

LINC Conceptual Map Developed from Responses during the October 7 Meeting

LINC project staff has conducted a more complete analysis of the challenges and barriers to the learning continuum that the Advisory Committee identified during its October 7th meeting. From this analysis, a conceptual map was developed to organize the five main categories identified by LINC members to show the relationship within the learning continuum.

Of the challenges identified, the majority were related to the following themes:

- *misperceptions of the nature and value of the work* between organizations and systems providing care and education within the learning continuum;
- *complex systems of care and education for children*, in which communication processes are rudimentary (and sometimes non-existent) between the organizations and systems, thereby creating silos, service duplication, or services not rendered to children and families in need;
- *lack of cross-sector collaboration* leading to misalignment of standards, curricula, and assessments, as well as misalignment in the preparation and professional development of leaders and teachers in ECE and K-12 systems;
- *incompatible policies and practices* that promote or sustain silos within the continuum rather than foster collaboration and seamless and integrated learning environments and experiences for children; and
- *insufficient family and community involvement* to empower and support families as essential partners in their children's development and education.

In analyzing the post-it notes that members contributed at the October 7th meeting, we found that the items represented not only challenges, but also potential solutions that can contribute to developing and sustaining the learning continuum. Through this analysis, the following conceptual map was developed.

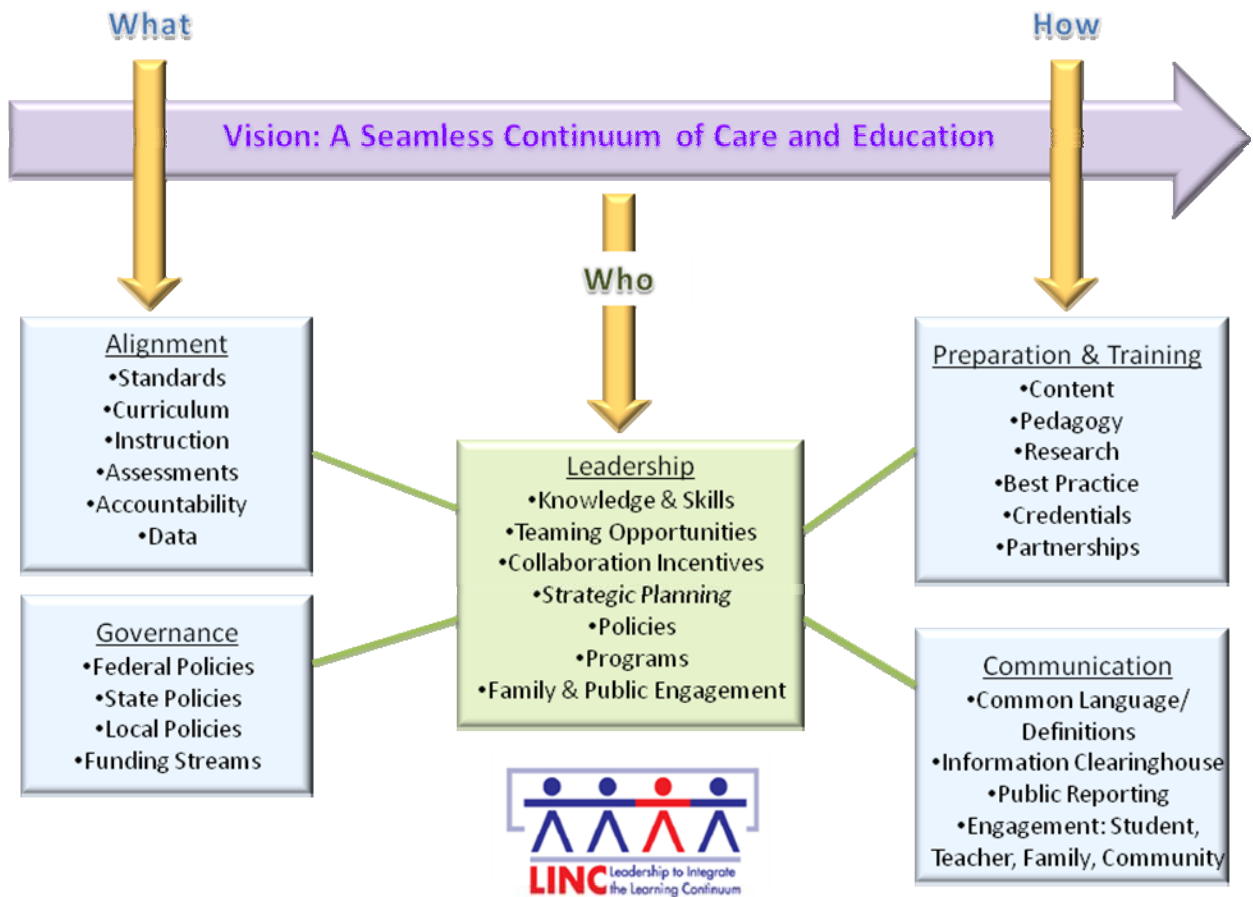


Figure 1. Conceptual map of the LINC Seamless Learning Continuum

Explanation of the Conceptual Map

The conceptual map begins with a vision of the learning continuum for care and education in the State of Illinois. [Currently, the state does not have a clearly articulated statewide vision.] This vision is then divided into three elements: *what*, *who*, and *how*.

- ***The “What” involves the key structural/technical components of the continuum:*** standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, accountability, and data. Once standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment are fully aligned, all stakeholders in the continuum are accountable for the quality care and education services provided. They use data to assess the scope and effectiveness of the services and make needed program improvements.

Governance components, when properly aligned, enable the continuum to function in a coordinated fashion: federal, state and local policies; and funding streams (which are currently fragmented).

