2022-2023

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan

Evaluation Report

Acknowledgements

The suggested citation for this report is: Munroe Meyer Institute (2023). Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation: 2022-2023 Academic Year. Retrieved from Buffett Early Childhood Institute website: http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/resources/reports-publications.
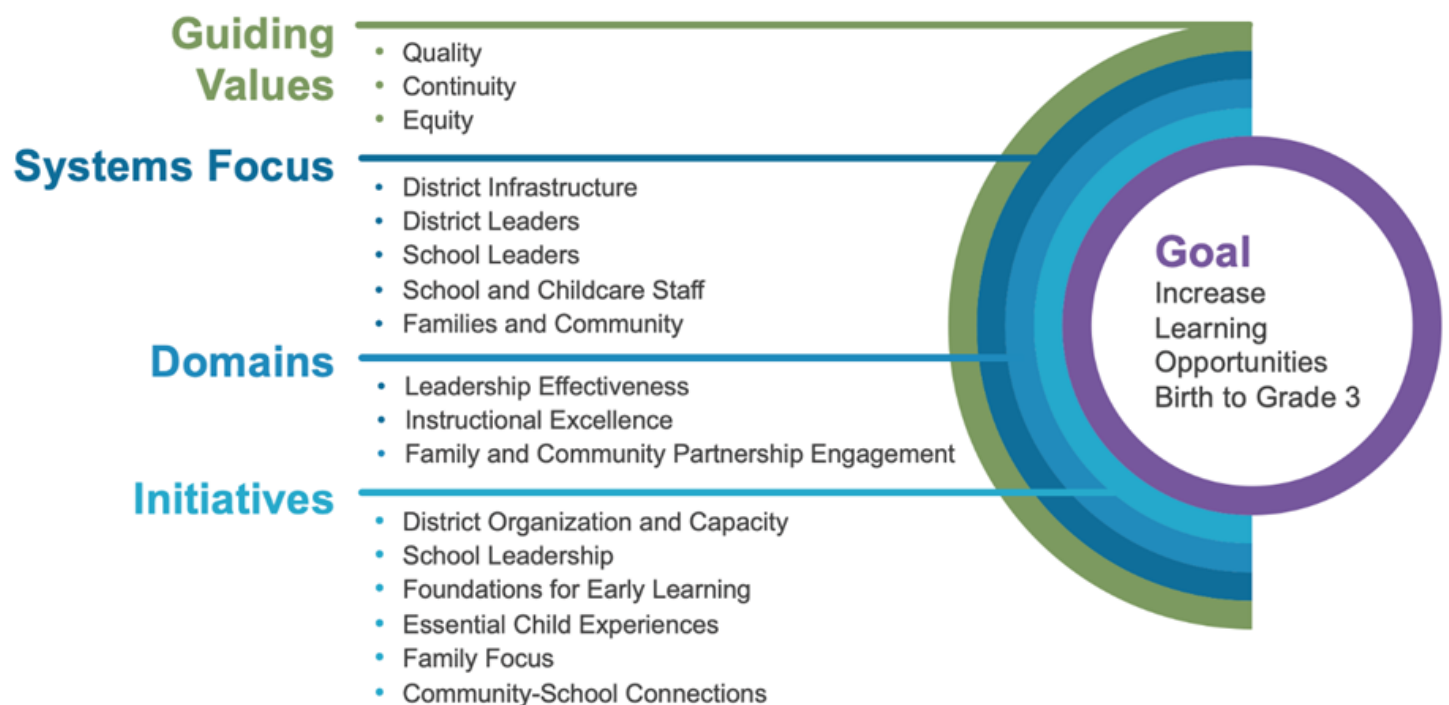
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*Buffett Early Childhood Institute Staff were engaged in evaluation processes and data analysis related to these areas

Executive Summary

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (SECP) was introduced in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties in the fall of 2015. It offers an innovative, comprehensive approach to reducing achievement gaps for young children from birth through Grade 3 in the Omaha metro area. The 2022-2023 school year marks the 8th program year of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. There are School as Hub sites in eight elementary schools across six school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. This year's evaluation employed a new strategy based on the findings of a landscape assessment completed in 2021-22. The evaluation was grounded in a value-engaged approach with primary outcomes of focus on program improvement and program quality assessment. A combination of assessments and methodologies were used to evaluate the collaborative relationship between BECI and school districts as well as district-level and school-level changes. Specific focus included components of School as Hub, home visiting, school supports for PreK to Grade 3 families, educator professional development, and change in educator practice.

Birth through Grade 3 Approach

Guiding Values
- Quality
- Continuity
- Equity

Systems Focus
- District Infrastructure
- District Leaders
- School Leaders
- School and Childcare Staff
- Families and Community

Domains
- Leadership Effectiveness
- Instructional Excellence
- Family and Community Partnership Engagement

Initiatives
- District Organization and Capacity
- School Leadership
- Foundations for Early Learning
- Essential Child Experiences
- Family Focus
- Community-School Connections

Goal
Increase Learning Opportunities Birth to Grade 3

Evaluation Questions

The goals for the 2022-2023 evaluation are split across the three domains of focus (Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family and Community Partnership and Engagement). In addition, a collaboration evaluation is being conducted to understand the relationship between the Institute and district partners. Finally, additional efforts supported within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan include the Instructional Toolkit Workgroup and PD for All opportunities. Evaluation questions for each of these programs are cited below.

Action Planning Guide Outcomes

SECP Collaboration

1. What is the level of collaboration between the Institute and program stakeholders?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators for collaboration between the Institute and program stakeholders?

Leadership Effectiveness

1. What effect does the SECP have on principal leadership?
2. What effect do SECP leadership activities (i.e., action planning, birth through grade 3 workshops) have on district-level goals?

Instructional Excellence

1. What effect does the SECP have on classroom practices?

Family and Community Partnerships Engagement

1. What effect does the SECP have on how family facilitators, community facilitators and/or home visitors engage with families?
2. What effect does the SECP have on family perceptions of family engagement?

Additional Efforts

PD for All

1. What is the reach of the "bite-size" PD for All approach?
2. If and how are early childhood educators implementing knowledge learned?
3. What are the best practices and barriers to new knowledge implementation within instructional settings?

Instructional Toolkit

1. What is the work group's self-efficacy for tool implementation through the lens of self-efficacy theory?
2. How does the workgroup experience influence perceptions of the six essential child experiences?
3. What are the best practices and barriers to workgroup program implementation?

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SECP Collaboration

1. What is the level of collaboration between the Institute and program stakeholders?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators for collaboration between the Institute and program stakeholders?

In the Spring of 2023, Evaluators within the Munroe Meyer Institute conducted an external collaboration evaluation between the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and its key partners within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. The two primary objectives of the evaluation were (1) to determine the level of collaboration between the Institute and plan stakeholders within school districts and (2) to determine the barriers and facilitators for collaboration between the Institute and plan stakeholders. A total of 59 surveys were completed by plan stakeholders across 9 school districts (6 districts with school as hub sites, 3 districts eligible for customized assistance), followed by 12 interviews. Survey respondents included 3-to-5 year-old classroom educators/paraprofessionals (n=10), Home Visitors/Family Facilitators (n=15), school-based leaders (n=13), and district-based administrators (n=21). Interviewees included: Home Visitors/Family Facilitators (n=3), school-based administrators (n=4), and district-based administrators (n=5). Twelve Institute staff members also engaged in a similar survey, with 10 staff members participating in a follow-up interview. Key findings are shared in the following report.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A survey was developed in collaboration between a Munroe Meyer Institute Education and Child Development Faculty member and Buffett Early Childhood Institute Research and Evaluation Staff. The District survey was comprised of 21 closed/open-ended questions and included an adapted version of a previously validated "Level of Collaboration" scale.* Questions were developed based on the Action Plan program domains of focus noted below. Respondents were asked to identify the level of collaboration they believe they have had with Institute Staff and with other Districts within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan in each of the following areas. Institute staff members were given a similar survey and asked to identify level of collaboration with Districts as a whole. Mean and standard deviations were calculated for each survey item.

PROGRAM DOMAINS OF FOCUS

Leadership Effectiveness	Instructional Excellence	Family and Community Partnership Engagement
District Organization and Capacity	Foundations for Early Learning	Family Focus
School Leadership	Essential Child Experiences	Community-School Connections

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION

Networking 1	Cooperation 2	Coordination 3	Coalition 4	Collaboration 5
-Loosely defined roles -Little communication -All decisions are made independently	-Provide information to each other -Somewhat defined roles -Formal communication -All decisions are made independently	-Share information and resources -Defined roles -Regular communication -Some shared decision making	-Share ideas, information, and resources -Regular and focused communication -Frequent shared decision making	-Frequent and strategic communication -Mutual trust -Shared decision making in all decisions -Consensus reached in all decisions

*Survey adapted from: Frey, B. B., Lohmeier, J. H., Lee, S. W., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring collaboration among grant partners. American journal of evaluation, 27(3), 383-392.

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INSTITUTE STAFF SURVEY FINDINGS

Institute Staff members were asked to identify the level of collaboration they have with all district/school stakeholders on a scale of 0-5 (0=no interaction at all; 5=collaboration) across the action plan domain constructs. **Institute collaboration** perceptions had a mean of 2.2 indicating a level of **cooperation** was typical.

Level of Collaboration
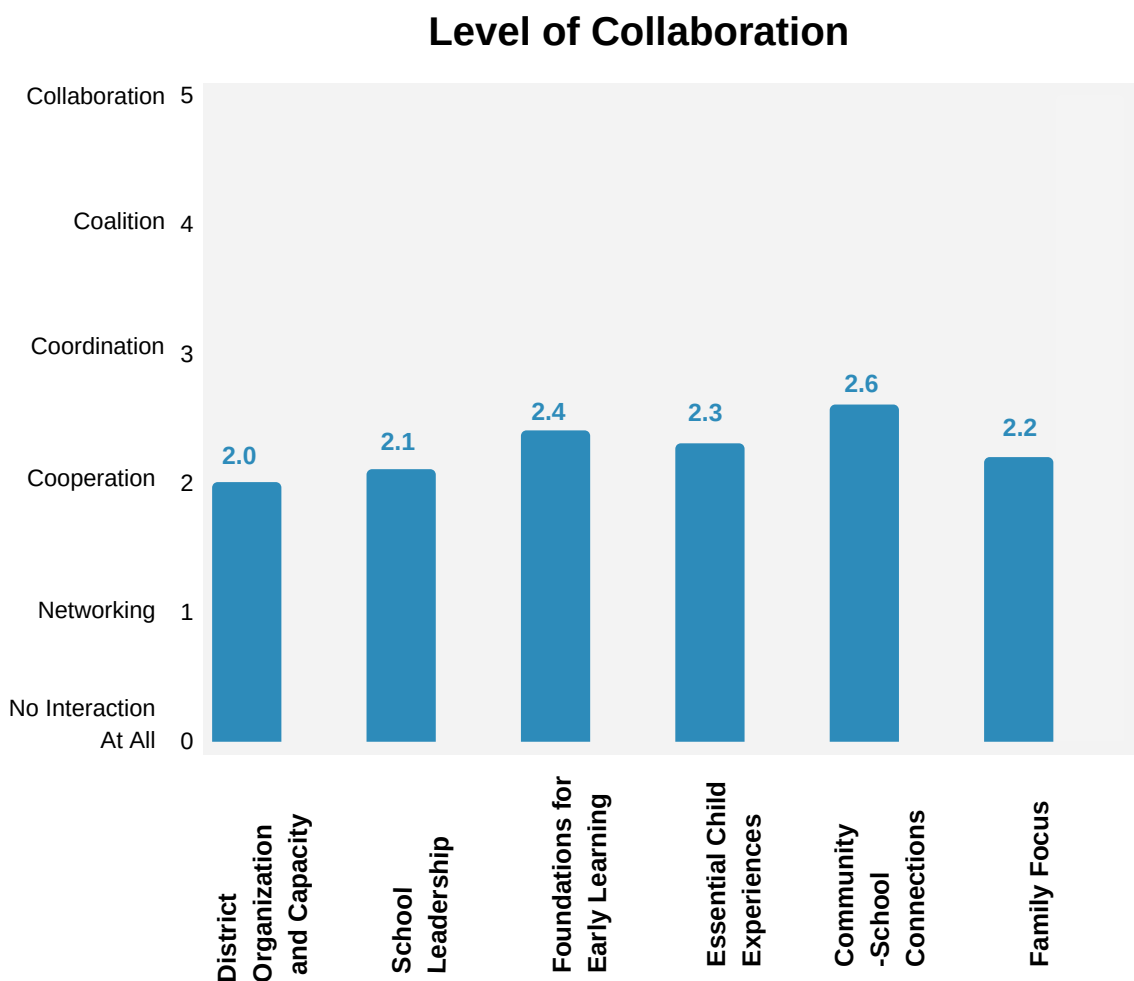
Institute staff (n=12*)* were asked to rate the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. Agreement was based on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

I am able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (m=4.17±.1.1)	My ideas are listened to and given appropriate consideration (m=4.17±.1.1)	Power is shared between the Buffett Institute and Districts (3.75±.1.1)
4.17	**4.17**	**3.75**
Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

5
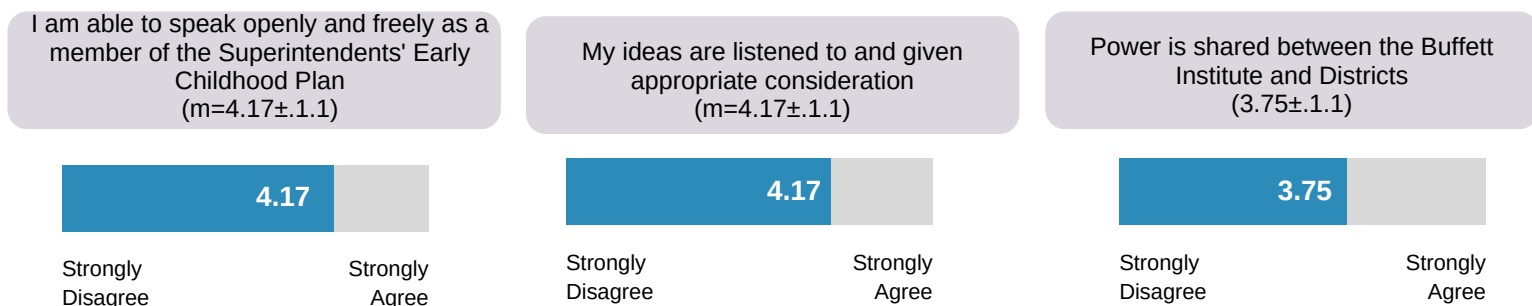
School/District Program stakeholders involved in the action planning process (n=33) were asked to identify the level of collaboration **they have with one another** on a scale of 0-5 (0=no interaction at all; 5=collaboration) across the action plan domain constructs. Findings for district respondents (n=6 districts) can be seen below in **grey.** These included all respondents from districts with school as hub sites: Bellevue, DC West, Millard, Omaha Public Schools, Ralston and Westside. Findings for Institute respondents can be seen in **blue.** Overall, district respondents typically identified higher rates of collaboration than Institute staff. **District collaboration** perceptions had a mean of 3.3 indicating efforts typically fell within the **coalition** level. **Institute collaboration** perceptions had a mean of 2.2 indicating a level of **cooperation** was typical.

Level of Collaboration

DISTRICTS WITH SCHOOL AS HUB SITES SURVEY FINDINGS

The following figures describe the level of collaboration **respondents with districts with school as hub sites (n=33) believed they have with other districts** in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (0=no interaction at all, 1=networking, 2=cooperation, 3=coordination, 4=coalition, and 5=collaboration). *Only individuals that self-identified as involved in the action planning process answered the following questions.* Overall, the average response mean was 1.7. This indicates that districts typically identified as **"networking"** with other districts.

DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND CAPACITY
MEAN=1.7±.30
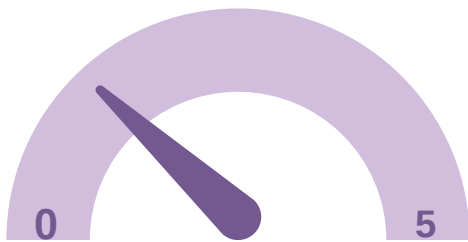
DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
MEAN=1.4±.39
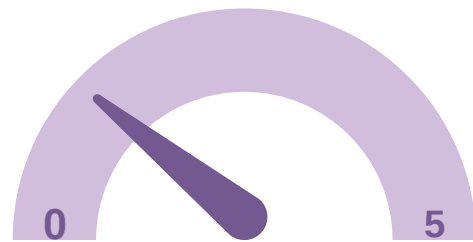
DEVELOPMENT OF FOUNDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING
MEAN=1.8±.48
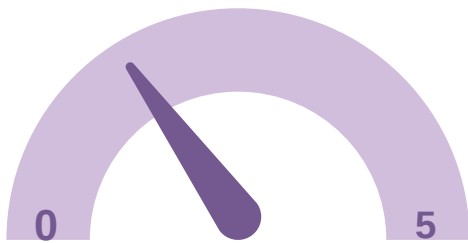
DEVELOPMENT OF ESSENTIAL CHILD EXPERIENCES
MEAN=1.9±.57
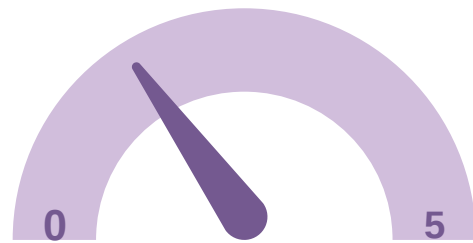
DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY FOCUS
MEAN=1.7 ±.42

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS
MEAN=1.9±..50
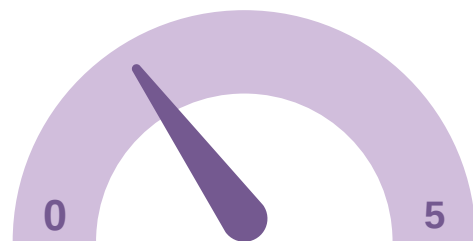
DISTRICTS WITH SCHOOL AS HUB SITES
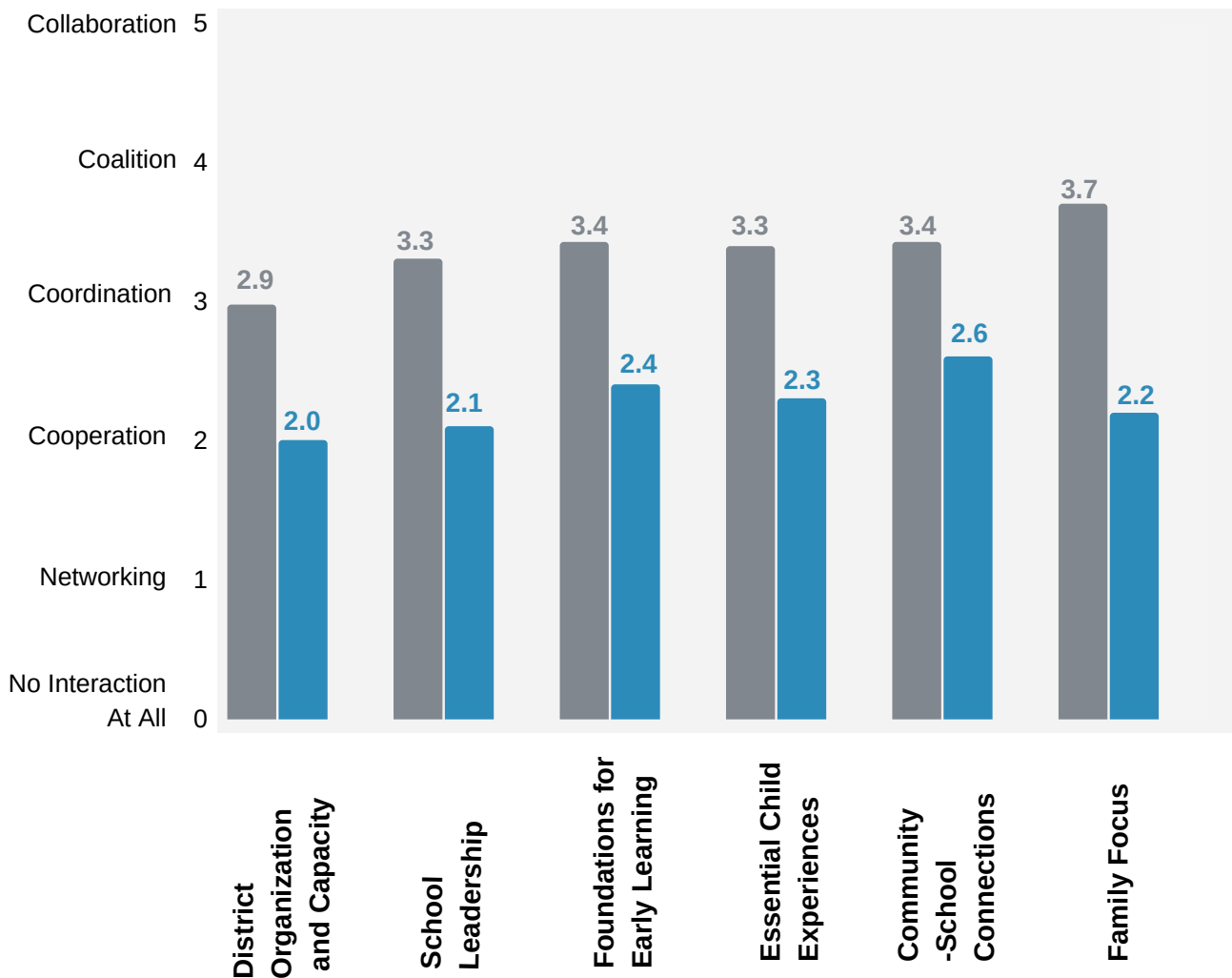## SURVEY FINDINGS

Plan stakeholders from districts with school as hub sites (n=45) were asked to rate the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. Agreement was based on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The strongest level of agreement was related to being able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (m=4.49±.91). The lowest level of agreements were noted in the following statements: the Institute is a key support for achieving action plan goals (3.9±1.1) and colleagues within the Superintendents' plan help to resolve challenges related to action plan goals (3.9±.95) although responses were still at the level of "somewhat agree". Additional mean and standard deviation findings are reported below.
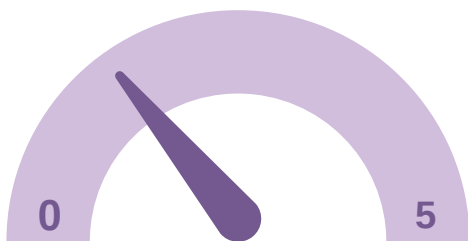
The Buffett Institute is a key support for achieving my action plan goals
3.9±1.1

1   5

My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan are a key support for achieving my action plan goals
4.1±1.0

1   5

The Buffett Institute is responsive to my questions and helps me to obtain answers as needed
4.4±1.0

1   5

My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan help me gain new knowledge that will support my action plan goals
3.9±.98

1   5

The Buffett Institute helps me resolve challenges related to my action plan goals
4.1±.86

1   5

My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan help me resolve challenges related to my action plan goals
3.9±.95

1   5

The Buffett Institute helps me gain new knowledge that will support my action plan goals
m=4.2±.98

1   5

My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan are a key support for achieving my action plan goals
4.0±.98

1   5

I am able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan
(m=4.49±.91)

1   5

My ideas are listened to and given appropriate consideration
(m=4.47±.91)

1   5

Power is shared between my team and the Buffett Institute
(4.16±.99)

1   5

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District program stakeholders (n=3) were asked to identify the level of collaboration **they have with one another** on a scale of 0-5 (0=no interaction at all; 5=collaboration) across the action plan domain constructs. Findings for districts eligible for customized assistance (n=3 districts) can be seen in **purple**. These districts included Bennington, Elkhorn and Papillion La Vista. Findings for Institute respondents can be seen in **blue.** District perceptions from districts eligible for customized assistance had a mean of .99 indicated a collaboration level of **networking. Institute collaboration** perceptions had a mean of 2.2 indicating a level of **cooperation** was typical. *Importantly, Institute staff were asked to identify the overall level of collaboration with all districts served. Institute staff were not asked to discuss collaboration with districts with school as hub sites and districts eligible for customized assistance separately.*

