

Early Childhood
Professional Development Needs Assessment

Introduction

As a part of an overall evaluation of the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE), a needs assessment survey was developed to determine the professional development needs of early childhood staff. This includes both teachers and classroom assistants across the main programmatic area of Head Start, State Prekindergarten, Child-Parent Centers and Tuition Based Preschool. Results from this survey will help shape the upcoming professional development sessions offered to early childhood classroom staff. The development of the survey and the analysis of the results was a joint effort between OECE and the Office of Research, Evaluation and Accountability.

Key Findings

- Overall response rate was 54%.
- Classroom assistants reported needs for basic information such as discipline skills and technology while teacher needs focused more on specific activities such as journal writing and early math methods. In open-ended responses, they reported needs for information on how to communicate with parents and the methods of increasing parental involvement.
- New teachers also stated the need to learn more basic information on classroom management whereas veteran teachers across all programs stated a need to learn more about technology. These results were echoed in their responses to open-ended items. In addition, new and veteran teachers expressed a common concern for learning more about special education/learning disabilities and science activities.
- Most staff felt that the presenters were knowledgeable, skilled and capable. The majority felt that it was useful and have even adapted some of the strategies presented at these sessions in their classrooms.
- Classroom assistants and veteran teachers reported higher rates of being at the beginner level of technical skills.
- While the majority of staff across all programs has had their classroom observed for purposes of collecting data for the ECERS and/or ELLCO, a high percentage of staff have not yet had results on either test shared with them.

Methodology

A 31-item online survey was developed and a direct link to the survey was accessible from the OECE Web site from February 6, 2006 to February 28, 2006. Teachers and classroom assistants were asked to complete this survey in order to provide assistance with professional development planning.

Analysis

The following analysis will address all items on the survey. For items specifically addressing professional development needs or impressions of past professional development sessions, the data will be explored in two ways: 1) teachers and classroom assistants, and 2) new teachers and veteran teachers. Teachers and classroom assistants were self-identified by answering a question on the survey. Teachers were also asked about their number of years of teaching experience. For this survey, new teachers are considered those with six or fewer years of experience and veteran teachers with seven or more years of experience. Each of these comparison groups will be examined across the four program types.

In addition to survey items with fixed choice responses, there were several opportunities for classroom staff to respond to open-ended questions. The responses to these items were also analyzed and the results will be discussed throughout this report.

Results

Respondent Profile

There were a total of 744 respondents to the survey. Table 1 illustrates that the overall response rate to the survey was 54 percent. Proportionately, there were more teachers who responded to the survey than classroom assistants. In regards to the program, staff from Child-Parent Centers responded at consistently high rates as compared to the other programs. Overall, staff from Head Start programs responded at the second highest rate, followed by staff from State Prekindergarten programs.

Table 1. Respondent Rate by Early Childhood Program

Program	Total	Teacher Respondents	%	Total	Assistant Respondents	%	Total	Total Staff	%
Head Start	242	168	69	266	118	44	508	286	56
SPK	350	209	60	350	169	48	700	378	54
TBP	23	9	39	46	15	33	69	24	35
CPC	48	31	65	48	25	52	96	56	58
ALL Programs	663	417	63	710	327	46	1373	744	54

Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of new teachers and veteran teachers by program. The majority of teachers across all programs have seven or more years of experience. Proportionately, the highest percentage of new teachers are in Tuition Based Preschool programs; however, please note that the total number of teachers in that program is small as compared to other programs. Conversely, State Prekindergarten programs have the highest rate of new teachers.

Table 2. Teacher Experience by Early Childhood Program

Teacher Experience Category	Program Type							
	HS		SPK		CPC		TBP	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
New (1-6 yrs exp)	42	26	57	29	3	11	4	44
Veteran (7+ yrs exp)	117	74	143	71	25	89	5	66

The profile of respondents to the open-ended items is somewhat different. Proportionately, more teachers completed open-ended items than classroom assistants. In regards to the program, staff from State Prekindergarten completed open-ended items at consistently higher rates as compared to the other programs. Overall, staff from Head Start programs completed open-ended items at the second highest rate, followed by staff from Tuition Based Preschool programs.

