

Project Early Kindergarten child care partners

March 2008 focus group results

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Summary

Project Early Kindergarten (PEK) is a Saint Paul Public Schools initiative that aims to improve the school-readiness of Saint Paul children. The program works to help close the achievement gap by offering high-quality educational experiences for preschool children. The program aligns pre-kindergarten education with the district's K-12 curriculum model, the Project for Academic Excellence. The model emphasizes standards-based education and extensive professional development. The program was first implemented in fall 2005 at 10 Saint Paul district schools. In fall 2006, PEK extended the program through a pilot child care component. As of March 2008, 10 schools, 4 child care centers, and 13 family child care homes offered the program.

The first cohort of partnering child care programs was asked to participate in PEK for two years, spanning the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. In the spring of the second year, PEK asked Wilder Research to conduct focus groups with these providers to gather their feedback on the program and suggestions for working with the next cohort. Seven child care center teachers and assistant teachers, 11 family child care home providers and assistant providers, and 3 child care center directors and assistant directors participated in the focus groups. Participants were also asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire at the end of their focus group session.

This report summarizes results of these focus groups and surveys. Major points emerging from the discussions and survey results are categorized into 22 themes, summarized below. Results provide the program with very positive feedback about child care providers' overall experience with the program and perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Results also provide the input program staff desired to inform programming decisions as it prepares to work with the second cohort of providers. Throughout this report, "directors" is used to refer to the child care center directors and assistant director participating in the focus group. "Teacher" is used to refer to family child care home providers and assistant providers, as well as lead and assistant teachers at child care centers.

Major themes

Overall program impressions

In each of the three focus groups, participants provided very positive feedback about their overall experience with PEK. Almost all also plan to continue using PEK practices even after their formal contract with the program ends.

Theme 1: Teachers and center directors feel that PEK is a great program.

Theme 2: PEK is well-prepared and its materials are well-organized.

Theme 3: Center directors believe their centers have benefited from PEK.

Theme 4: Teachers and center directors would like to continue PEK practices and stay connected to the program.

Impact on children

Teachers and center directors perceive strong gains in children participating in PEK, and describe parents as being excited about the progress their children are making.

Theme 5: Children are making impressive gains in PEK and are better prepared for kindergarten as a result of PEK.

Theme 6: Parents are excited about the progress their children are making in PEK.

Theme 7: Children enjoy PEK.

Impact on teaching

Overall, teachers see themselves as better able to prepare children for school as a result of participating in PEK.

Theme 8: PEK has positively impacted teachers' instruction and helps teachers know how to prepare children for kindergarten.

Professional development

Overall, teachers and center directors find PEK's professional development to be very helpful. They also appreciate and are motivated by the goal-setting aspects of the program. Due to teacher turnover, though, a number of teachers needed to begin working with the program without having first attended the in-depth two-day training. They found

it challenging not to have a broad program overview upfront. Most teachers would prefer separate monthly training sessions for centers and homes, although a couple of family providers value joint meetings as well.

- Theme 9: Overall, teachers and center directors find the program's training and coaching to be very helpful.
- Theme 10: Teachers appreciate and are motivated by the goal-setting aspects of the program. Some might benefit from additional help in this area.
- Theme 11: Center teachers would like more opportunities to attend the two-day training.
- Theme 12: Family child care home providers feel it is important to receive an overview of the program before delving into specific aspects.
- Theme 13: Center teachers prefer separating center and home teachers in monthly trainings. Feedback was more mixed among family providers, although a majority prefers separating the groups or at least combining less frequently.

Additional program supports

Teachers and directors also discussed areas where PEK might be able to provide additional support. Center teachers would like more options for themes and activities, and greater integration of PEK and their center's requirements. Center teachers would also like full inclusion of assistant teachers in the process. PEK has offered its training and training stipends to assistant teachers, but it is not a requirement. Individual centers have had discretion over whether assistants attend. Family providers would like additional opportunities to gain ideas from other teachers, and some would like additional adaptations for working in a home environment. Teachers and directors also raised some concerns about finding the time to fulfill program expectations.

- Theme 14: Center teachers would like more options for themes and activities they can use in their classrooms.
- Theme 15: Center teachers would like assistant teachers to be more included in the process.
- Theme 16: It can be challenging to integrate PEK requirements with the child care center's own requirements.
- Theme 17: It is challenging for teachers to find the time to plan for the day and accomplish what is expected during the day.

- Theme 18: Family child care home providers would like additional opportunities to gather ideas from other teachers and see what other teachers are doing.
- Theme 19: Some family child care home providers found aspects of the program challenging in a home environment.
- Theme 20: Center directors are concerned about the time that will be required of them in the role as the instructional leader at their center.

Other feedback

PEK uses Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) to monitor individual children's early language and literacy development over time. Teachers generally find results from IGDIs to be helpful in informing their teaching and establishing small groups, although they have seen problems with testing administration when not done by PEK staff. Child care centers have found parent participation to be a challenge.

Theme 21: Teachers generally find IGDIs useful for informing their teaching, but question the results given problems with administering the tests. It can be helpful to have the coach administer the tests.

Theme 22: Parent participation can be challenging at centers.

Future direction

As PEK staff prepare to partner with the second cohort of child care providers, results from the spring 2008 focus groups provide very positive feedback about the experience of the initial cohort. These teachers and child care center directors were enthusiastic about the program and its impact on children. Almost all plan to continue using PEK practices even after their formal relationship with the program has ended.

Results also provide feedback that the program can consider in its ongoing efforts to inform and examine its practices. Some of the issues for consideration that were raised by focus group participants have already been taken into account in program planning for the second cohort. For example, the program plans to equip center directors to provide initial training to new teachers. The idea is to help teachers who start after the two-day training workshop better understand the program before entering the classroom.

Other areas of feedback reflect ongoing challenges that may be difficult to fully resolve. For example, the program has worked extensively with family child care home providers to find ways to implement the program that are sensitive to needs associated with working in a home environment. Program staff likely have a better understanding than

researchers about whether more can be done in this area without compromising key components of the program.

Still, the focus groups provide clear feedback that program staff can consider in their planning efforts. Following are issues for consideration:

- *Program overview for new teachers.* Due to high teacher turnover, a number of center teachers and family child care home providers were new to the program since the most recent in-depth two-day training workshop. As previously mentioned, the program already plans to address this issue by equipping the second cohort of center directors to provide initial training to new teachers. Based on focus group feedback, it seems it will be important for directors to be able to provide teachers with a solid overview of the program. Having assistant teachers attend the two-day training may also be helpful, since it seems assistants are often promoted to lead teacher status when a lead teacher leaves. It may also be important to ensure that new center teachers and family child care home providers are comfortable referring to the PEK implementation manual. Program staff can also explore whether it is necessary and feasible to take additional steps such as offering a version of the in-depth two-day training during the year.
- *Full inclusion of assistant teachers.* Based on feedback from center teachers, participating centers may want to consider fully including assistant teachers in program expectations and professional development. PEK has offered its training and training stipends to assistant teachers, but it is not a requirement. Individual centers have had discretion over whether assistants attend. More fully including assistants would likely involve additional resources upfront, but may help preserve program knowledge in a classroom if the lead teacher leaves and the assistant is promoted. It also seems that in a number of cases assistants are helping with and at times leading the teaching. Fully including assistants in training and coaching may also facilitate communication between lead and assistant teachers and help alleviate center teachers' concerns that it can be challenging to find time to plan for and accomplish daily expectations. In making changes in this area, it seems it will be important to provide assistants with clear expectations upfront about their participation in coaching and training sessions.
- *Clearly defining instructional leader role.* Center directors expressed some concerns about the amount of time that might be required for future directors to assume the role of the PEK instructional leader at their child care center. Plans for directors to assume this responsibility seem important in light of the concerns these plans are intended to address. The instructional leader role also reflects a key component of the Project for Academic Excellence model on which PEK is based. In the focus group,

it seemed that concerns could be somewhat allayed by clarifying the reasons for assuming the role and what will be involved. As PEK works with the new cohort of directors, it seems it will be important to provide a clear idea upfront of what the role entails, why it is important, and what teacher training the program will still offer.

- *Separating teacher groups.* Staff may want to consider continuing to arrange opportunities for center teachers and family child care home providers to connect with and learn from each other, but perhaps with less frequency than every other month. Most teachers would prefer to attend more of the monthly trainings with their peer group only due to differences between the two environments. They discussed how meeting separately facilitates discussions that are more focused on the needs unique to their group.
- *Support with goal setting.* Center teachers and family child care home providers provided positive feedback about the goal-setting aspects of PEK and the helpfulness of the assistance they received with establishing goals. A majority strongly agreed with a survey statement that they received enough support with goal setting, and most others somewhat agreed. Still, responses seem to indicate that some teachers could benefit from additional support with setting goals.
- *Administering IGDI assessments.* Because teachers view IGDI as an important instructional tool, it seems important to continue these assessments. Based on concerns with their administration, though, it seems prudent for PEK staff or other trained outsiders to conduct the assessments, and in particular at times IGDI are administered to all children and used for research purposes. The program already plans to revert to program staff conducting IGDI this spring. Communicating upfront that program staff will be assuming this responsibility may also help alleviate time concerns among future teachers and center directors.
- *Additional themes and activities.* Center teachers are given the complete *Doors to Discovery* curriculum to implement, in addition to the PEK child care implementation manual which covers the Early Childhood Workshop classroom framework. These teachers seemed very favorable about the curriculum, but also indicated it would be nice to have additional themes to choose from and, because children can go through them very quickly, additional activities. A specific request was made for a multicultural theme. PEK staff can consider whether it is feasible to provide additional themes, and whether additional activities could be provided or if there are ways to help teachers extend current activities.
- *Parent participation at centers.* It may be helpful to explore, perhaps even in conversations with center directors and teachers, whether there are additional ways

PEK could encourage parent involvement at participating child care centers. Although they described parent involvement as a challenge, center teachers also enthusiastically spoke about parents' excitement over what their children are learning. Perhaps there are additional ways to build on that excitement and use it to encourage parent involvement.