Level of Collaboration
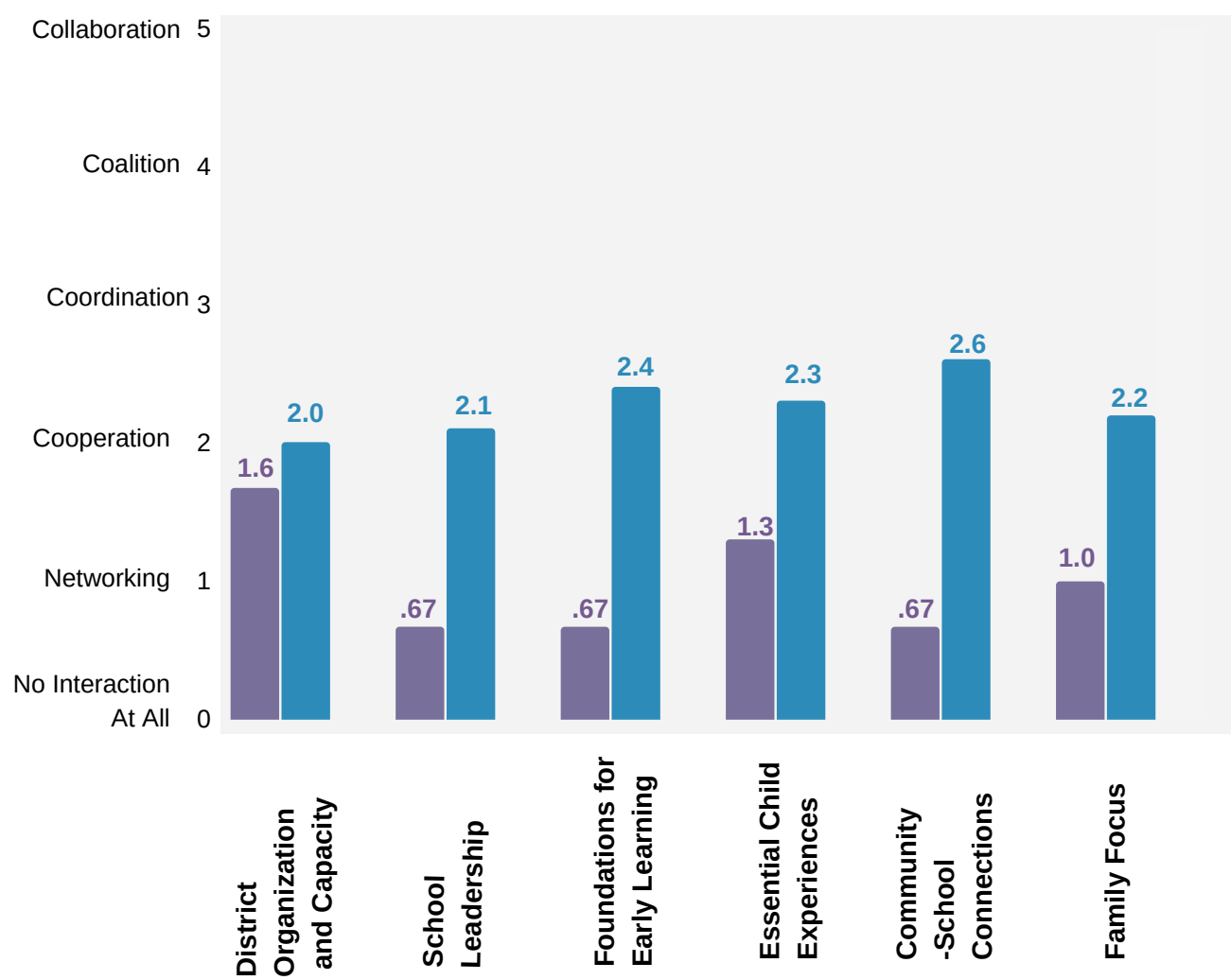
DISTRICTS ELIGIBLE FOR CUSTOMIZED ASSISTANCE SURVEY FINDINGS

The following figures describe the level of collaboration **customized assistance eligible district respondents (n=3 districts) believed they have with other districts** in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (0=no interaction at all, 1=networking, 2=cooperation, 3=coordination, 4=coalition, and 5=collaboration). Overall, the average response mean was .33. This indicates that districts typically responded as "no interaction at all" across action plan domains.

DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND CAPACITY
MEAN=.67±.94
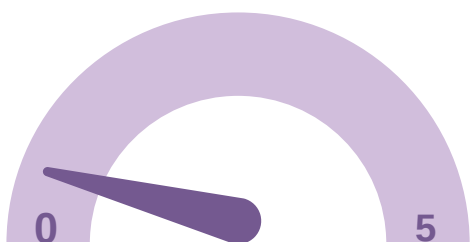
DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
MEAN=0.0±0.0

DEVELOPMENT OF FOUNDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING
MEAN=.33±.47

DEVELOPMENT OF ESSENTIAL CHILD EXPERIENCES
MEAN=.33 ±.50

DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY FOCUS
MEAN=.33±.47

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS
MEAN=0.0±0.0

DISTRICTS ELIGIBLE FOR CUSTOMIZED ASSISTANCE SURVEY FINDINGS

Plan stakeholders from districts eligible for customized assistance (n=4) were asked to rate the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. Agreement was based on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The strongest level of agreement was related to being able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (m=4.2±..43). The lowest level of agreement was noted in the following statement: power is shared between my team and the Buffett Institute (3.2±.83). Additional mean and standard deviation findings are reported below.

The Buffett Institute is a key support for achieving my action plan goals 3.5±.87	My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan are a key support for achieving my action plan goals 3.5±.87
1 ... 5	1 ... 5
The Buffett Institute is responsive to my questions and helps me to obtain answers as needed 4.0±.71	My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan help me gain new knowledge that will support my action plan goals 3.5±.87
1 ... 5	1 ... 5
The Buffett Institute helps me resolve challenges related to my action plan goals 3.7±.83	My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan help me resolve challenges related to my action plan goals 3.5±.87
1 ... 5	1 ... 5
The Buffett Institute helps me gain new knowledge that will support my action plan goals m=4.0±.71	My colleagues within the Superintendents' plan are a key support for achieving my action plan goals 3.5±.87
1 ... 5	1 ... 5

| I am able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (m=4.2±.43) | My ideas are listened to and given appropriate consideration (m=3.7±1.1) | Power is shared between my team and the Buffett Institute (3.2±.83) |
| 1 ... 5 | 1 ... 5 | 1 ... 5 |

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COMPARISON OF FINDINGS BY STAKEHOLDER TYPE

A comparison analysis for the level of collaboration **between the Institute and all districts** across action plan domains was completed across district stakeholder type. Responses were split into 3 groups: **(1) family facilitator/home visitor (n=11)**, **(2) school-based leader (n=7)**, and **(3) district-based leader (n=18),** only individuals that self-identified as engaged in the action planning process answered the collaboration scale questions**.** Mean findings were based on a scale of 0-5 (0=no interaction at all, 5=collaboration).

	No interaction at all 0	Networking 1	Cooperation 2	Coordination 3	Coalition 4	Collaboration 5
District Organization and Capacity			2.6 / 2.8 / 3.1			
School Leadership			3.1 / 3.1 / 3.0			
Foundations for Early Learning			3.4 / 3.1 / 3.2			
Essential Child Experiences			3.3 / 3.0 / 3.1			
Family Focus			3.8 / 3.4 / 3.0			
Community-School Connections			3.6 / 3.3 / 3.1			
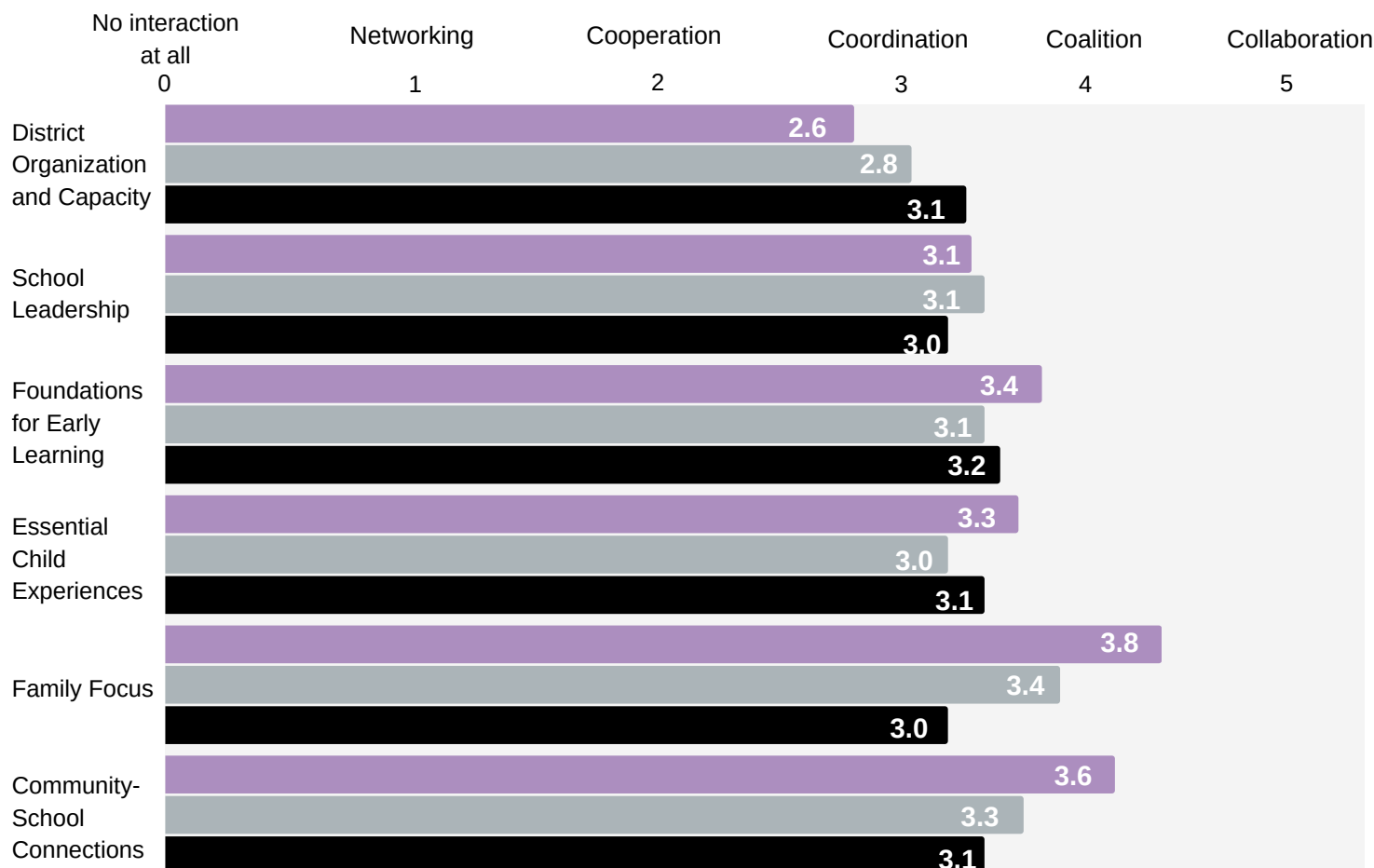
Findings are separated by District stakeholder type for the following: (1) School and District staff are able to speak openly and freely as members of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, (2) School and District staff ideas are listened to and their ideas are given appropriate consideration, and (3) Power is shared between the Buffett Institute and School and District staff. Agreement was based on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

	Speak openly & freely	Ideas are listened to	Power is shared
Paraprofessionals /Educators (n=10)	4.3	4.3	3.8
Family facilitators /Home Visitors (n=15)	4.6	4.6	4.4
School-based leader (n=13)	4.3	4.3	4.2
District-based leader (n=21)	4.7	4.5	4.1
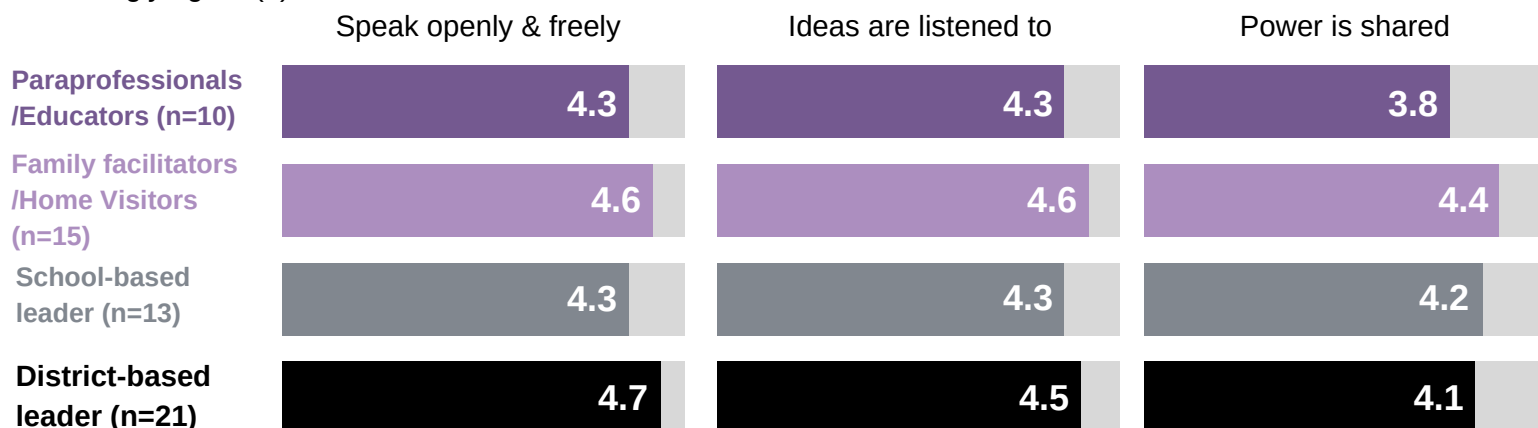
SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Institute staff members typically identified collaboration with districts involved in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan to fall within a level of "cooperation". Districts with school as hub sites typically perceived collaboration with Institute staff to fall within the "coalition" level. Districts eligible for customized assistance typically identified collaboration to be occurring at the "networking" level.

When considering an agreement scale of 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= somewhat agree, and 5=strongly agree), Institute respondents "somewhat agreed" that the Institute and Districts effectively share power (mean=3.75) and that District staff ideas are listened to and given appropriate consideration (mean=4.17). Districts with school as hub sites had higher levels of agreement and identified a mean of 4.16 related to power being shared between the Institute and districts and a mean of 4.49 related to being able to speak openly and freely as a member of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Customized assistance districts identified a mean of 3.2 related to power being shared and 4.2 related to the ability to speak openly and freely.

In addition, all districts staff typically somewhat agreed that Institute staff are responsive to questions, effective at resolving action plan goal-related challenges, and a key support for achieving action plan goals. Furthermore, all district respondents somewhat agreed that their colleagues within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan are a key support for action plan goal achievement, help them to gain new knowledge to support their action plan goals, and help to resolve challenges related to action plan goals. However, customized assistance districts means were typically lower (mean=3.5 vs 3.9) when considering Institute-specific questions (mean= 4.1 vs 3.8) and colleague-specific questions (mean=3.5 vs 3.9)

Specific to Action Plan domain constructs, district respondents from school as hub site districts and Institute respondents identified community-school connections (mean=3.4 vs. 2.6) to allow for the greatest level of collaboration with the Buffett Institute. Conversely, these district respondents and Institute respondents reported the construct of District organization and capacity to have the lowest level of collaboration (mean=2.9 vs. 2.0). Respondents from districts eligible for customized assistance identified district organization and capacity (mean=1.67) to have the highest level of collaboration with Institute staff.

When considering findings by all district stakeholder types, Family Facilitators/Home Visitors, School-based leaders, and District-based leaders reported collaborating with the Institute at the level of coordination (mean=3.3 vs. 3.1 vs. 3.1). When considering the ability to speak openly and freely as members of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, District-based leaders reported the highest level of agreement on the 5-point scale with a mean response of 4.7, while paraprofessionals/educators and school-based leaders somewhat agreed (mean=4.3). All stakeholder types somewhat or strongly agreed that their ideas were listened to and given appropriate consideration, with District-based leaders and Family Facilitators/Home Visitors having the highest levels of agreement (mean=4.5 vs. 4.6). Finally, all stakeholder types agreed power was somewhat shared between the Buffett Institute and school and District staff, with paraprofessionals and educators reporting the lowest level of agreement (mean=3.8) and Family Facilitators/Home Visitors reporting the highest (mean=4.4).

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Qualitative information was gathered from the open-ended survey questions within the District and Institute surveys and from subsequent interviews that took place with 10 Institute staff members and 12 district stakeholders from districts with school as hu (3 home visitors, 4 school-based administrators, 5 District-based administrators). Open-ended survey questions focused on benefits, strengths, accomplishments, and challenges of engagement in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Interview questions asked participants similarly focused questions but also asked individuals to expand on survey responses with respect to progress, challenges, and opportunities related to each program domain area (i.e., Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family & Community Partnership Engagement). Qualitative data were analyzed via a process of immersion and crystallization using a deductive content analytic approach. Overlapping survey and interview findings were combined in an open coding process. Three evaluators split initial transcription coding and met to discuss thematic findings. A qualitative expert then reviewed all codes and findings until a consensus was reached.

GREATEST BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT IN THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

There were three primary themes found related to benefits of engagement in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan from the perspectives of District stakeholders. These included (1) a shared focus between the Institute and school districts, (2) increased family engagement, and (3) access to resources and supports. The following quotes highlight these findings:

(1) "*A renewed strong focus on the importance of early childhood. The ongoing partnership helps us keep our focus on this work and provides excellent resources for the work*."
-District Administrator

(2) "*The most beneficial part is seeing more family engagement at our school than ever and creating a safe space for families*."
-District Family Facilitator

(3) "*Having an outside support system to help develop leaders, teachers, and students in the work of the SECP."*
-District Administrator

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GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN

DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Reaching Families Before School Years
"One of the biggest things is really reaching the families prior to them coming into school, when they are...under five, having them feel they are welcome at school and part of the [school name] family."
-School Administrator

Value of the Birth to 3rd Grade Approach
"I automatically think of that prenatal through third grade..in all decisions, it's not an afterthought anymore."
-School Administrator

Value of the Birth to 3rd Grade Approach
"10 years ago someone understood the importance of early childhood, the need for us to be successful as a community here in Omaha, Nebraska."
-Institute Staff Member

INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE

A Mind for Equity
"One of our goals is to close the opportunity gap. I feel like in some schools and districts we've seen that awareness of cultural responsiveness of parent and family engagement and all of these things that have now become built into a system instead of sprinkling equity on top."
-Institute Staff Member

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GREATEST STRENGTHS OF THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN

DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Effective Support
"Getting great support from Buffett, always feeling like we matter no matter what our role is."
-Home Visitor

Open Communication
"Their [Institute's] willingness to listen, meet our needs, and be a partner who is willing to help."
-District Administrator

Access to Subject Matter Experts
"We are able to tap into subject-matter experts to further our training."
-District Administrator

Trust and Relationships
"It varies by district, but the greatest strength is actual trust and relationship building that has happened over these last few months. I believe this is the foundation for future success."
-Institute Staff Member

Shared Vision Between Institute and Districts
"[There is a] shared mission and commitment to the children and families in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Collective action toward improvement in early childhood programming and systems."
-Institute Staff Member

INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE

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GREATEST CHALLENGES OF THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN

DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Balancing Expectations
"*Trying to balance the expectations of Buffett and our school to ensure we meet everyone's needs.*"
-Family Facilitator

Clarity of Expectations
"*The new plan has promise but still isn't fully clear. [We] just need time and to build the connections with the right people and see how we can make it work for us.*"
-District Administrator

Time Commitment
"*Time commitment. This is an important component to our school/district plan but it can be very time consuming for me.*"
-Principal

INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE

Communication
"*Communication! We have not been included in the district-level communication and invites to meetings are inconsistent. It is confusing who the leads are in the districts I work in.*"
-Institute Staff Member

Clarity of Expectations
"*[There is] inconsistency in Institute expectations, they vary from district to district.*"
-Institute Staff Member

Clarity of Outcomes
"*Undefined outcomes or ways of measuring success. Priorities are constantly being shifted and changed. [There are] unclear expectations.*"
-Institute Staff Member

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Interviewees were asked to identify how the Institute has supported progress related to leadership effectiveness goals as well as any challenges they experienced. In addition, interviewees were asked how they would like their districts to make improvements related to leadership effectiveness in future years.

Construct	District Perspective	Institute Perspective
Progress	District-based administrators believe School-based leaders are grounded in the Birth-to-3rd-grade approach and appropriate professional development has been given to allow for buy-in. *"They [Principals] take that full leadership because now they not only have the knowledge, they have the confidence on how to bridge that gap, meet with staff and be engrained with the whole school."* *-District Administrator*	Institute staff report the utilization and integration of evidence-based strategies to be beneficial to progress. Specifically, the Community of Practice available to principals was identified multiple times as a positive aspect of this domain. *"I'm really proud of the work done in this area. There's a couple of districts that have taken the work and really integrated it into their principal leadership."* *-Institute Staff Member*
Challenges	Time and follow-through were identified as challenges. Administrators felt that while buy-in was apparent, competing demands sometimes stalled progress. Interviewees identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a key influencer for competing priorities. *"The challenge I feel is for the Institute. This work is 100% what they do...it is one small piece of a much larger puzzle...we have many priorities competing for our time and attention."* *-District Administrator*	Institute staff reported the alignment of leadership goals to school-wide goals can be a challenge. Some Institute staff members identified principals as having different goals than other district staff members while others reported issues of district staff or district buy-in. In addition, time as a barrier was commonly mentioned. *"The Principal might be ready to start addressing things, but the district is not ready."* *-Institute Staff Member*
Future Strategies	There was a desire among interviewees to disseminate the knowledge principals had obtained from the Community of Practice to principals at other schools as well as at the teacher/paraprofessional level. *"I think just kind of share that vision...spread the knowledge and the wealth...I want to expand it from my school to all the elementary principals."* *-School Administrator*	Institute staff members want to continue to find ways for districts to collaborate with one another regarding how they are implementing strategies learned with the Community of Practice. *"Just the districts continuing to share ideas that work for them...the districts being able to share and collaborate on how things work and what we can do to make it work [at another district]."* *-Institute Staff Member*

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INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

Interviewees were asked to identify how the Institute has supported progress related to Instructional Excellence goals as well as any challenges they experienced. In addition, interviewees were asked how they would like their districts to make improvements related to Instructional Excellence in future years.

Construct	District Perspective	Institute Perspective
Progress	School and District administrators identified the implementation of social-emotional professional development opportunities and curriculums as signs of progress. Several districts reported implementing a new curriculum or providing a new educator training. *"They [Institute] chose the curriculum we use and we use it across [district name]. Then I got training on it in my one on ones with [Institute staff]. If I ever have questions about how to implement things...she's very helpful with that."* -District Administrator	Institute staff noted there were diverse opportunities in place for educators to receive professional development through opportunities such as PD for All, Instructional Toolkits and Coaching. In addition, staff felt they were starting to understand how to best meet needs across districts. *"There are some common themes that are showing in all of the districts, that's really allowing us to become an expert at what we're delivering."* -Institute Staff Member
Challenges	Interviewees report challenges translating knowledge into practice. Individuals stated school-based personnel were receiving additional education/training/curriculums but sometimes struggled to implement these changes. "*We have the training, we just don't know how to connect it."* -School Staff Member	In addition to the challenges of time and teacher workload, a challenge discussed by some was a concern for information overload for educators. Some worried that the professional development opportunities provided may not be leading to substantial changes in practice. "*Maybe we are trying to do too much and not go deep enough."* -Institute Staff Member
Future Strategies	Interviewees would like to develop new solutions to support educators and paraprofessionals to effectively engage in the evidence-based strategies they have learned. *"How do we build off of what we have done this year and continue to make sure that we're providing that equal PD [professional development] to teachers as well as our paraprofessionals because they work with students also?"* -District Administrator	Institute staff report a desire to evaluate data collected in this domain with the schools they serve to allow for continuous improvement to occur. *"Just take the time to look at it [data] and really go through that continuous improvement cycle. And it takes time. They have to come. You know, it takes time in addition to the school and team meetings that we have to really reflect and look at it."* -Institute Staff Member

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Interviewees were asked to identify how the Institute has supported progress related to family & community partnership engagement goals as well as any challenges they experienced. In addition, interviewees were asked how they would like their districts to make improvements related to family & community partnership engagement in future years.

