



Wyoming Early Childhood Education Research Work Group Proposal for The Early Childhood Outreach Network

Initiative Research Objectives

- Identify innovative educator preparation practices supported by some predictive evidence of successful outcomes on identified metrics.
 - Identify which innovative practices can be implemented with fidelity and rigor in Wyoming.
 - Develop or adapt and refine highly effective innovative practices for implementation in Wyoming.
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Initiative Research Work Group Name: Early Childhood Education

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Proposed Innovation

Why Is This Practice Innovative?

The Early Childhood Education Research Work Group (ECE RWG) proposes the Wyoming Early Childhood Outreach Network (WyECON) to act as an organizing body to provide high-quality field experience options, to make existing professional development opportunities available to all early childhood (EC) educators, and to create a degree pathway into the University of Wyoming system. The overarching goals are to support a highly qualified EC workforce in the state, to overcome limited access to early childhood education (ECE) excellence

due to economic hurdles related to traditionally low compensation and higher education degree or workforce credential attainment, and to elevate early childhood care scopes of service.

This multimodal focus on developing practical, applicable EC workforce training creates a unique opportunity for the University of Wyoming to become the national leader in supporting EC educators for rural settings.

The network is a progressive endeavor, establishing a platform to unify ECE businesses, organizations, agencies, and workers across the state, as they collaborate, share resources, and work on issues of mutual interest. This model also facilitates the discovery and development of a statewide vision, goals, and metrics for ECE that include all stakeholders, including parents, educators, business and industry, and government leaders.

The overall goals of the network are to provide high-quality support and education for Wyoming's current and future EC workforce in order to improve services, particularly to underserved and rural populations, to enhance kindergarten readiness across the state and to generate widespread public awareness of the importance of ECE. See Appendix A for a graphic overview of the proposal.

What Is the Proposed Innovation?

Wyoming Early Childhood Outreach Network (WyECON)

The primary role of WyECON is twofold: to provide a more seamless system of professional development opportunities to early care and education professionals across the state; and to expand field experience options available to preservice teaching students. Current professional development opportunities are largely available to providers working within systems such as Head Start or Child Development Centers (CDCs), while those available to others require extensive travel and cost. The rural location of many EC programs limits access to effective collaborative learning communities with ongoing professional development. Due to the rural scope of the state, providing a streamlined opportunity for professional development can be a major challenge.

WyECON would alleviate the uneven access to professional development by not only providing professional development opportunities, but also leveraging already available resources such as existing provider systems, Department of Family Services (DFS) systems, the University of Wyoming, local and community systems, and other informal opportunities around the state. WyECON would not replace these existing opportunities, but rather help to make them available to all providers, regardless of location, type of system, or education level. WyECON could accomplish this goal by taking advantage of the expertise, technology, and support available from the University of Wyoming. By utilizing the reach of the University, all EC educators would have access to the high-quality professional development opportunities offered across the state. Moreover, these same resources would be used to expand the options for field experience placements, allowing students to work in a variety of provider settings.

There are four components in the proposed network, with a recommendation for uptake by the University to develop a dual degree program that would then interface with WyECON.

Component 1: Field Placement Options

Although a bachelor's degree in an ECE program does not currently exist, this network would provide additional field experience opportunities to students in existing EC minor programs. WyECON would allow the University of Wyoming to place students enrolled in undergraduate programs in unique opportunities, including licensed home-based ECE environments, reservation Head Start centers and CDCs, and mobile EC classrooms, among others, to increase options for field experiences. A strong emphasis would be on placement in home settings, not only because of the high percentage of home providers, but also as a means to provide professional

development for these providers, which otherwise might not have professional development options. WyECON would create a fieldwork placement system that allows for family childcare providers to mentor University preservice education students placed with them, and for these mentors to receive training and support in tandem with mentoring these students. In this way, students would experience unique placements and integrate learning skills and knowledge with mentored application, while providers who agree to serve as mentors would have additional manpower and access to coursework that they might not otherwise undertake.

WyECON would work with home-based providers and other EC organizations to develop a list of potential mentors around the state. Then, students who are ready to be placed would have the option of working within the school system, within provider organizations, or in a home-based environment. Thus, students would be able to work within their hometowns, reduce housing barriers, and empower community systems. Students would take a fully online semester of courses to meet requirements, as well as electives focused on content areas such as parent partnerships, leadership, special education, and curriculum development. The planning committee would work with the University and DFS to determine which existing courses could be delivered online and to discuss potential course development.