- *Opportunities for family child care home providers to connect.* When prompted to offer suggestions, a couple of family child care home providers expressed interest in creating additional opportunities for providers to connect with and learn from each other. Program staff can explore whether additional opportunities can be created, such as arranging times for providers to observe each other's child care home environments.
- *Programmatic challenges in home environments.* It was clear from family child care home providers that feeling that their PEK coach understands the challenges they face and constraints they work under is very important to them and a key component of their satisfaction with the program. They greatly appreciated the coach's empathy and responsiveness to their needs. Program staff have worked extensively with providers to accommodate needs associated with working in a home environment. Nevertheless, some providers continue to struggle with implementing certain aspects of the program in ways that feel compatible with their living environment. Program staff are probably in the best position to determine whether more can be done to accommodate needs and alleviate time pressures while maintaining program integrity.
- *Integrating PEK and center requirements.* PEK staff are also likely in the best position to determine whether more can be done to integrate PEK and center requirements, given that PEK does not hold direct authority over centers. In their conversations with new directors, PEK staff may want to consider sharing teachers' feedback that integrating two curricula can be difficult, along with also conveying teachers' reports of their own and parents' enthusiasm about what children learn in PEK. It may also be worth considering whether PEK can provide any supports to center directors who may need to seek approval for implementing only the *Doors* curriculum.
- *Future focus groups.* The spring 2008 focus groups provided valuable feedback from the perspectives of child care providers partnering with PEK. These focus groups were conducted toward the end of the first cohort's partnership and will be used to inform work with the second cohort of providers. In the second cohort, program and research staff may want to consider conducting focus groups earlier as well, such as after the initial year.

- *Positive reinforcement for PEK coaches and staff.* Suggestions offered by focus group participants were given in the context of overall enthusiasm for the program. Participants provided very positive feedback overall about their experience with PEK, and about PEK's benefits to child care partners and children. In addition to informing future planning, focus group feedback can be used to acknowledge and commend the work and successes of PEK coaches and other staff.

Background

In March 2008 Wilder Research facilitated focus groups for child care teachers and child care center directors participating in Project Early Kindergarten (PEK), a Saint Paul Public Schools initiative. PEK aims to improve the school-readiness of Saint Paul children and help close the achievement gap through offering high-quality educational experiences for preschool children. The program aligns pre-kindergarten education with the district's K-12 curriculum model, the Project for Academic Excellence. The model emphasizes standards-based education and extensive professional development. The program operates primarily through funding from Saint Paul Public Schools and The McKnight Foundation. The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation also contributes funds to the child care portion of the program.

The program was first implemented in fall 2005 at 10 Saint Paul district schools. Implementation in family child care homes and child care centers began a year later, in fall 2006. As of March 2008, 10 schools, 4 child care centers, and 13 family child care homes offered the program. School-based sites serve 4-year-olds, and child care sites provide the program to 2½- through 4-year-olds.

PEK extends the program to child care settings through a partnership with Resources for Child Caring, a community agency working to improve the quality of early childhood care and education. The child care component of the program is considered a pilot, with the first cohort of child care centers and family child care homes participating in the program during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. Planning is currently underway for the second cohort of child care partners that will participate in the program. This report summarizes results of focus groups conducted with the first cohort of child care partners, including providers from participating family child care homes as well as teachers, assistant teachers, and directors from the participating child care centers.

Research methods

Focus groups

Staff from Wilder Research, the independent evaluator of PEK, conducted three separate focus groups: one with child care center teachers and assistant teachers, one with family child care home providers, and one with child care center directors and assistant directors. Focus groups were held on an evening in March 2008. All child care teachers, assistant teachers, directors, and assistant directors participating in PEK at the time were asked to attend, and were offered hourly financial reimbursement for attending.

Wilder Research staff in each focus group included a facilitator and a note-taker. Facilitators encouraged participants to feel comfortable sharing their opinions about what has worked well and what has not worked well, even if their opinion differed from what others in the group expressed. Participants were asked to respect the privacy of others in the group and not to mention anyone's name along with their comments outside of the group. At the end of the session, the note-taker briefly summarized the major themes to emerge from the group and asked participants whether those themes accurately summarized their opinions. Each group was also recorded by a recording device.

All focus groups were conducted in English. The facilitator of the group with family child care home providers is fluent in Spanish, although translation was not necessary. Focus groups lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half.

Questions

In developing focus group questions, Wilder Research staff worked collaboratively with PEK staff and staff from Resources for Child Caring who work directly with the program. Program staff who helped develop questions include the PEK assistant director, community outreach coordinator, lead child care coach, and child care coaches. The same questions were asked of child care center teachers and family child care home providers. These questions addressed the training and coaching offered by the program, the impact on instruction and practices, the impact on children, obstacles to implementation, the program's data-collection requirements, and suggestions for the next phase of the child care component. Center directors were asked a somewhat different set of questions. Directors' questions addressed the impact on their center, plans to continue PEK practices beyond their contract with the program, and PEK's plans for directors in future cohorts to play the role of instructional leader. Complete lists of focus group questions are provided in the Appendix.

Participants

Participants in the three focus groups were as follows:

1. *Child care center teachers and assistant teachers.* Seven of the 10 child care center teachers and assistant teachers with PEK at the time participated in the focus group. Participants included four lead teachers and three assistant teachers and represented three of the four child care centers. Three of the teachers had been with PEK for both years of the program's implementation in child care settings, two had been with PEK for six months, and the remaining two had been with PEK from two to three months. As previously noted, participants in this group are referred to as "teachers" throughout the report.

2. *Family child care home providers and assistant providers.* Eleven of the 14 family child care home providers participated in the focus group, including one assistant teacher. They represented 10 of the 13 family child care homes partnering with PEK at the time. Five of the participants had been with PEK between a year and a half and two years, and the remaining six had been with the program between five and nine months. Throughout the report, “teachers” refers to both child care center teachers and family child care home providers.
3. *Child care center directors and assistant directors.* Two child care center directors and one assistant director participated in the focus group. They represented three of the four centers partnering with the program at the time, and four of the six directors and assistant directors at those centers. The center that was not represented in the teacher focus group was represented in the director focus group. All three participating directors and assistant directors had been with the program for both years of its implementation in child care settings. One also serves as a teacher due to the small size of the center. Throughout the report, “directors” is used to refer to all three participants in this group.

Self-administered questionnaires

At the end of the focus group, participants were asked to complete a brief survey. One survey was administered to child care center teachers and family child care home providers, and another to child care center directors. Again, Wilder Research staff worked collaboratively with PEK and Resources for Child Caring staff to develop the survey questions.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about their experience with PEK’s professional development, their experience with implementing the program, the impact on their ability to prepare children for school, and the impact on parents’ familiarity with Saint Paul Public Schools. Response categories included “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” Respondents were also asked whether they planned to continue specific PEK practices in the future, and were allowed to indicate “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know” for each practice. Copies of the survey tools and complete results are provided in the Appendix.

Three child care center directors completed the directors’ survey, and 7 child care center teachers and 10 family child care home providers completed the teachers’ survey. These respondents reflect 50 percent of center directors and assistant directors (75% of directors), 70 percent of center teachers and assistant teachers, and 71 percent of family child care home providers and assistants with the program at the time.

Limitations

A limitation of the focus groups is that a number of the participating teachers had been with PEK for a relatively short period of time and therefore had not been exposed to the program during its full two years of implementation in child care settings. Four of the 7 participating child care center teachers and 6 of the 11 participating family child care home providers had been with the program less than a year, although most had been with PEK at least several months. A couple of the participating center teachers, however, had been with PEK only two to three months.

The staff turnover often seen in child care settings has been a challenge for PEK. Additionally, five family child care home providers became ineligible for the program when changes in their enrollment brought them below the program's minimum enrollment requirements. An additional two family child care home providers left the child care field, one lost her child care license, and one chose not to continue on after the first year. In addition to changes in teachers, two of the program's original six child care centers were no longer with the program in spring 2008. One of these two centers experienced a change in management and program direction, and the other was part of a national chain and unable to make requested changes due to corporate guidelines.

Contents of the report

The following sections of this report describe key themes emerging from the focus group discussions and surveys. Themes are organized under the following topics: overall program impressions, impact on children, impact on teaching, professional development, additional program supports, and other feedback. Selected quotations are used to illuminate key themes and areas of disagreement. In some cases, one respondent made more than one of the comments that are presented for a theme. All survey results appear in the body of the report and are presented in the discussion of the applicable theme. Complete survey results are also provided in the Appendix, in addition to the complete focus group questions and survey tools.

Overall program impressions

In each of the three focus groups, participants provided very positive feedback about their overall experience with PEK. Almost all also plan to continue using PEK practices even after their formal contract with the program ends.

Overall experience with PEK

Theme 1: Teachers and center directors feel that PEK is a great program.

Focus group results

Participants in all three of the focus groups were very positive about their experience with PEK overall. There was general agreement that PEK helps prepare children for school and that parents are enthusiastic about what their children are learning. Teachers also felt the program has positively impacted their teaching, and center directors felt their center benefited from the partnership. Participants also appreciated the program's professional development and found that the program was well-prepared and provided well-organized materials. Almost all plan to continue using PEK practices even after their formal contract with the program ends. Participants' positive feedback is described in more detail in discussions of themes in subsequent sections. Following are several quotes that illustrate participants' overall positive impressions of the program:

“I would say all the coaches, and everyone involved with the program for PEK have put a lot of work into it. You can tell that they're really passionate about it, too. I thank each and every one of them for taking their time to come out to our center and help our teachers learn, because it's not the easiest thing. They've done a really great job with it, and they have made a difference.”
—child care center director

“They've been great.”
—child care center director

“They offer a lot of support to the teachers, encouragement, and then that impacted the children. It's great. It's a wonderful program.”
—child care center director

“Within a month or two they're already being able to write the first letter of their name or being able to do so much. I mean they learn so much just from going from one room to the next. ... You can just see the light bulbs going above their head. ... It's more than just playing, you know, and they're having fun doing it. ... Just what the *Doors* [curriculum] gives us to teach them, and all the different areas that they give us to teach them. It makes a huge impact.”
—child care center teacher

“That was really something for me to see that improvement in the kids and how they write their names, and I had one mom cry. You know she said she couldn’t believe her little guy was, you know, writing his own name and I wasn’t pushing the pencil.”

—family child care home provider

Survey results

The last question on the teacher and director surveys prompted respondents to add any comments they have about PEK. These comments show their positive feelings about the program. All three child care center directors, two child care center teachers, and eight family child care home providers wrote a comment about PEK, and all were positive. A complete list of their comments follows:

“The staff have been wonderful! Everyone is very professional and passionate about their work. They are all very pleasant and enjoyable to work with. The program has been extremely valuable to help our children and teachers. It has helped our teachers tremendously ... to know the best way to prepare our children for school. We will continue to use this wonderful program. Thank you!”