Construct	District Perspective	Institute Perspective
Progress	School and District administrators identified increases in drop-in plays and socializations as something worth celebrating over the past year. In addition, interviewees report a solid foundation for family and community facilitators to build off of in future years. In addition, the resources the Institute is able to provide were reported as integral to current practices. *"They [Institute] support us with training our staff when it comes to family and community partnerships. They're just the expert."* -School Administrator	There was a level of agreement that the institute had effectively conveyed the importance of family and community partnership engagement to the schools and districts they work with. *"I think the Institute has supported that effort [family & community partnership engagement] in showing the importance of starting early through home visitation and bringing that concept to schools."* -Institute Staff Member
Challenges	Interviewees identified barriers such as parents' time, trust, and the COVID-19 pandemic as factors that negatively impact their ability to provide family engagement services to the degree they would like. "*The families that we need to engage with the most are the hardest...the challenge has been finding ways to give a voice to families who historically have felt like they didn't have a voice at the school."* -District Administrator	Institute staff reported competing priorities within some schools that can hinder progress in this domain. Staff noted that sometimes schools needed additional support to facilitate community engagement. *"I think that there are some systems that make it difficult to promote family engagement and community engagement, and really, it's up to the districts to disassemble and recreate a system."* -Institute Staff Member
Future Strategies	Future strategies that were discussed included: being flexible to parents needs, additional training, support for home visitors and developing plans to increase engagement in family-wide events. *"It's not a one-size fit all, not all parents want the same thing, just to be able to hone in on what our parents need and give them multiple opportunities, different ways to show what engagement and true partnership looks like."* -School Administrator	Institute staff would like to continue to find opportunities to develop programming that directly supports families diversity and allows for greater cultural considerations when developing engagement strategies. Staff members discussed the need for schools to meet the specific needs of the families they serve. *Every district is different. What is your true definition of family engagement? What do you want it to look like and be able to confidently say these are the great things we do?"* -Institute Staff Member

HOW CAN THE INSTITUTE SUPPORT FUTURE GOALS?

DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Support to Continue to Hone In on Program Focus
"Family engagement has been a huge part of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. I know there is a lot of insight and knowledge and resources in that area and kind of asking for their support with our teachers."
-School Administrator

Strategies to Align Program Goals with Ongoing Efforts
"I think sometimes things get duplicated between where we get supports from...we action plan with [other organizations] and sometimes it's hard to go to people to be like, let's join another initiative."
-District Administrator

Additional Concrete Support
"I feel like there is a lot of talk about philosophy and goals, but I don't feel like there is a lot of concrete examples or action steps to accomplish our goals."
-School Administrator

Continue to Develop Strategies for Accountability
"Maybe we could grow in the accountability space to make sure goals are moving forward. And when they are not, how do we address that?"
-Institute Staff Member

Greater Community Involvement
"Definitely getting the community more involved in what we do...Family/community is the bridge to academic success."
-Institute Staff Member

Continue to Try and Align School/District Goals with Domains
"I feel like being a little more intentional about making the connection between the three domains, the three domains should align with the goals."
-Institute Staff Member

INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE

SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute was perceived by District interviewees (n=12) as an effective source for information dissemination and expertise. District stakeholders reported they value the Birth-to-3rd-grade approach and believe a great accomplishment since program onset has been the ability to reach families before school begins. In addition, District respondents reported that they are well-equipped with the resources and/or curriculums they have received from the Institute and see Institute staff as expert leaders in their respective areas. By comparison, Institute staff (n=10) saw the greatest accomplishments of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan as the value placed on the Birth-to-3rd-grade approach, and a developing foundation for ensuring equitable practices across districts.

Related to identified barriers, District interviewees identified challenges when trying to balance expectations of the Institute with expectations of their schools and districts. Both Institute and District interviewees desired enhanced clarity of programmatic expectations. However, several reported that clarity had improved over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year. When considering barriers within the domains of Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family & Community Partnership Engagement, time, workload, and translation of new knowledge into practice was prevalent across Action Plan domains. This knowledge translation refers not only to Principals sharing information learned with teachers and paraprofessionals but also to Home Visitors and/or Family/Community Facilitators translating information and/or curriculums learned with families. In addition, there was some concern that information overload could be hindering translation of knowledge into practice. Once again, aligning program priorities across schools and districts was commonly discussed as a barrier across domains.

Related to leadership effectiveness, District and Institute interviewees indicated that they would like to enhance collaboration among District leaders as well as improve strategies for disseminating knowledge learned from the Principals' Community of Practice. Specific to instructional excellence, there was a desire from Institute leaders to use data more strategically to improve programmatic efforts, and District interviewees wanted to find ways to build on the professional development received over the past year. Finally, with regard to family & community partnership engagement, District interviewees wanted to maintain flexibility to meet families where they are and Institute staff wanted to build on efforts to ensure culturally considerate programming.

Overall, it was reported by District interviewees that the Institute can continue to support school and district progress by helping schools hone in on their program focuses. In addition, Districts indicated they would like more concrete support for their educators to support translation of philosophy into practical strategies. Institute representatives believed the Institute should continue to find ways to help districts maintain accountability for their action plan goal progress as well as increase community involvement and buy-in for programmatic efforts. Once again, Institute and District interviewees reported a desire to develop strategies to align programmatic strategies within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan with ongoing school priorities and curriculums.

Leadership Effectiveness

1.What effect does the SECP have on principal leadership?

A self-reflective assessment from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) was disseminated to Principals from 8 Omaha-based schools. This survey tool measured progress made within the Principals' monthly community of practice meetings that took place with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. The community of practice focused on 2 NAESP competencies ("Develop and foster partnerships with families and communities" and "Ensure equitable opportunities"). Principals were asked to complete a self-reflective assessment at two time points (January & May). Reflective assessments provided several constructs and asked respondents to rate themselves on a scale of (1) highly inaccurate, (2) inaccurate, (3) accurate, or (4) highly accurate.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Self-Reflective Assessment

Survey findings for all participating Principals

Mean scores are reported in the report below at each time point with pre scores reported in Grey and post scores reported in Yellow.

COMPETENCY 2: DEVELOP AND FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES
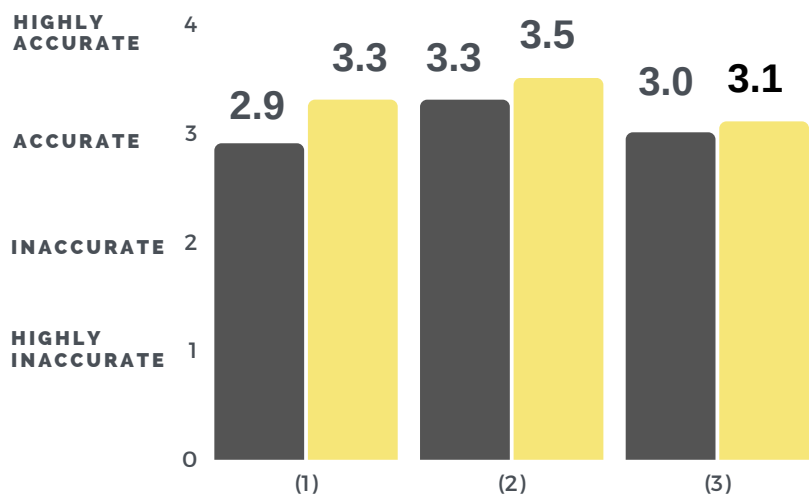
Strategy 2.1: Engage intentionally with families, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized.

- (1) As a principal, I have full awareness and understanding of the varied needs that exist for my students Birth through 3rd grade and their families.
- (2) There are dedicated spaces in our school to encourage families to visit and collaborate with others.
- (3) Our school enacts a communication plan that includes multiple strategies to partner with families and provides services and supports to families depending on their individual needs (e.g., home language, disability status).

Strategy 2.2: Establish relationships and support collaboration with early care and education, including home visitors.

- (4) I am familiar with and have established relationships with ECE programs in my community.
- (5) Our school provides opportunities and supports to kindergarten teachers to meet with ECE teachers (both those on-site and in community-based programs and including home visitors).

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COMPETENCY 2: DEVELOP AND FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Chart: Strategy 2.3 (items 6, 7, 8)
- (6) 3.0 / 3.3
- (7) 2.6 / 2.8
- (8) 3.0 / 3.3

Scale: HIGHLY ACCURATE (4), ACCURATE (3), INACCURATE (2), HIGHLY INACCURATE (1)
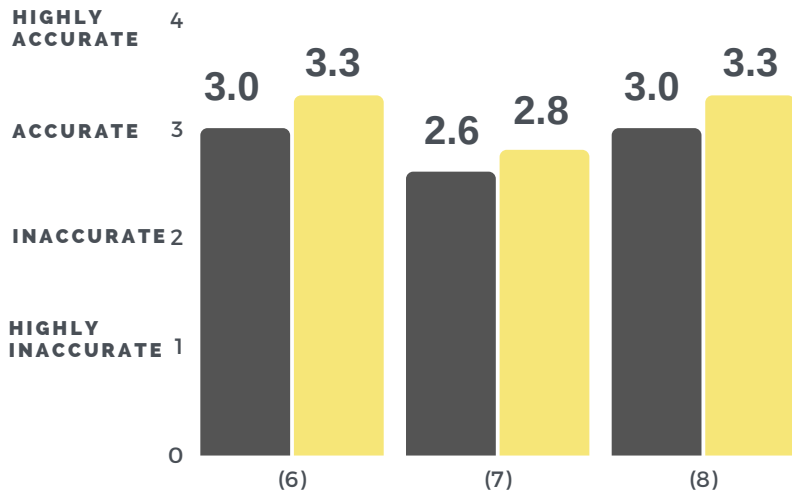
Strategy 2.3: Ensure smooth transitions for students and families not only between the variety of ECE programs and kindergarten but also across the Birth through 3rd-grade continuum.

- (6) Our school has a transition plan in place to welcome and embrace students and families new to our school.
- (7) We reach out to and partner with ECE programs and community organizations to support the transitions of students and families.
- (8) We have a well-defined, manageable, and shared process to help parents register at our school (e.g., supportive of languages other than English).

Strategy 2.4: Facilitate linkages with community supports and services to meet the needs of Birth through 3rd-grade students and families.

- (9) I am aware of or know where to find community supports that will meet the needs of all students and their families.
- (10) As a school, we have defined a process and identified dedicated personnel to serve as family liaisons to inform/coordinate external support for families with Birth through 3rd-grade students.
- (11) Our students are provided with opportunities to participate in a variety of enrichment learning activities outside of the school day and during the summer.

Chart: Strategy 2.4 (items 9, 10, 11)
- (9) 3.0 / 3.3
- (10) 3.5 / 3.6
- (11) 3.1 / 3.3

Scale: HIGHLY ACCURATE (4), ACCURATE (3), INACCURATE (2), HIGHLY INACCURATE (1)

COMPETENCY 4: ENSURE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Chart: Strategy 4.1 (items 1, 2, 3)
- (1) 3.0 / 2.8
- (2) 2.8 / 2.8
- (3) 3.1 / 3.0

Scale: HIGHLY ACCURATE (4), ACCURATE (3), INACCURATE (2), HIGHLY INACCURATE (1)
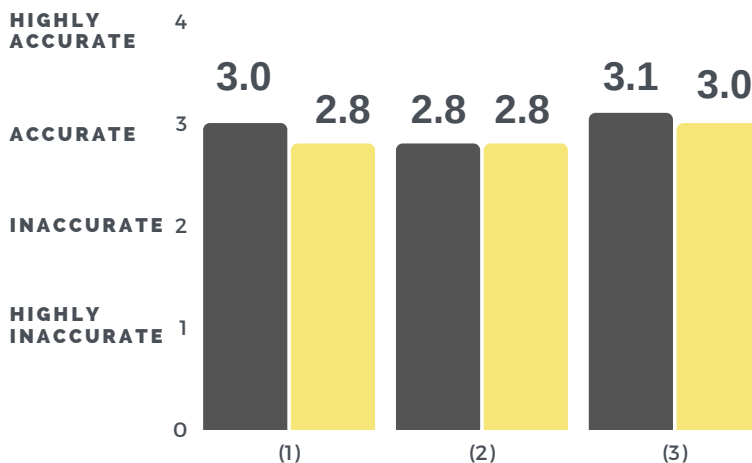
Strategy 4.1: Develop critical self-awareness and knowledge of oppression, privilege, and cultural competence.

- (1) As a leader, I engage in professional learning to examine how race and privilege impact my own values, beliefs, perceptions, leadership, and decision-making.
- (2) I have developed, and regularly revisit, my own personal action plan to develop my capacity to be an equity-minded leader.
- (3) I engage in conversations with students, families, and staff to better understand their perspectives and experiences pertaining to race, culture, socio-economic status, and gender identity.

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COMPETENCY 4: ENSURE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES
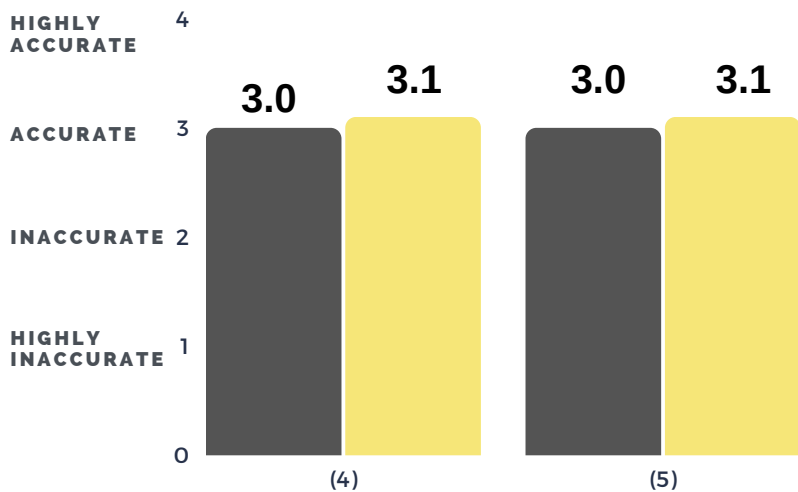
Strategy 4.2: Establish a school climate that is open, inclusive, and affirming of differences (for staff, students, and their families).

- (4) I have established trusting, respectful relationships with all stakeholder groups to create a climate that is open, equity focused, and affirming of difference.
- (5) As a school, we engage in professional learning that improves our culturally responsive and sustaining practices to help staff create learning environments that are inclusive and identity-affirming for students Birth through 3rd grade.

Strategy 4.3: Facilitate linkages with community supports and services to meet the needs of Birth through 3rd-grade students and families.

- (6) As a school, we have conducted an equity audit with a team of stakeholders that mirrors the demographics of the school. We have examined a wide range of data and used this information to identify areas of disproportionality and disparities.
- (7) To focus on equity in Birth through 3rd grade, we intentionally examine data related to enrollment in home visiting, suspension/expulsion, attendance, inclusion of children with disabilities, access for dual language and English learners, and engagement of diverse family voices.
- (8) As a school, we have developed an on-going process to monitor the implementation of equity measures, examine new data, and evaluate progress with an equity lens to inform our continuous improvement process.
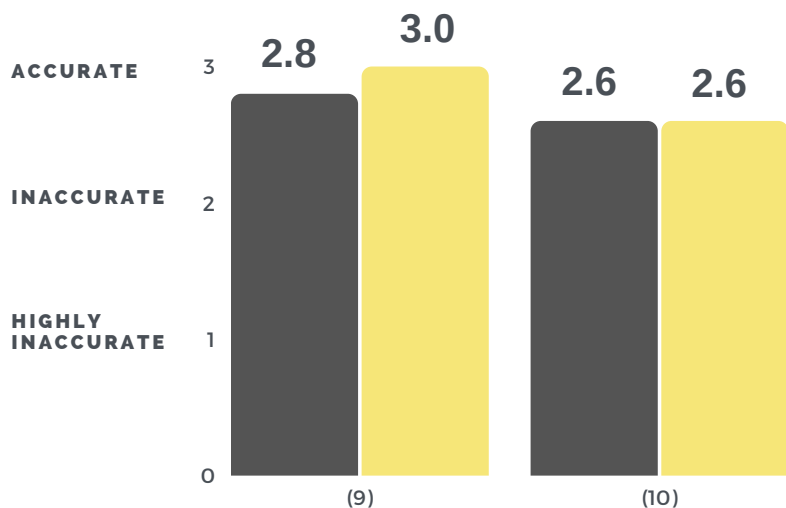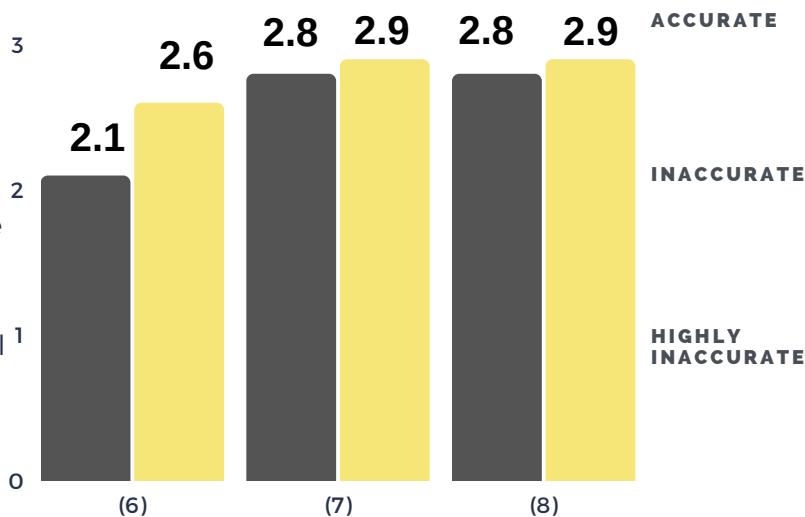
Strategy 4.4: Differentiate resources and strategies to ensure students, teachers, staff, and families have equitable opportunity to succeed.

- (9) I am aware of inequities that exist in my school and can identify how these disparities show up in programming, student achievement, resource allocation, and family engagement.
- (10) As a school, we have established clear ways for traditionally marginalized Birth through 3rd-grade families to share their perspectives, ideas, and concerns, thereby informing the adjustment of school practices and policies.

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Leadership Effectiveness

2. What effect do SECP leadership activities (e.g., action planning, birth through grade 3 workshops) have on district-level goals?

During the annual Action Planning Retreats within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, focus groups were held with Districts that had school as hub sites (Bellevue Public Schools, DC West Community Schools, Millard Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools, Ralston Public Schools, and Westside Community Schools. District team members were asked to reflect on their engagement in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan over the past year. A 5-question semi-structured interview guide was utilized to evaluate progress, challenges, and future directions within the three primary program domains of Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family & Community Partnerships Engagement.

Qualitative data were analyzed by Evaluators within the Munroe Meyer Institute. Evaluators transcribed focus group recordings verbatim and engaged in a process of immersion/crystallization of findings. Data was coded using a deductive coding framework in which codes were collapsed into categories based on the established questions. The following report shares findings from all focus groups.

PROGRESS MADE IN 2022-2023

Individuals were asked to rate their self-perceived progress for their action plan goals in each domain on a scale of 1-100. If multiple ratings were given within one district, the mean scale score was utilized. The mean score across all six districts can be seen below. Family and Community Partnerships Engagement related goals were identified to have the greatest progress with a mean progress score of 83.8 out of 100 being provided. Leadership effectiveness had the lowest mean progress score with a score of 70.8 out of 100.

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS (70.8)	INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE (79.6)	FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ENGAGEMENT (83.8)

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LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Focus group participants were asked to discuss progress and challenges specific to each domain within the action plan. Findings related to progress and challenges for each domain (Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family and Community Partnerships Engagement) can be seen below.

Construct	Identified Themes	Example Quotes
Progress	***Effective professional development has been given to school/district leadership*** ○ Individuals felt the professional development opportunities provided to school/district leadership enhanced understanding and appreciation for the Birth to Grade 3 approach. ***A solid foundation has been laid*** ○ Respondents believed a foundation has been set to allow leadership to effectively build relationships with school staff and to support staff's ability to engage with students and families	*"We were presenting...what are our foundations of early childhood and how what we're doing now will effect long-term in terms of developing that social-emotional awareness and equipping both kids and adults with the skills necessary."* *"I like that we had a system in place... We're having the ability to have those conversations [about early childhood] and really set aside some time to — in a busy year — to have some really specific focus."*
Challenges	***Time is limited*** ○ A lack of time was frequently discussed as a key barrier to action plan progress. Competing demands at the district and school level were often identified. ***Leadership Staff Capacity*** ○ Districts reported leadership staff capacity to limit goal progress due to staff buy-in, staff turnover, and staff capacity while addressing competing demands.	*"I think a challenge with all of this work is, it kind of goes back to that time piece. This is competing with a whole lot of things that are priorities for a school."* *"One of our goals was to be able to do some personalized learning and some coaching. And just as I found myself covering more in classrooms and doing that and not as much time coaching except on the job or in the hallway type things, I know that the district felt that as well."*

INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

Construct	Identified Themes	Example Quotes
Progress	***Improved Early Childhood Knowledge Base*** ○ Individuals felt that the curriculums implemented by the Institute and the coaching/professional development opportunities provided had increased school/district staff knowledge. ***Effective Instruction is Happening*** ○ Some interviewees reported that their teachers were meeting expectations of district leadership related to instructional practice. Others reported beginning to see growth from the curriculums and professional development opportunities that had been implemented over the past year.	*"That's really helpful to have Buffett come in and help with the Second Step...That was incredible to have the consistency of that."* *"I feel like they [teachers] do exactly what we ask of them and they do an awesome job."* *"We worked a lot on those academic conversations and then pulled that into our play and learns, and we pulled that into our socialization groups."*
Challenges	***Time is limited*** ○ A lack of time to engage in new curriculums or implement new strategies learned was frequently acknowledged. ***Identifying the right strategies to support students*** ○ Respondents felt that students required varied strategies for support, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some districts desired further support from the Institute to help develop skills related to engaging learners.	*"I think the biggest barrier again comes down to time to cover everything and really effectively support teachers in everything that they need to have to be effective teachers."* *"You hear everyone say, like, post-COVID, kids are a little bit different and they're a little bit more on edge. And so I think we're we're dealing with behaviors and family structures that are different than what we might have had pre-COVID. And I do think teachers are feeling that."*

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ENGAGEMENT

Construct	Identified Themes	Example Quotes
Progress	***Community and Family Partnerships Have Improved*** ○ Every district felt that their engagement with families and/or community partners had increased over the past year. Some respondents felt their district had made great strides in increasing the number of community partnerships while others reported improved family relationships. Evidence cited for this included higher numbers of families enrolled in home visiting, increased attendance at school and/or school events, and improved scores on the annual Family Engagement Survey.	*"We hear from our kids in the classroom about these things all the time, going to the library, all the stuff you're doing [community events], our kids are talking about it. They love it."* *"Then I think it's back to the overall goal.. of families just feeling welcome in the school. The more they're relaxed... the more they feel a partnership with the school, I think our outcomes only go up from there."* *"I think based on our measure [family engagement survey], we had great success for this. In terms of engagement, the amount of responses you've got on the family engagement survey...tons of things to celebrate."*
Challenges	***Improving trust between families and schools*** • Several respondents reported difficulties engaging with families due to some families lack of trust or belief that they would benefit from services, such as home visiting. Multiple respondents felt the dynamic between schools and parents had shifted negatively since the COVID-19 pandemic. ***Developing Authentic Relationships with Families*** • Some respondents felt the increases in family reach were apparent but there was still room for improvement related to the quality of the relationship with families. Multiple districts desired additional support from the Institute in this area.	*"I think the interest has shifted and the challenge to get people out of their comfort zone is more difficult because for the past two years it was acceptable for, 'Oh, you don't have to come out. Stay home and do everything virtually. We can keep a distance. It's dangerous to be together.'"* *"I think we're asking families how they want to be engaged, which feels different than what they've experienced, and so that's a barrier. Even though it's the right way to approach it, it feels different."*

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FUTURE STRATEGIES

Focus group participants were asked to identify what they need to be successful in achieving their action plan goals for the 2023-2024 academic year. Findings from all districts can be seen below.

