

We recognize that it is of utmost importance to respond to the immediate needs of the early care and education field associated with COVID-19. While this brief does not cover some of the new challenges faced by the field, it does highlight pre-existing training, education and compensation needs that continue to persist. The brief also includes practitioner perspectives that should be considered in long-term planning efforts to support the field.

Voices From The Field: Perspectives of Early Care and Education Professionals in Los Angeles County

Effective early care and education (ECE) policy requires input from practitioners in the field, so Child360 and Early Edge California went directly to ECE professionals to seek their feedback. In Fall 2019, we surveyed Los Angeles-based ECE providers and lead teachers about their training and coaching preferences, their professional skills and knowledge, barriers they face in recruiting and retaining teachers, and their experience working with Dual Language Learners¹ (DLLs) and partnering with families. After reviewing and synthesizing this data, we held two focus groups with providers and lead teachers that enabled us to further explore issues that were addressed in the survey. Key findings from the survey and focus groups indicate a need for:

1. Training and higher education coursework on:
 - a. working with children with challenging behaviors
 - b. supporting Dual Language Learners and their families
 - c. serving children with special needs
 - d. trauma-informed care
2. Mental health professionals who can work with teachers to support children with challenging behaviors
3. Fair compensation for ECE professionals
4. Paid professional development trainings for early childhood professionals
5. Funding for substitutes when trainings are held on a weekday

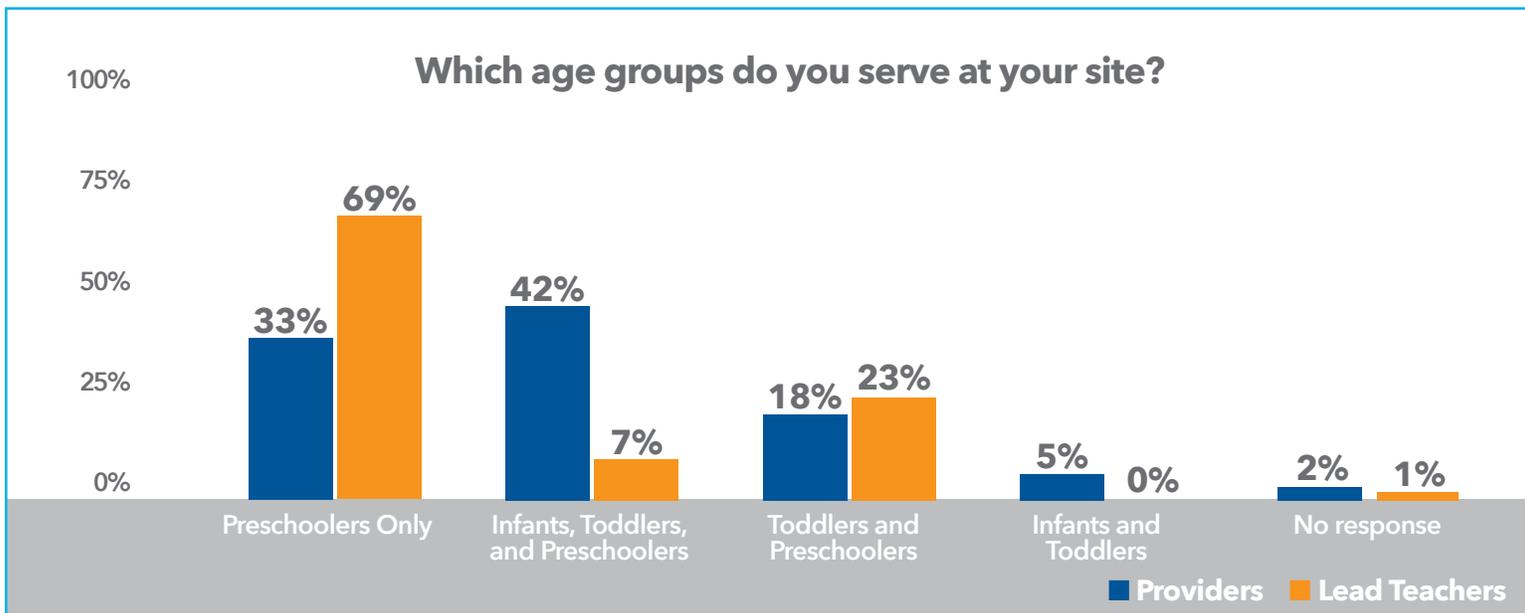
Introduction

In Fall 2019, Child360 and Early Edge California created an **online survey** designed to elicit feedback about the training needs and workforce challenges of early care and education professionals. The survey was administered to individuals working in early childhood programs throughout Los Angeles County for whom Child360 is providing quality improvement services.

In total, **191 early learning professionals completed the survey, including 105 providers and 86 lead teachers.** Providers included directors, assistant directors, site supervisors, principals, executive directors, family child care owners, center managers, site facilitators, a vice president, an administrator, a program manager and an education coordinator.

Forty percent of provider respondents and 84 percent of lead teacher respondents worked at an early learning center linked to a school district. The remaining respondents worked at independently run early learning centers, family child care homes, a child development center linked to a hospital, and a child development center linked to a church. **In addition, nearly all respondents worked at sites serving preschoolers, and 65 percent of providers worked at sites serving toddlers. Further, 47 percent of providers and 7 percent of lead teachers worked at sites serving infants.**

¹Dual Language Learners are children who are learning two or more languages at the same time, or are learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf.



