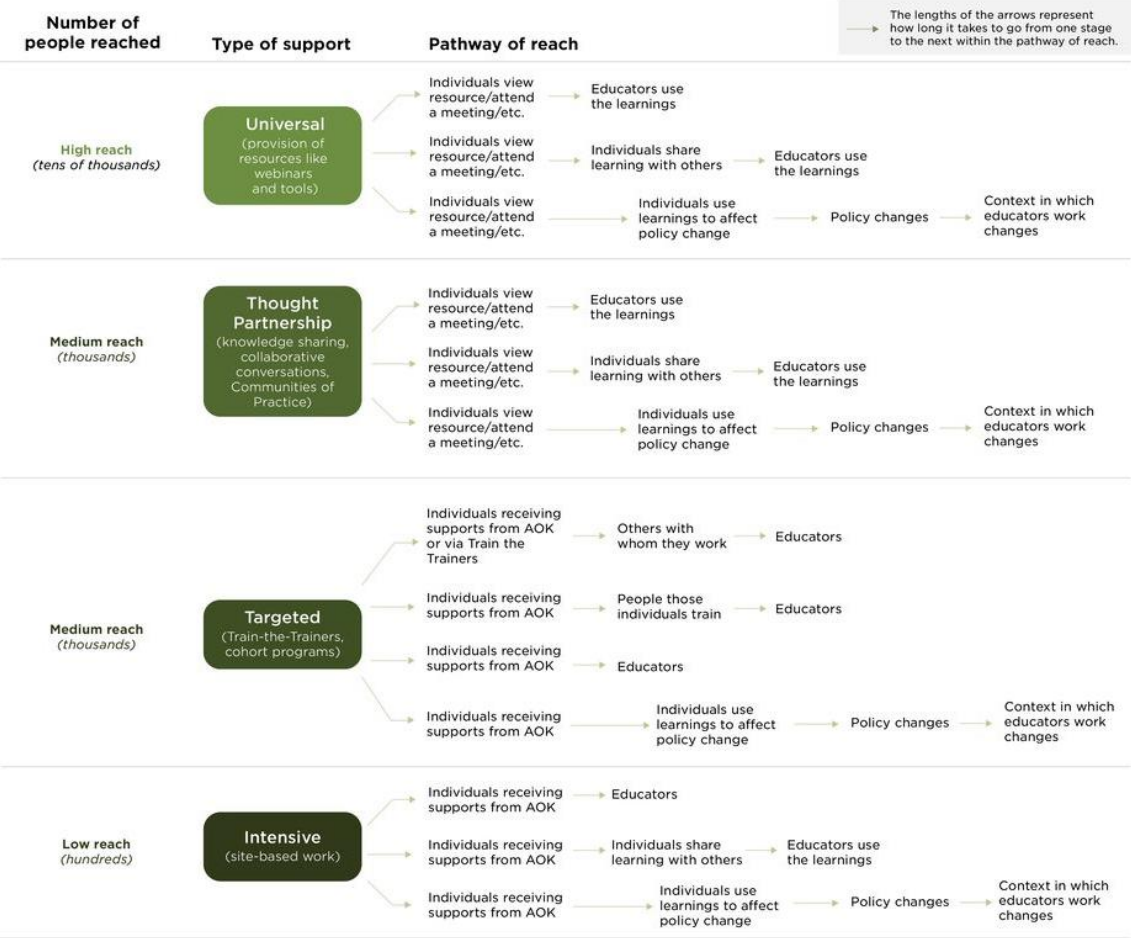
The Reach Measurement Framework reflects the following components: type of support, number of people reached, pathway of reach, and timing of reach.

- **Type of support**: Through their TA, AOK provides four types of support:
  - o Intensive (e.g., site-based work), which requires a high degree of effort for AOK and has a high likelihood of impact[13].
  - o Targeted (e.g., Train the Trainers [TTT], cohort programs), which requires a moderate level of effort for AOK and has a moderate likelihood of impact.
  - o Thought partnership (e.g., knowledge sharing, collaborative conversations, Communities of Practice), which requires a low level of effort for AOK and has a low-moderate likelihood of impact.

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[13] For the purposes of this report, we define "impact" as the achievement of the goals of the TA being provided (e.g., educators using the learnings, changing the context in which educators work).

- Universal (e.g., provision of resources like webinars, newsletters, blogs), which requires a low level of effort from AOK and has a low likelihood of impact.