Leadership Effectiveness

1. Expand professional development opportunities to additional school/district staff
2. Enhance focus of action plan goal to make more achievable
3. Continue the Principal Community of Practice Meetings
4. Continue to engage with district/school staff to enhance buy-in of goal efforts

Instructional Excellence

1. Continue training staff on foundational skills and scaffolding for educators
2. Continue to support implementation of evidence-based practices
3. Continue and enhance new social-emotional learning curriculum efforts
4. Support educators' ability to try new strategies and evaluate their impact

Family & Community Partnerships Engagement

1. Identify innovative strategies to improve quality and quantity of home visiting families
2. Develop strategies to improve quality of family partnerships
3. Increase community partnership outreach opportunities
4. Learn from existing strategies/Institute strategies that can leverage family partnerships effectively

Birth through Grade 3 Leadership Workshops

In the Summer of 2023, two Birth through Grade 3 leadership workshops took place with School Districts residing in the Douglas/Sarpy County area. The purpose of these workshops was to identify the current status of a district to assist in determining their readiness in implementing a Birth through Grade 3 approach. The first workshop took place with Papillion La Vista Community Schools on May 31st, 2023 and focused on the utilization of a P3 Audit Tool to support an internal assessment of Birth through 3rd grade alignment to district policies, procedures, and practices. The 2nd workshop took place on June 20th with administrators from Papillion La Vista Community Schools and Gretna Public Schools and focused on understanding the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's Birth through Grade 3 approach and to support building district cohesion related to the Birth through Grade 3 approach. A post-workshop survey was disseminated to participating individuals immediately following each workshop. The survey was designed to gather feedback related to workshop experience, impact, and future directions. Descriptive findings for each survey can be seen below. The most common reason for participation cited in workshop 1 was "to support leadership of Birth through Grade 3 in district systems" (25%). The most common reason cited for participation in workshop 2 was "to align pre-existing district goals with the Birth through Grade 3 approach" (31.5%).

MOST COMMON REASONS DISTRICTS CHOSE TO PARTICIPATE IN BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3 LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP 1 (N=7)

Reason	Percentage
To establish or expand relationships for collaboration with the Institute	8.3%
To support leadership of Birth through Grade 3 in district systems	25%
To align pre-existing district goals with the Birth through Grade 3 approach	16.7%
To develop Birth through Grade 3 District Goals	8.3%
To develop a plan that will guide my district in their Birth through Grade 3 approach	16.7%
To gain new information about the Birth through Grade 3 approach	8.3%
To gain access to new resources	8.3%
To learn about the Birth through Grade 3 approach	8.3%

WORKSHOP 2 (N=6)

Reason	Percentage
To establish or expand relationships for collaboration with the Institute	6.2%
To support leadership of Birth through Grade 3 in district systems	18.7%
To align pre-existing district goals with the Birth through Grade 3 approach	31.5%
To develop Birth through Grade 3 District Goals	18.7%
To develop a plan that will guide my district in their Birth through Grade 3 approach	25%

Workshop participants were also asked to identify their level of agreement with the following statements on a 1-5 scale (1, strongly disagree, 5, strongly agree). Mean responses can be seen below. The highest level of agreement within Workshop 1 was found for the following statements: I felt supported by the Buffett Institute's team throughout the workshop process (4.5); Workshop 1 was a positive use of my team's time (4.5); and The information I gained from workshop 1 will be of value to my district (4.5). The highest level of agreement from workshop 2 was the following item: After workshop 2, I understand the Institute's Birth through Grade 3 approach (4.3). The item with the lowest level of agreement after both workshops included: My district knows what gaps we need to address to transform into a Birth through Grade 3 approach district (3.8 & 3.3).

AFTER WORKSHOP 1...

Statement	Score
I have gained new information	4.4
I understand what the National P3 Center District Audit Tool entails	4.4
I have a comprehensive understanding of how to utilize the National P3 Center's District Audit Tool	4.0
Using the National P3 Center's District Audit Tool was a value to my district	4.4
My district knows what gaps we need to address to transform into a birth-grade 3 approach district	3.8
My district can apply what we learned from the National P3 Center's District Audit Tool	4.2
I feel better prepared to set district-level goals to address a Birth through grade 3 approach	4.2
I felt supported by the Buffett Institute's team throughout the workshop process	4.5
Workshop 1 was a positive use of my team's time	4.5
The information I gained from workshop 1 will be of value to my district	4.5
I got what I hoped out of workshop 1	4.2
I would recommend workshop 1 to another district leader	4.2

AFTER WORKSHOP 2...

Statement	Score
I have gained new information	4.0
I understand the Buffett Early Childhood Institute Birth through Grade 3 approach	4.3
My district knows what gaps we need to address to transform into a Birth through Grade 3 district	3.3
My district can apply the Institute Birth through Grade 3 approach to align with my district	4.0
I feel better prepared to set district-level goals to address a Birth through Grade 3 approach	3.5
I feel utilizing the National p3-audit tool (workshop 1) was necessary for our team	3.6
I feel supported by the Institute's team throughout the workshop process	3.8
The information I learned has positively impacted the way my district will approach goal-setting	3.5
Workshop 2 was a positive use of my team's time	3.8
The information I gained from workshop 2 will be of value to my district	4.0
I got what I hoped out of workshop 2	3.8
I would recommend workshop 2 to another district leader	3.8

Instructional Excellence

1. What effect does the SECP have on classroom practices?

Survey Overview

In the spring of 2023, a survey was disseminated to educators engaged in professional development within the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Educators were asked to reflect on the evidence-based instructional practices and learning opportunities they had engaged in over the last year for evaluation purposes. This report highlights the descriptive findings from the survey.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- A total of 19 surveys were completed by educators and paraprofessionals from two school districts.
- Respondents had worked with an Institute coach for an average of 7.2± 2.35 months.
- 52.6% of respondents identified their current role as educator, followed by 47.4% as paraprofessional.
- 73.6% of respondents identified as Caucasian/White.
- 57.9% of respondents had worked in early childhood for at least 5 years.
- 94.4% of respondents typically supported preschool-age children, with one individual supporting kindergartners.

100%

of survey respondents reported that the instructional opportunities they engaged in during the 2022-2023 academic year had been helpful to support the overall social-emotional development of children in their program.

MOST COMMON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Participants were asked to identify what professional development opportunities they engaged in since June 2022. The top activities included:
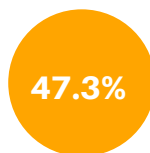
47.3%
One on One Coaching
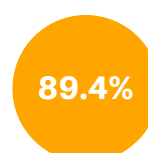
89.4%
Pyramid Model Training
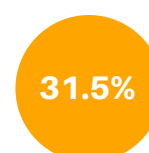
31.5%
TPOT Classroom Observations

Respondents were asked to identify the best part of receiving professional development through the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Responses centered around effective strategies, resource sharing, and a supportive network.

"Getting the training and the support from the school. Being trained on effective strategies we use often with the students."
-Paraprofessional

"It [Coaching] helps to support student needs with additional resources and allows us to problem-solve when students have high needs or challenging behaviors."
-Educator

"Knowing that there is help whenever we need it. Also, giving us ideas we might not think of."
-Paraprofessional

Classroom Related Skills

Educators were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements related to engaging in evidence-based classroom-related skills. Respondents were asked to reflect on how their instructional practices have changed from before the current academic year (2022-2023) to the time of survey completion. Respondents were asked to rank survey items as Not Applicable or on a scale of 1-4 (1=Almost Never, 4=Almost Always). Mean scores are reported below for each time point. Practices before the 2022-2023 academic year are in green, and current practices are noted in orange. A few of the largest self-reported increases in agreement include, "I use a visual schedule with children" and "I use a variety of strategies to help children learn social skills such as sharing and initiating play."

Statement	Before (green)	Current (orange)
I use a variety of strategies to build relationships with children in my care.	3.47	3.84
I follow a daily routine with children.	3.63	3.79
I use a visual schedule with children.	3.05	3.63
I am able to help children calm down when they are upset.	3.16	3.58
I use strategies that help prevent challenging behavior.	3.05	3.53
I use a variety of strategies to help children learn social skills, such as sharing and initiating play.	3.00	3.58
I help children problem-solve when they have a conflict.	3.32	3.79
I have posted rules with visuals and I refer to the rules throughout the day.	2.89	3.47
I give children specific positive feedback for following the rules.	3.11	3.68
When many children request my attention at the same time, I successfully respond to their needs.	3.32	3.53
I use creative strategies to meet the diverse needs of children in my care.	3.11	3.58
I share information about ways to support children's social-emotional development with families.	2.79	3.11
I use "time out" as a consequence when children misbehave.	1.26	1.37

Child-Specific Skills

Educators were asked to identify if there was a child in their care with ongoing challenging behaviors. 100% of respondents reported "Yes" and were asked a series of child-specific questions. Respondents were asked to reflect on their practice before the 2022-2023 academic year and their current practice. Once again, educators were asked to mark Not Applicable or select an option on a scale of 1-4 (1=Almost Never, 4=Almost Always). Mean scores are reported below for each time point. Practices before the 2022-2023 academic year are in green, and current practices are noted in orange. The largest increases in agreement between the two timepoints were seen for "I use effective strategies to address this child's challenging behavior or social-emotional issues" and "I have coping skills that keep me calm when this child's behavior pushes my buttons."

I use effective strategies to address this child's challenging behaviors or social-emotional issues.
- 2.94
- 3.47

I support this child's parents when they have concerns about his or her behavior or social-emotional development.
- 3.29
- 3.52

I share information about this child with my coach.
- 3.07
- 3.26

I have coping skills that keep me calm when this child's behaviors "push my buttons."
- 2.94
- 3.27

I can find resources in the community to help this child and his or her family with the problems they face.
- 2.55
- 2.66

I can help this child learn to use positive skills to replace his or her challenging behaviors.
- 2.89
- 3.21

I try to keep this child from being sent home due to challenging behavior.
- 3.0
- 3.16

0   1   2   3   4

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Educator Perceptions

Educators were asked to reflect on their experience working with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute since June 2022. They were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) the extent to which they agreed with the following statements. Findings indicate:

57.8% of respondents somewhat agreed (15.7%) or strongly agreed (42.1%) the Institute changed the way they approach their instructional practice.

77.7% of respondents somewhat agreed (33.3%) or strongly agreed (44.4%) the Institute had given them new ideas for how to approach their instructional practice.

72.1% of respondents somewhat agreed (33.3%) or strongly agreed (38.8%) the Institute had given them new resources to use in their instructional practice.

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest challenge they have faced when changing their instructional practice over the past year. Typical responses focused on two general areas: time commitments for trainings and meetings, and administrator/peer buy-in. Example quotes can be seen below.

"*Making sure the staff is on the same page with regards to student needs and providing consistent supports.*" – Educator

"*The extra trainings and meetings were time consuming.*" – Educator

In conclusion, educators and paraprofessionals self-reported that their ability to engage in evidence-based practices increased over the 2022-2023 school year. Opportunities related to the Pyramid Model were most commonly reported, and survey respondents view the Institute as a supportive partner for resource dissemination and as a supportive network. Future consideration could be given to time management of professional development opportunities and developing strategies to encourage school-wide buy-in.
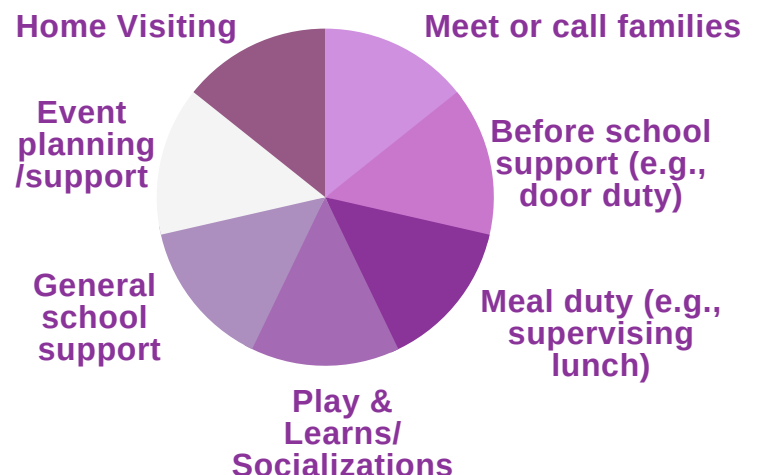
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Family and Community Partnerships Engagement

1.What effect does the SECP have on how family facilitators, community facilitators and/or home visitors engage with families?

In April 2023, two focus groups took place with a cohort of home visitor/family facilitators and community facilitators (n=7). These individuals directly support efforts within the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Individuals were interviewed in-person by Evaluators from the Munroe Meyer Institute and were asked to share their thoughts and experiences related to their current role. Questions were guided by constructs of the Social Support Theory seen below. Focus group data were transcribed verbatim and entered into Nvivo qualitative analysis software. A constant comparative analysis was employed. This process involved three major stages which included: (1) open coding data into small units or chunks with a common descriptor or phrase (2) grouping codes into categories and (3) developing themes that express each grouping.

CONSTRUCT	DEFINITION
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	Expressions of empathy, love, trust and caring
INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT	Tangible aid and service
INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT	Advice, suggestions and information
APPRAISAL SUPPORT	Encouragement, information useful for self-evaluation

Individuals were asked to start the focus group by describing their roles and responsibilities within a typical day. Please note these varied based on type of role (i.e., community facilitator, family facilitator and/or home visitor. The following graph describes the most common responses.

"I don't know that I've had two days that are exactly the same in the whole year. My day always starts out with greeting kids at the front door, so I have morning duty. And then from there, it just depends on what's needed to be done. I have some socialization playgroups that happen during the week. I have some home visiting that happens during the week. I support the pre-K program when they need it. I have a clothing closet and a SNAP program..so every day looks different just depending on what's needed in the building. " -Reflection on typical day in current role

Home Visiting

Meet or call families

Event planning /support

Before school support (e.g., door duty)

General school support

Meal duty (e.g., supervising lunch)

Play & Learns/ Socializations

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Interviewees were asked to discuss the following (a) how they provide emotional support to the families they serve, (b) if there is any type of emotional support they wish they could provide but can't, (c) what resources they would need to provide additional emotional support and (d) what challenges they encounter when providing emotional support. The following themes were identified related to emotional support.

Identifying as a trusted resource

Interviewees felt they provided support for parents by being seen as a trusted resource that they could talk to. They reported parents saw them as a safe space to come to.

> *Sometimes it's just holding space, holding space for parents, especially moms, who maybe don't have a good support system. And you are their person that they know they can kind of vent to and express their concerns to.*

Concern that they are not enough

Interviewees report being concerned that their services are not enough for the families they work with. Individuals reported worrying about their families after work and wanting services such as therapy or counseling for both parents and children to be more easily accessible.

> *One challenge for me is a lot of these families could use counseling and sometimes finding a therapist or finding counselors in our community..that can be a challenge. In my case, my families are Spanish-speaking.*

A desire to educate parents further

Related to resources needed to provide emotional support, there was a desire to learn more about how to support families when they were dealing with challenging behavior from a child.

> *It would really be nice to have like Conscious Discipline training or somebody that can have these [trainings] like once a quarter for these parents to come to.*

INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT

Interviewees were asked to discuss the following (a) how they provide instrumental support to the families they serve, (b) if there is any type of instrumental support they wish they could provide but can't, (c) what resources they would need to provide additional instrumental support and (d) what challenges they encounter when providing instrumental support. The following themes were identified related to instrumental support.

Sharing curriculum resources
Interviewees discussed various curriculums they provide to the families they serve. Some reported trying to eliminate resource barriers and bringing families the materials they needed to engage in curriculum-based activities at home.

> *I would say a lot of times even though our curriculum does encourage families to use things from their home, I do like to bring items because I don't want to assume that they have it or I don't want to send them on a wild goose chase in their home to have those resources.*

Helping to meet basic needs
Some interviewees reported supporting or providing services that meet basic human needs such as a clothing closet for families, a backpack program, drive thru pantries or snack programs.

> *We have a clothing closet as well that we help run. Also backpacks. We have like a food to-go bag, so we stow them to help disburse them to families in need.*

A desire to share more resources
Although one individual reported having a grant to support book purchases other individuals wished they could give families more books to take home. Others desired to bring in resources to meet the needs mothers face. For example, to bring in driving instructors to help mothers learn to drive or behavioral health specialists that could be made available to parents and children.

> *If we can provide like driving classes or like a driving instructor once a week, once a month, that'd be phenomenal to change those kids and mothers lives.*

INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

Interviewees were asked to discuss the following (a) how they provide informational support to the families they serve, (b) if there is any type of informational support they wish they could provide but can't, (c) what resources they would need to provide additional informational support and (d) what challenges they encounter when providing informational support. The following themes were identified related to informational support.

Providing feedback to parents related to child development

Interviewees reported that in addition to general information sharing through curriculum based learning they provided feedback to parents regularly. Some reported using developmental checklists to pinpoint areas of focus.

> " *I think the developmental checklists are really helpful too..just to let them know like "you're doing great and look at how much they're growing" or on the flip side, if you have a little one where you may be concerned. A lot of the ASQ [ages and stages questionnaires] are really helpful, just to start conversations about screening.* "

Adjusting information to meet parents needs

Some individuals reported that they follow the parents lead when it comes to information sharing. This may influence whether paper copies are provided, how materials are translated or the tone of the conversation.

> " *I feel like meeting their needs, like some parents do want physical printouts from like activity, their curriculum that we're using and some are like, don't give it to me because they literally leave it like just send me a picture or an email. So following their leads.* "

Having tough conversations

Some individuals reported no barriers to providing informational support. Others stated they were challenged by difficult conversations at times when trying to share information, especially with families of a child experiencing a developmental delay.

> " *I'm starting to have a lot of families that have children with a delay..I had one mom, she was told that her son might have autism and that is an area I don't know enough about. So just kind of hearing her and seeing what kind of information she was given by the doctor and reassuring her not to stress too much, talk to the provider, get all the information you can. I think that is a challenge for me because I do not have experience or wouldn't know where to start.* "

APPRAISAL SUPPORT

Interviewees were asked to discuss the following (a) how they provide appraisal support to the families they serve, (b) if there is any type of appraisal support they wish they could provide but can't, (c) what resources they would need to provide additional appraisal support and (d) what challenges they encounter when providing appraisal support. The following themes were identified related to appraisal support.

Encouragement with verbal and nonverbal Communication
Interviewees report being a cheerleader for their families and finding ways to give encouragement through positive praise and reinforcement on a regular basis.

"
I would tell mom, "you are doing an amazing job". A smile, eye contact, showing interest in her and the children. Remind them you know, being a parent is challenging enough.
"

Improving upon ways to respond in emotional situations
A majority of interviewees reported a desire to further their knowledge related to child development discussions and tough conversations that can arise when parents have a concern.

"
It never hurts to have more training, a lot of people just need training on how to handle emotional moments or how to respond because sometimes people can respond in a way that could really damage a relationship.
"

A desire to provide praise in other ways
Some individuals noted they would like to be able to celebrate families accomplishments in other ways such as with small incentives.

"
We do a lot of verbal [praise] or text messages for families like, "Oh my God, they just did it. They just went to the bathroom." We've been talking about potty training for months, and of course you celebrate. But wouldn't it be nice..to write a nice little card and have postage and maybe a gift card to buy underpants instead of just trying to get something donated..that would be amazing.
"

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GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Interviewees were also asked to identify their greatest accomplishment so far in their current role. Participants largely reported their greatest accomplishments to be linked to developing trusting relationships with parents/families and being seen as a source of support not only within schools but in the community as well. In addition, seeing children succeed developmentally was identified frequently as an accomplishment. Overall, there was a consensus that the work being done had value and was effective despite the barriers they faced.

> *I guess knowing this mom has faith in me and trusts me to help her and support her. When we celebrate together...like when her child gets into preschool and he's ready and he's reaching milestones, when they tell you about their lives without you even asking anymore.. you are more than just a social worker, you're a family to them.*

> *I think my biggest accomplishment is just building the relationships with families. I think that's really the foundation of the program working, having that relationship where they are texting you and saying "o my gosh, look at what their [child] did". We're seeing those big milestones and little milestones and celebrating them together.*

> *I feel like we really make strong partnerships. It's very odd that family just stop coming..typically they're there for the long run because they feel like you genuinely care and you want to work alongside them and they see the growth.*

2. **What effect does the SECP have on family perceptions of family engagement?**

An adaptation of the Road Map Family Engagement Survey (Ishimaru & Lott, 2015) was used to assess families' perceptions about collaboration among families, communities, and schools. Twelve items addressed six domains: Parent/Family Knowledge and Confidence, Welcoming and Culturally Responsive School Climate, Parent/Family Influence and Decision-Making, Family-Educator Trust, Family-Educator Communication, and Principal Leadership for Engagement. Parents rank items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Surveys were distributed to families in the eight districts with school as hub sites in an online format. Families enrolled in home visiting or family facilitation also received the surveys. The survey was available in 19 languages to accommodate the language needs of all the families at the participating schools.

A total of 499 families with at least one child age birth to grade 3 responded to the survey across the eight schools, with 98 (19.7%) of these families reporting speaking a language other than English in the home. The majority of the families reported their race as White (n=343; 68.7%) with the next largest race category reported being "Two or more races" (n=67; 13.4%), followed by Black (n=40; 8.0%) and Asian (n=24; 4.8%). Sixteen respondents (8.2%) preferred not to report their race. Almost a quarter of the families (n=117; 23.4%) reported their ethnicity as Latinx. Almost half of the families (n=228; 45.8%) reported qualifying for the Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) program, with 40 families (8.0%) preferring not to answer this question. Across the schools, the number of families responding to the survey ranged from 40 to 78 per school.

On a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high), families rated schools very positively, with item averages ranging from 5.85 (SD=1.83) to 6.42 (SD=1.79) out of 7. The highest-rated item across the schools was "If your home language is not English: I know someone at (school) who will assist me and my family in our home language." The lowest-rated item, while still very positive, was "I have opportunities to influence what happens at (school)." Figure 1 displays the families' ratings for each item. It is important to note that COVID-19 may have had negative impacts on school-family connections during the 2022– 2023 school year.