Staff Support

The highest percentages of staff from all the programs reported they received the most instructional support from principals (50% – 74%) and assistant principals (32% – 62%). In addition, a moderate percentage of staff from all programs reported they received instructional support from literacy coaches (13% – 32%), reading specialists (16% – 21%) and consultants (13% – 20%).

Professional Development Topics

Selected Responses

There were 32 possible topics from which staff could choose as possible areas for professional development. The topics with the greatest percentages were selected for each comparison group by program area and are listed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 illustrates the greatest percentage of reported topics of interest for teacher and classroom assistants across the program types. Learning more about transition activities is a common topic of interest among teachers in Head Start (43%) and State Prekindergarten (37%) programs. Teachers across all programs stated the desire to learn more about methods of teaching early math (39% – 47%) and the use of technology in the classroom (33% – 47%). A high percentage of teachers in Head Start (42%), State Prekindergarten (39%) and Child-Parent Center (39%) programs reported an interest in journal writing with children as a topic for professional development. A high percentage of classroom assistants across all programs expressed an interest in learning more about discipline skills (45% – 73%), whereas the topic is not reported as a high level of interest among teachers. Classroom assistants in Head Start (44%) and Tuition Based (67%) programs as well as teachers in Child-Parent Centers (51%) indicated that they would like more information about the mental health of young children.

Table 3. Teacher and Classroom Assistant Selected Topics of Interest for Professional Development

HS		SPK		CPC		TBP	
Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's
transition activities	child mental health	early math methods	discipline skills	child mental health	discipline skills	early math methods	discipline skills
early math methods	discipline skills	technology	technology	technology	ext child learning	technology (teachers)	child mental health
technology	enhancing language	technology (teachers)	early lit. methods	journal writing	enhancing language	articulation	classroom management
journal writing	early math methods	journal writing	transition activities	early math methods	technology	using ta's and volunteers	read/story methods
enhancing language	technology	transition activities	early math methods	classroom management and articulation	child mental health and math methods	referrals	journal writing and tech (teach)

Table 4 illustrates the greatest percentage of reported topics of interest for new and veteran teachers. A high percentage of new teachers across all programs stated they would like to learn more about classroom management (41% – 75%), whereas the topic is not reported as a high level of interest among veteran teachers. New teachers in Head Start (48%), State Prekindergarten (56%) and Child-Parent Center (67%) programs are interested in transition activities as a topic for professional development. Both new and veteran teachers in Head Start (45%, 47%) and State Prekindergarten (56%, 45%) programs are interested in learning more about methods of teaching early math. A high percentage of veteran teachers across all programs (40% – 52%) stated they are interested in the topic of technology in the classroom. Veteran teachers in Head Start (50%), State Prekindergarten (38%) and Child-Parent Center (48%) programs also expressed an interest in learning more about journal writing with children, whereas this was not a common topic among new teachers.

Table 4. New and Veteran Selected Topics of Interests for Professional Development

HS		SPK		CPC		TBP	
New	Veteran	New	Veteran	New	Veteran	New	Veteran
transition activities	technology	transition activities	technology	classroom management	child mental health	classroom management	technology (teachers)
early math methods	journal writing	early math methods	technology (teachers)	child mental health	technology (teachers)	articulation	technology
classroom management	early math methods	room setup and design	early math methods	transition activities	technology		paperwork
articulation	transition activities	classroom management	journal writing	using ta's and volunteers	articulation		using ta's and volunteers
discipline skills	enhancing language and lit. methods	early lit. methods and tech	child mental health and articulation	management skills	journal writing		referrals

Open-Ended Responses

Teachers and classroom assistants were allowed to voice their opinions and offer suggestions concerning Professional Development. There were 11 areas of input from which staff could choose to express their opinions about professional development. The topics with the greatest percentage were selected for each comparison group by program area and are listed in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 illustrates the greatest percentage of reported topics of interest for teachers and classroom assistants across program types. Learning more about learning disabilities is a common topic of interest among teachers in Head Start, State Prekindergarten and Child-Parent Center programs. Most teachers and classroom assistants indicated the desire to learn more about methods of teaching early science methods. Teachers in Head Start, State Prekindergarten and Child-Parent Center programs reported an interest in classroom and time management as a topic for professional development. Classroom assistants expressed an interest in learning more about how to communicate with parents, whereas that topic is not reported as a topic of interest among teachers. Teachers in Head Start, State Prekindergarten and Tuition Based programs expressed the need for classroom and time management. Though at a moderate rate, teachers from the Head Start and Tuition Based programs expressed a common need for job roles of classroom assistants and teachers to be defined.

