

Setting Priorities and Weighing Trade-Offs

As stakeholders with differing motives, it is expected that weighing the options or ideas will cause some conflict. But as my husband often says, "Conflict is good. It forces us to think and innovate toward better solutions."

- Chinelle Duncan, Quality and Evaluation Study Group Member

The WV Early Childhood Planning Task Force held the first round of Study Group meetings in July. Across the three groups (Service System Design, Quality and Evaluation, and Finance and Governance), the inherent tensions and trade-offs involved in planning began to emerge, including:

- A. **Family or societal responsibility?** How much of the responsibility for infant and toddler learning and well-being lies with parents and relatives? What are the responsibilities of the rest of us, as neighbors, professionals, faith group members or concerned citizens? How much and in what ways should government support and assure healthy development prior to children entering school?
- B. **More or better?** What should we do when we don't have enough local programs for the families who need them, and people are forced to travel long distances or, in some cases, go without? What should we do when the quality of programs meets basic standards, but falls short of helping young children fully develop their potential? And what should we do when there aren't enough resources to assure both access and quality?
- C. **Universal or targeted?** Which programs should be available to all young children, whether their families have high or low incomes, and what is government's role in funding those programs? If we don't have sufficient public funding to serve all young children, who should come first? How can we address the stigma associated with poverty and disability, which keeps some families from participating in certain programs?
- D. **Consistency or flexibility?** What should we do when applying consistent standards and practices conflicts with providing the most appropriate service for a particular child or family? To what extent does flexibility undermine quality and fairness in the delivery of early childhood services? To what extent do rules and regulations interfere with discovery and innovation in early childhood programs?
- E. **Require or incentivize?** What are our hopes and expectations for early childhood programs and for parents/caregivers in meeting the needs of young children, and how can we best achieve them? What expectations do we, as a society, feel are non-negotiable? What should we do to require and/or attract programs and parents to follow what we consider "best practices" during pregnancy and early childhood?