—child care center director

“Our preschool rooms have learned many valuable things from PEK (listed above), and we can tell that it has made a positive impact on both our teachers and children.”

—child care center director

“PEK [helps] a lot for my center [and helps] all my kids at my center too.”

—child care center director

“Keep up the good work!”

—child care center teacher

“I love it!”

—child care center teacher

“PEK has been a wonderful experience and [I] have received awesome knowledge. I would love to stay involved to keep ongoing education. It feels so great to have accomplished something with kids to know that you helped them. And see the results everyday.”

—family child care home provider

“Good program which has helped me better prepare my children for school success.”

—family child care home provider

“I want to thank PEK’s educator.”

—family child care home provider

“Thank you for doing this. [The] PEK program is wonderful.”
—family child care home provider

“I like [PEK] because I learn too. Nice program.”
—family child care home provider

“Great program! I learned how to be a teacher. I feel like I am changing the future of my kids.”
—family child care home provider

“Fantastic program.”
—family child care home provider

“Thank you for the chance to improve my children’s lives.”
—family child care home provider

Theme 2: PEK is well-prepared and its materials are well-organized.

Child care center directors participating in the focus group described PEK as being very well-prepared in its work with the centers and as providing materials that are well-organized. Center teachers and family child care home providers also described the program as providing the tools they need to implement the program, and well-organized curriculum materials.

“I think that everything is very well thought out and very well prepared. It’s very organized.”
—child care center director

“I like it. I’m a lot more organized with this whole box thing. ... I’m organized anyways, but like this just kind of like gives you all the tools you need. Your lesson plan is like right there. ... You can elaborate on it.”
—child care center teacher

Theme 3: Center directors believe their centers have benefited from PEK.

A focus group question asked center directors about the impact the training and their participation in PEK had on their center. Directors described now having more intentional organization and use of classroom space, more intentional use of instructional methods for engaging children in classroom lessons and dialogue, and greater emphasis on literacy skills. Directors also spoke positively about the program’s curriculum, themes, and about how teachers had more activities and information for the children as a result of the program. The following quotes provide examples of their comments, and in some cases were made by the same director:

“I just think about how important the literacy is and how much exposure they should have to seeing their names and seeing words, print that is kind of all over. So I think that was a big addition. I really liked the idea of signing in. That was a really good idea.”

—child care center director

“After I got training from PEK, it helped me a lot. ... I know how to create my room and [about] the development of the classroom. That is one thing. The other thing ... my [kids are] very excited for learning, writing, reading, [participating in] the story. When they can tell me right to left and left to right and what is an opposite, like I have to turn my book upside down and up and down. I learned a lot [in] those [areas] after I got training from PEK so I have more information to provide for my kids.”

—child care center director

“I think the curriculum also helped us a lot. I think that was really helpful to get kind of a focus and the themes. The themes are really good.”

—child care center director

“We changed their classrooms around a little bit, too. And it was beneficial to see how the children do. I mean research shows that, and that is what they’re telling us to do. So that was really beneficial to learn, to learn that. ... Arrange them, what they need, yah. I mean one thing that I never knew was that they didn’t want the books in the group area, to have a separate space with the books, their own little reading and writing area. Where we were so used to before having the books in group area because it just kind of made sense. Well yah, you know books go in a group area. Well, but not necessarily. Oh, okay. So they could tell us the reasons why for that.”

—child care center director

“PEK has taught us to do interaction, communicating back and forth, to ask open-ended questions. You know, to get the children involved. So they show us many different ways on how to do that and what questions to ask the children and get them more involved.”

—child care center director

Desire to continue PEK practices

Theme 4: Teachers and center directors would like to continue PEK practices and stay connected to the program.

Focus group results

Asked whether they thought they would continue some of the activities and practices they started as a result of PEK, all three participants in the directors’ focus group enthusiastically indicated they would. As a reason, they described how they receive positive feedback from parents who see how their children are benefiting from the program. In a follow-up question, the facilitator asked directors how they planned to

continue aspects of the program with new staff who have not gone through the training. Directors talked about using the implementation manual PEK prepared for child care partners and the lesson plans.

“We’ve already prepared our teachers that they will continue to keep doing PEK. Our children [are] learning. Small groups, word wall, they’re going to continue all of that. Sign-in, writing centers, they’re going to continue doing it all.”
—child care center director

“Yah, we’re going to continue as well. We think it’s a wonderful thing, so yah.”
—child care center director

“We would explain to [new teachers] the process that we went through with PEK and how important it was to our preschool program and that we do take it very seriously. And then add it to a part of our curriculum at our center and then just kind of go through it, you know, the child care handbook. It kind of explains a lot of it in there. So just go through that and do an orientation with them on that.”
—child care center director

Although focus group questions did not directly ask teachers about their desire to continue with the program, family child care home providers responded to a prompt for other suggestions by raising a discussion about ways they could continue to stay connected to PEK. Ideas that were offered included allowing providers to continue attending the training even though they would not necessarily receive a stipend, and having a monthly or quarterly program for providers whose contracts with the program have ended.

“I just want to keep up with this – the training. Because it seems like it just keeps me motivated.”
—family child care home provider

“And we can come to training. I’m speaking for myself, but I would love to just come to the training just to sit and listen, and I don’t have to get paid.”
—family child care home provider

“So just for us to be invited [back] if there’s something that comes up in the next couple years. . . . You know we would like to be reconnected with [the program].”
—family child care home provider

Survey results

The surveys administered at the conclusion of the focus groups asked teachers and center directors whether they plan to continue using specific PEK practices (Figure 1). All child care center directors and family child care home providers and almost all child care center teachers indicated they will continue using some PEK practices. One child care center teacher marked “don’t know” for all of the practices, and a few center teachers and

family child care home providers indicated they did not know whether they would continue using some of the practices.

1. Continued use of PEK practices

Will you continue using the following practices?	Number who responded “yes”		
	Center directors N=3	Center teachers N=7	Family child care home providers N=10
Schedule and routine	3/3	5/5	10/10
Community circle	3/3	6/6	10/10
Active learning	3/3	6/6	9/9
Small group instruction	3/3	6/6	9/9
Read aloud	3/3	6/6	10/10
Provide information to parents about preschool screening	3/3	5/5	10/10
Lesson plans	3/3	6/6	8/8
Accountable talk	3/3	6/6	8/8
Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)	3/3	5/5	5/6
<i>Doors to Discovery</i> curriculum or PEK family curriculum	3/3	5/5	5/6
Sign-in	3/3	6/6	10/10
Interactive writing	3/3	6/6	10/10
Parent education curriculum	3/3	5/5	6/7

Note: Excludes cases where the respondent marked “don’t know.”

Impact on children

Teachers and center directors perceive strong gains in children participating in PEK, and describe parents as being excited about the progress their children are making.

School-readiness

Theme 5: Children are making impressive gains in PEK and are better prepared for kindergarten as a result of PEK.

Participants in all three focus groups enthusiastically described the gains they have seen in children participating in PEK. For example, child care center teachers described how it has been exciting to see what the children are learning, and how PEK children are learning things that the teachers themselves did not learn until they were in elementary school.

“We have the goals, and it teaches us how to teach those. We have our kids learning so fast that they’re doing all the stuff they should be doing already so we actually have time to sit down and teach them now how to tie their shoes or how to do other things that they should also know when they go to kindergarten but they might not be getting other places. Because the system is set up so well that they’re learning it faster than we thought they would. So we have 5-year-olds who now are at a higher level than some of our 6- and 7-year-olds that are in the school-age room.”

—child care center teacher

“Before they come to kindergarten, they’re doing this PEK stuff for two years, and they’re just that much smarter than like the first graders [who are] just sitting in school that haven’t done any PEK whatsoever. So they’re learning this stuff for two years straight, and it just blows my mind how much they actually know.”

—child care center teacher

Family child care home providers also described feeling pleased with the results they have seen in children, even though some had initially been skeptical about whether the program would work. A couple mentioned that they are seeing progress even with difficult or special needs children. One talked about how children’s kindergarten preparation has progressed from knowing the ABCs to knowing phonics, rhyming, and beginning sounds and syllables, and understanding more concepts. In describing these results, a couple of the providers mentioned the helpfulness of the coaching aspect of the program.

“All my 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds know all their beginning sounds. I’ll say a word and then we’ll sound it out and they say what it, you know, the letter is. It just blows my mind that these kids do that.”
—family child care home provider

“When [the coach] first came to me ... I wanted to [know] how I’m going to have 2-year-olds [doing things]. ... But now with the program and with [the coach] coaching me, my 2-year-olds are writing their names. They can say their letters, and they try to print this or do that.”
—family child care home provider

Child care center directors also spoke highly of children’s progress in the program. Even though one director said the teachers were probably better equipped to talk about children’s progress, all three directors agreed that PEK improves kindergarten-readiness. They talked about how PEK children are learning more than they would without the program, and how the program teaches children the routines and behaviors they need to be successful in kindergarten. Following are some of their comments:

“I think our kids have learned a ton. Just with everything that PEK has added ... kind of like fine-tuning our schedule, fine-tuning just a lot of things. I think it has given our teachers the tools to teach them in the best way possible or things like that. I think because a lot of it is research based, so PEK knows exactly what the teacher should teach the children, what their goals are. So I think that has helped them a lot and given the teachers focus and stuff. To me, I think the children learned a tremendous amount.”
—child care center director

“I think our kids are going to be very prepared for [kindergarten]. And I think it’s really good that it’s part of Saint Paul Public Schools. And all of our kids are basically going to Saint Paul Public Schools. They were talking about the same things. They have the sign-in, the word wall. That will be the same so I think it will help the kids adjust, but I think just learning-wise, academically I think they are going to be further ahead just because of all the literacy and all that.”
—child care center director

“Because they already know the colors, they know the [procedures], all the basic [things] already. When they go to kindergarten they are already set. For learning, for word sight, for beginning reading and two or three words of the sentence. They already have that information. ... Because when they go they know that you are behind me, don’t bump me. That is one thing that I know that. She [knows] the school [rules] already. Or sometimes they talk without raising their hand and the student that [raises] their hand, that is the knowledge that they already get.”
—child care center director

Theme 6: Parents are excited about the progress their children are making in PEK.