Survey respondents were asked to:

- Identify subject areas in which they would like to receive training
- Assess which coaching strategies have been most helpful to them
- Identify core competencies and skills an individual should have before being hired to work as an ECE lead teacher, and assess whether they and their staff have these skills and competencies
- Identify the most challenging barriers to teacher recruitment and retention
- Assess their level of preparedness in meeting the needs of Dual Language Learners
- Identify challenges faced in effectively serving Dual Language Learners and their families

In order to further explore key issues addressed in our online survey, we held **two small focus groups**: one with **five providers and two lead teachers**, and another with **six lead teachers**. Providers came from both centers and family child care homes, while all lead teachers came from centers. All of the participants worked in Los Angeles County, and the majority worked at sites that received some form of state funding. Focus group participants were asked to share their thoughts on the main issues that were addressed in survey responses. Findings from our online survey and focus groups are discussed in the sections below.

Training Needs of the ECE Workforce

Early learning professionals need ongoing training to stay abreast of advances in the field, to gain tools to address changing dynamics in the classroom, and to continually hone their craft. In our survey, respondents were presented with thirteen subject areas² and were asked to indicate all of the areas in which they would like to receive training. Most of the subject areas are designated as Early Childhood Educator Competency areas³ by the California Department of Education. Both providers and lead teachers most frequently selected “supporting children with challenging behaviors” as an area in which they would like to receive training. Other top preferences are included in the lists below:

Providers

1. **Supporting children with challenging behaviors (73% chose this area)**
2. Observation, screening, assessment and documentation
3. Family and community engagement
4. Child development and learning
5. Special needs and inclusion

²The thirteen subject areas were: administration and supervision; child development and learning; culture, diversity and equity; dual-language development; family and community engagement; health, safety and nutrition; leadership in early childhood education; learning environments and curriculum; observation, screening, assessment and documentation; relationships, interactions and communication with young children; special needs and inclusion; supporting children with challenging behaviors; and trauma-informed care.

³The California Department of Education and First 5 California (2011). *California Early Childhood Educator Competencies*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/ececompetencies2011.pdf>.

Lead Teachers

1. Supporting children with challenging behaviors (60% chose this area)

2. Special needs and inclusion
3. Dual-language development
4. Observation, screening, assessment and documentation
5. Leadership in early childhood education

Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviors

Providers and lead teachers in our focus groups stated that they were seeing an increasing number of children in their programs with challenging behaviors. A challenging behavior has been defined as “any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with the child’s optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults.”⁴ Focus group participants explained that they were seeing more children who were subject to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)⁵ and trauma, which can manifest in behavioral challenges. According to one provider, “Our society has gotten so complicated. Our kids are

coming in with so many . . . adverse experiences, that are just nothing that any of us should ever have to experience as an adult, and here they are; they’ve experienced five or six of them, not just one or two.”

Focus group participants expressed that it can be overwhelming to respond to a child with challenging behavior while also striving to meet the needs of other children in the classroom. One provider stated, “That is one thing that has kept me really busy: responding to those needs. It’s almost like it’s too much for the teachers and even the principal because they’re working with all these other kids as well.” In addition, both survey and focus group respondents indicated that teachers wanted training on strategies for handling various types of challenging behaviors. For example, one provider stated that teachers wanted guidance on how to “handle [a] child without hurting the child when they’re hitting.” In addition, some children with challenging behaviors may have a learning delay. Several teachers shared that for children with learning delays or physical disabilities that have not yet been diagnosed, it can be difficult to know what strategies to employ. One teacher stated, “How do we identify what the child has? . . . Does he have autism? ADHD? What do I research for? What do I do? What activities do I set, because I don’t know what he or she has. ”

Focus group participants indicated that in addition to trainings for teachers, there is a need for more peer support workers (PSWs) or behaviorists, who can work hand in hand with teachers to support children with challenging behaviors. As one director explained, “I feel like what we’re dealing with is bigger than what the teacher can handle, even if she has information [on trauma-informed care and brain research]. I agree [that] we need specialists. We need behaviorists.”

Focus group participants also indicated that in some cases, parents might be reticent to acknowledge that their child may have a learning delay or disability, to work with the teacher to address a challenging behavior, or to accept assistance. One provider explained that some parents worry that, if they accept support for their child, the County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will become involved. Another provider recommended that teachers build relationships of trust with parents so that when a challenge with a child arises, the parents don’t feel that they or their child are being “targeted.”

“Our society has gotten so complicated. Our kids are coming in with so many . . . adverse experiences, that are just nothing that any of us should ever have to experience as an adult, and here they are; they’ve experienced five or six of them, not just one or two.”

– Provider Focus Group Participant

⁴Smith, B., & Fox, L. (2003). *Systems of service delivery: A synthesis of evidence relevant to young children at risk of or who have challenging behavior*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Center of Evidence-Based Practice; Young Children with Challenging Behavior. Retrieved from: <http://ohiofamilyrights.com/Reports/Special-Reports-Page-4/Systems-of-Service-Delivery-A-Synthesis-of-Evidence-Relevant-to-Young.pdf>