In addition to providing increased access to field experience options, WyECON would also provide significant benefits to mentors. They would receive a stipend for participation in the program, as well as full access to professional development opportunities for both students and providers. Courses or other professional development opportunities could target population-specific needs or individual preferences, and mentors could receive STARS or college credit. Courses could also be offered online, and professional learning communities could be created through collaborations with community colleges.

An important aspect of these experiences would be the provision of family-resource support. Preservice teachers and mentors would receive additional training, tied to coursework in best practices when working with families. Additionally, under the direction of mentors and with support from University faculty, preservice teachers would create and run family education offerings, to individual families as well as to groups, during their semester placements. The content of these trainings may include child development and enrichment activities to support healthy child growth and development. Specific training for both preservice teachers and providers would allow students to address specific needs that have been identified through processes within the county CDC or Head Start, or needs that the students themselves discover through their placements. Preservice teachers would also conduct, in addition to parent education, supervised home visits. This aspect of the program could be aligned with Head Start and CDC partnerships, as well as other early care and education facilities, that would provide training for both home-based providers and preservice teachers.

Component 2: Community Hubs

As the statewide network develops, community hubs would be established on the local level, potentially at community colleges throughout Wyoming. Through its research, this committee found that, though competitive, the EC workforce is in need of reliable, easily accessible channels for higher education and training. A critical component of this proposal is the establishment of these community hubs in which high-quality information, training, and resources would be housed and disseminated in a noncompetitive, nonexclusive, and non-regulatory manner to the entire EC workforce. Our vision is that, within these hubs, EC professionals will feel free to openly communicate their needs and challenges.

In terms of structure, a coordinator would be hired for each community hub. These coordinators would oversee the field experiences, provide coaching for preservice teachers and candidates, offer professional development, and link providers to available professional development opportunities both in person and virtually. The

community hubs and their coordinators would ensure that WyECON meets regional needs and that the unique perspectives, resources, cultures, and needs of the community are considered and prioritized.

Component 3: Professional Development Network

The third component of WyECON involves generating a professional development partnership between existing provider systems such as (but not limited to) the following:

- Wyoming Kids First: <http://wyokidsfirst.org/>
- Wyoming Department of Workforce Services: <http://www.wyomingworkforce.org/>
- Wyoming Department of Education: <https://edu.wyoming.gov/>
- Wyoming Department of Health: <https://health.wyo.gov/>
- Wyoming Department of Family Services: <http://dfsweb.wyo.gov/>
- Community colleges and campus child care centers: <http://www.uwyo.edu/ecec/>
- Wyoming Office of Head Start: <http://wyomingchild.org/index.php?/main/services/C19>
- Child Development Services of Wyoming: <http://www.cdswy.org/>
- Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES):
<http://www.crb2.k12.wy.us/boces/kindergarten.html>
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): <http://dfsweb.wyo.gov/economic-assistance/tanf>
- Wyoming's Statewide Training and Resource System (STARS): <http://wyostars.com/>
- Wyoming Early Childhood Association: <http://www.wyeca.com/>
- Parent Information Center/Parent Education Network (PIC/PEN): http://www.wpen.net/PAT_State.html

WyECON would collaborate with these partners to increase the availability of high-quality professional development opportunities for all practitioners in Wyoming. The goal of WyECON would be to join the effort to improve professional development for ECE providers in Wyoming. WyECON would support regularly scheduled meetings that provide a platform to share resources, reduce duplication of efforts, and make these professional development opportunities accessible. In addition, WyECON would provide train-the-trainer workshops, run by existing provider organizations, to strengthen the community and statewide professional development system. Some trainings would be delivered online, while others would be made available across the state. Wider access to thoughtful, cutting-edge professional development not only benefits providers and the environments and facilities in which they work, but also facilitates leveraging relationships and resources across a dispersed EC system. Initially, the planning committee would fulfill the role of coordination and oversight, but, in Year 3, a network coordinator position would be created.

Component 4: Degree Pathway

The WyECON community hubs would also work with the University to create a gateway into the University's education system, providing opportunities for providers to work towards associate's or bachelor's degrees. Mentor teachers could work on modules alongside students and with learning community members from their hubs. Successful completion of the modules could be combined for credit toward a degree.

Although the recommendation of a bachelor's degree in ECE is beyond the scope of the RWGs, the ECE RWG strongly endorses the development of this degree program. WyECON would support this program by providing increased field experience options as well as a pathway into the program for interested providers. The ECE RWG will forward its work on a degree program to the dean for further consideration.

