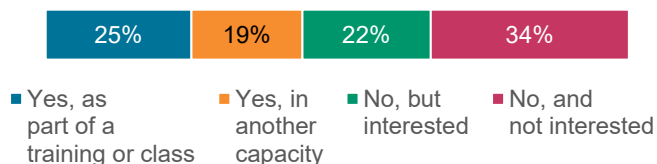# Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators

In 2023, Wilder Research contracted with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Department of Human Services (DHS), in partnership with the Children's Cabinet, to conduct an Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Survey. A similar study was done in 2011. The purpose of the study is to describe characteristics of the ECE workforce and assess educators' economic wellbeing in addition to their motivations for participating in training and professional development opportunities. Early childhood educators from a variety of public and private settings were randomly selected to participate in a mail-push-to-web survey. In total 1,050 educators responded. This summary highlights results from survey questions related to professional development, which includes training, coaching, mentoring, and business consultation.

Relationship-based professional development is well received.

Most early childhood educators either have or are interested in participating in relationship-based professional development (such as mentoring or coaching). They are engaging with mentors or coaches up to 200 hours a year, on average 17 hours.

1. HAD A PROFESSIONAL MENTOR, COACH, OR CONSULTANT IN THE LAST YEAR

25%	19%	22%	34%
■ Yes, as part of a training or class	■ Yes, in another capacity	■ No, but interested	■ No, and not interested

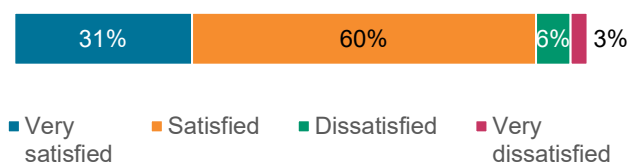**The five most common topics discussed with mentors, coaches, or consultants were:**

- Child development and learning
- Relationships with families
- Developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- Assessment, evaluation, and individualization[1]
- Behavior guidance

Develop is widely used and educators are satisfied with it.

Respondents were asked about their awareness and use of various professional development resources. The Develop workforce registry, which includes functions for early childhood educators to search for and document training and other professional development activities, was the mostly widely used resource, particularly among licensed family child care providers and staff at licensed child care centers and Head Start/Early Head Start programs. In 2018, Child Trends similarly found that large proportions of the child care workforce used Develop.[2]

2. SATISFACTION WITH DEVELOP

31%	60%	6%	3%
■ Very satisfied	■ Satisfied	■ Dissatisfied	■ Very dissatisfied

[1] Sec. 5. Minnesota Statutes 2019 Supplement, section 245A.149 defines this as "training in observing, recording, and assessing development; assessing and using information to plan; and assessing and using information to enhance and maintain program quality."

[2] Paschall, K., Kane, M. C., Hilty, R., Silamongkol, T., & Tout, K. (2018). *Professional Development for Minnesota's Child Care and Early Education Workforce: A Study of the Supply of and Demand for Training* (DHS-7758A). Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/professional-development-for-minnesotas-child-care-and-early-education-workforce-a-study-of-the-supply-of-and-demand-for-training

Wilder Research
Information. Insight. Impact.

Early childhood educators are satisfied with the professional development they have received, though there is room for improvement.

3. HELPFULNESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RECEIVED IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

32%	60%	8%	<1%

- ■ Very helpful
- ■ Somewhat helpful
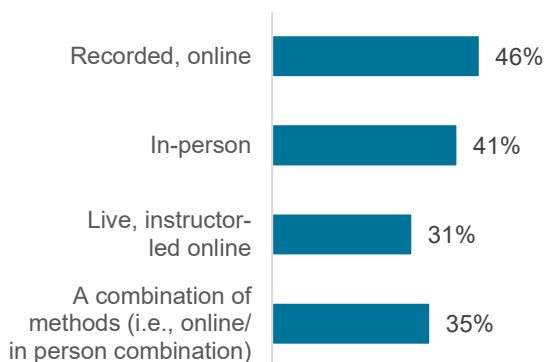- ■ Not very helpful
- ■ Not at all helpful
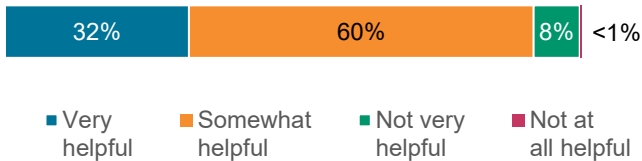
Trainings are most helpful when they are taught by trainers who have experience working with young children and the topics are directly relevant to educators' roles. For example, focus group participants described opportunities to learn about early childhood development, or discover helpful tips and ideas for games, activities, crafts, or creative learning approaches for young children as helpful training experiences.

Trainings about required trainings topics, such as SUIDS, can feel less helpful when the same subject matter is repeated for many years in the same annual trainings.

A variety of formats are needed to meet all educators' needs and preferences.

When early childhood educators were asked which training formats they have taken or prefer to take, responses were mixed. These data support the need to offer trainings in as many ways as possible to support the different learning styles of early childhood educators.