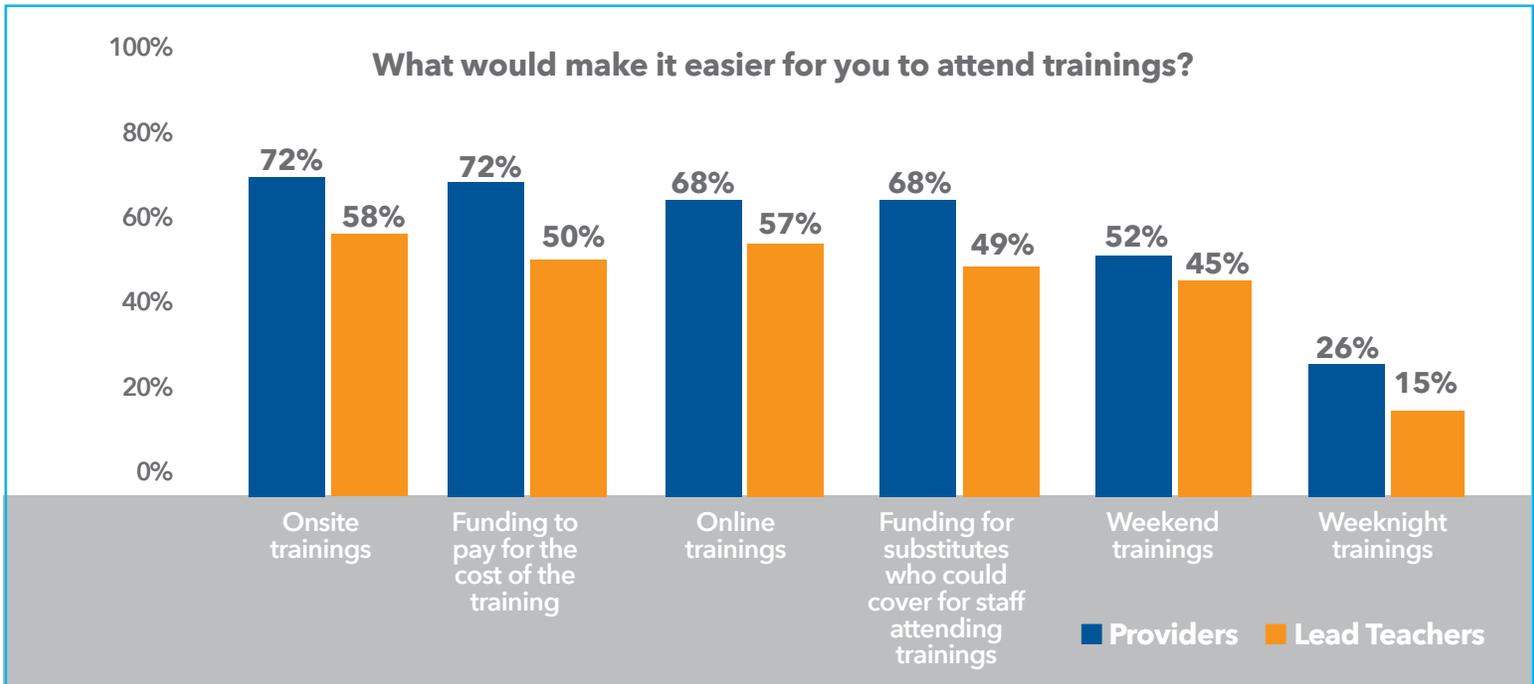
⁵Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before age 18. ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. Research has shown a significant relationship between the number of ACEs a person experienced and a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood, including poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and risky behaviors. Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*. Accessed May 7, 2020 from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/ace/>

Accessing Trainings

Our survey asked respondents to identify which of several options would make it easier for them and their staff to attend trainings. They were able to select any of the following options that applied to them, including:

- Onsite trainings
- Online trainings
- Funding to pay for the cost of training
- Funding for substitutes who could cover for staff attending trainings
- Weekend trainings and weeknight trainings

The results are included below:



Onsite and Online Trainings

Among both providers and lead teachers, the strongest preference was expressed for onsite trainings. Multiple focus group participants explained that they liked onsite trainings, because they felt the human interaction helped them learn. According to one lead teacher, in an onsite, in-person training, “you’re having people watch you, you’re expected to talk, you’re expected to converse with everyone to keep the flow of the conversation going. When that happens, you go off on tangents, but you’re also learning different things in each of those tangents, so you learn more than what that one conversation started off as.” Another respondent noted that one can lose focus in an online training, where the level of participation demanded in an onsite training is not required.

However, among both providers and lead teachers, there was nearly as much interest in online trainings as there was in onsite trainings. One focus group participant explained that it is important to provide multiple training options because there are different types of learners within the early childhood workforce, as well as varying time constraints and family circumstances. However, several lead teachers cautioned that some teachers might take the assessment portion of an online training and skip the instruction, yet still receive a completion certificate. Multiple focus group participants also suggested that utilizing a hybrid training model can work well, so that participants benefit from online training, practice in the classroom, and follow-up discussion.

Funding for Trainings

Among provider respondents in our survey, **72 percent** indicated that receiving funding to pay for the cost of trainings would make it easier for them and their staff to attend trainings. In addition, **68 percent of providers** indicated that receiving funding for substitutes who could cover for staff attending trainings would make it easier for them and their staff to attend trainings.

During our focus group, providers also emphasized that **paying teachers to attend trainings is important**. According to one participant, “we really need to afford them that kind of professionalism and pay them for their time.” Another stated, “I agree that we need to pay our teachers for their training time. I think that’s often lost in the policy and budgeting process. I think there’s a lot of funding for developing trainings, for deploying the trainings . . . and then our teachers get forgotten . . .”

Preferred Training Days and Times

Both providers and lead teachers indicated a preference for **two-hour afternoon trainings on weekdays** and **full-day (six-hour) trainings on Saturdays**. However, one provider in our focus group cautioned that Saturday trainings might not be possible for all staff. She stated, “Some teachers can go [to a training] on a Saturday because they’re not working two jobs and they don’t have a family at home. But we have other teachers that will just never be able to access [Saturday trainings].” Providers in our focus group also noted that on weekdays, having substitutes can help them provide dedicated training days for staff.