Table 5. Teacher and Classroom Assistant Open-Ended Topics of Interest for Professional Development

HS		SPK		CPC		TBP	
Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's	Teachers	CA's
learning disabilities/special needs	communicating with parents	learning disabilities/special needs	anecdotal	learning disabilities/special needs	becoming a teacher	communicating with parents	communicating with parents
early math/science methods/activities	creative art activities	project approach	early science activities	best practices		early science activities	
technology	teamwork	early science methods/activities	learning disabilities/special needs			classroom/time management	
literacy		classroom/time management				behavior management	
classroom management							

Table 6 illustrates the greatest reported topics of interest for new and veteran teachers. A high number of new and veteran teachers would like to learn more about early literacy methods and techniques. New and veteran teachers in Head Start and State Prekindergarten programs are interested in time and classroom management. A high percentage of veteran teachers across all programs indicated they are interested in the topic of technology in the classroom. Veteran teachers in the Head Start, State Prekindergarten and Tuition Based programs also expressed an interest in early science activities.

Table 6. New and Veteran Open-Ended Topics of Interest for Professional Development

HS		SPK		CPC		TBP	
New	Veteran	New	Veteran	New	Veteran	New	Veteran
learning disabilities/special needs	learning disabilities/special needs	learning disabilities/special needs	learning disabilities/special needs	early childhood theories	learning disabilities/special needs	early lit. methods and tech	early science activities
early math methods	early science activities	addressing standards	technology (teachers)		technology (teachers)	behavior management	technology (teachers)
early lit. methods and tech	technology (teachers)	behavior management	early math/science methods		early lit. methods and tech		early lit. methods and tech
time/classroom management	time/classroom management	time/classroom management	early lit. methods and tech				behavior management
	early lit. methods and tech	early lit. methods and tech	time/classroom management				

Presentation Format

Staff selected the presentation formats that would provide the most meaningful and useful information to them. Almost all teachers and classroom assistants across all programs (42% – 68%) feel that small group presentations and discussions are most helpful. In addition, teachers in State Prekindergarten (33%) and Tuition Based (33%) programs and classroom assistants in Head Start (40%), Child-Parent Center (24%) and Tuition Based (33%) programs prefer one on one coaching in the classroom. A varied group setting is also a popular choice for teachers in Head Start (42%) and Child-Parent Center (48%) programs.

Almost all new and veteran teachers across all programs (40% – 61%) feel that small group presentations and discussions are most helpful. In addition, veteran teachers in Head Start (45%), State Prekindergarten (36%) and Child-Parent Center (60%) programs view varied group settings as conducive to learning. New teachers in State Prekindergarten (40%) and Child-Parent Centers (67%) believe that one on one coaching works best for their programs.

Teachers and classroom assistants also indicated their preference as to when they would participate in professional development sessions. The vast majority of all staff across all the programs (59% – 82%) preferred sessions during work hours only. New teachers in Child-Parent Centers (100%) and classroom assistants in Tuition Based (38%) programs preferred summer sessions. New teachers in Tuition Based (58%) programs preferred after school sessions. Staff from Child-Parent Center programs had the highest percentage of staff who reported that they would attend professional development sessions without a stipend. Staff from the Tuition Based (67%) and Head Start (66%) programs were the next highest groups of staff who would attend professional development sessions without receiving a stipend.

Open-ended responses also had similar results. The majority of all program staff preferred sessions to occur during work hours only on professional development days. Veteran teachers in Child-Parent Center programs preferred that professional development sessions were not held during the summer. New teachers in Head Start, Child-Parent Centers and Tuition Based programs did not comment on this survey

question. Tuition Based teachers asked for convenient locations. Staff from the State Prekindergarten program reported that they were flexible to attend professional development sessions with a stipend. Veteran State Prekindergarten teachers also wanted a stipend for attending technology training. Tuition Based veteran teachers indicated they wanted technology classes that were conducted at their technical skill level. Teachers indicated they wanted CPDU credit for attending professional development and technology training.

