



The Improving Teacher Quality Early Learning Projects

Higher Education

FINDINGS

The Early Learning Projects validated that institutions of higher education are a vital link to the professional development of early childhood educators and to significant collaborations between the organizational stakeholders that work together to train and professionalize the field.

- Increase early childhood educator exploration and enrollment in certificate and degree programs
- Design cohort models to ease early childhood educators into higher qualifications and degree programs.
- Increase productive collaborations between early childhood education programs for young children and institutions of higher education.

Increase exploration and enrollment

Early childhood educators saw access to coursework at institutions of higher education as an exciting opportunity to develop their teaching practice and advance competencies and qualifications. Their participation in degree programs was supported by financial assistance and access to courses outside of their work hours. This instilled a sense of confidence in early childhood educators to enroll in degree programs, even if they had been out of school for a prolonged period. As a result, many participants went on to earn associate, bachelor and master's degrees. College courses helped early childhood educators increase their credentials, strengthening the early childhood education field and benefited the surrounding community.

Design cohort models

The cohort model was an important part of participants' back-to-school experience. Often, they started by exploring a single workshop that was designed as an example of what a class session might be like. Early childhood educators enrolling in the degree programs enrolled with peers. The shared experience buttressed confidence, creating a sense of collegiality – that the learning journey could help create professional community in early childhood.

“It’s a win for the teachers, the children, the para-professionals, and administration. It has provided this school in particular with phenomenal professional development. It has increased the teachers’ knowledge and pedagogical skills.”

“[The college] listened to early educators both in the K-12 setting and in the community pre-K programs...and found out what their needs were before their designed a program...I think that the very fact that those institutions and programs felt that their voice was heard and that they were being treated as equal partners led to a very auspicious start to the program.”

Increase IHE/ECE collaboration

The ITQ program fostered collaboration between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and early childhood education (ECE) programs through the development of meaningful coursework and providing access to degree programs. Colleges and universities met with early childhood educators to understand their needs when designing trainings, workshops or coursework and adapted delivery models accordingly. IHEs played an important leadership role in the project, most notably by bringing ECE stakeholders together. IHEs provided an important resource to participating early childhood educators by offering professional development trainings and course credits designed to stack into certificate and degree programs.

Partnerships with IHEs promoted important growth opportunities for the profession of early childhood educators. Content knowledge in the sciences and mathematics and pedagogical knowledge and skills in the practice of early childhood education, created an expanded pool of more qualified, competent and professional early educators within districts and communities. The partnerships also increased confidence in the early educators' academic experiences.



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TOOLS

- Convene leaders
- Connect required professional development
- Innovate delivery methods
- Emphasize early childhood pedagogy

Convene Leaders

Bring together district and community leaders such as superintendents, principals, executive directors and directors to understand the needs of the early educator workforce across sectors. Develop and create programming in response to this or offer existing certificate and degree opportunities that are related to advancing qualifications and competencies for the workforce and that will also serve to professionalize the field in your area- and thereby increase children's learning.

Connect Required Professional Development

When professional development or courses and programs are available, be sure to offer them to all early childhood educators in community non-profit programs and public schools. Invite museum educators and children's librarians to participate. Integrate master-level teachers with experienced para-professionals in workshops and trainings. It works!

Innovate Delivery Methods

Reaching the full array of early educators means you will have to offer content in many ways. Use workshops to introduce a course or program of study. Consider on-line or cohort models, as well as Saturday and evening sessions. Modularize coursework into a workshop series providing credits and professional development hours as needed by participants in an early childhood education mixed delivery system.

Emphasize Early Childhood Pedagogy

Be true to core knowledge in the science of early learning and accentuate the clinical practice skills found to produce positive learning outcomes for children. Underscore the significance of cultural proficiencies when working with diverse children and families as much as the content knowledge that is needed to be a professional and informed Early Childhood Educator.