Key Skills, Competencies, and Practicum Experience for ECE Professionals

Our survey asked respondents which skills and competencies they felt were most important to have *before* being hired to work as a lead teacher. The survey provided the following list of key skills and competencies, which respondents could mark as “somewhat important,” “very important,” or “extremely important”:

- English language proficiency
- Fluency in a language other than English
- Knowledge of child development
- Knowledge of curriculum development
- Knowledge of effective classroom management practices
- Knowledge of effective strategies to engage families
- Knowledge of effective strategies to support children’s literacy
- Knowledge of effective strategies to support children with challenging behaviors
- Knowledge of effective strategies to support children with special needs
- Knowledge of effective strategies to support Dual Language Learners
- Knowledge of effective strategies to teach children math or science
- Knowledge of the role of play in early childhood education
- Knowledge of using assessments like CLASS and DRDP
- Knowledge of how to assess children’s skills and development and use that information to guide practice
- Knowledge of trauma-informed practices and care

When provider and lead teacher respondents identified certain skills and competencies as “extremely important,” they did so in the *highest percentages* for these four areas:

- Knowledge of child development
- Knowledge of effective classroom management practices
- Knowledge of the role of play in early childhood education
- Knowledge of effective strategies to support children with challenging behaviors

Of the four “extremely important” competencies above, most respondents reported that they “definitely”⁶ possessed knowledge of child development (94% providers, 90% lead teachers), knowledge of effective classroom management practices (79% providers, 73% lead teachers), and knowledge of the role of play in early childhood education (88% providers, 87% lead teachers). However, **only 46 percent of providers and 56 percent of lead teachers indicated that they “definitely” had knowledge of effective strategies to support children with challenging behaviors.** We also asked respondents to what extent they felt that higher education in California offered coursework that prepared ECE professionals to support children with challenging behaviors. Only 24 percent of provider respondents and 41 percent of lead teacher respondents indicated that coursework is offered that “fully prepares” ECE professionals to support children with challenging behaviors.

The two areas in which both provider and lead teacher respondents indicated the *least* amount of skill or competency were “knowledge of effective strategies to support children with special needs” and “knowledge of trauma-informed practices and care.” Only 40 percent of provider respondents and 50 percent of lead teacher respondents indicated that they “definitely” had knowledge of effective strategies to support children with special needs. Only 37 percent of provider respondents and 44 percent of lead teacher respondents indicated that they “definitely” had knowledge of trauma-informed practices and care.

Our survey also asked respondents how important they thought it was for ECE lead teachers to have 90 hours of supervised practicum experience before entering the classroom. “Practicum experience” refers to supervised observation, participation and teaching in an early childhood setting. **Eighty-three percent of provider respondents and 64 percent of lead teacher respondents indicated that it was either “extremely important” or “very important” to have this practicum experience.** One provider participant in our focus group likened the practicum to an apprenticeship and noted that requiring hours of practicum experience helps treat early care and education as a profession.

Coaching Preferences

At the time of the survey, all respondents were either personally receiving coaching services, or having coaching provided to their staff through Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA).⁷ We asked respondents what forms of coaching had been most helpful to them, how frequently they preferred to receive coaching visits, and what length of coaching visits they would prefer to receive.

Most Helpful Coaching Strategies

We asked respondents which of the following coaching strategies had been most helpful to them and their staff: observation and feedback, modeling, training, resource sharing, and “other.” Respondents were able to check all strategies they found to be helpful. **Ultimately, “observation and feedback” and “modeling” were the two coaching strategies most often reported to be helpful by *both* providers and lead teachers.** “Observation and feedback” was the most frequently selected strategy by providers, while “modeling” was the most frequently selected strategy by lead teachers.

⁶Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had the key skills and competencies listed in the survey by marking “definitely,” “somewhat,” or “very little” for each skill or competency.

⁷Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA) is Los Angeles’ county-wide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), designed to empower early learning providers to build upon and improve the quality of care they provide to children birth to five. Partners include the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), the Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education, Child360, the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles, and First 5 LA.