- **Number of people reached**: The type of support that AOK provides is directly tied to the number of people reached. More people are reached through universal support, followed by thought partnership and targeted support, whereas fewer people are reached through intensive support. As described above, there is a tradeoff between the likelihood of impact and the extent of reach.

- **Pathway of reach**: For each type of support, AOK reaches individuals through different pathways. Table 2 describes the pathways and how reach can be measured for each type of support.

- **Timing of reach:** Some pathways of reach take longer than others. In the framework, the length of the arrows reflects the length of time each step takes, with policy change taking longer than other types of reach.

Table 2. Reach Pathways and Measurement of Each Type of AOK Support

Type of Support	Pathway of Reach	Measurement
Intensive (site-based work)	• Reaches the individuals directly receiving the supports, who can then use the learnings to support educators to use the information to help children and families. • Reaches the individuals directly receiving intensive TA supports who can also share the learnings with others with whom they work, who can then share this content with educators who can use the information to help children and families. • Reaches the individuals receiving supports from AOK, who can use the learnings to affect policy change, which changes the context in which educators work.	• Number of people receiving supports directly from AOK (AOK data) • Number of educators ultimately reached (AOK data and surveys) • Among the people captured above, number of people they work with (survey) • Number of children on educators' caseloads
Targeted (Train-the-Trainers, cohort programs)	• Reaches the individuals directly receiving the supports who can then use the learnings to directly support educators to use the information to help children and families. • Reaches individuals directly receiving the supports, who can also share the learnings with others with whom they work (potentially others they train if AOK is offering a Train-the-Trainers), who can then share the learnings with educators who can use the information to help children and families. • Reaches individuals receiving supports from AOK, who can also use the learnings to affect policy change, which then changes the context in which educators work.	• Number of people trained by those who were trained by AOK (surveys) • Number of educators ultimately reached (TTT: number of unique educators attending any training directly from AOK or indirectly from a trainer trained by AOK. Regular training: number of educators attending AOK training and from AOK data and surveys) • Among the people captured above, number of people they work with (survey) • Number of children on educators' caseloads
Thought Partnership (knowledge sharing, collaborative conversations, Communities of Practice) **Universal** (provision of resources like webinars and tools)	• Reaches individuals (educators and others) who view a resource, attend a meeting, etc., who then use what they learn to help children and families. • Reaches individuals who can also share what they learn with others, who can then share the learnings with educators who can then use the information to help children and families. • Reaches individuals receiving TA, who can use the learnings to affect policy change, which then changes the context in which educators work.	• Number of recipients/consumers of the message/meeting (AOK data, number of views/downloads) • List of people who are interested in AOK resources, which could include people who attended webinars/meetings and others who are more generally interested (AOK data) • Ask those who have used the resource if they shared/intend to share the resource and with how many people (survey) • Number of children on educators' caseloads

Conclusion

As AOK continues to expand their work to support FCC educators, looking to existing sites will be key in identifying best practices and examples to inform the replication and scale up of their work. Findings from across the three sites—Iowa CCR&R, Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas, and NECC—reveal that focus group and interview participants were highly satisfied with the support they received from AOK, noting AOK TA is clear, organized, thorough, and exceeded their expectations. When asked about why they have continued to engage with AOK over time, one participant shared:

> *"The great thing about AOK is that I have a relationship with them, and they have really embraced me …They have held my hand and kept me informed as they've built out their TA offerings. I have been there ever since [AOK started their TA for other states], and they feel like an actual friend and resource for family child care providers."*

Regardless of the TA strand the sites participated in—Business Development, Licensing Support, Network Development, and Policy Advising—the following facets of TA were cited as being especially valuable to continue in the future including ensuring that TA sites and participants:
- Interact with each other and build long-lasting relationships,
- Share resources and best practices, and
- Maintain accessibility of TA trainers so that they continue to be able to answer questions and provide support to TA participants both during and after TA sessions.

As reviewed in this report, these types of activities have resulted in statewide implementation of the Business Series by the Iowa CCR&R and NECC; NECC adapting AOK's Licensing Toolkit to develop the NECC Toolkit Program; the Tarrant and Dallas Counties Policy Cohort team offering additional sessions of the Introduction to Advocacy training; and overturning of an over 40-year-old ordinance restricting the viability of FCC. Importantly, these case studies also indicate that these accomplishments are directly related to the provision of AOK's TA and have resulted in increased knowledge, capacity, and confidence among FCC educators.

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