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**FINAL REPORT**

Results of the

Vermont Early Childhood Instructor Survey

by

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and

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**Results of the Vermont Early Childhood Instructor Survey**

A top priority of the Vermont Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant[[1]](#footnote-1) is investment in a highly skilled workforce through professional development.The growth and development of a highly skilled workforce requires early childhood[[2]](#footnote-2) instructors[[3]](#footnote-3) who are well-versed in the content, practices, values, tools, and frameworks that Vermont has identified as essential to supporting the full potential of each child through high quality interactions, experiences, and environments.

To better understand the strengths and capabilities of instructors who teach early childhood courses or recurring trainings in Vermont, a survey was developed and undertaken in the fall of 2016. The four purposes of surveying early childhood instructors with regard to Vermont early childhood content, quality frameworks, practices, and tools were to: 1) determine the current level of knowledge; 2) identify areas in which there was a desire for greater knowledge; 3) understand the current level of emphasis in courses; and 4) learn about instructor priorities for receiving free materials. A fifth purpose was to learn about how best to support enhancements to the knowledge, skill and practices of survey respondents.

This report will describe the survey instrumentation, sample, procedures, and findings. It will also offer recommendations for ways in which to use the findings to enhance the capacity of instructors to build a highly skilled early childhood workforce.

**Instrumentation**. *A new instrument*, the Vermont Early Childhood Instructor Survey, referred to as the *Survey*, was developed for this study. The *Survey* consists of a total of 50 items, 48 content items and two demographic items. The content items are organized into four areas: 1) Knowledge of the Domains of Development Birth through Grade 3 (14 items), 2) Knowledge of Components of High Quality Teaching and Learning (10 items), 3) Knowledge of Components for Supporting the Full Participation of Each Child (11 items), and 4) Knowledge of Vermont Assessment Tools and Quality Frameworks (13 items). See Appendix 1 for a copy of the *Survey*.

*Survey* items were drawn from and closely aligned with 14 key state and national early childhood/early childhood special education frameworks, standards, and competencies that are used to inform and measure quality (e.g., Vermont’s early educator and early childhood special educator endorsements). Each of the 48 content items required respondents to self-assess across four sections: 1) Current Level of Knowledge, 2) Desire for Greater Knowledge, 3) Current Level of Emphasis in Course(s), and 4) Priority for Receiving Free Resources. Three are national frameworks and 11 are state frameworks. Appendix 2 shows the alignment among survey items and state/national frameworks, standards, and competencies.

Each of the 48 content items required respondents to self-assess across four sections: 1) Current Level of Knowledge, 2) Desire for Greater Knowledge, 3) Current Level of Emphasis in Course(s), and 4) Priority for Receiving Free Materials. The survey was developed in Qualtrics and Survey Monkey. Individuals were also offered the opportunity to receive the survey in a hard copy format should they prefer. Unless otherwise specified, items addressed Birth to Grade 3.

**Scoring**. For the first three sections (knowledge, desire, emphasis), respondents were asked to rate 48 Likert scale items on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Low”, 3 meaning “Medium”, and 5 meaning “High”. Headers for scale items 2 and 4 were left unspecified. For the last section (priority), respondents were asked to rate the same 48 Likert scale items on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 meaning “Low”, 2 meaning “Medium”, and 3 meaning “High”. The two demographic questions required respondents to identify institution(s) or system(s) at which they primarily work, as well as connections with other institutions or professional development systems.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Procedures**. Contact information for respondents was obtained by the Principal Investigator for 169 individuals who served in either faculty or instructor roles across the state of Vermont. Respondents were identified as *faculty* if they identified their primary affiliation with one of seven institutions of higher education. Respondents were identified as *instructors* if they identified their primary affiliation as something other than a college or university. Instructors were Master Trainers from the Vermont Registry as well as Resource Development Specialists and individuals who teach Higher Education Collaborative courses. Table 1 shows the number of individuals contacted across these roles/settings.