In all three focus groups, participants said parents are enthusiastic about what their children are learning in PEK. Teachers provided personal examples of ways a child had impressed parents by demonstrating new skills. For example, a family child care home provider talked about parents being “flabbergasted” to see their 3- and 4-year-old children writing. Another family child care home provider indicated parents are appreciative that they are teaching children to be learners. Some of their comments follow:

“They’ve improved like a thousand percent. They know more than some of our school-agers do. They’re reading. When we sent the little Tabby Tiger books home with them, the parents you know they’re reading the books to the parents. The parents are just floored because their 4-year-old child is reading to them. ... We have one book that we read all week long. So we start this book on Monday. By Friday they’re reading the book to us. That’s how fast they’re learning this.”
—child care center teacher

“I have a little girl. ... I was so excited. ... We wrote thank you letters after Christmas ... and like mailed them out or whatever. And she wrote, seriously, I didn’t have to write anything down for her, and she wrote like, ‘Dear Mom and Dad ...’ You can actually read it. There’s no misspelled words. And she wrote ‘love always,’ and she handed it to her parents ... and they were so happy. ... I thought it was so amazing. I’ve noticed a lot of improvement.”
—child care center teacher

“I think that’s the best part of this whole program is the parents and how excited they are. I had a dad tell me on Tuesday that he’s just so excited that the kids come to my daycare and what they have learned and it’s amazing. ... These parents are just so happy and excited about what these kids are learning, and the words they’re writing. I mean before I started this program I [did] a preschool program in my house, but I adjusted tremendously. I wasn’t doing the writing. I didn’t have a writing center. I did not have a reading center. I have a separate area you know for daycare, but I never had specific centers. Since this whole thing started, I mean, my daycare is just totally different. It’s amazing. And the kids have access to the writing center. They’re writing constantly. I mean the 3- and 4-year-olds, and spelling words. I mean the parents are just flabbergasted. They’re just like amazed. ... One of my parents is a teacher and she says they write better than some of her first graders.”
—family child care home provider

“To hear her say, she’s in kindergarten now, to hear her say, ‘I’m so bummed we don’t have school tomorrow, I can’t wait for Monday. I love school.’ ... And I think parents appreciate some of that and even if they don’t say that, we’re teaching them to be learners from the age of 18 months or whatever.”
—family child care home provider

When asked whether they would continue some of the practices they started as a result of PEK, center directors presented positive feedback from parents as a reason for doing so. Directors said parents provide feedback that they can really see a difference in their children and how their children have benefited from specific components of the program, such as active learning, small groups, and signing in.

Enjoyment of learning

Theme 7: Children enjoy PEK.

In describing the difference PEK has made in children, focus group participants also described children as enjoying the program. For example, a center director described how children felt more comfortable in the classroom after they made changes to the room as a result of implementing PEK. A child care center teacher said the children are having so much fun that they do not realize they are learning, and a family child care home provider talked about how different her child care is as a result of PEK and how children are excited to attend.

“The kids are really excited. ... They love it. They’re even more and more into it, and I like it. ... I like it a lot.”

—child care center teacher

“It actually works, so the kids are excited, the parents are excited.”

—family child care home provider

Impact on teaching

Overall, teachers see themselves as better able to prepare children for school as a result of participating in PEK.

Theme 8: PEK has positively impacted teachers' instruction and helps teachers know how to prepare children for kindergarten.

Focus group results

Center teachers and family child care home providers described PEK as having positively impacted their teaching and their ability to prepare children for kindergarten. Examples teachers gave included that the program provided good ideas for explaining concepts to children, allowed the teachers time to teach additional skills because children learn so fast in the program, provided teachers with more structure or goals, helped teachers change their physical environment to be more conducive to learning, and gave them tools for talking with parents about children's progress. A family child care home provider said that children gain a love of learning through the program, and that she had never seen herself in the role of a teacher before.

“It’s a good jump start on what we need to be teaching the kids, and they give you a lot of good ideas to go on and how to further explain what you’re doing and how to get more answers out of the kids by asking them open-ended questions. And it’s a lot easier to explain it to the kids with this curriculum, and it’s a lot easier for the kids to understand it because they just have everything for you.”

—child care center teacher

“Because it gives me something to work towards. I know exactly what I’m working towards. I’m working towards them learning this amount of words or them rhyming. . . . It’s just getting them ready for kindergarten, because I [have] PreK, so I know exactly what they need to know to go to kindergarten.”

—child care center teacher

“Putting everything together to get these kids prepared for kindergarten.”

—family child care home provider

Survey results

Survey results support the feedback provided in the focus group discussions (Figure 2). Nearly all child care center teachers and family child care home providers strongly agreed that they better prepare children for school because of their involvement in PEK. All three center directors also strongly agreed that their center better prepares children for school because of their participation in PEK. Additionally, all family child care home

providers and all except one child care center teacher indicated they regularly used the new teaching activities and practices they learned from PEK. As shown in the following section on professional development, almost all teachers also strongly agreed that participation in PEK’s professional development has had a large impact on their teaching practices (Figure 3).

2. Impact on teaching

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Participant group	Number of participants			
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have used the new teaching activities and practices that I learned from PEK regularly.	Center teachers ^a	6	-	-	1
	Family providers ^b	8	1	-	-
I better prepare children for school because of my participation in PEK.	Center teachers ^a	6	-	-	1
	Family providers ^b	8	2	-	-
My center better prepares children for school because of my participation in PEK.	Center directors ^c	3	-	-	-

^a N=7.

^b N=9-10.

^c N=3.

Note: Survey questions varied somewhat among the three groups, and data for individual questions are provided for the groups that were asked that question.

Professional development

Overall, teachers and center directors find PEK's professional development to be very helpful. They also appreciate and are motivated by the goal-setting aspects of the program. Due to teacher turnover, though, a number of teachers needed to begin working with the program without having first attended the in-depth two-day training. They found it challenging not to have a broad program overview upfront. Most teachers would prefer separate monthly training sessions for centers and homes, although a couple of family providers value joint meetings as well.

Overall satisfaction

Theme 9: Overall, teachers and center directors find the program's training and coaching to be very helpful.

Focus group results

Participants were asked for their feedback on the program's professional development, which includes a two-day summer training institute, monthly meetings, and weekly or biweekly one-on-one coaching sessions. Only one of the center teachers in the focus group had attended the program's two-day training institute. She provided positive feedback about the training, which she said covers what teachers need to know to help prepare children for kindergarten. When prompted, that teacher said she did not think anything needed to be changed about the two-day training. Other center teachers said they had not attended because the two-day training had not been offered since they began working with PEK, or because they were an assistant teacher when the training was offered and were not asked to attend.

"I don't think it needs to change anything. ... It basically goes over what you need to know for the kids to go to kindergarten, so it goes over the letters, it goes over the rhyming, it goes over the alliteration. That's basically what it goes over. And it tells you about the books and stuff you need to read. So that's what I like about it."

—child care center teacher

Family child care home providers who had attended the two-day training also provided very favorable feedback. Speaking about the program's professional development in general, a few family child care home providers also indicated that it can motivate providers to seek additional education.

“That was nice, that was really nice to take those two full days and just go to training. Leave the house and learn all about the program and everything. So yeah, it was really helpful.”
—family child care home provider

“It was two full days, so I thought we had covered a lot of stuff.”
—family child care home provider

“[The SEEDS] trainings for me were amazing. I learned so much from her. ... I had a lot of ah-ha moments with her.”
—family child care home provider

“Yeah and then it’s almost like you come and ... for the next whole month you’re just like energetic. ... I wish I would have had this 10 years ago. I think it would have made [the] path that I had been taking, I think [it] would have ... given me more incentive to go on to something [at] a higher level.”
—family child care home provider

Focus group participants also provided favorable feedback about the helpfulness of the program’s coaching. All center directors agreed with a comment that the coaching is invaluable and reinforces what is taught in the training. Center directors also discussed how the one-on-one coaching is especially helpful for teachers who are new to PEK. One director described how at her center, coaches came twice a week initially and gave very helpful feedback to teachers implementing the program. A director also commented that it was helpful to have a coach who had a teaching background and understood how long it takes to do certain things, and who brought them practical tools to use.

“I think the coaching was very invaluable because it helped follow-up with what they learned in the training. Because if it was just the training I think a lot of it would get lost by the time it got to the classroom. But I think that helped, the coaching.”
—child care center director

“And to continue with the coaching, the one-on-one. Definitely. The coaching really helps our teachers.”
—child care center director

“The coaching, they are very helpful because the coaching person came in and you know, for example, you forgot to do something and they have to take notes and write what she does and then they come back and sit down and say here, next time you take a couple minutes to go [over this] so you know how to prepare yourself. Then you know what to do.”
—child care center director

“Sometimes they catch the teachers if they have forgotten about something. Then they remind them, this is what our goals were and did we follow through on these goals?”
—child care center director

“When we had some new teachers our coach came twice a week, and I think that really helped a lot.”

—child care center director

“She remembers what it’s like to be in a classroom, too. Coming from being in a classroom, it’s very helpful because she remembers what it’s like to be a teacher and how much time it does take to prepare. She actually brought something in for the teachers, and she did that on her own time, so she is very into it as well.”

—child care center director

Family child care home providers also provided very favorable feedback about the helpfulness of the program’s coaching. Examples they gave of ways coaching helped included reiterating program concepts and providing program accountability. As previously mentioned, a couple of family child care home providers noted that they were initially skeptical about what they could accomplish with the children, but now see the results and credit coaching as an important component of the program.

It was also clear from the discussion that it is important to family child care home providers to feel that the coach understands needs intrinsic to their environment. These providers greatly appreciated the coach’s empathy and responsiveness to their needs. For example, one provider said she appreciated the coach helping with situations that arose with the children during her visits, such as by taking a crying child out if needed.

“I think [the coach] just was so in tune with picking up on what our needs were and how things were different for us.”

—family child care home provider

“[The kids are] very excited to see [the coach]. ... And just like [another provider] said, [the coach] sees a baby cry, she will hold that baby or whatever you know and she really, really helped me. She went out and got me some of those carpet squares where they can sit on.”

—family child care home provider

“Well I think it was the, the repetition of certain aspects and certain skills, and to have those repeated when the mentor came to the home. ... They helped us recognize ... improvements.”

—family child care home provider

“I think that’s part of the training that works because it was always really hard for me to know she was coming every couple of weeks, because it’s a lot of stress. ... But then after it you’re like, woof, that was good that she came because she like gives you encouragement, too. ... You know, it makes me feel better. Like you get stressed out about it, but if she didn’t come every couple of weeks in a row, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

—family child care home provider

As described later, the discussion about coaching in the center teacher group primarily focused on whether teaching assistants should also receive coaching. It may be worth

noting here, though, that a center teacher described how her new coach is meeting with both the assistant and lead teacher, which she said helps ensure both are on the same page about the program.