Further, WyECON will share the results achieved, insights gained, and all implementation information with the UW College of Education and UW College of Agriculture and Natural Resources to inform and support the development of a University of Wyoming baccalaureate degree in Early Childhood Education.

In promoting WyECON as well as a baccalaureate degree program (to be developed at the University of Wyoming), potential candidates will be provided with the related risks and benefits to an Early Childhood degree and career, including the potential to serve in an early childhood setting for which wages in some instances are not comparable to wages in a K-12 setting.

What Are We Proposing?

Year 1: Planning Year (\$84,000)

The ECE RWG proposes the funding of a committee to develop the various components of WyECON in year one and to provide oversight in subsequent years.

WyECON committee. The ECE RWG proposes a committee composed of stakeholders and representatives from the University and EC organizations. The work of this committee would begin with a 2-day working retreat to ensure shared understanding, common goals, and stakeholder buy-in, and would continue with monthly meetings around the state.

This committee would be responsible for designing and implementing WyECON and accomplishing the following tasks:

- Development of a professional development network with key stakeholders from list of network partners in the state.
- Contact with community colleges or other local organizations to establish partnerships for the creation of community hubs that would be essential to the identification of priorities, providers, and placements.
- Creation of a “master list” of available professional development opportunities, including the STARS system.
- Survey research to prioritize state needs for professional development.
- Development of selection criteria for mentors and participating students.
- Discussion of potential delivery systems (online, in-person, coaching).
- Determination of costs and fees associated with professional development, with budget revision as needed.
- Support to the University as it determines whether and how to develop a dual degree program for ECE.

Specifically, the committee would begin with a 2-day working retreat with selected stakeholders to define the scope of work for the year. Each of the topics above would be addressed, and progress could be made in beginning the compilation and sharing of available resources. Essential to the success of this effort is the establishment of common goals and common language to frame the year’s work.

Additionally, the committee would set up the network for the Year 2 pilot as follows:

- Identify providers who are interested in professional development as part of a degree pathway and who will serve as mentors and provide placements for students.
- Evaluate “Parents as Teachers” as a possible partner for a family education module for students.

- Consider alternative practical experiences or field placement options (e.g., the Human Development and Family Sciences program in the College of Agriculture).
- Establish hub learning communities.
- Initially develop pilot training modules, utilizing existing resources.

Year 2: Pilot Year for Implementation of WyECON (\$130,000)

The focus in the second year of implementation would be on expanding coursework and practical experiences in family education and working with families through collaborations within the Human Development and Family Sciences program in the College of Agriculture. Students would have opportunities to participate in a community-based rotation focusing on home-based service delivery and family education. As WyECON spreads to more Wyoming communities, students would benefit from taking advantage of the potential strengths of the network through expanded opportunities in more diverse rural communities across the state. Initially, two hub sites identified during the planning year, one in the Laramie area and another in a high-needs area, would be set up for Year 2 implementation. Students placed in the high-needs hub would receive a stipend to cover travel and housing, and as an incentive to provide services to underserved populations. There would be three mentors per semester for each hub, and two students would be assigned to each mentor.

Fieldwork supervision would be provided by hub coordinators, who, along with a representative from the University program, would meet quarterly with the committee to assess the successes and challenges of the initiative. Necessary refinements would be implemented throughout the pilot year. The professional development modules designed by the planning committee would be made available to the mentor–student pairings, with an exit survey completed in addition to an assessment of learning.

Year 3: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion (\$183,850)

Year 3 would have two distinct phases. During the first semester, the pilot, using established mentees and the developed network, would continue to provide field experiences and professional development opportunities while a program evaluation is completed.

A graduate assistant (GA) would gather information on program effectiveness from fieldwork supervisors, mentors, students, course instructors, families, and hub coordinators, as well as develop and administer a survey and conduct focus groups to gather stakeholder feedback. At the end of the semester, the GA would meet with the committee, hub supervisors, and the network coordinator to make recommendations for refinements and expansion.

During the second semester, WyECON would be expanded to include two more community hubs, and professional development would continue to grow. Additionally, ongoing conversations with University faculty would fuel discussions for a degree pathway for mentors and professional development participants.

Documentation of Need

The field of ECE is fragmented across the nation in terms of the variety of funding sources, providers, and governmental regulatory agencies supporting the work (Gable, 2015). The research of the ECE RWG shows that Wyoming is no exception to this fragmentation.