Reference

Ishimaru, A. M., & Lott, J. (2015). User's Guide for Road Map Family Engagement Survey: Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration. Retrieved from the Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project website: https://education.uw.edu/epsc

Figure 1. Ratings of Family-School Partnerships
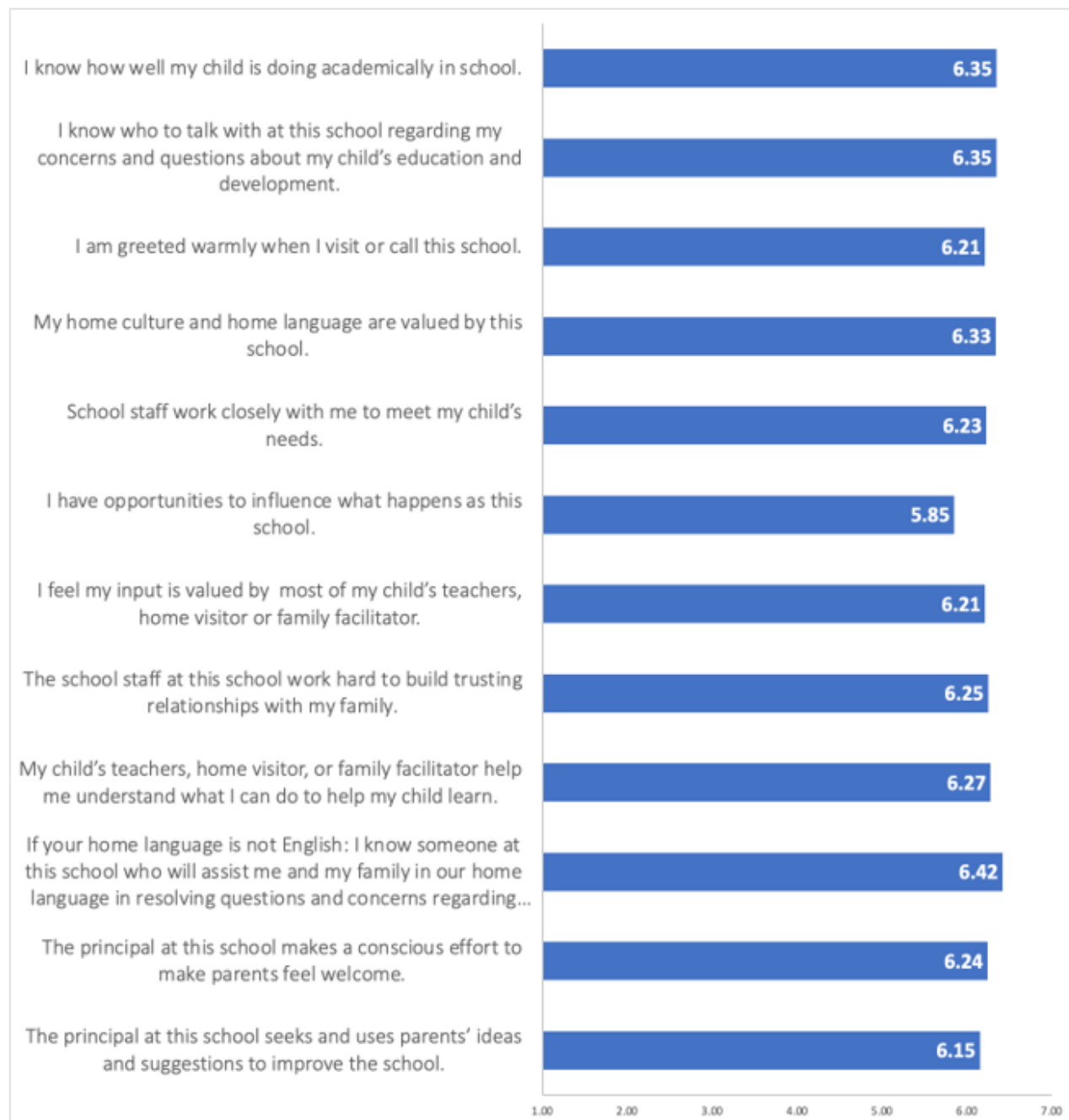
PD for All

1. **What is the reach of the "bite-size" PD for All approach?**
2. **If and how are early childhood educators implementing knowledge learned?**
3. **What are the best practices and barriers to new knowledge implementation within instructional settings?**

The theme of "PD for All" in the Spring of 2023 was building and sustaining powerful partnerships with families. A total of three sessions took place over a six-month period. *Twitter* and social media analytics were used to identify the reach of the "bite size" approach. A post-session survey was utilized to evaluate perception and feasibility of the approach. Finally, a mixed-methods cohort design (n=13) was employed to evaluate the influence PD for All had on an educator's self-determination to build and sustain family partnerships. The cohort was also utilized to identify perceptions, satisfaction, and opportunities for improvement for the bite-size approach over a longitudinal period. Cohort members were asked to complete surveys and interviews throughout the 6-month period.

Session Overview

Each session, a video was disseminated via social media that discussed that session's content area, session titles can be seen below. The video was followed by two *Twitter* chats each with a focused topic. After the *Twitter* chats an infographic was shared via social media as well as through an emailed summary that highlighted key pieces from that session's content. The email summary also housed a post-program survey that requested participation from any individuals that had engaged in any of the elements of the PD for All session.
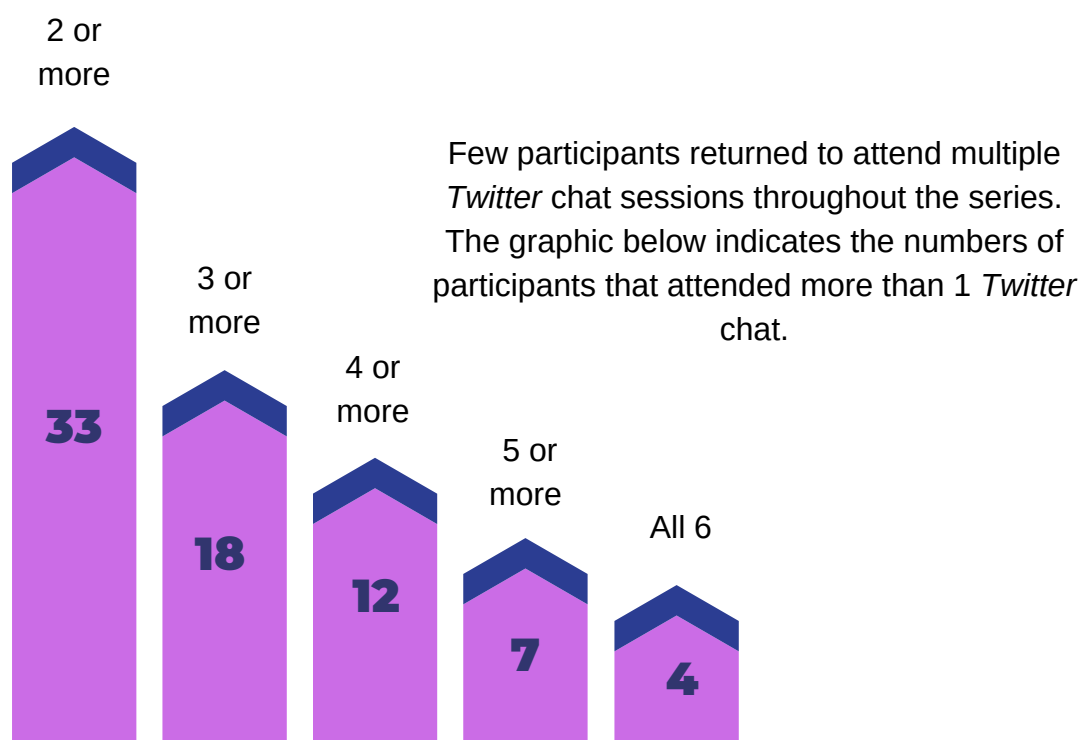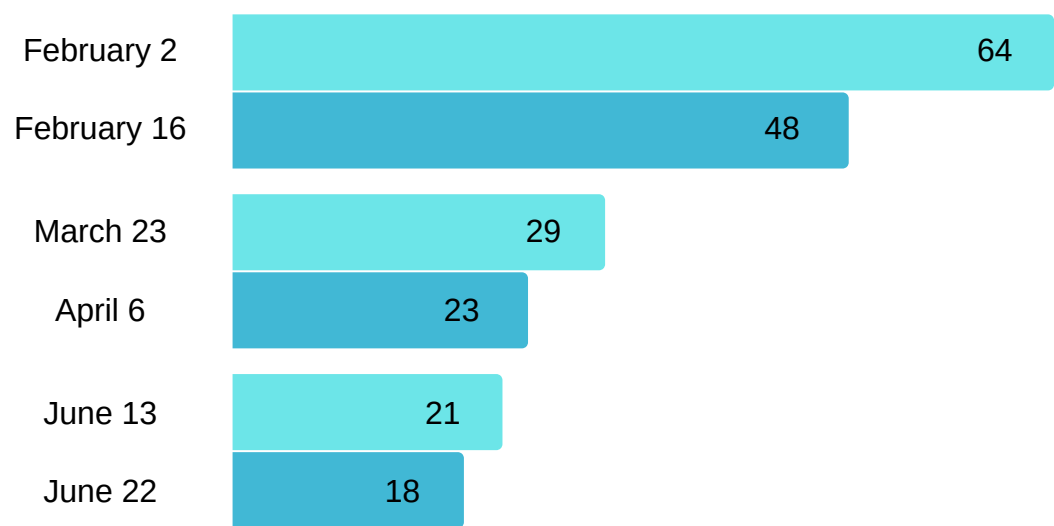
> **SESSION 1: BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS**

> **SESSION 2: SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS BY ADVOCATING TOGETHER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

> **SESSION 3: "WIDENING THE CIRCLE OF SUPPORT: CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO SUSTAIN POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS"**

Question #1: What was the reach of the bite-size approach?

A total of six *Twitter* chats were offered across the 6-month time period with two chats offered for each session. Participation in the *Twitter* chat sessions decreased steadily over time. 133 individuals (unduplicated count) attended at least one of the *Twitter* chat sessions held. The chart below shows the total number of participants that attended each *Twitter* chat (excluding BECI team support). During the first series, 15 participants who attended the first chat returned to attend the second, 14 participants attended both chats in the second series, and 5 participants attended both chats in the third series.

February 2	64
February 16	48
March 23	29
April 6	23
June 13	21
June 22	18

2 or more 33

3 or more 18

4 or more 12

Few participants returned to attend multiple *Twitter* chat sessions throughout the series. The graphic below indicates the numbers of participants that attended more than 1 *Twitter* chat.

5 or more 7

All 6 4

Twitter Analytics

Session 1
@BuffettECI

Several Tweets from the February 2nd and February 16th chat series had an average range of views of 1,000-2,200

Session 2
@BuffettECI

Several Tweets from the March 23rd and April 6th chat series had an average range of views of 1,000-2,300

Session 3
@BuffettECI

Several Tweets from the June 13th and June 22th chat series had an average range of views of 650-1,600

YouTube Video Views

A total of four videos were created (1 for each session + an overview introductory video) across the 6-month time period. The session 2 video had the highest number of views with 483. The session 3 video had the lowest number of views with 160 views. Video views are current as of July 14th, 2023.

Overview/Introductory Video	198 views Average view duration: 1:19 minutes Video length: 2:39 minutes

386 views Average view duration: 3:28 minutes Video length: 10:41 minutes	**Session 1 Video "Building Trusting Relationships"**

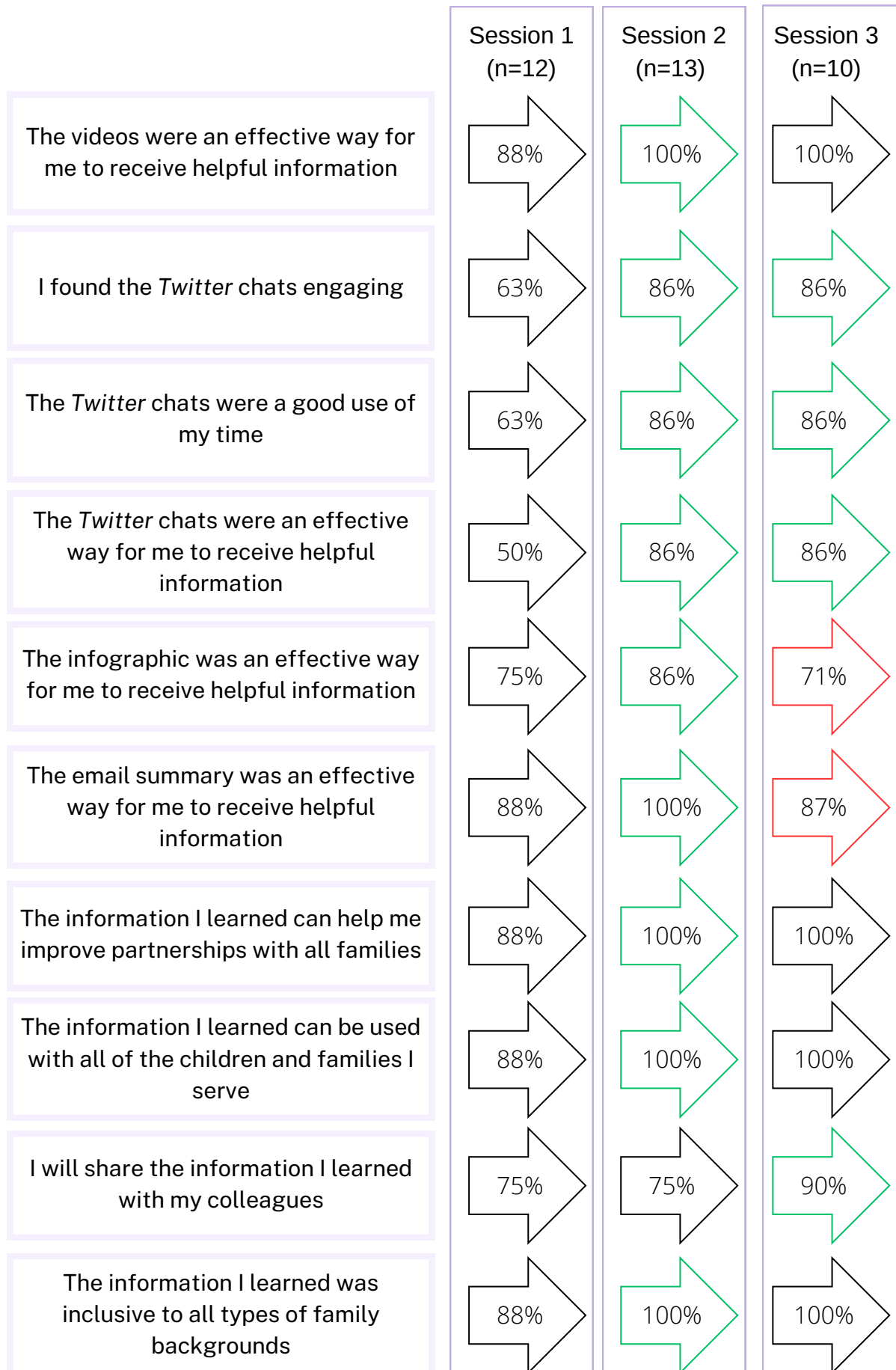| **Session 2 Video "Advocating Together for Student Success"**	483 views Average view duration: 2:41 minutes Video length: 10:34 minutes

160 views Average view duration: 3:44 minutes Video length: 10:59 minutes	**Session 3 Video "Widening the Circle of Support"**

A survey was sent in the email summary after each session and asked individuals to select a level of agreement from 1-5 (1, strongly disagree, 5, strongly agree). The summary below compares **all survey respondents across the 3 sessions** that selected **somewhat agree or strongly agree** for each item across the three survey time points. Please note individuals were only asked questions for items they identified that they had viewed or received.

	Session 1 (n=12)	Session 2 (n=13)	Session 3 (n=10)
The videos were an effective way for me to receive helpful information	88%	100%	100%
I found the *Twitter* chats engaging	63%	86%	86%
The *Twitter* chats were a good use of my time	63%	86%	86%
The *Twitter* chats were an effective way for me to receive helpful information	50%	86%	86%
The infographic was an effective way for me to receive helpful information	75%	86%	71%
The email summary was an effective way for me to receive helpful information	88%	100%	87%
The information I learned can help me improve partnerships with all families	88%	100%	100%
The information I learned can be used with all of the children and families I serve	88%	100%	100%
I will share the information I learned with my colleagues	75%	75%	90%
The information I learned was inclusive to all types of family backgrounds	88%	100%	100%

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Summary of Q1 & Q2 Findings

Twitter chat participation decreased steadily across the 6-month time period. Furthermore, tweet view ranges were lowest for 3rd session chats. After session 1, 63% of survey respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the *Twitter* chats were worth their time and 50% felt *Twitter* chats were an effective way to receive information. Although levels of agreement for these items increased for these items in Sessions 2 and 3, the number of individuals that reported attending the *Twitter* chats decreased.

Specific to the video component, video views were highest for session 2 with 483 views reported however the session 3 video had the longest average view duration of 3 minutes and 44 seconds. Overall, the majority of individuals that reported watching the videos agreed that the videos were an effective way to receive helpful information across the 3 sessions.

Each session a new infographic was disseminated. In all sessions the majority of respondents that viewed the infographic agreed that it was an effective way to receive new information however level of agreement was lowest after session 3.

Related to the email summary, the majority of respondents that viewed the email summary felt it was an effective way to receive information across sessions with the lowest level of agreement occurring after session 3.

Among survey respondents, there was a large level of agreement across all 3 sessions that the information shared within PD for All could be used to help improve family partnerships and the information could be shared with colleagues. Finally, the majority of survey respondents felt the PD for All content was inclusive to all types of family backgrounds.

Question #3: How did engagement in three "bite-size" learning sessions influence self-determination to build and sustain powerful family partnerships?
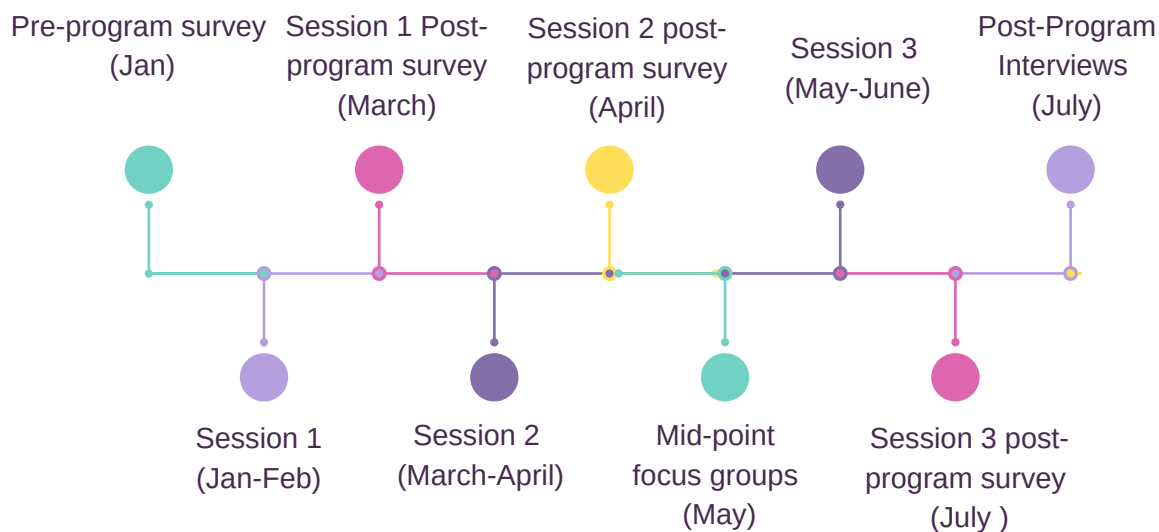
To answer this question a cohort of early childhood professionals was identified by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's program team (n=13). Cohort members were asked to participate in all 3 sessions of PD for All. Throughout this time they were asked to complete four surveys, one mid-program focus group and one post-program interview. Across time points cohort members were asked questions related to their self-determination to build and sustain powerful family partnerships.

Self-Determination Theory

The goal of the evaluation was to identify how the bite-size learning approach influences an individual's self-determination. Self-determination theory holds two primary assumptions, (1) individuals strive for growth and (2) intrinsic motivation is key. This theory posits that to allow growth or increased motivation in a behavior, such as building and sustaining powerful family partnerships, individuals need to feel autonomous, competent and connected with those around them (relatedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
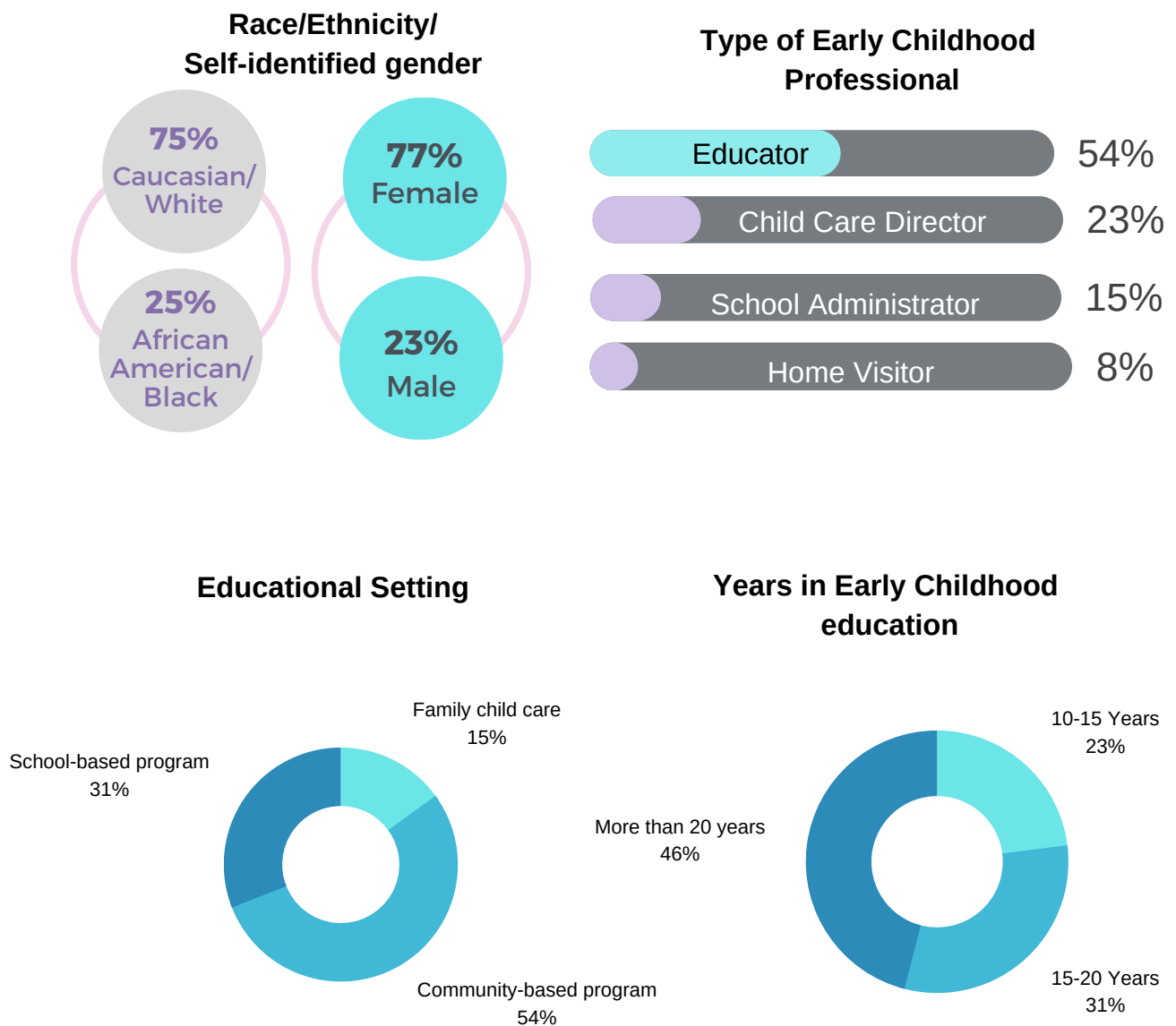
Data Collection/Analysis

Cohort members were asked several questions related to their autonomy, competence and relatedness to engage with families at several time points. A pre-program survey was disseminated to gather baseline information. Cohort members were also asked to complete a post-session survey shared in each sessions' email summary. Survey data was analyzed for descriptive findings and compared across time points. Pre-program survey data was analyzed independently. Interview data was analyzed via a constant comparative deductive analysis in which thematic findings were found at each time point and compared with one another to assess for change across time points. The timeline below demonstrates when cohort members were asked to complete various data collection pieces.

Pre-program survey (Jan) • Session 1 Post-program survey (March) • Session 2 post-program survey (April) • Session 3 (May-June) • Post-Program Interviews (July)

Session 1 (Jan-Feb) • Session 2 (March-April) • Mid-point focus groups (May) • Session 3 post-program survey (July)

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness.

Cohort Demographics

Cohort demographic information can be seen below. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian/White and female. Most had more than 20 years of experience in early childhood education and identified as an early childhood educator (lead teacher or paraprofessional). The majority identified working in a community-based program (54%) followed by a school-based program (31%). Cohort members were asked to describe demographics related to the children they work with. Most individuals worked with children that identified as non-Hispanic (76%) and were preschool-age (36.1%) or birth to 3 years (30.5%).