**Table 1. Respondents and Return Rates across Faculty and Instructor Participants**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Course/Training Setting** | **Respondents** | | | | | | **Comments** |
| **Original** | **Deleted**  **NA** | **Bounced** | **Revised N** | **Completed** | **%** |
| Champlain College | 12 | 1 |  | 11 | 7 | 64% | 2 Partial |
| Community College of Vermont | 22 | 1 |  | 21 | 12 | 57% | 1 Partial |
| Goddard College | 1 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 100% |  |
| Lyndon State College | 1 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 100% |  |
| Resource Development Specialists | 11 | 1 |  | 10 | 3 | 30% |  |
| Springfield College | 8 |  | 1 | 7 | 5 | 71% | 1 Partial |
| Union Institute and University | 1 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 100% |  |
| University of Vermont | 8 |  |  | 8 | 7 | 88% |  |
| Vermont Higher Education Collaborative | 8 |  |  | 8 | 3 | 38% |  |
| Vermont Registry-Master Trainer | 97 | 2 | 4 | 91 | 45 | 49% | 2 Partial |
| Total | 169 | 5 | 5 | 1591 | 85 | 54% |  |

1This N includes partial responses

A “heads up” email was provided to all identified individuals in early October, 2016. Shortly after this contact email, five individuals were identified as not appropriate for this study (did not live in the state anymore, no longer provided professional development, etc.) while email addresses “bounced” back for an additional five participants. Therefore, the final list of viable contacts was for 159 individuals. On October 24, 2016 participants received the contact email with the electronic survey; approximately four to five follow-up emails were conducted to encourage participants to complete the survey. Several participants identified issues with the Qualtrics system (e.g., computer screen freezing, not allowing participant to navigate to the next screen) so these individuals were provided with the survey in another electronic format (Survey Monkey).

**Return Rates.** Table 1 shows the return rates for the *Survey* across each of ten settings. Return rates by setting ranged from a high of 100% to a low of 30%. Completed surveys were submitted by 85 of the 159 participants for an overall return rate of 54%. This included 34 faculty members and 51 instructors.

**Data Analysis**. Descriptive statistics were conducted for the data obtained. Tables were developed to show the number of respondents per item (N), the overall mean, and the standard deviation (sd) for each of the items across the four sections of knowledge, desire, emphasis, and priority. Additional analyses were conducted to identify highest and lowest rated items. For knowledge, desire, and emphasis, highest rated items were those that obtained a mean score of 4.0 or higher and lowest rated items were those that obtained a mean score of less than 3.0. For priority, highest rated items were those that obtained a mean score of 2.25 or higher and lowest rated Items were those that obtained a mean score of less than 1.5. Results are provided as an aggregate (all respondents) and disaggregated by faculty and instructors.

Results of the data analysis for all respondents (faculty and instructors) are provided in Appendix 3. Appendix 4 shows results for faculty, and Appendix 5 shows results for instructors.

In thinking about and building from the results of this survey, consideration needs to be given to the response rates as well as the standard deviations noted. Response rates in some settings were less than 50%, which means the results may not be representative of their population. It is also important to consider both the mean and the standard deviation. A low standard deviation indicates that the data points tend to be close to the mean (also called the expected value) of the set, while a high standard deviation indicates that the data points are spread out over a wider range of values. Determining highest or lowest rated items becomes more difficult when there is a larger range of values.

**Findings**

What follows is a discussion of some highlights of the results in each category of the survey.

**Current Level of Knowledge.** Results for the four areas of the survey are summarized in Table 2. The results indicate that there are definite areas of high knowledge across all respondents. Notably, areas of lower knowledge were revealed on topics related to young dual language learners and newer or sector-specific tools (e.g., Ready for Kindergarten! Survey, Classroom Assessment Scoring System). With the one exception noted, the findings were consistent across faculty and instructors.

**Table 2. Current Level of Knowledge for All Respondents (Faculty and Instructors)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Highest Knowledge** | **Lower Knowledge** |
| **Domains of Development** | ● Social and emotional development ●Development of play and exploration  ●Development of literacy skills | ●Development of receptive and expressive language for **children who are** **dual language learners (DLLs)**  ●Development of literacy skills for **DLLs** |
| **High Quality Teaching and Learning** | ● How to design, implement and evaluate developmentally, contextually, and individually meaningful and appropriate practices  ● Practices for collaborating effectively with diverse early childhood partners, including family members, specialists, and administrators  ●Effective practices for family engagement | None |
| **Supporting the Full Participation of Each Child** | ● Ethical standards and other early childhood professional guidelines  ●Evidence-based practices for supporting preschoolers  ●Evidence-based practices for supporting infants and toddlers | ●Experiences and practices to support **children who are** **DLLs**  ●DEC Recommended Practices for supporting **children with disabilities** |
| **Assessment Tools & Quality Frameworks** | ●Vermont Early Learning Standards  ● Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS)[[5]](#footnote-5) | ●Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)  ●Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)  ●Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS)  ●Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!S)  ●Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)  ●Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) |

**Desire for Greater Knowledge.** Table 3 shows areas in which respondents have indicated a desire for greater knowledge, which were numerous for faculty. It appears the instructor respondents had more variability (sd) within their scoring so no item obtained a score of 4.0 or higher for desire for greater knowledge.