Survey results

Survey results also provided positive feedback about the program’s professional development (Figure 3). All three center directors strongly agreed that participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on practices at their child care center. Similarly, all but one child care center teacher strongly agreed that participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on their teaching practices, with the remaining one strongly disagreeing. All responding family child care home providers indicated agreement with the statement, with all but one strongly agreeing and the remaining one somewhat agreeing. Family child care home providers were also asked whether pre-visit phone calls helped prepare them for coach visits, and 9 of the 10 somewhat or strongly agreed. Survey questions also asked teachers about the program’s support with goal setting, and those responses are described under the following theme.

3. Professional development

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Participant group	Number of participants			
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on my teaching practices.	Center teachers ^a	6	-	-	1
	Family providers ^b	9	1	-	-
The assistance I received from PEK in goal setting has been helpful for me.	Center teachers ^a	6	-	-	1
	Family providers ^b	9	1	-	-
Goal setting is an important part of my progress/growth as a teacher.	Center teachers ^a	6	-	-	1
	Family providers ^b	7	3	-	-
I received enough support with goal setting.	Center teachers ^a	4	2	-	1
	Family providers ^b	6	4	-	-
Pre-visit home calls better prepare me for the coach’s visits.	Family providers ^b	6	3	1	-
Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on practices at my child care center.	Center directors ^c	3	-	-	-

^a N=7.

^b N=10.

^c N=3.

Note: Survey questions varied somewhat among the three groups, and data for individual questions are provided for the groups that were asked that question.

Theme 10: Teachers appreciate and are motivated by the goal-setting aspects of the program. Some might benefit from additional help in this area.

Focus group results

Child care center teachers and family child care home providers described how PEK is “motivating” or “satisfying” because it gives teachers goals to work toward, and because they can see the progress children are making. Family child care home providers briefly discussed how it can be difficult, however, to see that you have not met your established goals.

“It motivates you because there’s a goal. ... It’s one thing to teach somebody something you know. But there’s more to teaching than teaching something you know ... you [have] to know how to teach, too. ... With this curriculum ... it really does prepare the kids for kindergarten ... and with that brings motivation. It makes you want to teach.”

—child care center teacher

“I’m more focused on different things. ... I mean on a daily basis I’m more focused, and I know that when you have a goal to achieve each day ... the day runs more smoothly. ... By the end of the week you can see that you’ve more effectively, you’ve accomplished maybe three out of the five goals that you set for the week. ... I’ve set these five goals for myself. [I’ve] done three, and two I couldn’t do because I had sick kids all week. That’s okay, that’s cool, because I’ve accomplished this much and they learned this much more, and to me that’s satisfying.”

—family child care home provider

“I think just [writing] our goals down. That was a challenge for me. ... You can see all these goals that I didn’t meet again. That’s hard for me to go like I didn’t meet my goals again.”

—family child care home provider

Survey results

The teacher survey included questions about the assistance teachers received with and the importance of setting goals (Figure 3). All family child care home providers and all but one child care center teacher indicated the assistance they received with goal setting was helpful. All family child care providers also at least somewhat agreed that goal setting is an important part of their growth as a teacher, although fewer strongly agreed with this statement. All but one child care center teacher strongly agreed with the same statement. It seems that some center teachers and family child care home providers may benefit from further help with goal setting. Two child care center teachers and four family child care home providers gave ratings of “somewhat agree” and one child care center teacher provided a rating of “strongly disagree” when presented with a statement that they received enough support with goal setting.

Suggestions

Although prompted by a focus group question, teachers did not offer any suggestions related to the time, place, or length of training sessions. A couple of center teachers commented that meeting once a month is fine, but meeting more frequently than that might be too much. A center director commented that the evening monthly trainings make for a long day, but said there does not seem to be a better time because it would be difficult to accommodate staffing needs if the training took place during the day.

Center teachers did, however, offer suggestions related to the frequency of the two-day training and the types of teaching staff who are invited to attend that training. Due to teacher turnover, a number were relatively new to the program and had not had the opportunity to attend this annual training. Family child care home providers also talked about how it can be difficult to delve into specific parts of the program without first receiving a general overview. Center teachers and family child care home providers also shared opinions about whether the two groups should be combined or separated for training sessions. These suggestions are captured in the following themes.

Theme 11: Center teachers would like more opportunities to attend the two-day training.

As previously mentioned, only one of the participants in the focus group with child care center teachers had attended the two-day summer training institute. The other teachers who had not attended were either new to the center, were currently assistant teachers, or had newly been promoted from assistant teacher status. Participants talked about feeling somewhat overwhelmed when they were initially placed in a PEK classroom, because they had little knowledge of the program at the time. Although they have attended the monthly training sessions, they said it would have helped to have the in-depth overview and background the two-day training would have provided. Even the teacher who had attended the two-day training said that she had taken over a PEK room from another teacher and had to learn the lesson plan without first having the in-depth overview, and initially felt lost for that reason. There was general agreement among center teachers that they would like the two-day training to be offered more often. One assistant teacher suggested that PEK offer the two-day training every six months.

“I think maybe they could make it more often. ... Maybe have an option every six months or something. ... If we just got moved up to [a lead] teacher position then we missed out on that training.”
—child care center teacher

“I would have [liked to attend the two-day training]. I mean because I went from an aide to a lead teacher, so I just got kind of thrown into the mix, and like here’s the *Doors* curriculum, figure it out. So it would be nice if I had more explanation on how I could enhance some of the areas rather than just finding little bits out here once a month.”

—child care center teacher

“I too walked in ... like they did too. The first year they had it I walked in and there was another teacher in there, so I took over. So I think that they should change a little bit where ... like the lesson plan and stuff, I had to learn all that by myself before I went to the two-day training because I took over [from] where somebody else left off.”

—child care center teacher

Theme 12: Family child care home providers feel it is important to receive an overview of the program before delving into specific aspects.

Although family child care home providers did not specifically suggest offering the two-day training more frequently, their feedback also suggests they would like to receive this type of general overview before delving into specific aspects of the program. High turnover has been a challenge among family child care home sites as well. These providers described initially struggling to see how specific training topics would fit into a larger whole, and what their entire day would look like. In fall 2007 PEK provided a child care version of the program’s implementation manual, and participants said that having the “red book” in place now should be helpful to teachers in the future.

“We’ve been introduced to pieces at [a] time, and I can see now where there’s like this basic amount of information and the other things going on that hasn’t been visible all the way along.”

—family child care home provider

“I think because you’ve [got] people that are interjected, come into the program at different times, I think that going back to the basics like maybe every other time would be helpful for them because there is a lot of information. There’s a lot. I’m not saying that’s good or bad, but I mean I do think there’s a lot covered in basically less than two hours.”

—family child care home provider

“I think it would have been effective for me to see in the beginning an overview and then pick up the pieces rather than to be in, completely in the dark about the pieces.”

—family child care home provider

“There’s a red book that they compiled like a handbook. Once we saw that this year and we’re like ah-hah.”

—family child care home provider

“Now people coming in will have that book.”

—family child care home provider

“When you have to do things, plan for a whole week, you need to see the things like that. The whole day rolled out. What is my whole day going to look like? Or a sample of the whole day, yeah, instead of the different pieces.”
—family child care home provider

“But earlier on they focused on one piece and [spent] a lot of time on that. And now they’ve changed it where you get a variety of things, and it’s kind of nice.”
—family child care home provider

Theme 13: Center teachers prefer separating center and home teachers in monthly trainings. Feedback was more mixed among family providers, although a majority prefers separating the groups or at least combining less frequently.

There was general agreement in the center teacher group that they would prefer to be separated from family child care home providers in the monthly training meetings. Participants talked about how center teachers come from similar environments and therefore have similar needs and can relate to each other. Environmental differences they discussed included family child care home providers having multiple ages all together, and center teachers having a center curriculum that they are used to and may need to take into account. By holding separate training meetings for the two groups, center teachers felt the conversations could stay more focused on their needs, and that they would have more opportunities to share ideas that are relevant to each other.

“I think I would rather personally have it just the centers and just the home daycares because there’s a lot of overlap with home daycares having multiple ages in one spot, and we’re basically just either 2- and 3-year-olds or 4- and 5-year-olds, so ours is pretty set up for 4- and 5-year-olds, where when we have a mixed group they talk about how their 2-year-olds don’t know how to do something but their 8-year-olds do, and we go back and forth a lot like trying to figure out what ages we’re talking about. ... I like the once every month, but just the small group, just do centers.”
—child care center teacher

“It adds to the whole learning process, too. From us learning from each other. Our centers are not exactly the same but ... it’s pretty much the same thing. So what works for them probably could work for us. ... What works in the home probably won’t work the same as how it works for the centers.”
—child care center teacher

Feedback on the value of separating center and home teachers was more mixed in the family child care home provider group. Still, a majority prefers separating the groups or at least combining them less frequently than every other month. Some family child care home providers said they prefer separating the groups or talked about differences between the two groups, while others indicated they like learning from how centers are doing

things. One family child care home provider suggested continuing to combine the two groups, but only every third month. In describing differences between the two groups, one provider referenced how center teachers use the *Doors to Discovery* curriculum. Family child care home providers work with a theme-based curricular model developed specifically for them, and therefore would not have questions specific to *Doors*.

“I think when you’ve got the in-home and the center together it’s like comparing apples to oranges, you know.”
—family child care home provider

“I guess I haven’t seen it so much this year, and correct me maybe, but because last year they were given a curriculum, the *Doors*, and I think they’re still using [it], but there were always so many references made to that, so they were working within a different construct even though we were all doing PEK.”
—family child care home provider

“I think for [me] the trainings where we are split into family and center separately are more effective.”
—family child care home provider

“I personally like to be with centers and pretty much together because I guess I want that, I would like to learn how they’re doing their community circle, and you know small groups and stuff like that, you know?”
—family child care home provider

“I think that you can learn a lot from centers just [from] the way . . . they do things. I mean I know I picked up a lot of things from just visiting that preschool.”
—family child care home provider

“I might suggest [combining] even every third [month] because we benefit so much together, but there is that just being that one small piece.”
—family child care home provider

Additional program supports

Teachers and directors also discussed areas where PEK might be able to provide additional support. Center teachers would like more options for themes and activities and greater integration of PEK and their center’s requirements. Center teachers would also like full inclusion of assistant teachers in the process. PEK has offered its training and training stipends to assistant teachers, but it is not a requirement. Individual centers have had discretion over whether assistants attend. Family providers would like additional opportunities to gain ideas from other teachers, and some would like additional adaptations for working in a home environment. Teachers and directors also raised some concerns about finding the time to fulfill program expectations.

