

The EarlyEdU Alliance®

Equity-Driven Early Childhood
Teacher Preparation

Paper 3: Lessons Learned from Across the Nation



December 2021



Suggested citation: Joseph, G.E., Sandall, S., Porter, A., Emerson-Hoss, K., Soderberg, J., Chu, L., Clegg, T., & Ouyang, A. (2021). *The EarlyEdU Alliance: Equity-Driven Early Childhood Teacher Preparation. Paper 3: Case Study.* University of Washington.

The development of this paper was supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the Office of Head Start.

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The EarlyEdU Alliance

Five years ago, a nationwide collaboration of early childhood experts, government agencies, and practitioners launched an innovative strategy to transform the preparation of the early childhood workforce.

Since then, the EarlyEdU Alliance has addressed a critical challenge: to ensure that early care and education (ECE) providers and educators are equipped with the theoretical knowledge and effective practices to nurture close to 13 million U.S. children ages 0-5.¹

EarlyEdU's core mission is to improve access to high-quality college- and university-level courses that promote enhanced knowledge and acquisition of effective teaching practices. We develop and distribute courses to higher education institutions and support faculty in mastering the science, theory, and technology the courses incorporate. Through this work, we contribute to the professionalization of the early childhood workforce, a goal of local, state, and federal education policy for more than two decades.

1. National Center for Education Statistics, 2016 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), number of U.S. children ages 0-5 in at least one weekly nonparental care arrangement.

As we pursue this objective, we also want to help lower long-established barriers to college-level teacher preparation programs and degree attainment for ECE providers—barriers of access, affordability, relevance, and effectiveness (see Removing Barriers box on page 6). Our approach supports equity-driven early childhood teacher preparation.

Previous EarlyEdU² impact papers addressed the need for courses based on the science of early childhood education and development, explained the teaching framework used to develop them, and shared stories about how Alliance members are using them in colleges and universities across the country to lower the barriers to access.

In this third impact paper, we share survey results detailing faculty and student feedback about the implementation of EarlyEdU resources and the benefits and challenges of engaging in competency-based coursework, new learning technologies, and field-based learning.

While it is too early in the work of EarlyEdU to assess whether the Alliance has succeeded in improving the quality of teaching in the early childhood field, we are prepared to assess some of the practical effects of the EarlyEdU approach: How has it been used in higher education? Has it served to remove barriers to higher education for the ECE workforce? How is our work supporting pathways to relevant and affordable degrees for early childhood educators?



2. The EarlyEdU Alliance: "Increasing access to credits that count and degrees that matter: Issues and Impact" and "The EarlyEdU Alliance, Equity-Driven Early Childhood Teacher Preparation: Stories from the Field."

Removing Barriers

More than 40% of the early childhood workforce has neither a degree nor a credential. Recent federal and state education policies strongly encourage early childhood educators to obtain them. However, students face a range of obstacles, which the EarlyEdU Alliance works to address:

Affordability

The high cost of higher education—for tuition, technology, and transportation—falls heavily on ECE providers. They typically earn low wages, and they often must meet their own childcare expenses.

Access

Teacher preparation programs for the ECE workforce are unevenly distributed across the country, and many ECE providers live considerable distances from colleges and universities that offer satisfactory options.

Quality

ECE programs in colleges and universities rely disproportionately on adjunct and part-time faculty, which can lead to inconsistent teaching practices. Many are under-resourced and understaffed.

Relevance

Many teacher preparation programs lack practice-based course work and supervised practicum experiences vital for students to understand connections between theory and practice.

Effectiveness

College and university ECE courses struggle to incorporate current research and pedagogy that result in teachers who can apply developmentally appropriate best practices in their childcare and preschool settings.

Connection

Students need connections with instructors, peers, and professionals to become strong, effective professionals themselves. Many ECE programs lack the sustained and intensive professional learning experiences and networks that support these connections.

