

Early Learning and Development Standards: An Examination of Caregivers' Knowledge, Practices, and Professional Development Support and Needs

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Project Description

Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) articulate what young children should know and be able to do prior to beginning kindergarten. In 2013, early childhood experts in North Carolina revised the state's ELDS and released *The North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development (Foundations)*, which articulates standards across five domains for children birth to age five. Since the release of *Foundations*, numerous programs and agencies across North Carolina have developed different types of professional development opportunities to increase teachers' knowledge and use of *Foundations*. The purpose of this study is to provide information about the effectiveness of different types and amount of professional development related to ELDS, the extent to which teachers have learned how to use ELDS with children and families, and to identify additional professional development needs and supports teachers' require to be able to use ELDS more effectively. Results from the study will be used by the Child Care Administrator and others to guide plans for professional development to support the use of the ELDS, which is required in the recent reauthorization of the CCDBG Act.

Research Questions

1. What types and amount of professional development opportunities have teachers had related to the revised *Foundations*? How does teachers' participation in the different types of professional development opportunities vary by sector (e.g., child care, pre-K, Head Start)?
2. What have teachers learned from their professional development on *Foundations* and how do they report using it? How familiar and knowledgeable are teachers with *Foundations*?

How do teachers report they are using *Foundations* with families and children, including dual language learners and children with disabilities?

3. Does the type and amount of *Foundations* professional development make a difference in how prepared teachers are to use *Foundations*?
4. What types of professional development experiences and other supports do teachers feel they need in order to use *Foundations* effectively?

Sample

The sample includes 110 preschool teachers from across North Carolina who have participated in different types of professional development related to *Foundations*. Nine of the participants were selected based on their self-reported proficiency with *Foundations* and participation in various types of professional development for follow-up interviews.

Methods

The descriptive study will use quantitative and qualitative methodologies as well as a community engaged research approach.

Data Collection Measures and Procedures

- *Survey*. The Early Learning and Development Standards Survey Instrument for Early Childhood Educators includes seven sections that address: 1) preschool teachers' demographic information, 2) *Foundations* professional development and supports 3) knowledge of *Foundations*, 4) general implementation of *Foundations*, 5) implementation of *Foundations* with children who are dual language learners (DLL) 6) implementation of *Foundations* with children

with disabilities, and 7) *Foundations* professional development needs. The survey includes a combination of open- and closed-ended questions (e.g., likert items, true and false questions). Participants were identified and recruited at early childhood conferences, meetings, and via key informants from agencies that provide professional development. Surveys were distributed and collected via mail and in person.

- *Interview*. The interview protocol includes two types of data collection: interviews and document review. The interview portion of the protocol includes ten open-ended questions related to how teachers use *Foundations* in their everyday work in the classroom, experiences with professional development related to *Foundations*, as well as challenges they experience when trying to use *Foundations*. The second portion of the protocol is the collection and review of documents related to *Foundations* (e.g., lesson plans, bulletin boards, and family resources). Interview participants were selected and contacted via telephone. Interviews occurred in teachers' classrooms before and after school. During interviews, documents and displays related to *Foundations* were either photocopied or photographed.

Progress Update

Survey data have been collected and all data entry and coding has been completed. Interview data have been completed and interviews are currently being transcribed.

Implications for policy/practice

Data from the study can inform policy decisions by providing information on the types of professional development teachers have participated in, the extent to which they have learned how to use the standards, as well as identifying additional supports that are needed. By identifying barriers to ELDS implementation as well as supports teachers need, state policy makers as well as professional development providers can be more strategic in how they plan and implement ELDS professional development. These types of data are critical for North Carolina, as well as other states, as policy makers develop the Child Care and Development Block Grant required plan to implement ELDS.

Furthermore, these data can also inform decisions about where and how the use of ELDS should be required of programs, such as through QRIS and/or pre-kindergarten program standards.

Implications for research

A defining feature of this study is the use of a community-engaged research approach. Community-engaged research involves the collaboration between researchers and community members in aspects of the research process where community partners contribute their expertise and share in decision-making and ownership. For the purpose of this study a Community Research Design and Implementation Team (CRDIT) was formed with individuals who are currently supporting the use of *Foundations* across the state. Thus far, the committee has collaborated in the development and refinement of research priorities and questions, research design, methodology, measures, and recruitment. In the future, the CRDIT will take part in other aspects of the research process including the analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of results.

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