Presenter Preference

In addition to the presentation format, staff were also asked to select the type of presenter from whom they would best learn. In Head Start and State Prekindergarten programs, all teachers and classroom assistants preferred that the professional development sessions be led by peers (64% and 66%, respectively), experts (51% and 56%, respectively) or guest presenters (51% and 52%, respectively). The majority of all respondents in the Child-Parent Center and Tuition Based programs preferred experts (55% and 63%, respectively) or guest presenters (55% and 46%, respectively).

Comfort Level

Teachers and classroom assistants were asked to rate their level of comfort with the following areas: 1) screening process, 2) CAP, 3) CC.net, 4) COPA, 5) monthly reports, 6) early literacy development, and 7) early math development. Staff rated their level of comfort as extremely, somewhat, or not at all. In order to pinpoint professional development needs, those areas that received the highest percentage of staff reporting that they are not at all comfortable will be targeted for improvement. Please note that the vast majority of staff indicated they are extremely or somewhat comfortable in their knowledge of the areas listed above.

Higher percentages of classroom assistants in the Head Start (20%) and State Prekindergarten (15%) programs expressed a lack of comfort with their knowledge about monthly reports. Higher percentages of classroom assistants in the State Prekindergarten (12%) and Child-Parent Center (17%) programs and teachers in State Prekindergarten (5%) are not comfortable about their level of knowledge about the CAP. Higher percentage rates of teachers in Head Start (12%) and Child-Parent Center (4%) programs are not comfortable about their level of knowledge about COPA.

A higher percentage of new teachers across all programs (5% – 25%) expressed a lack of comfort in their knowledge about the screening process. Higher rates of both new (15%) and veteran (11%) teachers in Head Start programs have low levels of comfort in their knowledge of COPA and five percent of all teachers in State Prekindergarten programs have low levels of comfort in their knowledge of the CAP. Three percent of veteran teachers in Child-Parent Centers and eight percent of veteran teachers in Child-Parent Center programs expressed low levels of comfort in their knowledge about early math development.

Professional Development Feedback

At least 50% of all staff across all programs acknowledged that presenters in professional development and technical assistance programs are knowledgeable, skilled and capable. Staff were also asked about the usefulness of the professional development training they had received. At least 70% of all staff across all the programs reported that it was extremely or somewhat useful. Open-ended items provided more specific feedback on professional development sessions. New and veteran teachers in the State Prekindergarten and veteran teachers in the Child-Parent Center programs viewed professional development to have less of an impact because of the redundancy and boring topics. Head Start veteran teachers would like to eliminate paperwork. New and veteran teachers in State Prekindergarten programs feel that separating teachers by years of experience would determine the training topics and presentation formats of professional development.

In addition, over 75% of all staff across all programs stated that they have implemented strategies in the classroom that had been provided by professional development sessions. In fact, in the open-ended responses, a high percentage of new and veteran teachers stated literacy has had the most positive impact on their quality of instruction. The only exception is that 46% of the classroom assistants in Tuition Based programs have implemented strategies.

Although most staff felt that professional development is useful, there is a small percentage of staff that feels the professional development sessions are not at all useful or did not attend the sessions at all. With the exception of Tuition Based programs, teachers have higher rates (10% – 12%) of discontent or non-attendance than classroom assistants (4% – 8%). New teachers in the Head Start (17%) and Tuition Based (75%) programs have higher rates of discontent or non-attendance than veteran teachers (7% and 0%, respectively). In State Prekindergarten and Child-Parent Center programs, the trend is reverse. Rates of discontent and non-attendance are higher for veteran teachers (13% and 12%, respectively) as compared to new teachers (10% and 0%, respectively).

In addition, staff was also asked the number of times they had been visited by area office staff specifically for professional development follow-up. The highest percentage of staff across all programs reported being visited by area office staff between 1-2 times. The highest percentages of staff not receiving any visits were in the Head Start (22%) and Child-Parent Center (25%) programs.