Additional teacher supports

Surveys asked teachers to indicate their level of agreement with a statement that they had enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices. Most family child care home providers indicated they strongly agreed, and the remaining somewhat agreed. In contrast, fewer than half of the child care center teachers strongly agreed with the same statement, a few somewhat agreed, and one strongly disagreed (Figure 4). Some of the reasons behind center teachers’ somewhat weaker agreement may be reflected in the following themes.

4. Resources and support: Teachers’ perspective

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Participant group	Number of participants			
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	Center teachers ^a	3	3	-	1
	Family providers ^b	8	2	-	-

^a N=7.

^b N=10.

Theme 14: Center teachers would like more options for themes and activities they can use in their classrooms.

A child care center teacher suggested that it would be nice to be given more options for themes and activities to do with the children, and the other participants agreed. The teacher explained that six or seven themes come in a box for the month, and that the teacher comes up with one or two more on her own. She suggested and others agreed

that it might be nice to include a multicultural theme, for example. Center teachers also said it would be nice to have more options for activities because children can go through them very quickly, which can be challenging if the teacher is trying to accomplish other prep work during an activity. There was general agreement with a teacher who commented that the activities take a very brief period of time for children to complete.

“I guess I wish they would have more topics or like more things outside the box like different themes to choose from. That’s what I would say. ... Because like we have a ‘Healthy Me,’ we have like a science one, we have a ‘New Faces/New Places,’ ‘Vroom Vroom,’ ‘Discovery Street.’ ... There’s like maybe six, seven like themes to a box. Like it goes a whole month. So then I’m just saying like that covers a lot of your month so you [develop] a couple on your own which is fine, but I wish they would have maybe more themes outside the box just like to pick from or change around for the seasons. ... You can change it around now, but like even different ones like traveling around the world or something ... just different things you could elaborate on in more of the boxes. ... More themes.”
—child care center teacher

“The activities that they give us to do seriously take five minutes. ... More variety and more ideas to go off of. ... We do small groups, right, and we have two activities for that day for small groups, and those activities, my kids, their attention span is anywhere from four to eight minutes maybe. So you have this like this page that you’re supposed to have them, because I’m doing ‘Discovery Street’ right now, stamp collage, so they’re supposed to color it and cut it out and that’s supposed to take 15, 20 minutes for these kids and it lasts seriously like two, three minutes. So we need more variety of stuff to do with the kids.”
—child care center teacher

“With [the center’s] curriculum we have stuff that we have to cover, too. We have to talk about multicultural things, and then we have licensing where we have to prove that we talked about that and then for the accreditation and stuff like that, so if they could possibly build it in some way it would be nice. More multicultural stuff.”
—child care center teacher

While suggesting more themes and activities was not an overall finding to emerge from the other focus groups, it may be worth noting that a family child care home provider commented that some of her children with short attention spans need to change activities every five minutes. Additionally, a director described tailoring a theme for children who are recent immigrants:

“You can build the themes. For me I build the theme for those who are school age, or I can build literacy for my [kids] that are newcomers [to] the country plus for [those] who are born in the United States. That would be very helpful for those [curricula].”
—child care center director

Theme 15: Center teachers would like assistant teachers to be more included in the process.

PEK has invited assistant teachers to attend trainings and offered training stipends for their attendance, but individual centers have had discretion over whether they send their assistants to the training. There was general agreement among center teachers, including both lead and assistant teachers, that assistants should be more involved in the process. Assistants help lead teachers and also often do the teaching if the lead teacher is away. One assistant teacher said she and the lead teacher decided they would split portions of the teaching based on their interests so it would not be so much work for one person.

Participants in this group felt it would be beneficial for assistant teachers to attend the two-day training. It was also suggested that assistants receive clearer guidance upfront about what their involvement in the program and training is expected to be. Assistant teachers also indicated they would like to meet with the coach. One lead teacher said that for the past couple of months, a coach had been meeting with both her and the assistant, and that that helped both the lead teacher and assistant be on the same page.

“I think they should meet with the coach, too, because the assistant’s supposed to step in when the lead’s not there. So when I’m not there, she leads. So how can she lead if I know everything?”

—child care center teacher

“The meetings we come to each month, we have to come to, I have to come to. But when like the coach would come, I wouldn’t go to that, and that didn’t make sense because why did I have to come to this if I don’t have to go meet with the coach?”

—child care center teacher

“I don’t meet with the coach either. I wish I did. Because it seems like when the coach is there, because I’m the assistant it’s my job to step in and watch [the kids] while she gets to go have her meeting, and then the coach occasionally meets with the director, too, and then she just leaves. And it’s like okay well I’ve been teaching them while you were gone, so.”

—child care center teacher

“When the head teacher would get off, then I would come in and finish the day off. So like it’s like we split the classroom. She would get the first half and I would get the second half. ... But then I come in and I don’t even know what’s going on and I can imagine that’s how [another assistant teacher in the group] feels.”

—child care center teacher

“The last couple of two months I think the coaches have been meeting with both the aide and the lead, and what the coaches have been doing is, they talk to the lead teacher and see what needs to be worked on for the classroom to get to their goals, and then they talk to the aide to see what the aide can do to help the lead teacher go to the goals, and now they’ve been, for the last probably month they’ve been meeting with both. So now both of them are on the same page.”

—child care center teacher

“[It would be helpful to know upfront] either they can or they can’t meet with the coaches, or what our place in this should be ... as assistant teachers.”

—child care center teacher

Theme 16: It can be challenging to integrate PEK requirements with the child care center’s own requirements.

Center teachers described how in addition to PEK requirements, they also have other requirements from their center, and integrating the two and finding time to accomplish both during a day can be challenging and stressful. PEK’s ability to integrate program and center requirements may be somewhat limited, however, because the program works in partnership with and does not have direct authority over participating child care centers.

The main example teachers discussed was integrating the *Doors to Discovery* curriculum used by PEK with their center’s own curriculum. They talked about how it is difficult to integrate the two because they use different themes. There seems to be variation among centers in the extent to which PEK teachers are expected to cover another curriculum in addition to *Doors*. One teacher said that because *Doors* and her center’s curriculum are so different, they are focusing primarily on *Doors* now. One teacher suggested that when a center signs an agreement with PEK, they decide on one curriculum they will use during that time. Another teacher also described the need to integrate requirements related to her center’s Christian orientation.

“I think like when they’re doing the program they should just do one [curriculum]. ... Why not just do *Doors* for [those] whole two years, and not do [the center’s] curriculum because we’re testing out *Doors*?”

—child care center teacher

Although directors’ discussion did not focus on difficulties associated with integrating more than one curriculum, one director indicated that PEK’s expectations related to what would be posted on classroom walls conflicted somewhat with center expectations. This director said the center expects that certain items be posted, but that PEK emphasized avoiding clutter on the walls that could be distracting to children. The director indicated that the conflict was resolved by limiting some of what they posted to only certain areas of the room. Another director described placing materials in a book parents can look at instead.

Theme 17: It is challenging for teachers to find the time to plan for the day and accomplish what is expected during the day.

Both center teachers and family child care home providers described struggling to find enough time for day-to-day activities. In their discussion about the challenges of integrating more than one curriculum, center teachers talked about how it can be difficult to accomplish everything that is expected during the course of a day. Family child care home providers also described struggling to find the time to plan for their day and accomplish all that is expected during the day.

“Maybe finding time to try to fit all this in in an eight-hour day. I mean because for that we have to touch on interactive writing, we have to do the reading, we have to do the small groups with the kids where we, you know, do the rhyming, the alliteration, but at the same time for our [center] curriculum we still have to work on shapes, colors, numbers, we still have to go outside during the day, we have a two-hour nap. There is not enough time in the day to get all of this done, and to go with our [center] curriculum. I mean I really like doing this stuff. The kids are really getting it. It’s just finding the time to fit all of it in.”
—child care center teacher

“Time is [an] obstacle for me. It’s so hard to do the prep, and it was a wonderful, wonderful step forward when the coaches started doing the lesson.”
—family child care home provider

“Even though it’s planned to a degree with a book and you know small group and that ... I like to be able to send stuff home with the kids, so now when we come up with a new program, a new theme, I have to do worksheets but the worksheets I’m doing now are totally different from what I used to do. There’s more. The kids are writing more, they’re matching words, so that’s my challenge. Now that’s still a challenge because I’m very busy and to, to switch gears and each week do different worksheets and projects to go with this theme, is a challenge for me because like I said I’m so busy. I mean we all are you know, and but, I manage, but that’s what I find challenging.”
—family child care home provider

“Things become pretty more automatic now that we [have been doing them]. But like I said we, it’s not reality to be able to do everything on a daily basis. And if you say you’re doing it, that’s not telling the truth because I know I don’t do everything on a daily basis. I just don’t. I just can’t. Today I read my book, we had a small craft, and they got to, they always write their name, they repeat and they write their name, and I revisit a story, that’s it. That’s all that got done today. But if I do that then I’ve done that part. I’m not going to sit there and stress over that.”
—family child care home provider

Theme 18: Family child care home providers would like additional opportunities to gather ideas from other teachers and see what other teachers are doing.

When prompted to offer suggestions, a couple of family child care home providers offered suggestions related to creating additional opportunities for teachers to connect with and learn from each other. One suggested finding opportunities for family child care home providers to observe each other, in addition to visiting school and center sites. Another suggested having a retreat focused on learning what other teachers are doing. As discussed earlier, a couple of family child care home providers also indicated they think monthly training sessions provide valuable opportunities to learn about what centers are doing.

“I think it would be fun if we could figure out some way we could go watch one of these others do a circle time or something and see how they do it. You know, to get different ideas.”

—family child care home provider

“I think you know it was nice going and seeing the school, you know the preschool. ... I got excellent ideas, and I went home and I ... got containers and I put blocks in over by the block center, and [an] ABC book. I mean I [have] books all over the house now, all over the daycare area. ... Just [going] and getting different ideas on how others do things. ... You know everybody is such a wealth of information and it’s fun to get together and talk, but I’m a visual person.”

—family child care home provider

Theme 19: Some family child care home providers found aspects of the program challenging in a home environment.

