



THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY: EARLY EDUCATOR PREFERENCES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Early education professionals require and deserve access to professional development (PD) that help grow their preexisting skills and knowledge, as well as help them develop new ones. Early care and education programs spend a considerable portion of their funds on professional development; yet little is known about what types of PD early educators actually receive, and what their preferences for PD are with respect to content and format. Cambridge's early educators shared their perspectives on this topic through their responses to the Pulse Survey.

WHAT DO EDUCATORS CURRENTLY RECEIVE & WHAT DO THEY WISH TO RECEIVE?

In Spring 2022, Pulse Survey respondents identified all topics of professional development from a list of fifteen that they had received since September 2021 (shown below).

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| 1) Diversity, equity, and inclusion | 7) Center or school compliance, regulations, or reporting | 11) Working with English language learners |
| 2) Behavior management | 8) Partnering with children's families | 12) Mathematics instruction |
| 3) Social and emotional learning | 9) Literacy and language instruction | 13) Using technology in your program |
| 4) Curricular or pedagogical approaches | 10) Program leadership (managing staff, business practices) | 14) Science instruction |
| 5) Observation and assessment | | 15) Art music and movement |
| 6) Working with students with disabilities | | |

Respondents then ranked their top three preferences for PD from the same list.

TAKEAWAYS:

At the time of the survey, the top five topics of professional development that early educators received that school year were:

DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION	BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING	CURRICULAR OR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES	COMPLIANCE, REPORTING, AND REGULATIONS
(62.62%)	(54.67%)	(53.74%)	(45.79%)	(44.86%)

We compared these topics to those early educators ranked as their most preferred, and we noticed some differences between PD experiences they currently receive and those they wish to receive.

EARLY EDUCATORS RECEIVE TRAINING ON SOME TOPICS THAT ALIGN WITH THEIR PREFERENCES.

Most early educators receive training in DEI, behavior management, and SEL.

These topics are also ranked among their most desired for PD.

EARLY EDUCATORS WISH TO RECEIVE MORE TRAINING IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO REQUIRE SPECIALIZED SERVICES.

Low numbers of early educators reported receiving training in working with children who have disabilities and English language learners.

These two topics ranked high among early educators' most desired.

EARLY EDUCATORS RECEIVE TRAINING ON SOME TOPICS THAT DO NOT ALIGN WITH THEIR PREFERENCES.

High numbers of early educators reported receiving PD in the areas of "compliance, reporting, and regulations" and "observation and assessment."

These topics were ranked among their least preferred.



WHICH STRUCTURAL FEATURES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO EARLY EDUCATORS?

In addition to *topics* of professional development, early educators shared which structural features (e.g. time, place, format) of PD experiences they most prefer by responding to a choice task in the Pulse Survey. This task, called a conjoint experiment, is a tool often used in market research wherein survey respondents are asked to choose between two hypothetical profiles of an experience.

Pulse Survey respondents were posed the following question:

"If two professional development programs were otherwise identical in every other way – same topic, same cost – which would you prefer?"

They were then presented with two hypothetical profiles of a professional development with eight features and asked to choose between them. Below is an example of two hypothetical profiles:

Feature	Option 1	Option 2
Location	Online	In-person, in Cambridge
Type	Professional Learning Community	Specialized training (e.g., workshop course, seminar, conference)
Time of day	Morning (before 8am)	Evening (after 6pm)
Led by	Another educator	An expert in the field
Feedback	No opportunities for personal feedback	Opportunities for personal feedback
Materials	Provides materials for your classroom	Provides materials for your classroom
Modeling	Opportunities to see new practices modeled	Opportunities to see new practices modeled
Practice	No opportunity to practice new skills	Opportunity to practice new skills

TAKEAWAYS:

CONVENIENCE IS KEY.

Educators expressed preferences for PD offered online or in-person at their programs, as opposed to off-site. They also expressed preferences for training during lunch-time or in the afternoon, as opposed to early in the morning or in the evening.

CREDIBILITY MATTERS.

Early educators expressed a preference for PD that is led by an expert in the field, followed by a preference for another educator, as opposed to PD led by an administrator.

These findings are consistent with how early educators describe their preferences:

"[I wish we had] professional development that is offered within our paid hours."



"[I wish we had] more time for teachers to plan and take workshops or professional learning DURING school time or allowing for extra time in the mornings or afternoon to do this without feeling burned out or exhausted."



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Understanding early educator preferences when it comes to PD topic and structure can help decision-makers deliver content in a way that is most aligned with what early educators say they need to best support the children in their care. Reflecting these preferences in a PD plan may ultimately lead to increased attendance and engagement.