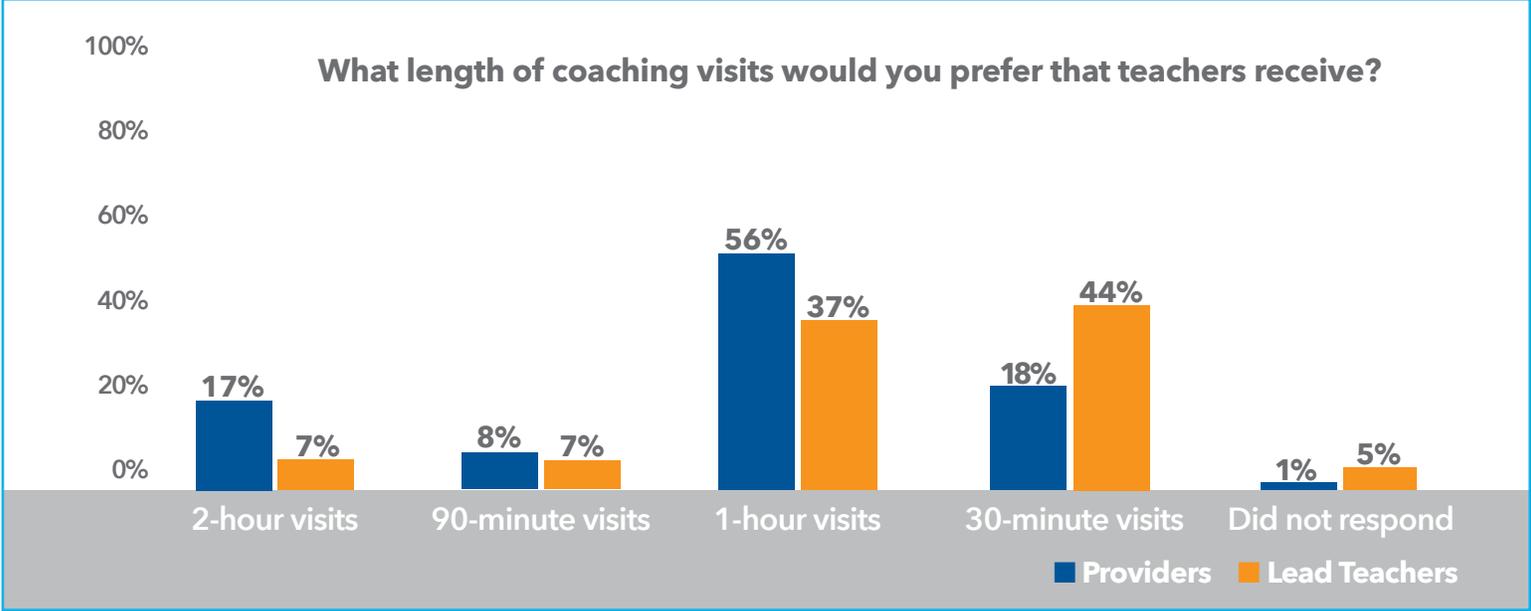
One provider in our focus group reported that observation and feedback are particularly important because teachers can't see themselves when they're working. She explained that it is helpful when a coach comes in to observe and then supports early learning professionals in "seeing things they wouldn't normally see" and viewing their practice through a different lens. Another provider noted that observation and feedback is important because teachers have little time to reflect on their practice. She stated, "Because our teachers are so busy, they don't have time to sit and think, 'How did that go? What could I have done differently?' . . . It's really hard to fit that into the day to day. So having that coach there prompting you through that process, giving a different perspective, is really helpful." Multiple survey respondents also echoed the sentiment that coaching helps teachers to be more reflective about their practice.

Teachers also echoed similar sentiments about observation and feedback. One said that having a coach observe him and provide feedback helped him to reflect on his style of teaching, while several others said they appreciated when coaches provided positive reinforcement and pointed out strengths in their feedback, rather than just focusing on deficits. According to one teacher, "I want [my coach] to be here [to] see what I'm doing right and wrong . . . When we're debriefing, she tells me all these positive things . . . [which] inspires me to do better in my classroom. I want to learn what I can improve on and then she'll tell me exactly what to do . . . It takes time, but I learn a lot from her."

Focus group participants also talked about the merits of modeling. One provider stated that modeling had been "really helpful" to her teachers, and described their experience, saying: "If you can sit alongside me and you can support me when I get stuck, and you continue the dialogue with the child and I get to listen to what you're saying . . . I'm not only hearing what you say but I'm seeing what you do. And that gives me a little bit more to work with."

Frequency of Coaching Visits

The majority of providers and lead teachers indicated that they preferred to receive coaching visits once per month. However, when asked what length of coaching visits they preferred for teachers, the preferences of providers and teachers differed. **The majority of providers preferred that teachers receive 60-minute coaching visits. By contrast, 44 percent of lead teachers preferred 30-minute coaching visits, and 37 percent preferred 60-minute coaching visits.**



One provider said she thought that her teachers might have expressed a preference for 30-minute sessions with a coach because they had very limited time for daily preparation. Thus, time with the coach took up scarce preparation time. Several teachers confirmed this view. One teacher also added that she preferred 30-minute coaching sessions because her classroom is observed not only by coaches, but also by psychologists and UCLA researchers, and when the children see multiple visitors they start demonstrating challenging behaviors. Another teacher said that he would like to spend more time with his coach, but could not do this because there were no substitutes to take over his class. He said, "If we had a sub come in I[d] stay with [my coach] for two hours. But . . . realistically we can't give more time."

Working with Dual Language Learners

In California, nearly 60 percent of children ages five and younger are living in a home where a language other than English is spoken.⁸ As noted previously, these children, who are learning two or more languages at the same time, or are learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language, are known as Dual Language Learners.⁹ Seventy-six percent of providers and 79 percent of lead teachers who responded to our survey reported serving children in their programs who were DLLs. However, **only 19 percent of provider respondents and 22 percent of lead teacher respondents reported feeling adequately prepared to meet the needs of DLLs.**

Need for Coursework and Training on Serving Dual Language Learners

Survey respondents indicated that the top challenge they faced in effectively serving DLLs and their families was a lack of training on serving DLLs. For example, **only 40 percent of provider respondents and 37 percent of lead teacher respondents reported that they had completed coursework related to DLLs. In addition, the majority of respondents had not received training on any of the following topics related to DLLs:**

- Strategies for supporting dual language and literacy development¹⁰
- Engaging and communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse families
- Socioemotional and identity development of culturally and linguistically diverse children
- Strategies for assessing DLL children's development
- Stages of second language acquisition
- Strategies for teaching math to DLLs

Currently, in order to obtain a Child Development Permit issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, prospective early learning teachers are not required to complete any coursework or demonstrate competency in serving DLLs. There is also no requirement for teacher preparation programs to incorporate competencies regarding DLLs in their curriculum. This results in a lack of availability of DLL-specific courses in California institutions of higher education. Not surprisingly, in our survey, only 30 percent of provider respondents and 43 percent of lead teacher respondents indicated that California higher education offers coursework that fully prepares professionals to work with DLLs. In addition, once teachers enter the field, professional development opportunities to learn DLL-specific strategies are limited, despite the large percentage of DLLs in the state.