PEK has taken a number of steps to accommodate environmental differences across child care settings while maintaining key elements of the program. One example is in the program’s approach to curricular support. Child care teachers receive more extensive lesson-planning support than do the licensed teachers at school sites. For centers this means the *Doors to Discovery* curriculum, and for homes this means a theme-based curricular model developed for them. Coaches have also worked with family child care home providers to find ways to create a literacy-rich physical environment without disrupting their home environment. As previously described, providers were very strong in commending the coach for understanding and responding to their needs. Even so, it seems some family child care home providers continue to struggle with implementing certain aspects of the program in ways that feel compatible with their living environment.

Focus group participants discussed challenges of fulfilling some program expectations in a home setting, and some indicated they would like the program to adapt more to their environment. For example, a couple of providers described feeling conflicted about

making environmental changes requested by the program and posting materials on walls. They recognized the program benefits of making the changes, but also felt reluctant because the environment is also their home. As another example, a couple talked about the challenges associated with working with children who are at different levels, and about working with older children while also tending to the needs of younger ones.

“That’s the thing with doing group daycare because you do have levels, diversities of you know, the age groups, so you have to understand, you know, because we don’t have aides we take care of everything. I do the cooking, I do the cleaning up, and I change pants, and I wipe snotty noses.”
—family child care home provider

“Yeah, and I do everything. ... I have a lot to do in a certain period of time and so it’s not making less of the program, but you know, I think you need to be a bit more adapting to how we do run our homes. ... We’re doing daycare in our homes.”
—family child care home provider

“I struggle with the level of understanding of that we have to be so flexible, and I can’t have small group at 2 o’clock even if you’re going to be there to watch me today. And it’s just, I’m sorry, but you know.”
—family child care home provider

“How to manage [younger kids’] time appropriately while we’re doing some other stuff.”
—family child care home provider

“That was a challenge for me. Somebody coming in and telling me I had to do this with my house. That was very stressful for me. But once I sat back and looked at it I knew that after seeing different pictures of ... the way I could do things, that was a real big learning step for me. To make use of a table in a corner, set something aside specifically for something. You know, I had to learn that. I did not know that. But that was, yeah, that was an obstacle.”
—family child care home provider

Additional director supports

All three center directors strongly agreed with a survey statement that their centers have enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices (Figure 5). They did, however, express concerns in the focus group about the amount of time that will be requested of directors in the future in their role as the instructional leader at their center. As discussed in the following theme, these concerns may in part reflect uncertainty about what that role will entail specifically.

5. Resources and support: Child care center directors' perspective (n=3)

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Number of participants			
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My center has enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	3	-	-	-

Theme 20: Center directors are concerned about the time that will be required of them in the role as the instructional leader at their center.

As in the teacher groups, insufficient time was also raised as a concern by center directors. Directors expressed these concerns in response to a question about what PEK staff should keep in mind as they move forward with plans for center directors to be instructional leaders at the center. Due to the high turnover among child care teachers, PEK plans that the next cohort of center directors will start PEK training six months before teachers. The idea is that this will equip directors to train new teacher hires on PEK classroom procedures. Directors described feeling pressed for time already, and having concerns about how much additional time will be required for this role and the associated training.

“The first thing that comes to my mind is time. When we’re going to find the time to do that. I don’t know how extensive you want the training to be that we do with them. I would need more information on that, what exactly it is that you want, how you want us to train them. If it’s just basic or extensive again.”
—child care center director

“Timing is just a really big factor for being in the position that we’re in [because] we also have a center to run with all the other rooms, if that makes sense. You know we would definitely love to put PEK first, but sometimes things come up at the spur of the moment and we have all the center to take into account.”
—child care center director

This discussion related to future program plans, and it seems directors’ concerns may in part be allayed by providing specific information about exactly what will be required, how much time will be involved, and what additional training the program will provide to teachers. After the focus group facilitator clarified that teachers would still participate in training offered by the program, and that the idea is that the director is equipped to train new teachers when they come on board, a director commented as follows:

“Right, which we would be willing to do, for sure. Yah, because PEK has really helped our program, too.”
—child care center director

As described in the following section, center directors also raised concerns about time in relation to administering Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) to individual children.

Other feedback

Teachers generally find IGDI results to be helpful in informing their teaching and establishing small groups, although they have seen problems with testing administration when not done by PEK staff. Child care centers have found parent participation to be a challenge.

Progress monitoring

Theme 21: Teachers generally find IGDI results useful for informing their teaching, but question the results given problems with administering the tests. It can be helpful to have the coach administer the tests.

PEK school, child care center, and family child care home teachers use Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) to monitor individual children's early language and literacy development over time. Preschool IGDIs measure children's progress in three areas: picture naming, alliteration, and rhyming. During the assessments, facilitators hold up cards with pictures and ask children to name pictures, identify pictures starting with the same initial sound, and identify pictures that rhyme.¹ PEK coaches administered IGDIs to all children at the beginning of the year, and center staff and family child care home providers administered IGDIs to all children during the year. In the focus groups, participants were asked to provide feedback on their experience with data-collection aspects of the program, and teachers were asked how data collection impacted their teaching. Their responses primarily addressed IGDI data, although the program also collects attendance data and other information.

There was general agreement among center teachers that IGDI results help them understand children's skills and progress, and areas they should emphasize in their teaching. Center teachers use results to establish small groups of students in which they differentiate instruction based on different groups' needs. However, center teachers also agreed that in cases where IGDIs have not been administered by PEK staff, there have been problems with their administration that could compromise results. Concerns that were raised included test administrators leading children to the correct answer by emphasizing certain words, and children not being fully engaged in the test because they were removed from an activity they were enjoying. Concerns were also raised about children providing an answer that was technically correct but that was not the specific word that was desired. Based on the types of problems described in the focus groups and

¹ Get It! Got It! Go! website, n.d. Background information and assessment procedures and materials. Retrieved April 2, 2008, from http://ggg.umn.edu/get/procedures_and_materials/index.html

the amount of resources required to administer the assessments, PEK plans for program staff to again administer IGDI at the end of the program year.

Following are examples of teachers' comments. It is important to note that a number of concerns raised suggest a lack of understanding of IGDI procedures. Additionally, in some cases a teacher seemed to illustrate a point by providing an example that was fictional or based on memory, and perhaps not reflective of an actual IGDI card.

“What we did with our IGDI scores is, the ones that were say stronger in rhyming, and the ones that were you know less strong in rhyming, that’s how I figured out my small groups. So I had one activity planned, so for the ones that were stronger in rhyming I would emphasize this more, and then the other ones I would have to work up to. ... I would have to have these guys work up to what these guys were actually at. So the IGDI scores, having those, helped a lot. Because that way you know that these kids aren’t just feeding off of these kids and answering what these kids are doing. You know that these guys are actually knowing what they’re talking about.”

—child care center teacher

“It tells us exactly what kids need to work on.”

—child care center teacher

“It’s the way you say it to them. Like if you’re saying what rhymes with ‘king,’ and then you [have] three other pictures, like I can say to my kids I can name different pictures, it’s the way I say it to them that they know ‘king’ rhymes with ‘ring.’ So if I’m saying ‘king,’ ‘block,’ ‘rock,’ ‘ring,’ they know because it’s the way I’m saying it to them. ... It’s the way they emphasize it to them.”

—child care center teacher

“Before we even tested the kids, my assistant director sat me down, and we went through them, and she was flipping the cards over and there was a picture of a dime and I said ‘dime’ and she looked at me and we talked about it later. For that dime you could have either said ‘coin,’ ‘change,’ ‘money,’ ‘dime,’ like anything. They wanted a specific, they wanted ‘coin’ or something. Where if you say ‘dime’ because you know it’s a dime, you get it wrong. And there’s a lot of pictures on there that are like that. ... So I think the picture naming is a little skewed because there’s a lot of kids who know exactly what it is and they’ll say exactly what it is, but that’s not what they want.”

—child care center teacher

“These kids seriously could be the brightest things and their tests are really low [because] ... they could have been doing something really awesome ... and then you take them away ... and they’re having a hard time focusing [on the test]. Their mind’s on something else. ... I think there [are] different ways about going about it and testing the kids at the right time of the day.”

—child care center teacher

“Even with how it is now it helps with the small group.”

—child care center teacher

The family child care home provider group also raised concerns about how assessments are administered. Their responses also indicated there were varying interpretations of assessment instructions. One concern that was discussed at length was administering IGDIs in a language other than the child's home language. For example, one teacher said that a child's parent had asked her to speak to the child in Spanish during the day, and she had to discount an answer that was correct because the word was said in Spanish first instead of English. Other teachers disagreed with this method of scoring and said they would count the response in instances like this. Another teacher described having to discount an answer because it was given in sign language. Other concerns raised by this group included teaching to the test, children scoring lower if they are having an "off" day, and finding ways to administer the test separate from other children.

It was suggested that someone other than the provider come in to administer the test to avoid bias. This would also make it easier to separate the child being tested while the provider watched the rest of the group. There was general agreement that it helped when the PEK coach administered the test.

One family child care home provider said she thinks testing in general does little or nothing to inform them about what children have learned, but most agreed that IGDIs were useful to them. There was also interest expressed in this group in seeing overall results for PEK children, in addition to their own children's IGDIs results. The group facilitator explained that some early results are currently available on the Wilder Research website.

"Attendance does nothing for me. I don't know what it does for the administrative side. But for me the IGDIs were incredibly eye opening because it exposed a lot of contenders and really showed me some things I had no idea were going on with individual kids."
—family child care home provider

"Seeing the scores is really helpful."
—family child care home provider

"I have three kids that no one can understand a thing that they say but I can understand everything that they say, so a tester unknown to them would probably give them zeros and I'd probably give them like 22 words. So that's the bias of, I mean, to kind of teaching to the bias a little bit because we are administering it. ... Because that reflects on how well I'm doing my job in PEK's eyes. If all my kids are outstanding then pat myself on the back, and you know, but are they really?"
—family child care home provider

“I don’t know [how you] guys are [doing] this, but I have a bilingual kid. You can’t count any Spanish words. I have a 3-year-old who, she doesn’t know, if I say, say it in Spanish, she doesn’t know what words in her mind are Spanish/English. She’s bilingual. But if I say to her, say it in English, she doesn’t know it in her mind yet what’s English words, and what’s Spanish words, but she’s bilingual so she’ll say like [the Spanish version of the word followed by the English version], but I can’t [count it] because she said [the Spanish version] first. . . . I don’t think that’s fair.”
—family child care home provider

“She got it in a different language, but she got it.”
—family child care home provider

“I think that [the] tests should be in their [home] language.”
—family child care home provider

“Have the mentor come in and do it.”
—family child care home provider

“When [the coach] was doing them the kids enjoyed it more.”
—family child care home provider

Asked about data-collection aspects of the program, center directors also indicated that although testing is time-consuming, it provides useful information about where children are at and areas teachers should emphasize, and can be a helpful tool for evaluating teachers. One of the directors also mentioned that because of the amount of time required to conduct the tests, it helped when the coach came in to do the testing.