Currently, more than 60 percent of all childcare providers in Wyoming are family or group childcare home providers. Specifically, according to the Resource and Referral division at DFS, Wyoming is home to 698 licensed childcare facilities as of July 6, 2017. These are broken down as follows:

- 274 childcare centers (39%)
- 149 family childcare centers (21%)
- 275 family childcare homes (40%)

Wyoming is a predominantly rural state with a low population in comparison to its land size. As a result, obtaining training is difficult for many professionals across the state. While programs such as Head Start or CDCs may include access to specific trainings, other private centers and home providers are left to find or develop training on their own, which can lead to a segmented and difficult-to-navigate system statewide. Some online services are available, such as the ECHO network; however, awareness of these resources is low, and relying exclusively on online professional development limits the face-to-face opportunities for classroom networking. Moreover, resources sometimes reveal a failure to account for the ability of ECE providers to participate. For example, the ECHO network hosts opportunities midmorning on Fridays, making professional development inaccessible to family childcare providers unless they have the finances and support network to hire substitutes for part of the day.

The University of Wyoming’s ECE programs are currently housed in the College of Education and the College of Agriculture. Although these programs have slightly different foci, a great deal of overlap exists.

WyECON aligns with the TEI Vision and Mission, which focuses on preparing and graduating “preeminent P-12 professional educators” resulting in “high school graduates who are among the most skilled and best educated in the nation.” The body of research on learner success consistently shows that high quality early learning experiences are a powerful predictor of long-term student success, including reading ability, and persistence to high school graduation.

Alignment to Key Performance Indicators

- Statewide perceptions of the University of Wyoming College of Education
- Continuous Improvement Protocols for field and clinical experiences

Evidence Supporting Proposed Innovation: Literature Review

Tribal and rural outreach:

National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives. (2006). *Proceedings of the Rural Early Childhood Forum on American Indian and Alaska Native Early Learning, July 28–29, Little Rock, AR* (Rural Early Childhood Report No. 2). Mississippi State, MS: Mississippi State University, Early Childhood Institute. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498834.pdf>

Difference in rural and non-rural early childhood education:

Gable, S. (2015). America’s fragmented child care and early education system. Retrieved from <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/ccf-briefing-report-fragmented-child-care/>

- Green, N. C., & Nolan, A. (2011). Preparing the Australian early childhood workforce for rural and remote settings: A review of the literature. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(12), 83–96.
- Maher, E. J., Frestedt, B., & Grace, C. (2008). Differences in child care quality in rural and non-rural areas. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 23(4).
- Miller, P., Votruba-Drzal, E., & Setodji, C. M. (2013). Family income and early achievement across the urban-rural continuum. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(8), 1452–1465.

Summary of Literature Review:

Families in rural settings have difficulty finding early childhood education that is affordable and convenient and that has high-quality, prepared teachers (Gable, 2015). Green and Nolan (2011) suggested that teachers moving to rural areas must be familiar with how to work in these settings, but that they are often not properly prepared. Teacher training in rural contexts is needed but impeded by lack of offerings and the cost of travelling to rural locales. According to Green and Nolan (2011), “Adequately preparing the workforce to be confident and comfortable teaching in rural and remote early childhood settings will need to be one goal...” (p. 92). The authors also mentioned that teacher shortages and low teacher retention rates in rural schools are due to perceptions that such settings are unattractive.

Another goal, then, would be to create a new perspective on rural schools in order to attract and retain excellent teachers. Maher, Frestedt, and Grace (2008) suggested that teacher shortages result in fewer available adults per child in rural EC settings. This shortage leads to a lower quality of care. The authors also mentioned that there are fewer facilities available because of the high costs of opening and operating them. Additionally, less availability of licensed child care compels many employers to lower standards when staffing the buildings. Miller, Votruba-Drzal, and Setodji (2013) conducted a study suggesting that, even when they have enough money, families are unable to utilize it for EC services because resources are still not readily available in rural settings. The shortage of licensed centers may lead to a reliance on in-home childcare.

Native Americans are an often-discussed underserved subgroup. According to the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives (2006), many American Indians or Alaska Natives live in rural settings (p. 4). These rural communities deal with shortages of high-quality teachers, higher costs for transporting students, limited economic opportunities, and increased concentrations of poverty (p. 4). As the center states, “Understanding the specific contexts in which Indian education takes place, including both the challenges and assets posed by the rural context, is a crucial part of developing a better understanding of promising models and practices to improve the life chances of Native children, and of ensuring the continued social, cultural and economic vitality of the communities of which they are a part” (p. 4–5).