Race/Ethnicity/ Self-identified gender

75% Caucasian/ White

25% African American/ Black

77% Female

23% Male

Type of Early Childhood Professional

Role	
Educator	54%
Child Care Director	23%
School Administrator	15%
Home Visitor	8%

Educational Setting

Family child care 15%

School-based program 31%

Community-based program 54%

Years in Early Childhood education

10-15 Years 23%

More than 20 years 46%

15-20 Years 31%

PRE-PROGRAM SURVEY FINDINGS

Prior to the program beginning, cohort members were asked to complete a brief open-ended survey (January 2023) regarding how they currently obtain information related to sustaining family partnerships and how they engage with families. Most providers reported receiving information about family engagement through learning from personal experiences (90.9%), their organization providing professional development (81.8%), finding professional development outside of their organization (81.8%), or through discussions with colleagues (81.8%). When asked about current engagement strategies, responses varied widely. Respondents discussed efforts related to daily communication such as sending letters home, newsletters or conversations at drop off and pick up. Others reported offering parent participation opportunities through school events and conferences. Some individuals identified promoting community engagement opportunities for families or utilizing social media avenues such as *Facebook* groups to connect with parents. Several respondents identified trust as a key factor in building relationships and noted trusting relationships as something they valued with the families and children they work with.

PRE-PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-DETERMINATION TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Prior to the onset of PD for All, cohort members were asked questions to identify their baseline self-determination for building and sustaining powerful family partnerships. Questions related to the individual's feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness were asked.

Autonomy

Cohort members identified high levels of control when asked about their ability to engage with families. Individuals felt they played a large role in families lives and saw themselves as a key source of support for the families and children they work with. As one participant noted, *"I am a listener for what each family/child needs. I am a resource conduit, sometimes that is providing a needed item, a referral to an agency...or advocating alongside to build the partnership needed for the situation".*
Conversely, cohort members felt barriers such as family time, language barriers and lack of buy-in from parents to sometimes hinder their ability to give support to the extent they wanted to. One cohort member noted, *"I would say the biggest challenge is lack of buy-in. Some parents look at us just as a stop to drop their child off, they are in and out quickly".*

PRE-PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-DETERMINATION TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Competence

A high level of confidence to engage with families was reported among cohort members. Cohort members felt their communication styles with families were effective. These included ensuring face to face discussions as well as written communication were frequent. There was a consensus among cohort members that effective family engagement required going beyond a "one size fits all" approach and individualizing strategies to meet family needs. For instance, "***These strategies seem to work because they vary. We don't use one way to communicate with families."*** When asked about resources to increase competence, cohort members desired translation support for non-English speaking families. When asked what knowledge or information they needed some individuals could not identify any while others reported they were always willing to learn new techniques or strategies. One individual stated, "***There's always rooms for improvement. I am looking forward to learning more from these videos."***

Relatedness

When asked to identify who they go to for support when it comes to relationships with families, most individuals identified a co-worker or administrator. As one individual noted, "***I speak with my co-provider often".*** One individual in the cohort did not feel like they had anyone to discuss these issues with, "***to be honest, I don't feel like I have many people or organizations to turn to with these issues. I will occasionally turn to management but that can be difficult as well."*** When asked if there was someone or something they would prefer to get support from several individuals reported increased support from administrators or experts such as school counselors or child therapists. As one individual stated, ***"A child therapist. I feel at a loss for answers for parents sometimes."***

POST-PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-DETERMINATION TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Post-program perceptions were gathered by comparing open-ended survey question responses, mid-program focus group data (n=9 cohort participants) and post-program interviews (n=10 cohort participants). Themes were collapsed across time points via a constant comparative analysis and the top themes for each theoretical construct are identified below.

Autonomy

Cohort members were split when asked to discuss autonomy-related changes since the onset of PD for All. Half of individuals did not feel any changes had been made and still felt in control of their ability to reach families with the skills and knowledge they currently had. Others reported that this experience increased their intentionality when having conversations with students and their families. One provider mentioned, **"I don't think any major changes, it's probably like good reminders of the importance of partnerships with families."** Cohort members still felt like they lacked control to engage parents that didn't want to be engaged or were not as easily engaged. As one person stated, "**you have those families that when you do try to get more in-depth with them, they do tend to push away more."** Respondents felt they could navigate these situations by only pushing families to engage a little at a time and felt it was up to the families to reciprocate.

Competence

Respondents varied in their responses when asked to discuss changes in competence. Some cohort members did not feel like their knowledge increased throughout PD for All while others reported new information was learned. As one person noted, **"If someone had any kind of two year or four year degree, most the information would be based on what those programs would have covered. I didn't feel like there was a lot of new information."** Some cohort members reported new information was learned related to the use of interpreters. As one individual noted, **"I think one of the things that was helpful for me was learning about interpreter services and trying to partner with families in their first language as much as you can so that the conversations and the interactions will be more meaningful."** Individuals that identified as teachers or paraprofessionals were more likely to report increased competence from the PD for All experience compared to individuals that identified as administrators or childcare directors. Importantly, several respondents noted that language barriers continue to be a key barrier to engaging with families effectively.

POST-PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-DETERMINATION TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Competence Continued

About half of respondents reported learning and trying out new strategies for family engagement such as utilizing open-ended questions, asking parents to share their stories and meeting parents where they are. One cohort member stated, **"I think learning to give grace. And by that I mean if a parent did not come to parent-teacher conferences or a parent meeting, like having positive intent. Recognizing that a parent wants to be involved in their child's life but something may have come up."** Other respondents appreciated discussions around how to engage families since the COVID-19 pandemic. As one individual recalled, **"We found that a lot of families are like still hesitant [since pandemic]..so we had been trying to like find strategies to get them to come in. So like inviting them to breakfast in the morning and having like a check in system that the parents do with the kids in the mornings."** Several respondents identified family communication platforms that were discussed that were new to them. Two cohort members reported interest in switching communication systems within their educational setting because of information they received from PD for All. One individual reported already actively making a chance since PD for All started while the other wanted to discuss it with colleagues. For example, **"I'll say we've switched systems from Hi Mama to BrightWheel. We also switched communication systems that we use within the center and then also how we do some family engagement stuff, like sending out email, like reminders and checking up on families more."**
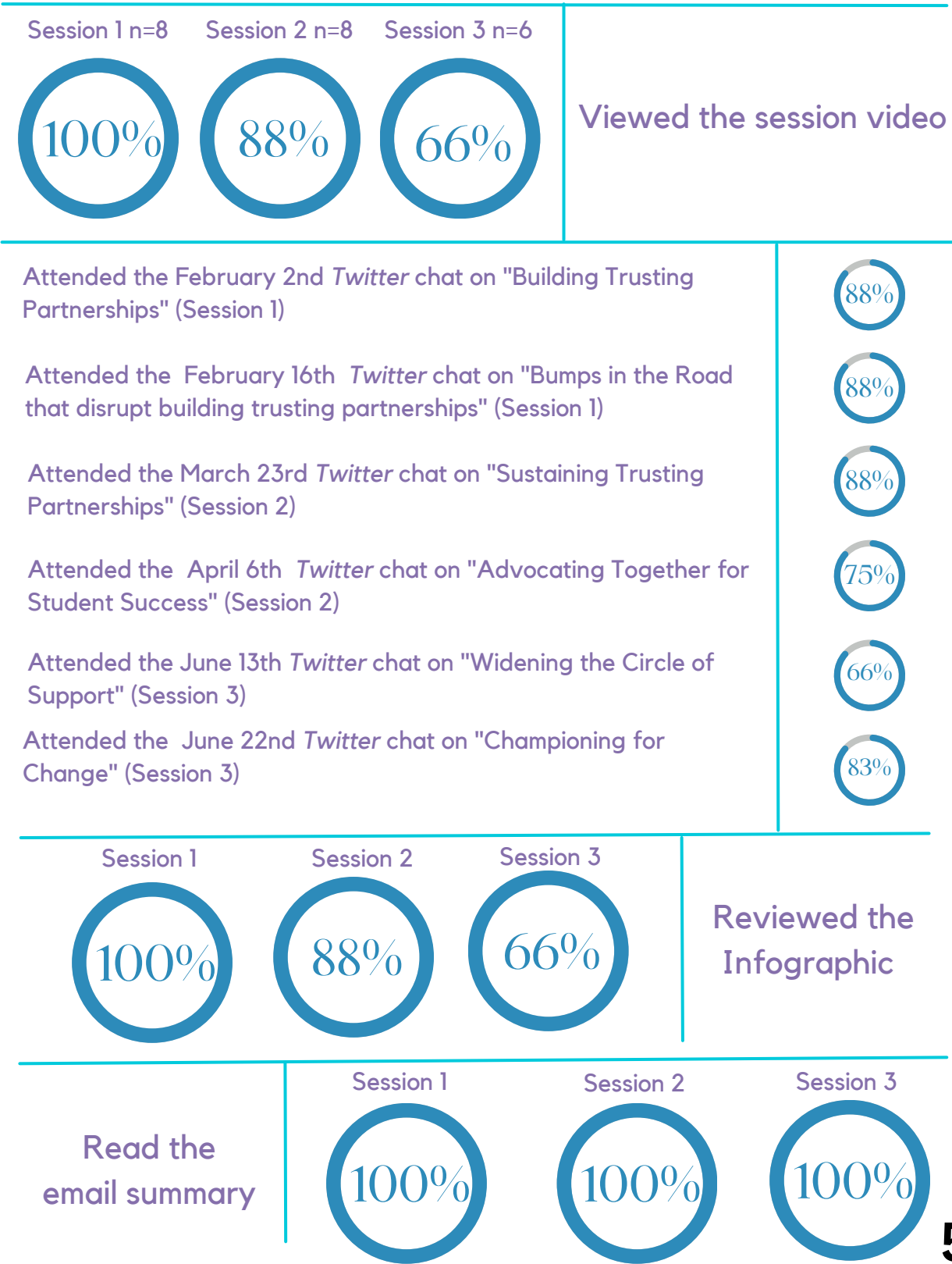
Relatedness

Cohort members enjoyed the opportunity to learn from individuals with diverse backgrounds via the videos and twitter chats but they desired the opportunity to have more conversations with educators from diverse backgrounds. Cohort members reported appreciating the focus groups conducted as part of the PD for All evaluation because it gave them a chance to learn from one another. Cohort members still felt like their administrators or colleagues were a primary source of support when working to improve family engagement but felt like greater opportunities to connect with their fellow cohort members would have been beneficial. A few cohort members did report bringing back information they learned to their workplace. For instance, "**So after every [Twitter] chat conversation, typically it fell within 2 weeks of our admin meeting. So I would bring back all the information that I learned or discussed from everyone else and all the Twitter conversations and things like that."**

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Question 4: How did perceptions and satisfaction for the bite-size design change over time among the cohort?

COHORT ENGAGEMENT ACROSS SESSIONS

Descriptive findings depicting the extent to which each cohort member engaged in each session can be seen below. Overall, cohort participation in the post-program survey was not optimal with 8 out of 13 individuals completing surveys 1 and 2 and 6 individuals completing survey 3.

Session 1 n=8	Session 2 n=8	Session 3 n=6	
100%	88%	66%	Viewed the session video

Attended the February 2nd *Twitter* chat on "Building Trusting Partnerships" (Session 1)	88%
Attended the February 16th *Twitter* chat on "Bumps in the Road that disrupt building trusting partnerships" (Session 1)	88%
Attended the March 23rd *Twitter* chat on "Sustaining Trusting Partnerships" (Session 2)	88%
Attended the April 6th *Twitter* chat on "Advocating Together for Student Success" (Session 2)	75%
Attended the June 13th *Twitter* chat on "Widening the Circle of Support" (Session 3)	66%
Attended the June 22nd *Twitter* chat on "Championing for Change" (Session 3)	83%

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	
100%	88%	66%	Reviewed the Infographic

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Read the email summary	100%	100%	100%

The survey asked individuals to select a level of agreement from 1-5 (1, strongly disagree, 5, strongly agree). Findings below represent individuals that selected agree or strongly agree for each item.

AGREE

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
The video was an effective way for me to receive helpful information	88%	100%	100%
I found the *Twitter* chats engaging	63%	86%	83%
The *Twitter* chats were a good use of my time	63%	86%	83%
The *Twitter* chats were an effective way for me to receive helpful information	50%	86%	83%
The infographic was an effective way for me to receive helpful information	75%	86%	66%
The email summary was an effective way for me to receive helpful information	88%	100%	83%
The information I learned can help me improve partnerships with all families	88%	100%	100%
The information I learned can be used with all of the children and families I serve	88%	100%	83%
I will share the information I learned with my colleagues	75%	75%	100%
The information I learned was inclusive to all types of family backgrounds	88%	100%	100%

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Question 5: How can the bite-size learning approach be improved?

Cohort members were asked during the mid-point focus groups and post-program interviews to reflect on their experience with PD for All. Individuals were asked to identify benefits to participation, any challenges they experienced, changes they would recommend and remaining gaps in knowledge and/or resources. Similar questions were asked in each post-program survey as well. Thematic findings were collapsed across the focus groups, interviews and survey findings and are shared below.

PROGRAMMATIC SUCCESSES

APPRECIATION FOR VIDEO-BASED LEARNING

The majority of cohort members reported enjoying the videos. Individuals appreciated hearing from different provider types and appreciated the video length as well. One person noted, *"I really like watching the videos and listening to all the speakers and the people that are talking, to get a personal reflection on things."* A few individuals noted they would have preferred longer videos while others noted more videos such as 2 or 3 videos per session.

A VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES

Cohort members appreciated the diversity of perspectives and learning from individuals with different backgrounds. As one individual noted, *"Just a bunch of different information from all these different people was just truly an awesome experience".* Another individual mentioned, "*being able to talk to people in different situations and learn the challenges and things that they're doing, gaining that perspective was really, really nice. I would say that was most beneficial for me."*

APPRECIATION FOR THE BITE-SIZE LEARNING MODEL

Individuals appreciated the bite-size learning approach with respect to the time required for involvement and the direct nature of the information shared. One person noted, *"I think it [bite-sized learning approach] is very informative, I don't think there is any wasted time. Like this is your 8 minutes, this is all of the information you need. There's no fluff to it, no beating around the bush, even with the questions on Twitter-it's very direct, to the point questions."* Another individual shared similar sentiments and stated, "*It was stuff that was very quick, very accessible and very easy to navigate. So I appreciate that. I appreciated the Twitter chats that there were an hour...then the infographics and going back to the videos, I think that the fact that they were just short and sweet was helpful."*

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS HINDERED EXPERIENCE

About half of respondents felt their experience was negatively impacted by the use of Twitter chats due to a lack of familiarity with the Twitter platform. Individuals reported that they struggled to keep up with conversations during the chats and disliked the limited character limit allowed in chats. As one individual noted, "*I have never used Twitter before..and so it was a bit difficult for me to navigate the conversation. Just how do I follow individual comments on it and see new comments..I'm very familiar with Facebook and Zoom but not twitter. "* Other cohort members echoed a desire for more Zoom opportunities, *"Maybe just doing some more Zooms with others instead of just doing Twitter chats so I can actually talk to people. I think that was sometimes missing."*

LACK OF DEPTH IN INFORMATION SHARED

Some respondents felt there was a lack of depth around the information shared across sessions. Several respondents identified themselves as well-trained educators due to their years of experience in early childhood education and reported feeling like the information shared was for a more novice individual. For example,

"*I think that because it was so superficial, it was hard for me to feel like anyone walked away with gaining information. And to me, when we're doing professional development, you should walk away with something you gained. It may not all be new information, and I've been in this field a really long time. But I find that when I go to a conference, I may not walk out with the amount of information I walked out when I was a young professional. But I always gained something. And I cannot say that from this experience."*

LACK OF TIME TO FULLY ENGAGE IN PD FOR ALL

While cohort members appreciated the concise nature of the education shared, several individuals still struggled to fit the PD for All opportunities into their personal lives. Some disliked the timing of the Twitter chats as they fell over dinner time and others reported struggling to review materials to the extent they would have liked to. Many individuals appreciated being able to review materials on their own time and reported going back to the videos and twitter chats however most still felt like a lack of time hindered their experience. As one person noted, "*Working a full-time job, some things are just harder than others to find time for."*

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

MORE FOCUS ON HOW TO ADDRESS INEQUITY

Cohort members desired a greater focus on inequity within future programming. Some individuals discussed a focus on barriers that rural early childhood programs face while others wanted to identify ways to support families of lower socioeconomic status. Other cohort members wanted ways to teach their students about various cultures. For instance, "***Until we start addressing some inequities, we can train people all day long but have to look at what those inequities are so we begin to mobilize and train people to be able to advocate.***"

ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEER TO PEER ENGAGEMENT

Individuals enjoyed any opportunity to learn from their peers. Some individuals wished that their colleagues had been with them so they could have further discussion on learning points or work together to apply strategies discussed in the session videos or *Twitter* chats. Others reported a desire to increase networking opportunities. One person noted, ***"I think just hearing the different ideas from different people, we [early childhood educators] suck at networking and for some reason, in this industry, we get stuck in our own world. We focus on our own ideas, our own curriculum, our own philosophies, but at the end of the day we all have this one shared goal and that is to work these kids and these families."*** Another cohort member mentioned, ***"The greatest takeaway for me is that you don't have to do it by yourself. Like I don't have to recreate the wheel. There is another professional that knows how to do what I'm trying to do. So being able to reach out to people and ask for help."***

PROVIDE INFORMATION MORE FREQUENTLY

Cohort members felt it was difficult to remain engaged throughout the six-month period due to the gaps between sessions. Individuals desired more frequent bursts of information. One individual noted, ***"I wish there wasn't such a lull...I don't necessarily enjoy the lulls, if it would have been just more consistent information...over time this kind of went to the back burner, it ramped up and slowed back down."*** Some individuals reported wanting more information via video or infographics while others just wanted information shared more consistently throughout the 6 month period.

Summary of Q3-Q5 Findings

Prior to the onset of PD for All programming, the identified cohort of early childhood professionals reported high levels of confidence and control regarding their ability to engage with families. In addition, most cohort members felt they had a good support system among their colleagues and administrators. Based on the qualitative data gathered throughout the 6-month period, cohort members perceptions of competence appear to have increased. Cohort members report obtaining new information related to family engagement and have either integrated new strategies into their routine or have plans to do so in the future. Feelings of autonomy and relatedness do not appear to have shifted however cohort members greatly desire the opportunity to learn from other educators, especially when their backgrounds vary from their own. Cohort members still report language barriers to be the greatest challenge when working to connect with families and still desire more resources in this area.

When considering the PD for All format, cohort members liked the video-based learning the most and had the greatest challenges with the *Twitter* chats due to technical barriers. Several individuals desired the inclusion of a platform such as Zoom due to their familiarity with it but also to allow for more engagement with other cohort members. Furthermore, there was a desire to receive information more consistently and a push for information to focus on addressing inequities within early childhood education. Finally, some cohort members felt the level of information provided was superficial and desired a deeper level of learning to occur with future programming.

The reach of PD for All was limited and participation was low beyond cohort member engagement throughout the 6 month period. Cohort members also struggled to engage in program evaluation measures suggesting current expected involvement (i.e., surveys, focus groups and interviews) may be too burdensome.

In conclusion, the bite-size learning approach was well received by cohort members with video-based education being most preferred. Future programmatic efforts could consider the addition of peer engagement opportunities to allow educators to learn from one another. In addition, various online platforms could be considered to reduce the technological barriers identified while using *Twitter.*

1.What is the work group's self-efficacy for tool implementation through the lens of self-efficacy theory? (Cohort 1)
2. How does the workgroup experience influence perceptions of the six essential child experiences? (Cohorts 1 & 2)
3. What are the best practices and barriers to workgroup program implementation? (Cohorts 1 & 2)

Essential Child Experiences Toolkit Workgroup Description

Early childhood educators and leaders joined the staff at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to guide the development of an Essential Child Experiences Instructional Toolkit. The Toolkit focused on enhancing quality, expanding equity, and strengthening continuity in classrooms serving children from birth through Grade 3. Workgroup members co-constructed and developed resources that promote deeper understanding, enhanced usability, and increased clarity for successful implementation of the following essential child experiences:

1. Cultural, Linguistic & Personal Relevance
2. Language-Rich Communication
3. Cognitive Challenge
4. Collaboration among Peers
5. Child Decision Making and Planning
6. Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation

COHORT 1 EVALUATION
JANUARY-DECEMBER 2022

Essential Child Experiences Toolkit Workgroup 1 Evaluation

From January to December of 2022, 15 educators and 15 school/child care leaders participated in the Instructional Toolkit workgroup. Participation in the Instructional Toolkit workgroup consisted of two phases. In the first phase, toolkit workgroup members participated in four virtual workshops that met in January and February 2022. The second phase included monthly workgroup meetings, beginning in March and ending in December 2022. In order to assess their comfort level implementing the six Essential Child Experiences in their classrooms and their understanding of each Essential Child Experience, toolkit workgroup members were asked to complete a survey at three timepoints across the year-long process: (1) before attending the four workshops (2) after attending the four workshops, and (3) after completing the completion of the workgroup experience. Throughout this report timepoints will be referred to as (1) pre-workshop, (2) midpoint, and (3) post-workgroup.

Comfort with Implementation

Toolkit workgroup members were asked to rate their comfort level in implementing each of the six Essential Child Experiences in the classroom on a scale of 1 (very uncomfortable) to 5 (very comfortable). The average comfort level across the six Essential Child Experiences was 3.97 (n = 32) at the pre-workshop timepoint, 3.93 (n = 27) at the midpoint, and 4.29 (n = 18) at the post-workgroup timepoint. For Cognitive Challenge and Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation, workgroup members' ratings reflected lowest comfort levels prior to completing workshops with scores increasing across the three time points. When rating their comfort implementing Cultural, Linguistic, and Personal Relevance, Language-Rich Communication, and Child Decision Making and Planning, workgroup members scores decreased from pre-workshop to the midpoint, and scores reflected the highest comfort levels after the workgroup was completed. For Collaboration with Peers, workgroup members had the highest comfort ratings prior to completing workshops and ratings dropped across the next two time points. Comfort ratings for each Essential Child Experience across the three timepoints can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1. COMFORT RATINGS FOR IMPLEMENTING EACH ESSENTIAL CHILD EXPERIENCE

	Cultural, Linguistic, and Personal Relevance	Cognitive Challenge	Language-Rich Communication	Collaboration with Peers	Child Decision Making and Planning	Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation	**Overall**
Pre-workshop	3.97	3.75	4.16	4.39	3.78	3.88	**3.97**
Midpoint	3.96	3.81	4.07	4.00	3.71	4.05	**3.93**
Post-workgroup	4.22	4.11	4.76	4.24	4.24	4.25	**4.29**

The slight changes in comfort scores from pre-workshop to the midpoint following the four workshops could be driven by toolkit workgroup members' shifts in understanding of the six Essential Child Experiences after participating in the workshops; workshops could have brought toolkit members a greater awareness of the definitions, which could cause them to be less comfortable with implementation. Following the workgroup completion, overall scores increased, which could be a result of increased opportunities to implement learning.

Understanding

Toolkit workgroup members were asked to describe their understanding of each of the six Essential Child Experiences in their own words at each of the three time points (pre-workshop, midpoint, and post-workgroup). To analyze responses, predetermined elements of each Essential Child Experience definition (as presented in the workshops) were identified and a qualitative approach was utilized to evaluate survey responses for the use of the predetermined definition elements.

## Cultural, Linguistic and Personal Relevance

In their definitions of Cultural, Linguistic, and Personal Relevance, workgroup members focused on "identity" prior to attending workshops while use of this term decreased following workshops and the workgroup. "Background knowledge" was also used often initially and use steadily increased across the following timepoints. "Personal relevance" which was used less often pre-workshop, also increased in usage across sessions. "Responsive" was used somewhat frequently pre-workshop, less often at the midpoint and appeared most frequently in post-workgroup definitions. Though participants did not use the term "language" in pre-workshop or midpoint definitions, it appeared frequently in post-workgroup definitions. Figure 1 depicts the percent of time the predetermined elements of the definition of Cultural, Linguistic, and Personal Relevance were used by participants across each of the three time points.