“We have an assistant now so that helps a lot, so that we have someone who can do that stuff. But before it’s hard if you’re a director and you don’t have someone to help out with that stuff. The director already has so much paperwork and so many other things. One more thing and it’s like, when am I going to find time to do that? But we have someone else who can help out, so that helped. And it also helped when the coaches would come and help do the IGDI testing, too.”
—child care center director

“You want to see the progression, you know. But it takes a lot of time to do it. It really does.”
—child care center director

“Oh yes, [IGDIs are] extremely [useful]. You can see each child on an individual level, where they’re at.”
—child care center director

“And you can see because of the graphing. Because how many [words] they know, for sound, for rhyming, all kind of stuff. They know exactly how your child progresses. So you can see from one month to the next so you can see your child growing.”
—child care center director

“It’s nice to see the kids progress, especially if you’re working on one area or something, then you can see the increase. It also shows you where you need to focus on if you have a whole group or a bunch of kids that aren’t doing very well on alliteration, then you need to work more on that. It’s a good teaching tool.”
—child care center director

“It’s good for the teacher too, [to] evaluate the teacher. What part do you do most for the child, and what part do you lack for the child? You are the teacher, you have to prepare equally for those [areas].”
—child care center director

Parent participation

Theme 22: Parent participation can be challenging at centers.

Focus group results

Although not discussed in as much length as some of the other themes mentioned here, the center teacher group raised and was in general agreement that parent participation can be difficult to attain at child care centers. They talked about some parents being unaware their children were in PEK even though the center had sent a letter home or posted information about the program on the door. Asked if they encountered any obstacles to implementing what they learned in training, one teacher indicated she thinks it goes well overall, but noted that PEK wants parent participation and that that is lacking at her center. Other teachers agreed that parent participation is a challenge.

“They want parent participation, and at our center we don’t get that at all. ... The parents don’t know who we are, they don’t know the other kids in the room, and they have no desire to go home and work with their kids on this stuff. ... A lot of them still don’t even know that we have a PEK program.”
—child care center teacher

Survey results

Survey results also suggest challenges with parent involvement. None of the child care center teachers and only one of the three child care center directors strongly agreed that parents are more familiar with Saint Paul Public Schools because of the center’s or teacher’s involvement in PEK. Six of the 10 family child care home providers strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 6).

6. Impact on parent familiarity with schools

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Participant group	Number of participants			
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Parents are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my involvement in PEK.	Center teachers ^a	-	3	3	1
	Family providers ^b	6	2	2	-
Parents at my center are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my center's participation in PEK.	Center directors ^c	1	2	-	-

^a N=7.

^b N=10.

^c N=3.

Note: Survey questions varied somewhat among the three groups, and data for individual questions are provided for the groups that were asked that question.

Appendix

Teacher focus group questions

Director focus group questions

Teacher self-administered questionnaire

Director self-administered questionnaire

Survey results

Teacher focus group questions

1. CHILD CARE CENTER TEACHERS: Introductions – name, child care center name, position (main teacher or assistant teacher), length of time you have participated in PEK.

FAMILY HOME DAY CARE PROVIDERS: Introductions – name and length of time you have participated in PEK.

2. First we have a question about the PEK-sponsored training sessions in which you participated. Do you have any suggestions for how these trainings could be improved (for example, with regard to the content of the sessions, the time or place they are held, length of the training, or anything else)?
3. Do you like the combination of large group training (all teachers from homes and centers combined) one month and smaller group training (family and center day care providers separately) the next? If not, explain the reasons.
4. What impact did the training, coaching, and your participation in PEK have on your teaching? That is, what are the biggest differences in your teaching at the child care center/home daycare as a result of your participation in PEK?
5. Did you encounter any obstacles to making changes or implementing the things you learned during training? If yes, what obstacles were these?
6. Did the changes you made in your teaching at your center/home daycare as a result of PEK make a difference for the children you serve? If yes, in what ways?
7. What suggestions or advice do you have for how PEK could improve the program during the next phase?
8. How did the data collection part of the project impact your teaching (collecting IGDI data, gathering attendance, etc.)? Do you have any suggestions for how to improve data collection process or how the data could be used?

Director focus group questions

1. Introductions – name, title, child care center name, length of time you have participated in PEK.
2. First we have a question about the PEK-sponsored training sessions in which you participated. Do you have any suggestions for how these trainings could be improved (for example, with regard to the content of the sessions, the time or place they are held, stipends, or anything else)?
3. Because of the high turnover of teachers, in the next cohort child care center directors will start PEK training six months prior to when teachers begin training. Directors will be asked to be the instructional leader at the center which will include training-in new hires with PEK classroom procedures. What do you think of this idea? What should PEK staff keep in mind as they go forward with this approach?
4. What impact did the training and your participation in PEK have for your child care center? That is, what were the biggest changes made to what is done in the classrooms at your center as a result of your participation in PEK (for example, schedules & routines, specific activities, curriculum, the way teachers interacted with the children)?
5. Did you encounter any obstacles to making changes or implementing the things you learned during training? If yes, what obstacles were these?
6. Did the changes you made at your center as a result of PEK make a difference for the children you serve? If yes, in what ways?
7. Do you think that you will continue some of the activities and practices you started as a result of PEK? If yes, what activities or practices are you most likely to continue?
8. What suggestions or advice do you have for how PEK could improve the program during the next phase?
9. How did the data collection part of the project go for you (gathering the child information forms, providing IGD data, turning in attendance, etc.)? Do you have any suggestions regarding this part? How could this process be more efficient?

Teacher self-administered questionnaire

**Child care center teachers'/family home day care providers' survey
March 2008**

Please take a moment to answer a few questions about your experiences with PEK. Your feedback will help us to monitor and improve our services. Thank you.

Please indicate whether you agree, somewhat agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement below.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on my teaching practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
2. The assistance I received from PEK in goal setting has been helpful for me.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
3. Goal setting is an important part of my progress/growth as a teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
4. I received enough support with goal setting.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
5. Family home day care providers only: Pre-visit home calls better prepare me for the coach's visits.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
6. I have used the new teaching activities and practices that I learned from PEK regularly.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
7. I have enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
8. Parents are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my involvement in PEK.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
9. I better prepare children for school because of my participation in PEK.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵

10. will continue to use the following practices in my teaching, even if I am no longer involved in PEK.

	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Schedule and routine	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
b. Community Circle	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
c. Active learning	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
d. Small group instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
e. Read Aloud	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
f. Provide information to parents about preschool screening	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
g. Lesson plans	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
h. Accountable talk	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
i. Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI)	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
j. Door to Discovery curriculum or PEK family curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
k. Sign-In	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
l. Interactive Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
m. Parent Education Curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸

--OVER --

11. Please add any comments you have about PEK:

THANK YOU!

Director self-administered questionnaire

Child care center directors' survey March 2008

Please take a moment to answer a few questions about your experiences with PEK. Your feedback will help us to monitor and improve our services. Thank you.

Please indicate whether you agree, somewhat agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement below.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on practices at my child care center.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
2. My center had enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
3. Parents at my center are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my center's participation in PEK.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵
4. My center better prepares children for school because of our participation in PEK.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁵

5. My center will continue to use the following practices:

	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Schedule and routine	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
b. Community Circle	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
c. Active learning	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
d. Small group instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
e. Read Aloud	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
f. Provide information to parents about preschool screening	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
g. Lesson plans	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
h. Accountable talk	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
i. Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI)	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
j. Door to Discovery curriculum or PEK family curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
k. Sign-In	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
l. Interactive Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸
m. Parent Education Curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁸

6. Please add any comments you have about PEK:

THANK YOU!

Survey results

A1. Child care center directors (n=3)

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Number of participants			
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on practices at my child care center.	3	-	-	-
My center has enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	3	-	-	-
Parents at my center are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my center's participation in PEK.	1	2	-	-
My center better prepares children for school because of my participation in PEK.	3	-	-	-

A2. Child care center teachers (n=7)

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Number of participants			
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on my teaching practices.	6	-	-	1
The assistance I received from PEK in goal setting has been helpful for me.	6	-	-	1
Goal setting is an important part of my progress/growth as a teacher.	6	-	-	1
I received enough support with goal setting.	4	2	-	1
I have used the new teaching activities and practices that I learned from PEK regularly.	6	-	-	1
I have enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	3	3	-	1
Parents are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my involvement in PEK.	-	3	3	1
I better prepare children for school because of my participation in PEK.	6	-	-	1

A3. Family child care home providers (n=9-10)

Please indicate your agreement with the statements below.	Number of participants			
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Participation in PEK professional development has had a large impact on my teaching practices.	9	1	-	-
The assistance I received from PEK in goal setting has been helpful for me.	9	1	-	-
Goal setting is an important part of my progress/growth as a teacher.	7	3	-	-
I received enough support with goal setting.	6	4	-	-
Pre-visit home calls better prepare me for the coach's visits.	6	3	1	-
I have used the new teaching activities and practices that I learned from PEK regularly.	8	1	-	-
I have enough resources and support to implement the PEK curriculum and teaching practices.	8	2	-	-
Parents are more familiar with the Saint Paul Public Schools because of my involvement in PEK.	6	2	2	-
I better prepare children for school because of my participation in PEK.	8	2	-	-

A4. Continued use of PEK curriculum and practices

Will you continue using the following practices?	Number who responded "yes"		
	Center directors N=3	Center teachers N=7	Family child care home providers N=10
Schedule and routine	3/3	5/5	10/10
Community circle	3/3	6/6	10/10
Active learning	3/3	6/6	9/9
Small group instruction	3/3	6/6	9/9
Read aloud	3/3	6/6	10/10
Provide information to parents about preschool screening	3/3	5/5	10/10
Lesson plans	3/3	6/6	8/8
Accountable talk	3/3	6/6	8/8
Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)	3/3	5/5	5/6
<i>Doors to Discovery</i> curriculum or PEK family curriculum	3/3	5/5	5/6
Sign-in	3/3	6/6	10/10
Interactive writing	3/3	6/6	10/10
Parent education curriculum	3/3	5/5	6/7

Note: Excludes cases where the respondent marked "don't know."