



**2011 National Smart Start Conference**  
**Using Data and Evaluation Practices to Improve Early Childhood Programs**

**Integrating Emerging Professional Development Research and Practice  
to Promote Cross-Sector Professional Development Planning:  
Workforce Development Project Summary**

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. Our mission is to promote the health and development of infants and toddlers. We achieve this by translating research and knowledge—specifically information about the kinds of early experiences that help children thrive—into a range of practical tools and resources for use by the adults who influence the lives of young children. We invite you to look at our award-winning website ([www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)) for cutting-edge child development information on a broad array of topics.

**The Best Start LA Workforce Development Project Background**

Beginning in 2008, First 5 LA contracted with the ZERO TO THREE Western Office to implement the five-year *Best Start LA Workforce Development Project* to define best practices and core competencies for the workforce that serves the prenatal through age three (P-3) population. First 5 LA created Best Start LA with the goal to optimize the social, emotional, cognitive, language, physical, and motor development of Los Angeles County's youngest children within the context of the multiple factors that affect their development. The \$125 million investment will have impact at both the community- and county-levels to support capacity strengthening strategies for the prenatal through age three (P-3) population and their families.<sup>1</sup>

**Core Partners**

ZERO TO THREE has partnered with several national, state, and local experts to provide support and guidance for the Project. Senior Scientists at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute serve as consultants to identify evidence-based practices and capacity building models. WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies, Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers assists in identifying and reviewing existing training and learning models, and field-testing training approaches. LA Best Babies Network shares information about related activities.

**Workgroups and Other Participants**

ZERO TO THREE supports the workforce development initiative by convening three Workgroups: Core Competencies, Training, and Sustainability. The Workgroups are implemented in a stagger approach, and members represent the cross-service sectors of *early care and education, early intervention, mental health, physical health, and social services/child welfare*. Workgroup members represent cross-service sector leaders, community partners, and family representatives.

In addition, a culturally diverse, cross-disciplinary Training Network has been created to field-test a professional development model within two Best Start LA Communities in Los Angeles County. Partnerships were formed with local agencies and providers with expertise in training the P-3 workforce in order to deliver training and learning approaches to local Community Providers.

### **Project Objectives**

Now in its third year, the objectives for the overall Project are:

- Review and synthesize evidence-based practices in P-3 workforce development encompassing the sectors of early care and education, early intervention, mental health, physical health, and social service/child welfare. (Ongoing effort.)
- Identify a set of cross-sector core competencies for those who deliver P-3 services. (Accomplished by the Core Competencies Workgroup.)
- Identify and execute training and learning approaches for the Best Start LA Communities. (Identified by the Training Workgroup and field-test in progress.)
- Identify opportunities to expand and sustain a cross-sector training model. (To be identified by the Sustainability Workgroup.)

### **Values and Programmatic Strategies**

Project staff engaged in several months of research and Project development to plan activities to create a strategic implementation framework to identify and develop needed resources for the Workgroup members. This process allowed Workgroup members to build upon common understanding of competencies and protocols across service sectors and professions. This effort also fostered collaboration and group consensus practices and provided the needed tools and resources to understand and organize information and make decisions that would achieve the desired project goals. These program strategies included adopting guiding principles that would foster collaboration, group processes, and consensus as well as an evidence-based decision-making process to guide the work. The Project was designed to promote the following values and practice strategies when carrying out the scope of work and working with community partners:

- Evidence-based practice in decision-making;
- Joint information sharing, communication, and planning;
- Cross-sector working relationships;
- Collaboration, coordination, and integration of new and existing resources;
- Critical thinking, shared knowledge, mutual respect, and reflection; and
- Culturally responsive practice.

**For additional information** about the Best Start LA initiative, visit <http://beststartla.org>; or to learn more about the Best Start LA Workforce Development Project, contact Leticia C. Lara, Project Director, ZERO TO THREE Western Office at [llara@zerotothree.org](mailto:llara@zerotothree.org).

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<sup>1</sup> First 5 LA. (2006, November). *Prenatal through three focus area: Approval item*. Retrieved from [http://www.first5la.org/files/November2006BoardItem\\_0.pdf](http://www.first5la.org/files/November2006BoardItem_0.pdf)

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