FIGURE 1. CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND PERSONAL RELEVANCE DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE

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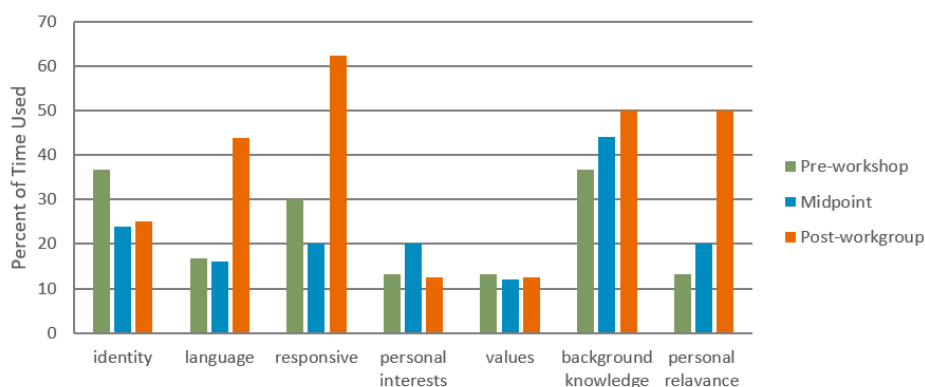
Cognitive Challenge

When asked to define Cognitive Challenge, many toolkit members often included "development of knowledge" and "thinking" in their definitions prior to attending workshops. Use of these terms became even more frequent after attending workshops, but following the completion of the workgroup, they were used even less frequently than at the first timepoint, indicating some potential learning loss. Several members used the terms "apply" and "rigorous" in their pre-workshop definitions. At the midpoint, "apply" was not used at all and "rigorous" was used slightly more often. Both terms appeared even more in post-workgroup definitions than in any other time point, with "rigorous" being used more often than any other term post-workgroup. This may indicate that experience with implementing the term was most impactful in relation to these terms. Figure 2 displays the usage of Cognitive Challenge definitional elements across time.

FIGURE 2. COGNITIVE CHALLENGE DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE
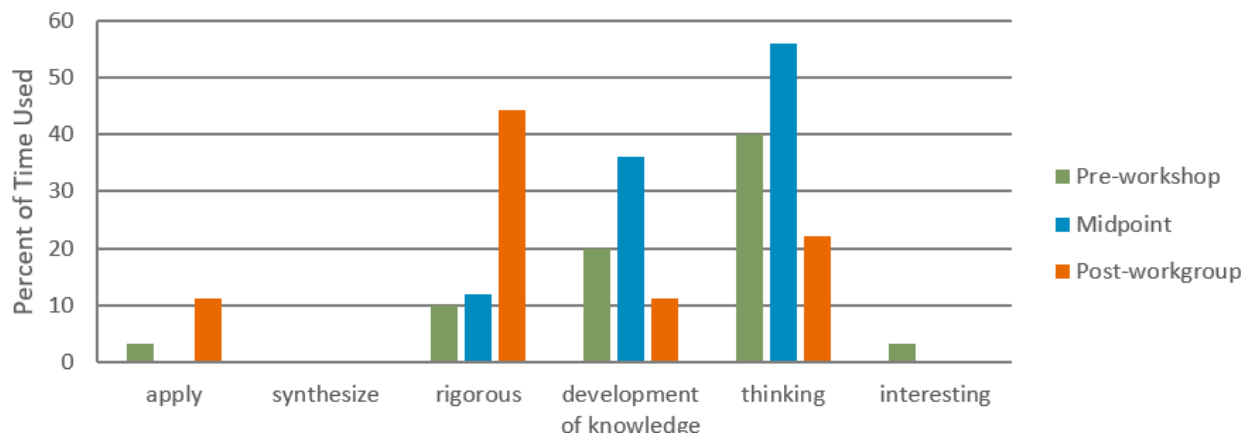
Language Rich Communication

Perhaps the most noticeable shift was how workgroup members defined Language Rich Communication across time points. After completing workshops, members included the terms "interaction" and "speaking" more frequently, but use of these terms decreased following completion of the workgroup. Similarly, "discourse" was used somewhat frequently prior to workshops, most frequently at the midpoint, and returned to baseline usage at the post-workgroup timepoint. In contrast, "listening" was used most often prior to attending workshops decreased across the next two timepoints. This may demonstrate a paradigm shift where workgroup members came to see Language Rich Communication as a two-way interaction rather than a teacher using words and children listening. Slight learning loss may have occurred following separation from the more intensive learning phase of the workshops. Use of the term "literacy" declined steadily across all three timepoints. Conversely, use of "non-verbal cues" increased in frequency from the pre-workshop timepoint to the post-workgroup timepoint. Usage of the definitional elements of Language Rich Communication across time can be found in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. LANGUAGE RICH COMMUNICATION DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE
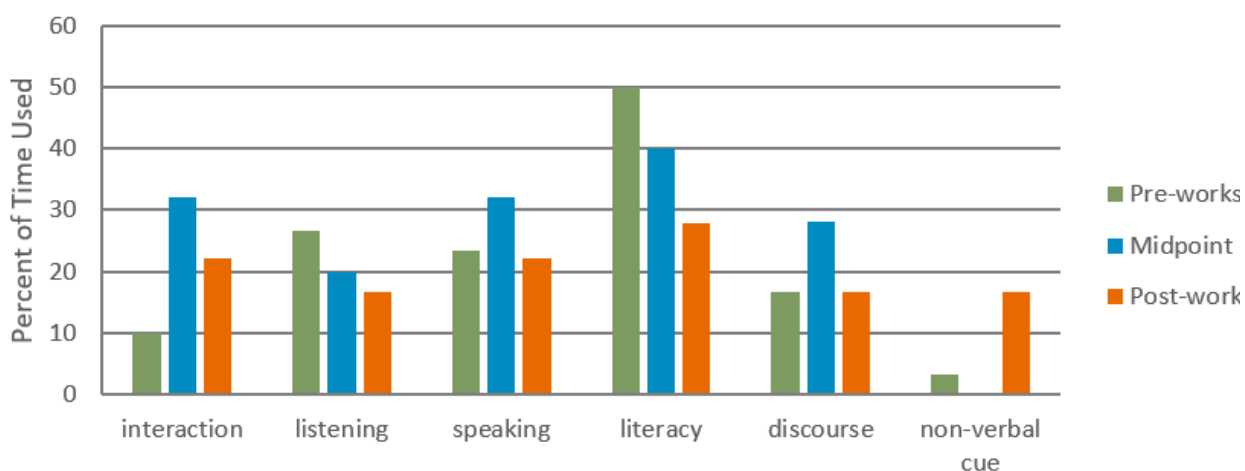
Collaboration with Peers

In definitions of Collaboration with Peers, the most frequently used terms pre-workshop were "cooperative learning" and "interaction." Workgroup members used "cooperative learning" even more often at the midpoint, while post-workgroup, it was used less often than at the first timepoint. Use of the term "interaction" increased across all three time points. Other commonly used terms included "solve social problems" and "social development", both of which were used less often following the workshops, and most often of all following completion of the workgroup. This may be evidence that these terms were most relevant in the real-world implementation of Collaboration with Peers during the window of time where workgroup members were creating tools. See Figure 4 for the percent of time each definitional component of Collaboration with Peers was used across time.

FIGURE 4. COLLABORATION WITH PEERS DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE

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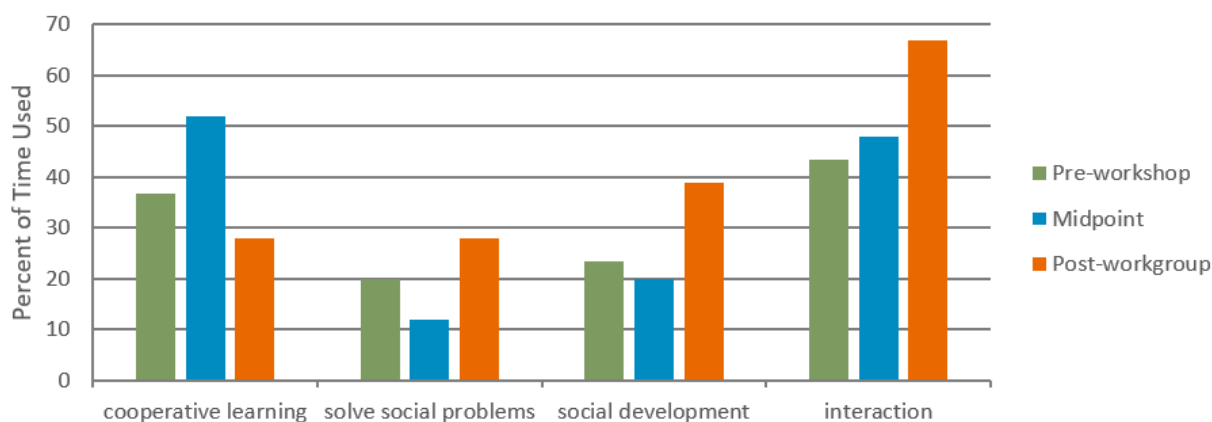
Child Decision Making and Planning

By far, the terms used most frequently to define Child Decision Making and Planning across all time points were "autonomy" and "child-directed." Both terms were used even more often at the midpoint. Following the workgroup, use of both terms decreased, with "child-directed" dropping below the pre-workshop usage. This may imply that in practice, allowing children to have autonomy was more relevant to Child Decision Making and Planning than having activities be child-directed. Usage of each element of the definition for Child Decision Making and Planning across time is displayed in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5. CHILD DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE
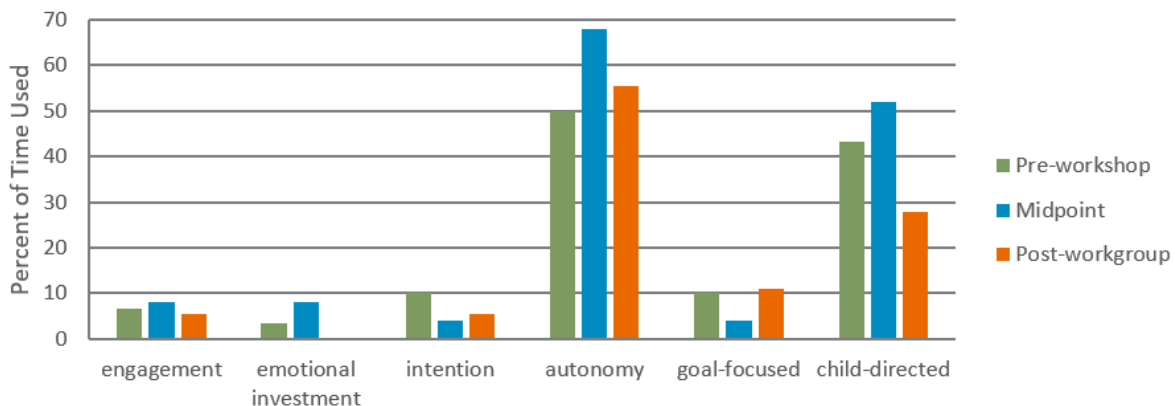
Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation

Definitions of Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation included "open-ended" and "curiosity" most frequently across all three time points. At the midpoint, use of "curiosity" slightly increased while use of "open-ended" slightly decreased. Following the completion of the workgroup, these terms were used less often than at any other time point, which may follow suit with the trend of slight learning loss once workgroup members were removed from the more intensive learning atmosphere of the workshops. "Innovation" and "play" were also used somewhat frequently in definitions and slight changes in usage indicate increases in the use of "innovation" following completion of the workgroup. Figure 6 represents the percent of time each definitional element for Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation appeared across the three timepoints.

FIGURE 6. CHILD INITIATED EXPLORATION AND INNOVATION DEFINITION ELEMENT USAGE

69
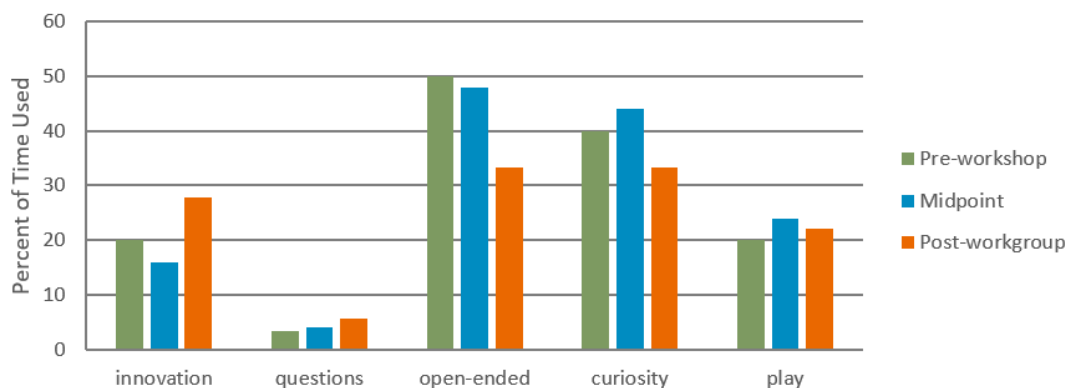
Conclusion

Results of these surveys indicate that workshops had the most meaningful impact on how workgroup members defined the six Essential Child Experiences. While workgroup members indicated minimal change in their comfort levels implementing the essential experiences in their classroom, learning was evident in the expanded definitions of these terms following the workshops. Following the completion of the workgroup, definitions of the six Essential Child Experiences continued to shift, with some potential loss in learning. However, participants felt more comfortable with the implementation of the six Essential Child Experiences, demonstrating the implications of the practical experience gained during the workgroup sessions.

Post Program Focus Group Findings-Cohort 1

In January 2023, four focus groups took place with 11 participants of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Instructional Toolkit Cohort #1. Focus groups took place over zoom and lasted an average of 49 minutes. Participants were asked a series of 10 semi-structured questions regarding their experiences participating in the toolkit program.

Questions were developed based on the constructs of self-efficacy theory to investigate three primary evaluation aims:

1. To investigate how the workgroup experience influenced perceptions of the six essential experiences.
2. To determine what influenced work group members' self-efficacy for implementing new knowledge.
3. To identify feasibility of tool implementation.
4. To identify best practices and barriers to workgroup program implementation and provide future programmatic recommendations.

Participants had an average of 16 years of teaching experience and had diverse teaching experiences. These included lead teaching, assistant teaching, owning a childcare center or family childcare home, serving as a director of an Early Childhood Center, or as an instructional coach.

Semi-structured focus group data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed via a deductive content analysis approach. Four evaluators were involved in the data analysis process that consisted of 3 steps. Step 1 involved deductively coding the data within the main constructs of self-efficacy theory. Step 2 involved meeting as a team to discuss codes and reach consensus. Step 3 involved a primary evaluator reviewing all combined codes to ensure appropriate categorization, interpretation, and representativeness. This report depicts primary thematic findings.

HOW DID THE WORKGROUP INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIX ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES?

Thematic findings related to the six essential experiences included: desire to support children through the lens of the child, greater intention within classroom practice, serving as a model for peers, and validation for current practices. Overall, participants reported an appreciation for the six essential experiences and found this topic area to be extremely valuable to their professional growth and learning. Participants noted that they enjoyed the presentations related to the essential experiences as well as the opportunities for self and group reflections. Example quotes within each thematic area can be seen below.

Desire to support children through the lens of the child

> *I think taking that lens of the child and having that perspective throughout... a child of color and in a kindergarten classroom intentionally because they are marginalized, those are the kids that we're leaving behind, that are left out of the curriculum and just trying to make that shift and also encourage that shift in teachers' brains. I think that was a big takeaway for me.*

Greater intention within classroom practice

> *I think making me more mindful about providing those opportunities in purposeful ways, you know, getting into those centers and playing with kids and using those everyday experiences to provide these.*

Serving as a model for peers

> *Just being mindful and being in the classroom and being that model or coach to show them [peer teachers] how they can do that and be a model when they come in [the classroom].*

Validation for current practices

> *We often find ourselves kind of complaining about this and that. And I said, wait a minute, why are we all here together? What is the purpose of all of us being here? What's the purpose of our staff being here? And then it's for the individual child. Yes, we are in group childcare and our classrooms are full of kids and all of that. But we have little individuals in all of our rooms. And so, for me personally, it brought me back to the very purpose.. right back to my roots of working with children.*

WHAT INFLUENCED WORK GROUP MEMBERS' SELF-EFFICACY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE?

Performance Outcomes

- Appreciation for final product creation
- Drive to improve practices based on new knowledge
- Strong belief in ability to implement created tool if tool was finished

Verbal Persuasion

- Substantial peer support
- Encouragement from others was greatly valued
- Hearing diverse perspectives increased drive to implement new learning

Emotional States

- Appreciation for time spent together
- Positive perception of group dynamic
- Perceived institute staff as supportive and passionate

Vicarious Experiences

- Value for diverse voices with respect to child age and program location
- Desire to emulate shared practices

WHAT IS THE FEASIBILITY OF TOOLKIT IMPLEMENTATION?

Specific to the tools developed within each affinity group, the majority of participants felt confident they could implement these tools in their own early childhood practice. When asked to rate this confidence on a scale of 1 to 5 (1, low-5, high), the average score was **3.9.** Thematic findings related to confidence level included: identifying the tool as valuable and self-appreciation for tool development. Specifically, participants felt that the tool was a worthwhile resource because of the choices they made when creating the tool. For example, one participant stated:

> *We have a lot of resources. I think it's just knowing what to use and when and just becoming more efficient with those resources, but I feel like this tool could help that, you know, to hone in on it. How to get the most bang for your buck.*

Participants were also asked to share any anticipated barriers they thought might occur when asking an individual not currently engaged in the workgroup to implement the tools. The main thematic finding was related to limited resources. Participants were concerned that not all early childhood professionals would have access to resources such as funding and materials to utilize the tools effectively. In addition, several participants mentioned a concern related to language within the tools. Participants worried that several of the tools used "***teacher talk,***" and that some individuals in early childhood wouldn't have an understanding of this terminology.

> *Because that was the one thing, like if you're going to make this toolkit and you're going to make it accessible for everybody...if you don't have the materials, then you can't use those things, and that was like a huge conversation we had because I had a girl in my group that was from a daycare and she's like, 'Well, you know my funding - I have to go to the goodwill to get things and stuff." And so we had a lot of conversations about how can we make something that doesn't require you to go and have blocks or have these books or all these kinds of things.*

WHAT WERE THE PROGRAMMATIC SUCCESSES?

NEW KNOWLEDGE WAS OBTAINED

Participants enjoyed the information given in the presentations at the beginning of the program, especially information related to the six early childhood experiences. Most individuals felt they gained a deeper understanding of their specific affinity group and felt this knowledge would shift their day-to-day actions in their practice.

"I feel like I made a goal to do more from the affinity group that I was in, thinking about [affinity group], and I think I still am taking some of that into my work, but I think that was my capacity of just being able to focus on that one. And I didn't dive into the others as much, but it's also because there's just so much going on when it comes to planning and so many other things that we have to take into consideration."

INSTITUTE STAFF WERE APPROACHABLE AND SUPPORTIVE

The majority of participants felt that the Institute staff were always approachable and supportive. Institute staff were reported to always be available for questions and troubleshooting. Participants noted that institute staff always followed up when they had questions and were available to be thought partners. As two participants noted:

"They were definitely approachable. I really liked the presentations."

"They wanted to see this come together and stuff. She [institute staff] always had a lot to say and was very knowledgeable about everything."

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION WITH PEERS AND INSTITUTE STAFF

The majority of participants stated they enjoyed the opportunity to dialogue and engage with their peers. Participants often stated that the diversity of program participants with respect to background and experience was a huge benefit to the program. Interviewees appreciated the opportunity to receive insights and viewpoints from the institute staff, especially related to the final products. A few participants shared:

"I really liked how us, as peers, all the different educators in the group, would go in and evaluate our final projects. But I also liked how then they as an institute went and looked at it and gave ideas from their viewpoint too."

"You know, we all worked well together...I loved meeting different educators from around the metro - that was really neat, and just learning about their roles, where they work and teach. So that was fun."

WHAT WERE THE PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES?

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE MAY BE LIMITED TO AFFINITY GROUP

Some participants felt that they would have preferred to work with more than one affinity group. Individuals noted that they had been asked to select an affinity group early in the process, and by the end of the process, they may have chosen a different group. Many noted they had a desire to learn more about other affinity groups but identified time as a barrier to doing so. For example, one interviewee stated:

"I feel like I know the most about my own affinity group though, and like once I dove into that, I kind of forgot about some of the other ones."

However, several individuals did feel they had a deep understanding of their chosen affinity group, and this translated into classroom practice changes. For instance:

"When I go to do my everyday job, I probably focus on the one that I dived deepest into, and so that's the one I implement the most, and you know, really think about when I'm teaching."

UNCLEAR PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

The majority of participants reported being unsure of program expectations at program onset. This was especially true for the affinity group process. Several participants noted they were unsure of what this process would entail and stated they would have selected a different affinity group if they had known the process. One participant shared:

"I would say that having more direction at the beginning, because I felt like in the beginning, and I know maybe because it was a new experience that they were trying, but I just felt like it was all over the place."

GROUP DYNAMICS

Participants reported frustration with a lack of consistency among affinity groups and among Institute staff. Individuals noted Institute staff turnover and confusion over who was involved from the Institute. However, this improved as the program continued. Some individuals reported affinity group members changing throughout the program, while others felt that the individuals they were paired with did not put in enough effort. Conversely, some felt they worked well in their affinity groups and saw themselves as a "team."

"I was an original member of the group, and I can't remember when we started those. That was around July, I believe. But my group changed members many times. I'd have one month, there'd be two of us, and then the next month, that person wouldn't be there. And then I was told, 'Oh ya, you're getting this person,' and I don't, you know, I started thinking it was me."

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WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT?

MORE TIME FOR GROUP WORK

The majority of participants felt they didn't have enough time to accomplish the program objectives they were tasked with. A few individuals felt there was too much time spent outside of the expected hours of involvement. Further, a few individuals reported unclear expectations related to time commitment to the program and believed some individuals left the program because of the time commitment required.

"I feel like we only probably tapped the tip of the iceberg because of the time frame that we had. And then, you know, we have these good intentions of, 'Hey, let's do a meet up on some other time,' and we just never could get it all together."

LOGISTICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Several participants gave suggestions for logistical improvements. These included: (1) ensuring participants receive mailed materials prior to meetings, (2) adding checkpoints with institute staff during affinity group work to ensure they are on the right track, (3) providing indicators for each meeting with what will be discussed and accomplished (4) allow cross-collaboration between affinity groups (5) support for technological barriers. Specific to the technological barriers, participants reported barriers related to the various platforms utilized and desired fewer platforms be included. Several participants reported issues with utilizing Google Docs.

> *But then one thing, I was one [affinity group], and there was two groups, and we always wondered what the other group was doing, but we never got to collaborate with that other group or even come back and see.*

> *I'm not a Google Docs person. I don't really know how to do it. So one girl kind of stepped up, and she'd always like, kind of type for us, and we would all try to, you know, like work together to make sure she would pull it up on our screen so we could see it, which that, you know, that makes it so much easier for everybody to be able to contribute at the same time.*

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COHORT 2 OVERVIEW JANUARY-JUNE 2023

Data Collection Methodologies

- Focus groups were conducted prior to the program start and at the immediate end of the program. In the pre-program focus group , individuals were given a brief description of each essential child experience and asked to describe what each definition meant to them. Individuals were also asked to describe how they integrate that experience into their teaching as well as share challenges to integration. Finally, individuals were asked to share their perceptions related to the term "lens of the child" and how they perceive their personal biases influencing their practice. In the post-program focus group individuals were asked to describe how the integration of each essential child experience, lens of the child and their biases had changed since beginning the instructional toolkit program as well as share thoughts related to program tool development and program quality improvement.

- A post-program survey was disseminated in June 2023. This consisted of a confidence scale (1-low; 7, high) that asked individuals to rate level of confidence in their ability to integrate essential child experiences into their instructional environment. In addition, an experiencing scale was included to evaluate how the workgroup experience influenced experiential learning based on the Kolb cycle of learning. The experiencing scale is a 20-item instrument that asks individual to rate their experience across several constructs (Stock & Kolb, 2021). Example questions from both instruments can be seen below.

On a scale of 1.7 (1, low confidence, 7, high confidence) how confident are you in your ability to integrate the following essential child experiences into your instructional environment?