Proposed Innovation: Program Evaluation

During the first part of Year 3, a graduate student would use the data collected from surveys and assessments, as well as data from the quarterly meetings, to develop an evaluation report that would be shared with the committee in mid-fall semester. The committee would determine recommendations for changes and expansion and put them into action during the spring semester.

Proposed Budget

We seek a total investment of \$397,850.00 for this project for innovation.

Description of Costs	Estimated Total Cost
Year 1: Planning Year	\$84,000
Facilities for initial retreat – 15 @ \$600	\$9,000
Travel for retreat, site visits, and monthly meetings (some will be via Zoom web conferencing)	\$35,000
Stipend for committee members – 15 @ \$2,000	\$30,000
Technical support	\$5,000
Platform for dissemination	\$5,000
Year 2: Pilot Year	\$130,000
Stipends for mentors – 12 @ \$2,000	\$24,000
High-needs hub student support – 12 @ \$2,500	\$30,000
Committee quarterly meetings (stipends and travel for 15 members + 2 hub supervisors and UW faculty representative)	\$30,000
Stipends for hub supervisors – 2 @ \$6,500 per semester	\$26,000
Stipends and costs for professional development providers, 1/2-year salary for network supervisor	\$20,000
Year 3: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion (Semester 2)	\$183,850
Stipend for mentors, expanded in Semester 2 – 18 @ \$2,000	\$36,000
High-needs hub student support, expanded in Semester 2 – 18 @ \$2,500	\$45,000
Network coordinator salary	\$30,000
Stipends for hub supervisors – 2 @ \$6,500 per semester	\$26,000
Professional development provider stipends	\$7,500
Evaluation report convening (stipends and travel for 15 members + travel for hub coordinators, network coordinator, and UW representative)	\$8,000
Graduate student assistantship	\$31,350
TOTAL: \$397,850	

Evidence Supporting Proposed Innovation: Evaluation of Leading Programs

Programs Reviewed:

Traditional educator preparation programs in public and private universities across the United States

Names and locations of traditional programs studied:

- South Dakota State University, Early Childhood Education (B.S.) – Birth to 8 Specialization: <https://www.sdstate.edu/programs/undergraduate/early-childhood-education-bs-birth-8-specialization>
- University of Northern Colorado, Early Childhood Education: <http://www.unco.edu/programs/early-childhood/>
- Warner School of Education at the University of Rochester, Early Childhood Education Program: <https://www.warner.rochester.edu/programs/earlychildhood>

Alternative educator preparation programs

Names and locations of traditional programs studied:

- University of Denver (DU), Marsico Institute for Early Learning and Literacy: <https://www.du.edu/marsicoinstitute/>
- The State University of New York at Buffalo, Early Childhood Research Center: <http://ecrc.buffalo.edu/>
- University of Colorado Denver, Colorado School of Public Health, Tribal Early Childhood Research Center
<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/centers/CAIANH/trc/Pages/TRC.aspx>

International educator preparation programs

Names and locations of international programs studied:

- Edith Cowan University Australia, Centre for Research in Early Childhood: <http://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/education/research-activity/centre-for-research-in-early-childhood>
- University of New Brunswick, Early Childhood Centre: <http://www.unb.ca/fredericton/education/ecc/>

Existing early childhood professional development networks associated with university programs

- The City University of New York (CUNY), New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute: <http://www.earlychildhoodny.org/>

Summary of Evaluation of Other Programs:

ECE RWG found only one program associated with a university and focused on professional development (at CUNY). However, this program is in an urban setting and has different needs than those in Wyoming. Other early childhood centers (NIEER at Rutgers and Marsico Institute at DU) focus on research rather than professional development. Centers that focus on professional development are federal (NAEYC) or state (Indiana Association for Child Care Resources and Referral [ACCRR] Training Central). Therefore, evaluation of existing programs reinforces the need for a program that would serve Wyoming's specific needs and be of use to other states with rural demographics.

Contextual Constraint Analysis

Identify and Describe Specific Contextual Constraints That Could Have an Effect on the Successful Implementation of the Innovation (e.g., fiscal; state, federal, or local policy; accreditation requirements; other)

As this proposal is to fund a planning, pilot, and revision phase, the only limits involve locating stakeholders who are willing to commit to the effort. Careful recruitment, the opportunity to network with other stakeholders, and the availability of stipends should ensure participation of the right individuals.

Risk Assessment

Identified Potential Risks to College of Education Candidates

There is a risk in terms of safety and educational validity of placing students in home-based childcare settings for fieldwork. The planning committee would address this risk by developing a careful vetting process. The hub supervisor would also monitor this risk throughout the placement.

