

## Results of the Vermont Early Childhood Instructor Survey

### Summary<sup>1</sup>

January 2017

To better understand the strengths and capabilities of instructors who teach early childhood courses or conduct recurring trainings in Vermont, a survey was developed and undertaken in the fall of 2016. The 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 interest and priorities for receiving free materials.

### BACKGROUND

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 Early Childhood Domains of Development (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).

*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 dimensions: 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.

Surveys were sent electronically to 169 individuals. Based on the two demographic items, respondents were identified as *faculty* if they identified their primary affiliation with one of seven institutions of higher education (i.e., Champlain College, Community College of Vermont, Goddard College, Lyndon State College, Springfield College, Union Institute and University, and the University of Vermont). 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. Ten individuals were removed from the respondent pool for a variety of reasons (e.g., they were no longer providing professional development). 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. The tables below summarize how Vermont's faculty and instructors assessed themselves.

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## Current Level of Knowledge for All Respondents: Faculty and Instructors

Highest Rated Items by Mean Score <sup>2</sup>	Lowest Rated Items by Mean Score <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social and emotional development</li> <li>● Development of play and exploration</li> <li>● Development of literacy skills</li> <li>● How to design, implement and evaluate developmentally, contextually, and individually meaningful and appropriate practices</li> <li>● Practices for collaborating effectively with diverse early child-hood partners, including family, specialists, and administrators</li> <li>● Effective practices for family engagement</li> <li>● Ethical standards and other early childhood professional guidelines</li> <li>● Evidence-based practices for supporting preschoolers</li> <li>● Evidence-based practices for supporting infants and toddlers</li> <li>● Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)</li> <li>● Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS)<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Development of receptive and expressive language for children who are <b>dual language learners</b></li> <li>● Development of literacy skills for children who are <b>dual language learners</b></li> <li>● Experiences and practices to support young children who are <b>dual language learners</b></li> <li>● DEC Recommended Practices for supporting <b>children with disabilities</b></li> <li>● Vermont assessment tools, including the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4KIS), Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS), Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP), and Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)</li> </ul>

## Desire for Greater Knowledge by Faculty

Items of Highest Desire by Mean Score <sup>4</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How a child's <b>racial/ethnic identity development</b> impacts their learning and development</li> <li>● How a child's <b>cultural identity development</b> impacts their learning and development</li> <li>● Social and emotional development leading to successful peer and adult relationships, self-regulation, and self-awareness</li> <li>● Development of literacy skills for children who are <b>dual language learners</b></li> <li>● Development of receptive and expressive language for children who are <b>dual language learners</b></li> <li>● Evidence-based practices that support access and participation for <b>children with disabilities</b></li> <li>● How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support the needs of young children who are <b>culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse</b></li> <li>● Evidence-based practices for supporting infants and toddlers</li> <li>● Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)</li> <li>● Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)</li> </ul>

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

## Priority for Receiving Free Materials<sup>5</sup>

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.

## Vermont Assessment Tools and Quality Frameworks

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 (VELS) (for both groups).

<sup>2</sup> Rating Scale is 1=Low to 5=High; Highest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of 4.0 or higher and Lowest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of less than 3.0.

<sup>3</sup> This was an area of high knowledge *only* for instructors.

<sup>4</sup> This is a partial list. Faculty expressed a high desire for greater knowledge about half of the items in the survey.

<sup>5</sup> Rating Scale is 1=Low to 3=High; Highest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of 2.25 or higher and Lowest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of less than 1.5.

## Current Level of Emphasis in Courses

Faculty identified seven areas of high emphasis in their courses, while instructors identified only one item with a high score (above 4.0). Of note is the fact that instructors identified 6/10 (60%) of the items in a section related to supporting the full participation of children who are culturally, linguistically, and individually diverse and their families, as areas of low emphasis in their courses.

Items with High Level of Emphasis in Courses <sup>6</sup>			Items with Low Level of Emphasis in Courses <sup>6</sup>		
Item	Faculty	Instructors	Item	Faculty	Instructors
How to develop, implement, and evaluate learning experiences and strategies that match the characteristics of each young child	√		How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support young children who are <b>dual language learners</b>	√	√
Development of approaches to learning (creativity, problem solving)	√		Development of literacy skills for children who are <b>dual language learners</b>	√	√
Social and emotional development leading to successful peer and adult relationships, self-regulation, and self-awareness	√	√	The DEC Recommended Practices for supporting children <b>with disabilities</b>	√	√
			Development of key social studies concepts	√	
How to design, implement, and evaluate developmentally, contextually, and individually meaningful and appropriate practices	√		Development of receptive and expressive language (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) for children who are <b>dual language learners</b>	√	√
Observing, documenting, and assessing young children to inform decisions about goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies	√		Development of key science concepts	√	√
			All Vermont assessment tools and quality frameworks except the VELs and Strengthening Families	√	
Development of play & exploration	√		Development of key math concepts	√	√
Observing, documenting, and assessing young children within the context of a child's <b>culture, language, family, and circumstances</b>	√		Evidence-based practices that support access for children <b>with disabilities</b> (e.g., universal design for learning, assistive technology)		√
			How to develop, implement, and evaluate experiences and practices to support the needs of young children who are <b>culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse</b>		√

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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 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:

<sup>6</sup>Rating Scale is 1=Low to 5=High; Highest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of 4.0 or higher and Lowest Rated Items obtained a Mean Score of less than 3.0.

- Items pertaining to diversity (e.g., children who are dual language learners, disability, race, and ethnicity) consistently received lower mean scores for knowledge and/or emphasis in course(s) for faculty and instructors.
- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- For faculty and instructors, their knowledge of a topic exceeded the extent to which they emphasized that topic in their courses. This was true for 98% of the survey items.

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 are summarized below.

- **Provide targeted professional development for faculty and instructors.** In several areas (e.g., supporting the learning and development of young children who are 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 for faculty and instructors that emphasize both content and pedagogy) would be an 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 children who are dual language learners and their families;
  2. 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 free, high-quality, evidence-based resources 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 children who are dual language learners), and are not emphasizing it in their courses, it follows that their students may not be well versed in that topic. 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 should include sharing survey findings with groups like the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children for use in program planning.
- **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.

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<sup>7</sup> Many of the tools listed in this section are relatively new and often used by one sector (e.g., PreK).