4. PREFERRED FORMAT FOR TRAININGS

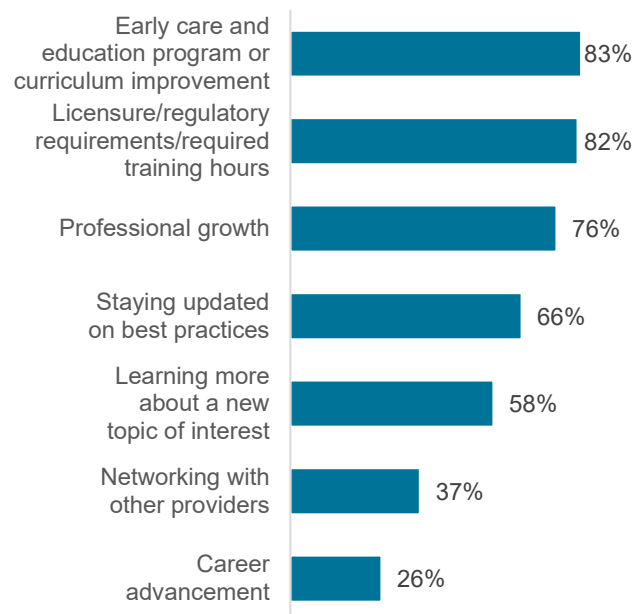| Format	
Recorded, online	46%
In-person	41%
Live, instructor-led online	31%
A combination of methods (i.e., online/in person combination)	35%

Internet and computer hardware does not appear to be a high need (or barrier) to participating in professional development; just 2% of respondents (less than 20 people) said they needed either. However, licensed family child care providers are most in need of these technical supports; as self-employed business owners, they would need to invest in those resources themselves. In addition, a greater percentage of early childhood educators in greater Minnesota report the need for high speed internet than those in the Twin Cities (2.5% vs. 1.5%) whereas those in the Twin Cities have higher need for hardware (3.4% vs. 1.8%).

While less than 1% of respondents indicated they needed coaching or trainings in their preferred language in order to participate in professional development, the survey may not have adequately captured data from providers who speak languages other than English.

Requirements and quality are top motivations for participating in professional development.

5. TOP MOTIVATORS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION

Motivator	
Early care and education program or curriculum improvement	83%
Licensure/regulatory requirements/required training hours	82%
Professional growth	76%
Staying updated on best practices	66%
Learning more about a new topic of interest	58%
Networking with other providers	37%
Career advancement	26%

Refer to figure A1 in the Appendix for a complete data set.

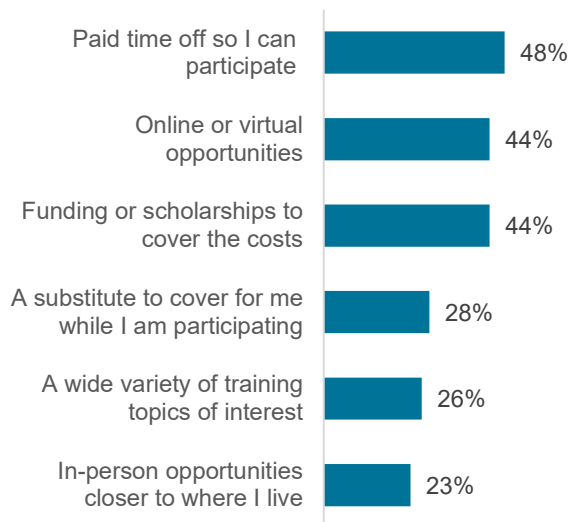## Behavior management and child development are topics educators really need and want.

6. TOP TOPICS EDUCATORS NEED AND WANT

Topic	Percentage
Behavior management/Proper discipline practices	48%
Developmentally appropriate learning experiences	33%
Trauma-informed care and practice	33%
Child development and learning	32%
Relationships with families	29%
Working with children with special health care needs (including mental health)	29%

Refer to figure A2 in the Appendix for a complete data set.

Educators need more online opportunities and funding to participate in professional development.

7. TOP FACTORS THAT WOULD HELP RESPONDENTS PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Factor	Percentage
Paid time off so I can participate	48%
Online or virtual opportunities	44%
Funding or scholarships to cover the costs	44%
A substitute to cover for me while I am participating	28%
A wide variety of training topics of interest	26%
In-person opportunities closer to where I live	23%

Refer to figure A3 in the Appendix for a complete data set.

Educators in different settings have differing professional development needs

Licensed family child care providers

- Seek training on health, safety, and nutrition and business practices
- Want more training opportunities offered online, or evenings and weekends
- Express less need for substitutes in order to participate in professional development

Staff at licensed centers

- Seek training on business practices, child development and learning, and behavior guidance
- Want paid time off to be able to participate in trainings

Head Start/Early Head Start

- Want more training on behavior management and professionalism
- Express a higher need for substitutes to participate in professional development
- Express less need for additional online training opportunities

School-based programs

- Seek training on working with children with special health care needs, multilingual families, and gifted children.
- Seek training on assessment, evaluation, and individualization
- Want more paid time off and substitutes in order to attend training
- Have less desire for training on evenings and weekends

License-exempt programs

- Want more training on developmentally appropriate learning and child development
- Need more opportunities closer to where they live

Appendix

A2. TOP MOTIVATORS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION

Motivators	%
Early care and education program or curriculum improvement	83%
Licensure/regulatory requirements/required training hours	82%
Professional growth	76%
Staying updated on best practices	66%
Learning more about a new topic of interest	58%
Networking with other providers	37%
Career advancement	26%

A2. TOP TOPICS EDUCATORS NEED AND WANT

Topic	%
Behavior management/Proper discipline practices	48%
Developmentally appropriate learning experiences	33%
Trauma-informed care and practice	33%
Child development and learning	32%
Relationships with families	29%
Working with children with special health care needs (including mental health)	29%

A3. TOP FACTORS THAT WOULD HELP RESPONDENTS PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Factor	%
Paid time off so I can participate	48%
Online or virtual opportunities	44%
Funding or scholarships to cover the costs	44%
A substitute to cover for me while I am participating	28%
A wide variety of training topics of interest	26%
In-person opportunities closer to where I live	23%

Wilder Research
Information. Insight. Impact.

For more information contact **Angela Butel**
CDS Data and Policy Analyst | Child Development Services
Minnesota Department of Human Services | angela.butel@state.mn.us

DECEMBER 2023