It is interesting to note that faculty identified some items as high knowledge and high desire for more knowledge. At the same time, there are some items that both faculty and instructors identified as low knowledge but did not indicate high desire for more knowledge.

There were no areas in which instructors identified a **high** desire for greater knowledge.

**Current Level of Emphasis in Courses.** Table 4 highlights the topics that faculty and instructors are currently emphasizing in the courses they teach. Faculty identified seven areas of high emphasis in their course, while instructors identified only one item above a high score of 4.0.

**Table 3. Current Level of Desire for Greater Knowledge for Faculty**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Faculty** |
| High Desire |
| **Domains of Development** | ●How a child’s **racial/ethnic identity development** impacts their learning and development  ●How a child’s **cultural identity development** impacts their learning and development  ●Social and emotional development  ●Development of literacy skills for children who are **dual language learners (DLLs)**  ●Development of receptive and expressive language for **children who are DLLs** |
| **High Quality Teaching and Learning** | All items were scored as a high priority including effective practices for family engagement with **families of diverse cultures, languages, values and circumstances** |
| **Supporting the Full Participation of Each Child** | ●Evidence-based practices that support access and participation for **children with disabilities**  ●How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support the needs of young children who are **culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse**  ●Evidence-based practices for supporting infants and toddlers |
| **Assessment Tools & Quality Frameworks** | ●Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)  ●Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) |

**Table 4. Highest Rated Items under Current Level of Emphasis in Course(s): Faculty and Instructors**

| **Faculty** | | | **Instructors** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Item #** | **Item** | **Score** | **Item #** | **Item** |
| 4.53 | 15 | How to develop, implement, and evaluate learning experiences and strategies that match the characteristics of each young child | 4.25 | 3 | Social and emotional development leading to successful peer and adult relationships, self-regulation, and self-awareness |
| 4.38 | 1 | Development of play and exploration |  |  |  |
| 4.29 | 3 | Social-emotional development leading to successful peer & adult relationships, self-regulation, and self-awareness |  |  |  |
| 4.25 | 16 | How to design, implement, and evaluate developmentally, contextually, and individually meaningful and appropriate practices |  |  |  |
| 4.25 | 18 | Observing, documenting, and assessing to inform decisions about goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies | 3.94 | 1 | Development of play and exploration |
| 4.24 | 2 | Development of approaches to learning (creativity, problem solving) | 3.88 | 18 | Observing, documenting, and assessing young children to inform decisions about goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies |
| 4.03 | 17 | Observing, documenting, and assessing young children within the context of a child’s culture, language, family, and circumstances | 3.82 | 2 | Development of approaches to learning (creativity, problem solving) |

Table 5 identifies the topics that faculty and instructors say they are emphasizing the least in the courses they teach. Instructors identified 6/10 (60%) of the items under Section III. Knowledge of Components for Supporting the Full Participation of Each Child (Birth – Grade 3) as an area of low emphasis in courses. These results seem to show that the emphasis on children who are diverse in terms of culture, language, ability, race, and ethnicity is consistently low across both groups of respondents.

Some responses may reflect the topics of the courses taught by each respondent. For example, respondents who teach infant/toddler courses would be likely to indicate that there was not a high level of emphasis on supporting the learning and development of children in the K – Grade 3 age range.

