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Initiative Name: Thirteen States Have Adopted Michigan's Infant Mental Health Competencies and/or Endorsement for Workforce Development

State: MI

Category: Professional Development, Social and Emotional Health, Professional Development

Source Of Information: ZERO TO THREE Policy Center state updates

Status: Active

Description: In recent years, a number of states have taken steps to ensure that professionals working with infants, toddlers, and their families are knowledgeable and skilled in promoting social-emotional development. Thirteen states* purchased licenses to use the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health's (MI-AIMH) Infant Mental Health Competencies and/or its Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health to help them achieve this goal. Michigan has long been a leader in the infant mental health field. Its experience developing and implementing the Competencies and Endorsement serves as a model for other states.

MI-AIMH's multidisciplinary competency guidelines are based on the principle that all development occurs in the context of relationships. They are organized around eight core competency areas: theoretical foundations; law, regulation, and agency policy; systems expertise; direct service skills; working with others; communicating; thinking; and reflection. A diverse group of MI-AIMH leaders worked for several years to develop them, reaching consensus about existing research, practice, and policy developments in infant and early childhood mental health. Published in 2002, the Competencies provide a framework for cross-disciplinary training and workforce development. They serve as the basis for the MI-AIMH Endorsement – a workforce development system that lays out education, training, work experience, and reflective practice requirements for four levels of competency (Infant Family Associate, Infant Family Specialist, Infant Mental Health Specialist, and Infant Mental Health Mentor). Professionals can earn endorsement at one of the four levels by submitting a portfolio documenting fulfillment of the requirements and, for levels three and four, completing an exam.

When MI-AIMH first began offering endorsement in Michigan, professionals primarily used the system to recognize educational, work, and supervisory experiences they had received while working with infants, toddlers, and their families. Within a few years, professionals who were new to the infant and family field became aware of the Competencies and their importance for professional development. This was due in large part to the systems and policy changes that began to take place as a result of MI-AIMH's work. For example, in 2007 the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) required infant and early childhood mental health consultants to meet the guidelines for endorsement as Infant Family Specialists. One year later, MDCH required all providers of in-home services and infant mental health services to earn endorsement as Infant Family Specialists or Infant Mental Health Specialists. Significant to these policy changes, MDCH worked hard to assure that all infant and early childhood consultants and in-home providers received specialized training and reflective supervision as required to meet the criteria for endorsement. There are now 330 professionals in Michigan who have earned endorsement and another 250 who are in the process of applying for it.

States licensing the Competencies and Endorsement have also made significant progress in promoting infant mental health. Several used the standards to guide service expansions and workforce development. Texas used them to promote competencies in child care. Kansas expanded its statewide early childhood mental health consultation program to meet Endorsement workforce requirements. New Mexico developed an Infant Mental Health Training Institute and guidelines for behavioral health services for infants, toddlers, and their families. Arizona developed a competency-based applied master's program in Infant and Family Practice at Arizona State University. The Endorsement's emphasis on reflective supervision also led several states to begin including it in both training and provision of direct services. State affiliates of the World Association for Infant Mental Health are taking the lead in engaging policymakers and professionals around the Competencies and Endorsement. Members share lessons learned and best practices for implementing the tools in monthly conference calls and annual meetings convened by MI-AIMH. In 2007, state leaders agreed to honor endorsement by all states using the Michigan model, assuring reciprocity and demonstrating their shared commitment to building capacity around the Competencies and the Endorsement.

Adoption of the MI-AIMH Competencies and Endorsement enables states to support relationship-based practice promoting infant mental health by strengthening

and recognizing professionals' skills and experience. Participating states benefit from Michigan's leadership in the field and continue to learn from each other as they implement these evidence-based tools.

For additional information visit the MI-AIMH website at www.mi-aimh.org.

*The thirteen states that purchased licenses to use the MI-AIMH materials are: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Wisconsin, and Virginia.