Technological Skill

Staff were asked to rate their level of technological skill. The response choices included: 1) never used a computer, 2) beginner, 3) intermediate, and 4) advanced. Only four staff members stated they have never used a computer. At least 69% of staff across all programs considered themselves to be at the intermediate or advanced level. Roughly one quarter of the staff in each of the programs considered themselves to be beginners. The range of rates of classroom assistants (25% – 40%) who described themselves as having beginner technology skills is higher than that of teachers (13% – 23%). The range of rates of veteran teachers (20% – 31%) who felt they had beginner technology skills is comparable to the rate of new teachers (0% – 33%).

When staff was asked about their preferences as to when they would participate in technology training sessions, 43% to 64% across all programs preferred sessions to occur during work hours only. New teachers in Child-Parent Centers (33%) preferred the sessions be in the summer and 40% of veteran teachers in Tuition Based programs preferred sessions during working hours, after school and during the summer.

ECERS & ELLCO

Over 80% of staff from the Head Start, State Prekindergarten and Child-Parent Center programs stated they have had their classrooms observed in order to complete the ECERS and/or the ELLCO. More than half (56%) of the staff from the Tuition Based program stated having these observations. The majority (84%) of all staff across all programs are familiar with the purpose of the ECERS and the ELLCO. The highest percentage of staff that reported that ELLCO results have not been shared is from the Head Start program (78%), followed by the State Prekindergarten (68%), Child-Parent Centers (64%), and Tuition Based (56%) programs. The highest percentage of staff reporting that ECERS results have not been shared is from the Tuition Based program (67%), followed by the State Prekindergarten (62%) and the Head Start (53%) programs, and lastly Child Parent Centers (38%).

Discussion

The overall response rate was moderate (56%), but this was encouraging given the fact that this was the first online survey administered to all teachers and classroom assistants. The overall response rate of each program was over 50%. The response rate was the highest from the Child-Parent Centers (86%). The lowest response rate was received from the Tuition Based programs (35%).

There were several trends in the selection of topics for professional development. Classroom assistants reported the need for basic information such as discipline skills and technology while teachers' needs focused more on specific activities such as journal writing and early math methods. New teachers also confirmed the need to learn more basic information on classroom management whereas veteran teachers across all programs acknowledged a need to learn more about technology. Results from open-ended items were similar in that new teachers expressed a preference towards basic information. The mental health of young children is a popular topic among all staff in Child-Parent Centers and classroom assistants in the Head Start and Tuition Based programs but not as popular in State Prekindergarten programs. The results from open-ended items were slightly different in that the mental health of young children is a popular topic among new and veteran teachers in the Head Start and State Prekindergarten programs and veteran teachers in Child-Parent Centers, but not as popular in the Tuition Based program.

The feedback on past professional development sessions is encouraging. Most staff agreed that the presenters were knowledgeable, skilled and capable. The majority of the staff confirmed that the sessions were useful and has adapted some of the strategies that were presented in their classrooms. In regards to future scheduling, most staff would participate if the sessions were held only during the workday. The results from open-ended items provided more specific feedback on professional development sessions. Teachers indicated they wanted CPDU credit for attending professional development and technology training. Veteran teachers wanted the professional development training to be separated by years of experience. Teachers also mentioned repeatedly they want to spend more time in the classroom. At a low rate, Head Start teachers expressed a desire to eliminate paperwork.

In regards to technical skills, classroom assistants and veteran teachers reported higher rates of being at the beginner level because these groups may have had the least exposure to technology in the classroom. Similarly to professional development sessions, the majority of staff would participate in technology training only during work hours.

While the majority of staff across all programs has had their classroom observed for purposes of collecting data for the ECERS and/or ELLCO, a high percentage of teachers and classroom assistants have not had the results on either test shared with them.

It is important to note that although the response rate was moderate, those staff who did respond are a self-selected and possibly higher motivated group. Although these results provide information about staff preference on professional development topics as well as areas in which staff may need more training, the results should be read with caution. It will be critical to continue to seek professional development feedback from Early Childhood staff, both in the development process and after the sessions have occurred. Most importantly, an ongoing discussion about these issues can be developed between program planners and classroom staff.

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