⁸Early Edge CA. *Dual Language Learners (DLLs)*. Accessed April 18, 2020, from <https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/ece-priorities/dual-language-learners/>.

⁹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education.

¹⁰The DLL training in which both providers and lead teachers expressed most interest was "strategies for supporting dual language and literacy development," followed by "stages of second language acquisition."

One provider in our focus group noted that when early learning professionals have not received adequate training in working with DLLs, the result is that children's needs are not met. She explained that children might not feel safe or understand what is going on around them, and that it is especially important to have strategies in place when ECE professionals do not speak the home language of a child or children in their class. Several other providers noted that the first weeks or months when a new Dual Language Learner comes into the class can be challenging, even though "children are very resilient and they learn English really fast."¹¹ One explained that if a child doesn't feel like her basic security or communication needs are being met, "then initially it's really stressful and hard for both the teachers and the children." Several providers also noted that if a child comes into the class who does not speak English, they will pair that child with another child who speaks their language, though this is not always an option.

Need for Training on Effectively Engaging with Families of Dual Language Learners

The second most significant challenge providers identified in working with DLLs was **a lack of training on effectively engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families**. However, despite a lack of training in this area, providers in our focus group noted that they have found creative ways to communicate and build relationships with families who speak a different language. Several use Google Translate, and another said she connected families who have recently moved to Los Angeles from another country with other families who speak the same language, so they could develop friendships. However, these strategies, while resourceful, are not always adequate. According to one provider, "For basic [translation] . . . we can use Google. But if I really need to have a conversation or I really want to know more about the family, I don't have resources."

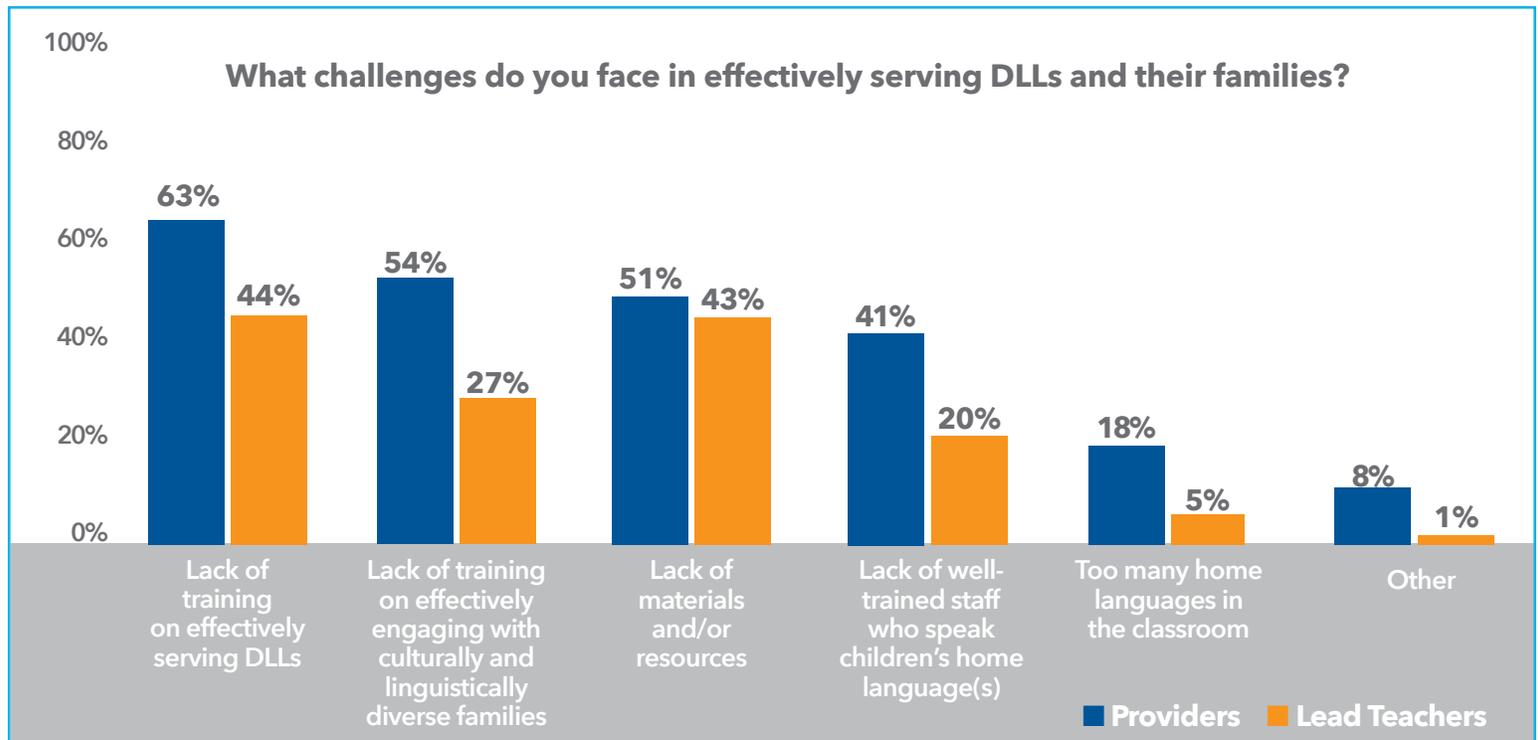
Lead teachers in our focus group also shared ways that they communicated and built trust with culturally and linguistically diverse families. One said that she greeted parents with a smile every morning and tried to speak a few words in their language. Another said that she greeted parents by name, and several others said they tried to make themselves accessible by giving parents their phone numbers and encouraging them to call with questions or concerns. Several others emphasized the importance of providing parents with positive reinforcement about their children and showing them projects their children have accomplished. According to one teacher, "Showing [the parents] that their kids are there for a purpose . . . and they're safe, that is going to build the best relationship with that parent because they have the knowledge that you're there for their child's best interest."