Cultural, Linguistic and Personal Relevance
Each child experiences learning built upon the foundation of what they already know and through familiar approaches to learning. They have ample opportunities to connect new ideas to their background knowledge, cultural values and interests.
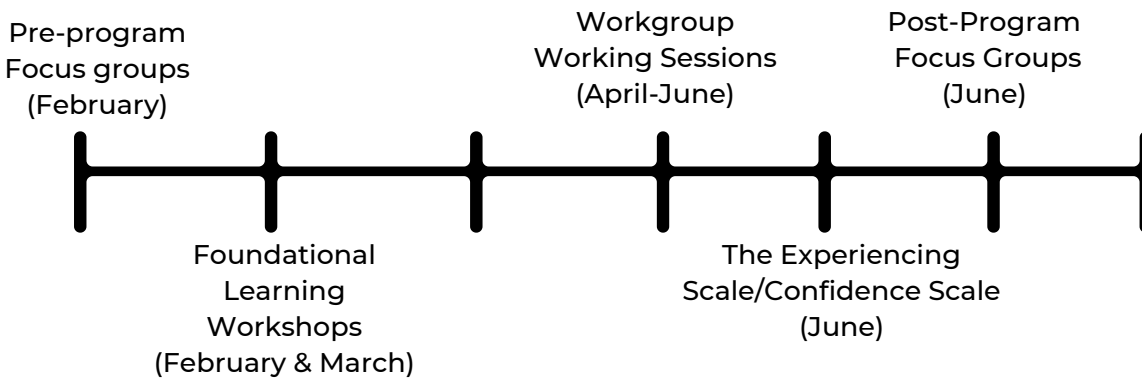
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Figure 1. Confidence Scale Example Question

1	I saw things in new ways	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	My views did not change.
2	It was fresh & new.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	It was pretty much as I expected.
3	I learned something new.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	I didn't learn anything new.
4	I was deeply involved.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	I was uninvolved.
5	I was alert and aware.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	I was easily distracted.
6	I actively participated.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	I did not participate.

Figure 2. The Experiencing Scale Example Questions (Stock & Kolb, 2021)

Program & Evaluation Timeline

Pre-program
Focus groups
(February)

Workgroup
Working Sessions
(April-June)

Post-Program
Focus Groups
(June)

Foundational
Learning
Workshops
(February & March)

The Experiencing
Scale/Confidence Scale
(June)

Focus Group Data Analysis

Focus group data were transcribed verbatim by evaluators within the Munroe Meyer Institute. Data was then entered into NVivo qualitative analysis software and analyzed by three evaluators. Evaluators reviewed initial transcripts through a process of immersion/crystallization. A deductive content analysis approach was employed and guided by the definitions of the six essential child experiences. Evaluators met to discuss initial codes and collapse overarching categories. A trained qualitative expert then reviewed all codes and resolved any coding discrepancies. This process was conducted separately for the pre-program findings (February) and the post-program findings (June). Upon completion, the primary qualitative researcher completed a constant comparative analysis utilizing axial coding to draw connections between pre and post program findings specific to the integration of the six essential child experiences. Findings are reported below.

Survey Data Analysis

Confidence scale scores in the post-program survey were analyzed for descriptive means. Confidence scores were then compared with pre-program focus group findings as individuals were asked to provide the same scale rating. The Experiencing Scale was scored based on the scoring information associated with this instrument. Specific scale items were identified to demonstrate level of engagement in learning from novelty to presence to embodiment. Responses leaning to the left side of the scale line were identified as being in line with the experiencing self. Dots leaning towards the right side indicated the participant may be less engaged in the learning process. For our purposes reverse scoring occurred and scale dots were provided a numerical score of 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2,1. A mean scale score was calculated for each subconstruct of novelty, presence and embodiment with a higher score indicating greater engagement in the learning process.

QUESTION #1 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE INTEGRATION OF THE SIX ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES INTO THE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

Cultural, Linguistic and Personal Relevance-Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Respondents commonly discussed identifying ways to link children's home experiences into their educational environment. In addition, respondents reported meeting children where they are at and taking a child's culture into consideration when developing curriculum. *"Making sure that my lesson and what I am doing is culturally respective, linguistically respected and that the material is relevant."*	Respondents desired to educate administrators further in this area. In addition, discussions of reducing personal biases were shared. Respondents reported a wish for more culturally relevant classroom resources and access to community resources to continue their personal cultural education. *"A lot of the materials we have are not up-to-date...we have a big long list of books that we are passionate about, about a lot of different issues that we want to add to our classroom."*

Cultural, Linguistic and Personal Relevance-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Some respondents did not identify changes in this area as they felt like this was an area they already excelled in. Others reported increased confidence to apply new strategies to the knowledge they had before the workgroup. Furthermore, some reported an increased awareness of how to support a child's cultural or personal relevance. *"If my students are...any other culture, if they don't know something, this has allowed me to be a little bit more aware of maybe..is this a cultural aspect or is this something on a personal or familial level? It allows me to reflect a little bit more before I jump in and say, well they just don't know this"*

Language Rich Communication- Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Strategies related to integrating language rich communication included: asking open-ended questions, connecting existing words to knowledge, holding meaningful conversations with children and allowing children to expand language in a safe environment. *"Just giving them opportunities to talk to the teacher, talk with their peers and having those conversations flow, expanding on them [conversations] through learning and giving a chance to talk and ask questions."*	When asked what additional strategies they might like to utilize, ideas included: adding labels to the classroom, narrating classroom materials into multiple languages and learning new techniques to engage children at the infant/toddler level. *"I would still love to learn little new techniques to help children learn language, especially infants and toddlers."*

Language Rich Communication-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Some respondents reported their integration had not shifted since the workgroup experience. Others reported an increased awareness related to the value and importance for child conversation and peer to peer verbal interactions. *"I think that just understanding that to help like younger kids' kind of develop their voice..we probably need to talk more and also listen more. And give them time to kind of like express their feelings, even if it starts off as just babbles and just allowing them to kind of have that back and forth or allowing them to kind of explain what they are seeing."*

QUESTION #1 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE INTEGRATION OF THE SIX ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES INTO THE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

Cognitive Challenge-Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
When considering cognitive challenge, respondents reported that they tried to help children solve problems with "just enough" support. In addition, finding opportunities for children to feel a sense of autonomy and accomplishment were highlighted. Finally, identifying innovative strategies to push children to think differently were mentioned. *"When I think of cognitive challenge, I think of working through things on their own and figuring out how the world works. Whether it be putting a puzzle together or building big structures and they fall down and then they do it again. Unfortunately, we have very little time for that kind of activity."*	Educators reported a desire for more classroom time to devote to cognitive challenge opportunities. In addition, they hoped for more administrator buy-in and opportunities for professional development around integration of cognitive challenge. *"Getting K-12 administration to sort of understand what early childhood should look like would help."* *"PD [Professional Development]...with some make and takes would help."*

Cognitive Challenge-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Respondents reported engaging in more child-led activities to promote cognitive challenge since they began their workgroup experience. A few individuals reported pushing themselves beyond their comfort level to try new strategies that they had learned. In addition, some individuals reported making curriculum choices more focused on meeting children's interests in order to help them push their critical thinking skills. *"I've had to push myself more because I feel like I've been teaching long enough now where I'm like, I know this works this is how I do it...it has helped me to think of different ways to do things."*

QUESTION #1 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE INTEGRATION OF THE SIX ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES INTO THE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

Collaboration among Peers-Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Strategies shared included: allowing children to work together during activities as well as giving children a goal and objective to work towards together. Play-based learning strategies were often cited. *"I think it looks like giving examples of appropriate interactions. We're using social stories, we have several social emotional curriculums that we implement...really try to teach empathy and build community in my classroom."*	Respondents desired more administrator buy-in and more time to allow for peer collaboration opportunities to occur. *"Just the time, really the time to make it happen would really be nice to allow for it."* *"To educate the people that are enforcing all of this to happen, the curriculum, the time constraint, if they are really educated on the benefits of all this [peer collaboration]."*

Collaboration among Peers-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Discussions related to this essential experience focused on an increase in intentionality. Cohort members discussed trying to be more intentional about providing opportunities that allow for peer to peer interaction. *"I've become more mindful of how I have the kids interact with each other, not just letting them go off and do it [activity]. Thinking of different techniques I can do and making it more meaningful."*

QUESTION #1 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE INTEGRATION OF THE SIX ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES INTO THE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

Child Decision Making and Planning-Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Respondents reported utilizing child choice when making lesson decisions. There was a common desire to allow children to feel "in charge" of their learning. *"Allowing children to have the chance to make decisions and feel like they are contributing to planning things in the classroom."*	There was a desire for increased administrator buy-in and more time to focus on what children were interested in learning. *"I would give kids more opportunities to play together and to make choices about how they want to learn about something."*

Child Decision Making and Planning-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Cohort members report they are now more comfortable with giving up control and allowing children to help plan their day. There was an overall increase in child autonomy that was frequently mentioned. *"Releasing that control and letting kids strive for learning because it might cause a mess, or it might cause an opportunity to problem solve or something like that that, people get anxious. They're [children] fully capable of it and they're telling us what they need and want. For me, I've seen a lot of room for growth in my program to be able to say like, here's all the benefits of that child directed learning, and here's how you can do it."*

Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation-Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Strategies such as providing hands on learning opportunities and providing activities based on child interest were cited. Allowing opportunities for children to ask questions and make predictions were also reported. "Having a variety of materials that kids can explore and create with." "It's about children bringing the ideas to the forefront and then teachers following their lead."	There was a desire to increase parent education of the value of learning through play. In addition, increased opportunities for child play and a reduction of curriculum expectations were desired. "Parents don't understand what we're doing and how much they [children] are learning from exploration and how much they are learning not only that social interaction, that cognitive development, they're learning so much from those exploration pieces."

Child Initiated Exploration and Innovation-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Cohort members reported they were trying to be more intentional in giving children opportunities to learn from one another. In addition, cohort members reported trying to provide chances for children to be autonomous and seeing the value of children making mistakes and learning from them. A few cohort members did report they were confused on the difference between exploration and innovation. "A lot of my kids were having trouble finishing tasks and initiating things because they're afraid they are going to make a mistake. I feel like the research really helped me promote a growth mindset around that and how to do that."

QUESTION #2 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO LENS OF THE CHILD?

Lens of the Child Before Workgroup

How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Lens of the child was described as an understanding of how a child experiences and sees the world. Respondents reported strategies such as providing children with autonomy over what they are learning and opportunities to talk and interact as examples of utilizing the lens of the child. *"I feel like it is how they experience the world. It's amazing to me even after I think we've had a bad day they are like, no we had fun today..so see it through their lens."*	Some individuals did not share additional information related to what else they would like to do. Those that did, reported a desire to continue to improve their empathy and understanding for the children they work with. *"I'm really trying to hone in on this and really explain..that's really something I try to work on."*

Lens of the Child-After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Respondents reemphasized a drive to always try and see things through the lens of the child. Some educators reported enhanced empathy to be a result of their workgroup experience. Others reported that the workgroup experience helped them to reflect on how a child would see and experience typical classroom routines. *"They played a video like within one of the first few sessions and it was like from the lens of a child, it was like when my teacher tells me to catch a bubble, they feel silenced. And I think that was a really eye opening video to have shared because when they're getting in line or when you're teaching and you're just like, okay, catch a bubble, like, voices off I am talking. You're not able to hear it from their point of view."*

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QUESTION #3 HOW DID THE WORKGROUP EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE INDIVIDUAL BIASES?

Perceived Biases- Before Workgroup

| How integration is happening	What else they would like to do
Educators reported trying to always ensure children were being treated equally and receiving an equal opportunity in their education regardless of their demographic characteristics. *"Just like making sure that as an educator, we're giving each student an equal opportunity to get the best education and the best support possible."*	Educators desired strategies to continue to improve their ability to treat children equally no matter the child's background or what they learn about the child. *"To not let the things that parents tell me affect how I treat the child or how I treat the parent and treat them all with respect and dignity."*

Perceived Bias- After Workgroup

How integration has changed since the toolkit workgroup experience...
Workgroup members were split when asked about how the workgroup experience influenced perceived biases. Some individuals felt there was limited discussion on biases while others felt there was a large focus on biases. Overall, individuals reported a desire to continue to work on their own biases. *"I feel like during the group, like this was just kind of gone over, I feel like it wasn't there. It was brought up and moved on. I kind of feel like there could have been more with this aspect of it just because I feel like it is a really big one."* *"We actually spent a really long time talking about biases, so that was good."* *"I don't feel like mine has changed as must as just maybe being more cognizant of it, to realize it's out there and to realize that it comes in many different forms then I was actually thinking of before."*

Confidence to Integrate Essential Experiences into Early Childhood Practice

Cohort members were asked to rank their confidence to integrate essential experiences into early childhood practice on a scale of 1 to 7 (1, low, 7, high) at two time points (**before the program via focus group** and **after the program via survey**. Levels of confidence for integration were similar before and after workgroup implementation. In general, respondents felt confident in their ability to integrate each essential experience. with an average score of 6 out of 7.0 identified in the **pre-program focus groups** and 5.9 out of 7.0 in the **post-program survey.** In the post-program survey respondents were also asked to identify confidence in their ability to integrate all six essential experiences into the learning environment simultaneously. Respondents reported a mean confidence level of 5.8 out of 7.
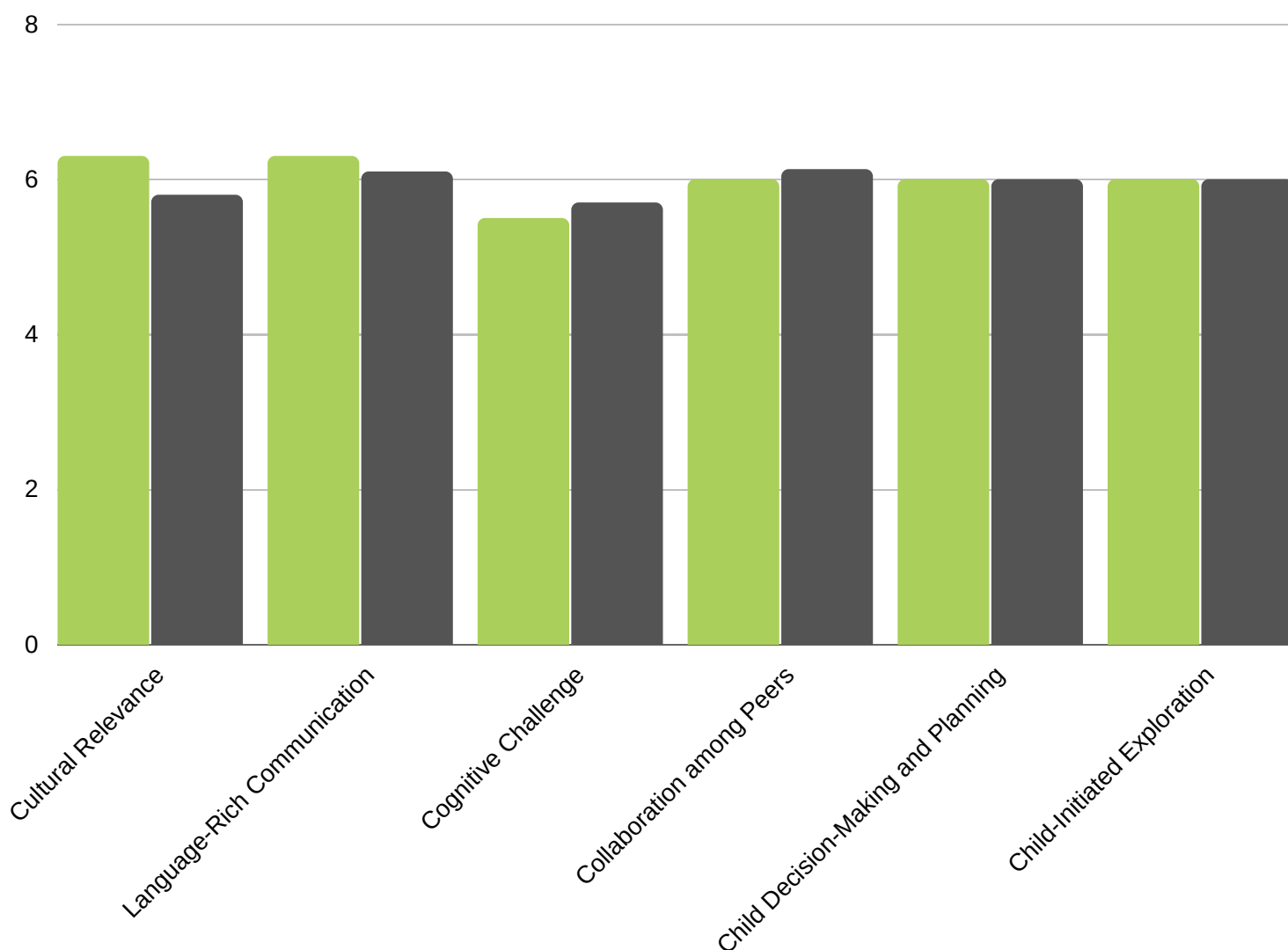
Workgroup members (n=13) completed the Experiencing Scale in June 2023 (Stock & Kolb 2021). Items that represent Novelty are highlighted in blue, items representing Presence are highlighted in red and items representing Embodiment are highlighted in dark green. Mean scores on a reverse order scale of 1-7 (1, low, 7, high) are reported. The mean score for novelty items was 6.46; the mean score for presence items was 6.29 and the mean score for items reflecting embodiment was 5.67.

Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 2015)

Mean

Mean			
6.38	I saw things in new ways	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	My views did not change
6.38	It was fresh and new	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	It was pretty much as I expected
6.62	I learned something new	● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I didn't learn anything new
6.31	I was deeply involved	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was uninvolved
6.31	I was alert and aware	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was easily distracted
6.54	I actively participated	● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I did not participate
6.38	My senses were engaged	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	My senses were not engaged
6.46	I was fully present	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was somewhere else
6.38	I was "in the flow"	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I felt resistant
6.54	My attention was focused	● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I felt connected and whole
6.39	I felt connected and whole	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I felt scattered
6.25	I was in the here and now	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was in the there and then
6.38	I responded to what was happening	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was on "automatic pilot"
5.54	I was not self-conscious	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was self-absorbed
6.00	I didn't notice the passage of time	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I was aware of time passing
5.46	I felt a sense of oneness with the natural world	○ ○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	I did not feel a connection with the natural world
5.67	I felt the experience in my body	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I had no bodily sensation
5.67	The experience was emotional	○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I had no emotional reactions

QUESTION #6: WHAT IS THE FEASIBILITY OF TOOL IMPLEMENTATION?

Specific to the tools developed within the workgroup, the majority of participants felt confident they could implement these tools in their own early childhood practice and typically cited numbers between 4-5 when presented with a 1-5 confidence scale. The developed tools were described as unique, innovative and interesting.

"
I do a lot of trainings with teachers and I definitely feel like I could use them [developed tools] in some of my trainings.
"

Participants were also asked to share any anticipated barriers they thought might occur when asking an individual not currently engaged in the workgroup to implement the tools. The main thematic finding was related to resistance to change. This was discussed specific to administrators and parents. Specifically, there was concern that administrators would not be interested in supporting new strategies and not all parents would agree with a tool and it would keep an educator from trying it. Additional barriers cited included time constraints, technological literacy and budget limitations.

"
I think sometimes the principals or administration or the districts have just fallen into a rule of doing what they've been doing so having these tools that are different...if we bring those up, it's just going to be like o we don't need that or we don't need to do that.
"

"
The time constraints and work with the curriculum guide, the schedule, you have to have your class on, we don't have time for that.
"

APPRECIATION FOR GROUP DYNAMIC

The majority of participants appreciated the diversity of the cohort primarily related to educator type. Individuals enjoyed getting to learn from an educator that worked in a setting that differed from their own. Cohort members described one another as validating, trustworthy and supportive. In addition, cohort members appreciated the opportunities to collaborate with other cohort members and learn from their experiences and backgrounds.

"I thought it was really interesting because I haven't really networked with many people in a daycare center...so it is really interesting to hear those points of view."

"I think everybody, all of that worked together, I think we collaborated really well and we were very respectful and everybody was willing to ask questions, answer questions and share."

INSTITUTE COLLABORATION AND WORKGROUP STRUCTURE

Participants enjoyed in-person interactions and felt that they were productive during meeting times. Participants also appreciated the reminder emails and follow up that Institute staff members provided. Institute staff members were described as organized, helpful, open to hearing new ideas and adjusting their strategies accordingly.

"They are very open to new ideas, as you're creating the tools, we're each kind of going our own way. They were able to take a minute to understand where we are coming from with our ideas, like kind of take it in and then give feedback based on that."

"I felt like I could reach out to them [Institute staff] at any time. They obviously know because an educator, we don't have a lot of time. So they would accommodate around our schedule which I thought was very, very nice and helpful."

WHAT WERE THE WORKGROUP CHALLENGES?

UNCLEAR PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

Participants desired increased clarity upfront related to program expectations and outcomes. Some participants felt confused about the overall program objectives. Other individuals reported confusion due to the jargon utilized at the beginning of the program and desired further wording clarification.

"It was really difficult for me to understand if the objective was for it to be teacher facing or child facing. I think we lost a lot of time in just not understanding what the objective was for what were doing at a given time."

"A hardship I faced was that I didn't always feel like I knew what I was supposed to be doing or if I was doing it correctly. Also, I came into this knowing I was building a toolkit but at some point I felt it was a professional development I was trying to learn from instead of trying to help build it [toolkit]."

"The challenging part for me was, I felt like the beginning paced well but towards the end, the last few sessions, we jumped ahead and were assigned things we weren't quite sure about..it would have been nice to have examples and a better understanding of what the expectation was."

LACK OF TIME /TIME COMMITMENT

Individuals felt there was too much to accomplish during the workgroup period and too large of a time commitment was required outside of meetings. Some individuals desired more in-person work time to get tasks done however others felt the time commitment overall was too much. Several individuals did not feel they had enough time to complete their tools and desired more time to review tools at the end of the workgroup experience.

"I do think that at points there were times, having our day-to-day professions as well as tasks that they were giving us outside of the meetings, I felt sometimes that was kind of a lot to handle."

"It was like if you can commit to this time and date then please be a part of this. But it didn't say you're going to have to take this many hours outside of this time to do things and that was really a struggle for me."

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT?

IDENTIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were given when asked how to improve the cohort experience for future workgroups:

- Make all meetings in-person
- Enhance clarity on requirements of tool development
- Reduce utilization of academic jargon
- Focus on one tool rather than multiple tools
- Provide time to look at tools at the end of the workgroup experience
- Increase session duration

> *From the beginning of the cohort, explain the process and like the bigger picture, what we're trying to do, what it is going to be, our end goal. I think would help us visualize where we're going with it because it was like we're going through each meeting but we weren't sure how it was going to all end.*

> *We could have used more time to look at everybody's tools, it's nice to be able to see it in-person and ask questions.*

> *Some of the terms they used, where they knew what they meant but I was like, what does that mean?*

> *Maybe a little more time on those last 3 sessions...when we got to those hour and a half sessions it was like warp speed.*

CONCLUSION

Overall, engagement in the Instructional Toolkit workgroup increased cohort members' awareness, intentionality, comfort and empathy within their instructional practice. Specifically, cohort members reported an increased awareness of the need to acknowledge a child's cultural relevance and the value of peer-to-peer verbal interactions. There were reports of increased intentionality related to providing opportunities for cognitive challenge and peer-to-peer interactions. Related to comfort level, cohort members reported increased comfort in their ability to relinquish some control and allow children to support lesson and activity planning. Finally, cohort members reported increased empathy related to the child experience and a reinforced desire to utilize the "lens of the child".

Cohort members were split when asked to consider how their individual biases were influenced by the workgroup experience with some individuals reporting increased awareness while others identified limited change.

Related to cohort member confidence to integrate essential experiences into early childhood practice, responses did not vary greatly from pre to post program however confidence levels were high prior to program onset. When reflecting on the learning experience, the Experiencing Scale identified cohort members had high incidence of presence, novelty and embodiment. These findings indicate cohort members were very engaged in the learning process.

When considering workgroup experience facilitators and barriers, the workgroup dynamic was considered a programmatic success. Workgroup members greatly appreciated the variety of provider types involved in the workgroup. In addition, the BECI staff were applauded for their responsiveness, support and flexibility. Challenges discussed included: unclear program expectations and a lack of time to achieve the set objectives.

Cohort members gave several suggestions for programmatic improvement. These largely focused on logistical enhancements such as making all meetings in-person, increasing the duration of meeting times, decreasing the utilization of academic jargon, enhancing objective clarity at program onset and allowing more opportunities for in-person tool review at the end of the workgroup experience.