**Table 5. Lowest Rated Items under Current Level of Emphasis in Course(s): Faculty and Instructors**

| **Faculty** | | | **Instructors** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Item #** | **Item** | **Score** | **Item #** | **Item** |
| 2.42 | 29 | How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support young children who are **dual language learners (DLLs)** | 2.08 | 8 | Development of literacy skills **for children who are DLLs** |
| 2.62 | 8 | Development of literacy skills **for children who are DLLs** | 2.33 | 27 | DEC Recommended Practices for supporting children **with disabilities** |
| 2.76 | 6 | Development of receptive and expressive language **for children who are DLLs** | 2.33 | 29 | How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support **children who are DLLs** |
| 2.87 | 27 | DEC Recommended Practices for supporting children **with disabilities** | 2.35 | 6 | Development of receptive and expressive language (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) **for children who are DLLs** |
| 2.88 | 10 | Development of key science concepts | 2.76 | 25 | Evidence-based practices that support access for children **with disabilities** |
| 2.91 | 12 | Development of key social studies concepts | 2.80 | 11 | Development of key math concepts |
| 2.97 | 11,  4 | Development of math concepts; Development of strength and control of large and fine muscles | 2.80 | 30 | Practices to support the needs of young children who are **culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse** |
|  | | | 2.84 | 24 | How to advocate for and lead change in the early childhood field |
| 2.86 | 7 | Development of literacy skills (reading and writing) |
| 2.90 | 23 | Laws, policies, and research that support the importance and benefits of including children **with disabilities** |
| 2.92 | 10, 28 | Development of key science concepts; Practices to support children **with disabilities** |
| 2.94 | 12 | Development of key social studies concepts |
| 2.98 | 34 | Evidence-based practices for supporting the learning and development of young children (Kindergarten through Grade 3) |

**Priority for Receiving Free Materials.** Table 6 synthesizes data on the topics about which faculty and instructors indicated the greatest interest in free materials. Faculty identified 33/35 (94%) of the items as a high priority for receiving free materials. The only two items that did not obtain an aggregate faculty score above 2.25 were: 1) Development of strength, coordination, and control of large and fine muscles; and 2) Development of key science concepts. Instructors identified 8/35 (23%) of the items as high priority for receiving free materials, half of which focused on supporting young children who are culturally, racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.

**Table 6. Highest Rated Items for Receiving Free Materials: Faculty and Instructors**

| **Faculty/IHE** | **Instructors** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Score** | **Item #** | **Item** |
| **All but two identified above** | 2.35 | 3 | Social and emotional development leading to successful peer and adult relationships, self-regulation, and self-awareness |
| 2.33 | 13 | How a child’s **racial/ethnic identity development** impacts their learning and development |
| 2.33 | 14 | How a child’s **cultural identity development** impacts their learning and development |
| 2.31 | 6 | Development of receptive and expressive language (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) **for dual language learners** |
| 2.27 | 30 | How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support the needs of young children who are **culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse** |
| 2.25 | 2 | Development of approaches to learning (creativity, problem solving) |
| 2.25 | 5 | Development of receptive and expressive language (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) |
| 2.25 | 15 | How to develop, implement, and evaluate learning experiences and strategies that match the characteristics of each young child |

**Vermont Assessment Tools and Quality Frameworks.** One purpose for the *Survey* was to understand the extent to which faculty and instructors were familiar with and emphasizing the tools and frameworks that Vermont is using to support each child’s full potential and to grow quality in early childhood settings. Table 7 summarizes what the responses reveal.

The majority of the items in this section obtained low scores for emphasis in courses (92% of the items for faculty; 85% of the items for instructors). Items that did not get low ratings were Strengthening Families (for instructors) and the Vermont Early Learning Standards (for both groups). The finding that instructors are very familiar with the Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS), while faculty are not, is not surprising as many instructors do double duty as early childhood/early childhood special education professionals and instructors.

Faculty members indicated that they were interested in more information about two of the items in this section (the Inclusive Classroom Profile and the Social Skills Improvement System). Instructors indicated that they wanted more information about the Early Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

The lack of emphasis on many of the tools and frameworks is not surprising as they are relatively new and often sector-specific (e.g., only required in PreK settings).

**Table 7. Highest and Lowest Rated Items on Vermont Assessment Tools and Quality Frameworks**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tool/Framework** | **Faculty** | | | | | | **Instructors** | | | | | |
| **Knowledge** | | | **Emphasis** | | | **Knowledge** | | | **Emphasis** | | |
| High | Neutral | Low | High | Neutral | Low | High | Neutral | Low | High | Neutral | Low |
| Vermont Early Learning Standards | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |  | **√** |  |  |  |  | **√** |
| Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** | **√** |  |  |  |  | **√** |
| Environment Rating Scales, Teaching Strategies GOLD |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |
| CLASS, R4K!, TPOT, TPITOS, ICP, SSIS[[6]](#footnote-6) |  |  | **√** |  |  | **√** |  |  | **√** |  |  | **√** |
| ASQ[[7]](#footnote-7), Strengthening Families |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |
| Early Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |  | **√** |  |  |  | **√** |

**Discussion**

**Results.** The results of this survey highlight both assets and opportunities. Assets include:

* There are areas in which both faculty and instructors identified considerable knowledge, notably the areas of social-emotional development, play and exploration, literacy and creative expression.
* Faculty and instructors both highly rated their knowledge about the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS); instructors also highly rated their knowledge about the Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS).
* Both groups of respondents indicated a consistent interest in greater knowledge and a high priority for receiving free materials.