In addition to our focus group participants, survey respondents were asked to share effective ways they had found to communicate and build trust with families, particularly those who did not speak their language. Common suggestions are included below:

- Connect and engage daily with parents (e.g. in person, by phone or through text)
- Make an effort to communicate in the parent's home language. Learn a few basic words or have a simple conversation in this language.
- Provide information, newsletter(s) and resources in the home language(s) of families
- Have an interpreter or an aide who speaks the language(s) of the families and can communicate with them
- Invite parents to visit and volunteer in the classroom
- Hold parent meetings and conferences
- Learn about, appreciate and respect the cultures of the families
- Keep an open line of communication with parents and make them feel welcome

¹¹It is also noteworthy that DLL children who receive consistent support in developing their home language during their early learning years are far more likely to match and even exceed the academic performance of their monolingual peers, extending into the middle and high school years and beyond. Espinosa, L. (2013). *PreK-3rd: challenging common myths about dual language learners. An update to the seminal 2008 report*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Included below is a figure showing the challenges providers and lead teachers face in effectively serving DLLs and their families.



Barriers to Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Historically, turnover rates in the early education field have been high, at about 30 percent per year.¹² High teacher turnover can decrease staff morale, negatively impact program quality, and disrupt the consistency in relationships that children need to thrive.¹³ In addition, recruiting teachers to the profession can be difficult due to low compensation and a variety of other issues. Our survey asked respondents to identify specific barriers to teacher recruitment and retention, and we then explored these issues further in our focus groups.

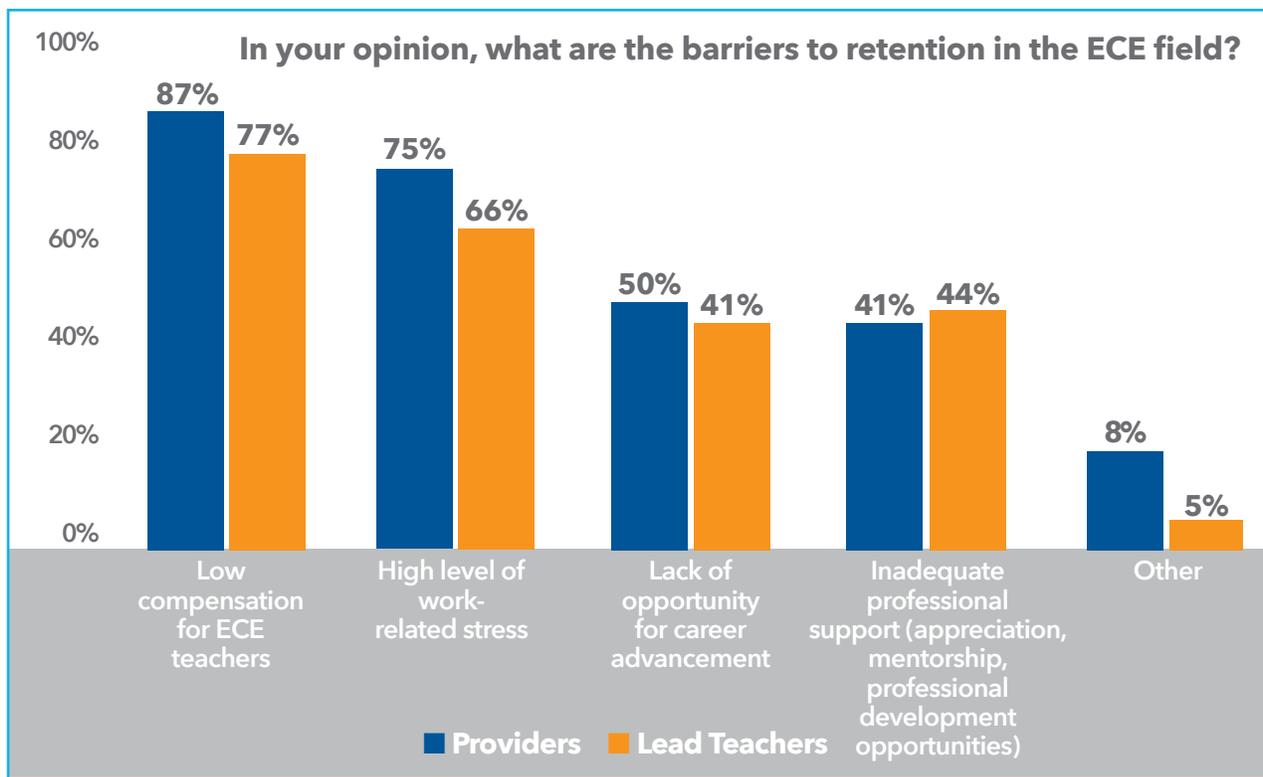
Survey respondents were asked to rank specific **barriers to teacher recruitment** from most challenging to least challenging. These ranked results are shown below, with 1 being the most challenging barrier:

1. Inability to pay higher salaries
2. Shortage of applicants who have adequate preparation and training to enter the ECE workforce
3. Qualified individuals applying to TK or K-12 positions
4. Shortage of individuals applying for ECE positions

Survey respondents were also asked to identify **barriers to teacher retention**. From a list of potential issues, they were asked to select all issues that they recognized as barriers: low compensation for ECE teachers, high level of work-related stress, lack of opportunity for career advancement, inadequate professional support (appreciation, mentorship, professional development opportunities) and "other." The results are displayed in the figure below:

¹² Whitebook, M. (2014). *Building a skilled teacher workforce, shared and divergent challenges in early care and education and in grades K-12*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. Retrieved from: https://csce.berkeley.edu/files/2014/Building-a-Skilled-Teacher-Workforce_September-2014_9-25.pdf

¹³ Cassidy, D. J., Lower, J. K., Kintner-Duffy, V. L., Hegde, A., & Shim, J. (2011). The day-to-day reality of teacher turnover in preschool classrooms: An analysis of classroom context and teacher, director, and parent perspectives. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25(1), 1-23.



