

# NC Early Care & Education Study: Professional Development Needs

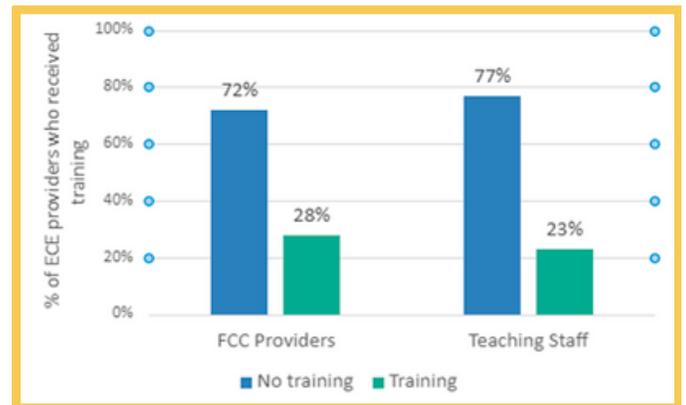
Early care and education professionals lay the foundation for children’s lifelong learning and well-being. To do this effectively, they must have access to timely, relevant professional development that equips them to meet the growing and complex needs of the children in their care.

This brief offers some examples of professional development needs that emerged from the recent **2022/2023 NC Early Care and Education Study**<sup>1</sup>, in which over 1,700 administrators, 400+ family child care (FCC) providers and more than 5,300 teaching staff serving children under 5 in licensed programs participated. Through interviews and focus groups, administrators, teaching staff and FCC providers were also offered the opportunity to reflect on what was needed to strengthen the field of early care and education in North Carolina, including professional development. **One thing that was made clear:** North Carolina must do more to support the workforce behind our youngest learners!

## Three Critical Areas Emerged

1. *Help preparing for licensure visits:* Providers asked for more support in preparing for state licensure visits, including a statewide training program delivered at the local level. This training would help ensure educators understand what’s expected, feel confident in their programs and can meet or exceed licensing standards that protect and benefit children.

2. *Training to support children dealing with trauma and grief:* More than 70% FCC providers and teaching staff surveyed reported not having the training needed to support children experiencing grief, especially following the sickness and death of a loved one<sup>2</sup>. Programs need to be able to identify parties to provide professional development support to address these critical issues and be able to support centers and FCC homes adequately.



### Training to Support Children Who Had Experienced Grief

<sup>1</sup> 2023 North Carolina Early Care and Education Workforce Study. [earlyyearsnc.org/research/2023-north-carolina-child-care-workforce-study](https://earlyyearsnc.org/research/2023-north-carolina-child-care-workforce-study)

<sup>2</sup> National Alliance for Children’s Grief. [nacg.org/education](https://nacg.org/education)

<sup>3</sup> Professional Development Resources. [naeyc.org/resources/pd](https://naeyc.org/resources/pd)

<sup>4</sup> Professional Development in Early Childhood Programs: Process Issues and Research Needs (2009). [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756772](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756772)

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3. *Tools to support young children's mental health, especially those born during the COVID-19 pandemic:* Educators have noticed increased behavior challenges among children born during the pandemic. Participants said they need more resources and training to support children dealing with anxiety, frustration, or emotional distress.

**"I do think the mental health support, having PD for mental health ways to help children deal with anxiety, depression, I think would be helpful for staff as well."**

-Administrator, rural, 5-star

**"I am so glad to hear others call them "COVID babies"! I see so many behavior issues with the children that were born during COVID and they do need more attention and patience. More access to behavior specialists would be great. Ours in the area is booked out for months."**

-Administrator, rural, 3-star

## A Call to Action

Professional development offerings should be flexible, whether offered in person (onsite) through Smart Start or virtually<sup>3</sup>. It also should be geared toward helping children with behavioral and emotional needs, which is vital for the support of centers and FCC homes in the state.

By investing in the ongoing training of early educators, we strengthen the quality of care for our youngest children and build stronger communities<sup>4</sup>. **Educators want to be prepared. They want to grow. They want to stay in the field they love. They simply need the right support to do it.**

## What have you noticed in your own community regarding professional needs?

Please share with us any practices you think should be elevated and implemented. *Together, we are stronger to better support the well-being of early childhood educators, young children and their families.*