Identified Potential Risks to the UW College of Education:

The College of Education could be at risk if placements do not meet the standards established. However, the process described above should prevent this from occurring.

Identified Potential Risks to College of Education Partners (e.g., Wyoming School District Partners, other colleges at UW)

There is a risk associated with funding for WyECON beyond the three years. If the evaluation provides evidence that the program should be continued, a committee could be formed to develop alternate funding sources during Year 3, Semester 2.

WyECON will collaborate with the TEI Governing Board, the University of Wyoming Foundation, and the University of Wyoming College of Education to develop and implement a plan to identify and garner sustained financial support for the program beyond the initial funding period.

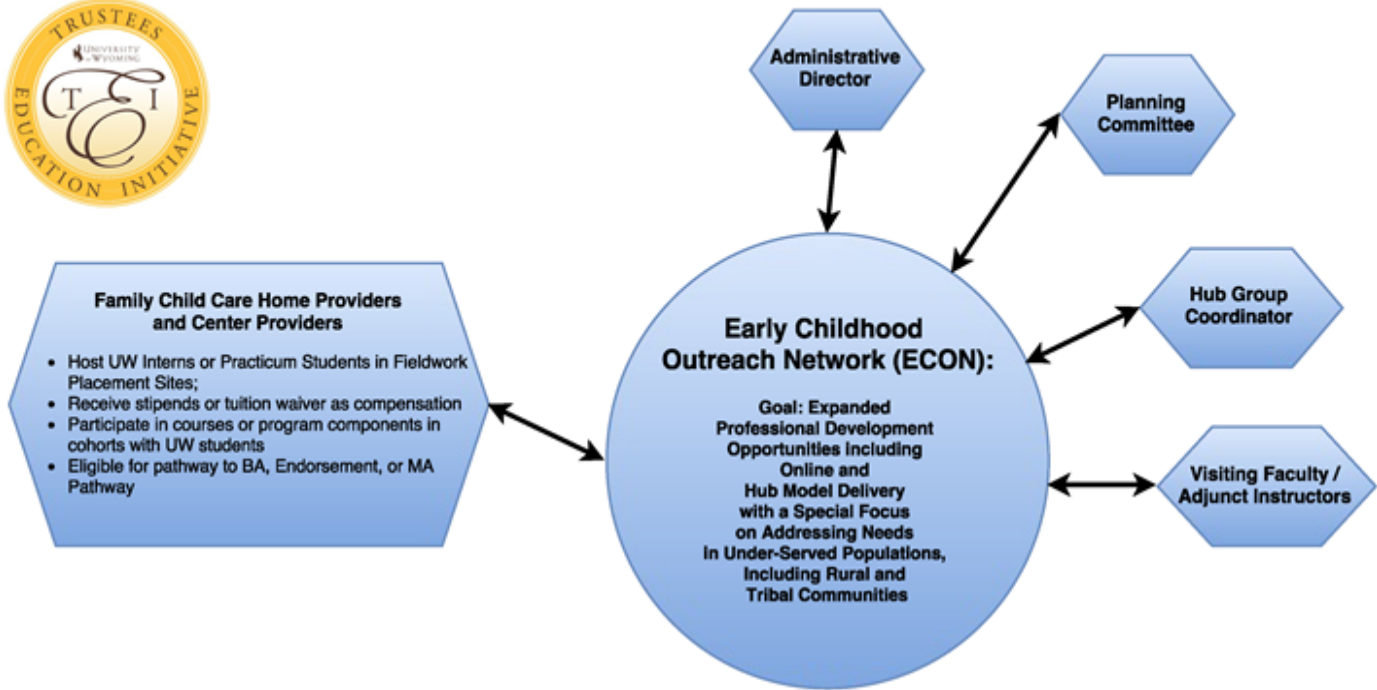
Identified Potential Risks to the UW Trustees Education Initiative

None.

Identified Potential Risks to Other Stakeholders

None.

Appendix A. Graphic Overview of Proposal



Model

- The professional development network is designed around community college hubs.
- All interns and participating providers would be eligible for a pathway to an AA, BA, or MA
- Delivery mode includes online courses and modules.
- Clinical experiences focus on early childhood center-based professional development delivered by TANF, HeadStart, and child development center teachers.
- UW candidates could complete internships in a focused area, e.g., at centers providing family-based development services.
 - Internships in this and other focused areas could lead to a graduate certificate.
 - Interns would strengthen and expand the existing services provided to families.