Low Compensation

Low compensation for ECE teachers was the issue most frequently selected by both providers and lead teachers as a barrier to teacher retention. Survey respondents also selected this issue as the number one barrier to teacher recruitment. According to a recent report by the Learning Policy Institute, the median annual salary for California child care workers is \$24,150, and for preschool teachers it is \$31,720.¹⁴ By comparison, the median annual salary for a kindergarten teacher is more than double these salaries, at \$63,940.¹⁵

One lead teacher explained that low compensation inhibits teacher recruitment because it discourages students from going into the early learning profession. She stated, “You have to take into consideration how much it costs just to get a BA. Depending on what school you go to, you walk away and you’re in debt. You’re going to walk into a position . . . [where] you don’t even make enough money to pay back your education that’s required of your job I think people are not going into [the early learning profession] because they’re not making enough money to pay what it takes to earn that position.”

Another teacher explained that low compensation causes teachers to leave the field because salaries aren’t keeping pace with the cost of living. She said, “It has been really sad to watch a lot of extremely good educators leave the field because they have families, they have a mortgage to pay, and if we live in L.A., there’s nowhere where we can afford to have a job like this and buy property, that’s just the reality I want to provide experiences and be a good teacher for all these kids, but am I sacrificing my family for them? . . . I’ve seen people really struggle with leaving the field because of their passion for it, but in reality, that [staying in the field] is not something they can afford to do.”

Other focus group participants explained that low wages can motivate early childhood teachers to move to the K-12 education system - where they can earn more - or to leave the education profession altogether. As one provider noted, “You can have a brilliant [early learning] teacher making \$19 an hour. You could go to Costco and make \$25 and just be a greeter . . . You [can] have a [teaching] assistant making \$15 an hour. [She] could go to a McDonald’s and make \$16.”

¹⁴ Melnick, H., Meloy, B., Gardner, M., Wechsler, M., & Maier, A. (2018). *Building an early learning system that works: Next steps for California*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Building_Early_Learning_System_Works_CA_REPORT.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

High Level of Work-Related Stress

A high level of work-related stress was the second most frequently selected barrier to teacher retention, by both providers and lead teachers. When we asked focus group participants what was causing this stress, several common issues were identified. Participants noted that **not knowing how to handle challenging behaviors exhibited by children in the classroom** can be stress-inducing for teachers. They also cited **long work hours** and **inadequate planning time** as causes of teacher stress. In addition, multiple participants stated that **teachers feel like they are carrying the weight of the trauma the children in their classroom are experiencing**, and that teachers would benefit from training in self-care. In addition, participants stated that **large amounts of paperwork** (particularly paperwork associated with the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)) are contributing to teacher stress. Finally, participants explained that a significant percentage of teachers are **experiencing economic and food insecurity**, and this contributes to stress. As one provider noted, “I can’t even imagine, if you’re trying to provide resources for the families that you’re serving, and then also struggling on your own. It goes back to compensation.”

Need for Child Development Assistants with More Education and Training

In our online survey, respondents ranked “shortage of applicants who have adequate preparation and training to enter the ECE workforce” as the second most challenging barrier to teacher recruitment. When we discussed this finding with our focus groups, participants highlighted the need for child development assistants to receive better preparation for the classroom experience.

Many focus group participants felt that assistants should receive more professional development. As one teacher explained, “We could role model, but if they’re not provided the resources or the tools in order for them to do their job it’s not going to help.” Lead teachers in our focus group emphasized that *all* early learning professionals working with children in the classroom need to be adequately trained in order for the needs of the class to be met. Several lead teachers stated that the task of training assistants should not fall to them because of their limited time, and that assistants need better compensation to be motivated to stay and grow in the profession.

Recommendations

The results of our provider survey and focus groups indicate a need for the following investments to better support the early care and education workforce and improve program quality:

1. Provide training and higher education coursework for current and aspiring early learning professionals on strategies for dealing with challenging behaviors in the classroom, and for working collaboratively with the parents of children exhibiting these behaviors.
2. Provide funding for mental health specialists, psychiatric social workers, or behaviorists who can work hand-in-hand with teachers to support children with challenging behaviors. Specialists could also conduct developmental and behavioral screenings of children when needed.
3. Ensure that providers receive sufficient professional development funding to cover training expenses, staff time to attend trainings, and substitutes when trainings are held on a weekday.
4. Increase provider reimbursement rates so that early care and education professionals can receive fair compensation that reflects their skills, their experience, and the significance of their work.
5. Ensure that coursework focused on working with Dual Language Learners in early learning settings is available at institutions of higher education (particularly at California community colleges).
6. Offer more professional development trainings on supporting Dual Language Learners and engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families.
7. Offer more professional development trainings and higher education coursework on effective strategies to support children with special needs and on trauma-informed care.

Following these recommendations will improve teacher recruitment and retention and lead to a more skilled, supported, and educated ECE workforce. These improvements will ultimately raise the quality of early care and education in California, ensuring that more children will have the opportunity to thrive both in school and in life.



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