- ***The “Who” involves leadership,*** including leaders in both the early care and education sectors and K-12 school systems. Leaders throughout the continuum apply their knowledge and skills to establish the local conditions for serving students. These leaders create teaming opportunities, incentives for collaboration, and strategic plans that span sectors. They influence local policies and programs, and create opportunities for family and public engagement. *The main focus of the LINC project is the role that educational leaders play in both the early care and education and K-12 systems in developing and sustaining the learning continuum.*
- ***The “How” involves preparation, training and communication.*** Leaders and staff gain their knowledge and skills through well-designed preparation programs and professional development opportunities that leading to the attainment of credentials. Credentialing requirements should incorporate knowledge and skills related to the whole child progressing through the learning continuum. ECE providers, school districts, higher education institutions and professional organizations partner to assure that preparation and training merge the best of research, theory and best practice.

Communication requires that stakeholders agree on common definitions and language to describe their work within the continuum. An information clearinghouse can provide coordinated access to important knowledge for practitioners, families and the public. Strong communication promotes meaningful engagement among students, families, educators and the public.

Using the Map to Move the Work Forward

If the conceptual map of the Advisory Committee’s contributions helps to clarify the idea of a learning continuum with specific elements and responsibilities, the work may proceed forward in some specific ways:

1. Use the map to identify areas of strength and weakness in Illinois’ current learning continuum.
2. Use the identified strengths and weakness to generate recommendations for a smooth and supportive learning continuum, with specific goals to benefit students.
3. Create a “roadmap” of priority steps to putting the recommendations in place.
4. Create a sense of urgency regarding implementation of the recommendations.

(Questions for LINC members)

- 1. How well does the conceptual map capture key issues/elements of the learning continuum, as collected at the October 7th meeting? What additions/modifications would you suggest?*
- 2. In what ways does the conceptual map provide a means for moving the work of the Committee forward? Do you have other suggestions for proceeding at this point in time?*
- 3. What policy recommendations would you suggest that would bring the learning continuum and the concepts identified in this map to fruition?*