

Early Childhood Professional Development

Summary of Significant Trends:

The quality of care a young child receives has been shown to dramatically impact his or her social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and ultimately success in school and life. Research studies show that when caregivers of young children educated about the development of young children, when there is low staff turnover, low child/staff ratios, and above minimum licensure or accreditation of the childcare program, the quality of care received is higher.

In North Carolina, of the more than 620,000 children under age six, 66% have mothers in the labor force. Eighty percent of mothers of children 6-17 are in the labor force. In North Carolina, there are 4125 licensed childcare centers and 5100 family childcare homes. That adds up to a great deal of responsibility in raising our children.

Emerging Trends and Issues:

Quality childcare will be an issue as long as children are in care and as long as the annual turnover rate in the childcare workforce remains above 35%. Children need consistent care from caregivers who understand children's development and can plan stimulating activities in a positive environment. The investment in professional development is critical but also costly when the market rate of pay falls often below the poverty line for childcare workers.

Professional development and educational outreach is required through childcare regulations, but is also necessary to continue to build quality for all children. The trend in educational outreach is to provide intense long term educational interventions in an effort to raise knowledge and build skills. With this in mind, the trend is to encourage the completion of credit classes leading to two- and four-year degrees. In North Carolina two specific classes for lead teachers and directors are required and are offered through the community colleges. To supplement credit courses, non-credit clock hours are required annually.

Accessibility to educational sites is of concern. After working with children all day long, some providers are traveling lengthy distances to meet educational requirements. In rural areas, in particular assuring that classes are offered at the times for providers who need them and at a geographic distance that is convenient is critical.

childcare centers and homes in North Carolina are required to hold a star-rated license. Five stars marks higher quality. In the system, 119 are two-star centers, 1416 are three-star centers, 822 are four-star centers, and 330 centers have five stars. For homes, there are 84 with two stars, 1146 three stars, 622 four stars and 261 with five stars. There is room for continued quality improvement. In addition to regulated educational requirements, there is some discussion in the state about a voluntary individual

professional license much like the medical, accounting, or legal profession currently has. As these plans emerge, Extension will want to keep in tune to supporting professional development for providers who will seek this credential.

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Family and Consumer Sciences Cooperative Extension provides non-credit classes to childcare providers. With the trend of obtaining credit courses, Cooperative Extension must look at the emerging needs in communities to assure that there are no gaps, particularly when it pertains to accessibility to course work for childcare providers.

Potential needs may include providing support to adult students who are required to complete a college class for the first time or who have not been in a classroom setting for many years. These students may not be library- or internet-savvy. This means that the building skills to be a successful student may include knowledge about writing papers and word processing, web surfing for information, sorting through the sea of internet documents, and navigating community and library resources.

Accessibility is another area where Cooperative Extension can support the childcare workforce. With Extension's local presence, their training courses are close to providers, but also consideration will be given to distance education in the next few years. Providing computer access and leadership to help providers develop as professionals will be critical.

Audiences who will benefit from early childhood professional development

- Childcare providers, teachers, caregivers
- Parents of young children
- Community leaders

Sources of Supporting Data:

Childcare Services Association

<http://www.childcareservices.org/>

Child Advocacy Institute <http://www.ncchild.org>

North Carolina Early Childhood

Professional Development Institute

<http://www.ncchildcare.org>

Primary Contact: Karen DeBord, Ph.D.

karen_debord@ncsu.edu

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