Survey findings also show that:

* Items pertaining to diversity (dual language learners, disability) often received lower mean scores for knowledge and/or emphasis in course(s) for faculty, and instructors.
* Instructors rated the majority of items under Section III. Knowledge of Components for Supporting the Full Participation of Each Child (Birth – Grade 3) as low – especially under level of emphasis in course(s).
* The majority of the Vermont Assessment Tools and Quality Frameworks were rated low on knowledge and emphasis in courses by both the faculty and instructors.
* For faculty and instructors, their knowledge of a topic exceeded the extent to which they emphasized that topic. This was true for 98% of the survey items.

**Recommendations.** Results of the survey underscore the fact that Vermont’s faculty and instructors have many areas of knowledge and expertise. They also reveal opportunities to strengthen the expertise and the quality of instruction across settings. Specific recommendations for addressing lower scoring areas are summarized below.

* **Provide targeted professional development for faculty and instructors**. In several areas (e.g., supporting the learning and development of young dual language learners, knowing how a child’s racial/ethnic identity development impacts their learning, evidence-based practices and assessment tools for supporting children with or at risk for disabilities) the survey highlighted the need for both greater knowledge and greater emphasis in courses. Master Classes (professional development opportunities targeted to faculty and instructors and featuring an emphasis on both content and pedagogy) could be a very effective way to increase knowledge and support the integration of that knowledge into course readings, activities, and assignments. The top three priorities for Master Classes, based on survey results, should be:

1. evidence-based practices for supporting young dual language learners and their families;
2. considerations and evidence-based practices for supporting young children who are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse and their families; and
3. evidence-based practices and assessment tools for supporting each and every child in inclusive home, program and community settings.

* **Provide resources**. The availability of free, high quality evidence-based resources could be instrumental in changes in areas of lower knowledge and emphasis. A central website with access to evidence sources, print sources, audiovisual sources, and web sources would be one strategic response to these findings.
* **Include faculty and instructors in ongoing professional development about Vermont assessment tools and quality frameworks**. Greater knowledge of and familiarity with these components of quality will yield greater emphasis in courses and better prepared professionals.
* **Share these results**. If faculty and instructors are not knowledgeable about a topic (e.g., supporting young dual language learners), and are not emphasizing it in their courses, it follows that their students may not be well versed in that topic. Thus the findings of this survey, relative to areas of lower faculty and instructor knowledge, could be used to inform the content of early childhood/early intervention conferences and trainings. This might include sharing survey findings with groups like the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children to inform their fall 2017 conference program.
* **Consider extending the survey to elementary education faculty.** The results of this survey provide information about faculty and instructors who are preparing and supporting individuals for their roles as early childhood professionals, working with children from birth through Grade 3. To support a continuum of quality for young children beyond Grade 3 it might be important to survey and better understand the knowledge base and emphasis of elementary education instructors.

1. See About Vermont’s Early Learning Challenge Grant [**http://buildingbrightfutures.org/early-learning-challenge/**](http://buildingbrightfutures.org/early-learning-challenge/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Early childhood refers to the birth through Grade 3 age range. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In this report, the term *instructors* is sometimes used collectively to refer to the individuals who teach early childhood education and early childhood special education courses, either in college and university settings or as part of recurring trainings (e.g., through the Higher Education Collaborative). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Many respondents are responsible for courses in more than one location. For example, a faculty member at Springfield College might also teach courses for the Community College of Vermont. To avoid duplication, the demographic information was used to assign each faculty member or instructor to one setting. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This was an area of high knowledge *only* for instructors. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System, R4K! = Ready for Kindergarten! Survey, TPOT = Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, TPITOS = Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale, ICP = Inclusive Classroom Profile, SSIS = Social Skills Improvement System, [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ages and Stages Questionnaire [↑](#footnote-ref-7)