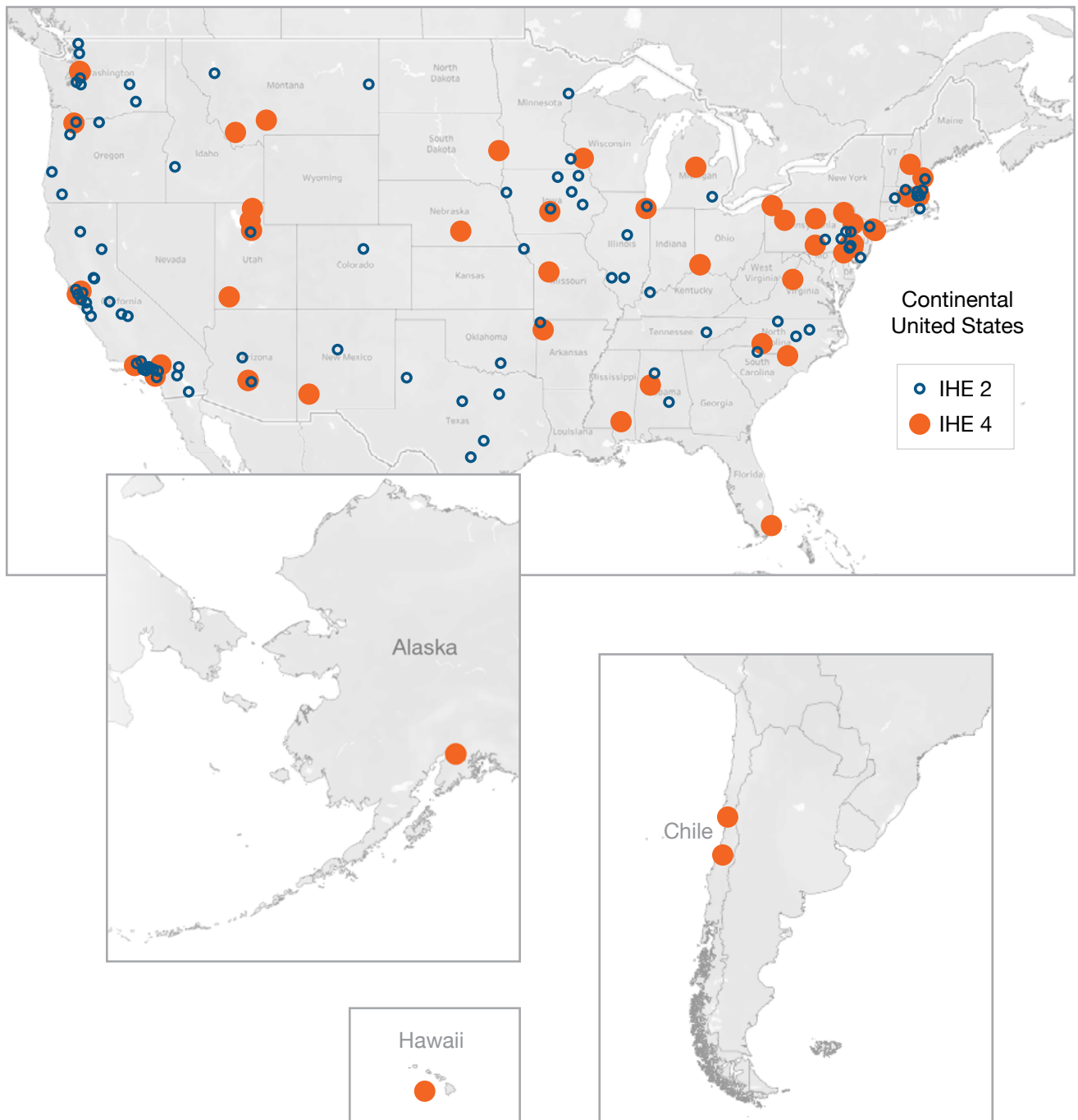
System-wide barriers

Challenges include meeting articulation and transfer requirements across programs, institutions, and state policies.

The Alliance and its Partners

Since its inception in 2015, the Alliance has evolved into a diverse and nationwide community of more than 1,800 faculty, individual, and community stakeholder members and 133 institutions of higher education (IHEs) (84 2-year and 49 4-year schools).

Figure 1. Map of Alliance Members



College and university faculty mobilize the teaching tools that instructional designers have built into every EarlyEdU course (see page 20 for a list of EarlyEdU courses). Teaching tools include student videos and video-sharing technology, practice-based assignments, and mechanisms for group and individual feedback. Faculty are invited to use the features most appropriate for their students and communities. In addition, they are encouraged to use EarlyEdU materials to address system barriers such as course alignments and transfer and articulation requirements.





Our Surveys

During the past three years, we have closely monitored the implementation of EarlyEdU resources. During the 2017-18 academic year, the Alliance's internal evaluation study produced initial insights into how these resources and tools were being used and who was using them (see Appendix, Executive Summary 2017-18).

As our program continued to grow during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years, we surveyed 1,602 Alliance members about implementation of the EarlyEdU approach. Respondents were presented with a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions about their experiences using EarlyEdU materials.

Faculty

Surveys were distributed to faculty members on six occasions during each of the three academic quarters (Q1, Q2, Q3) of the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years.

- **Q1:** First quarter surveys capture general information about overall EarlyEdU Alliance membership, including faculty members.
- **Q2:** Second-quarter surveys sought information from college and university faculty about their experiences preparing for and teaching specific EarlyEdU courses, the course features they have found to be most successful or challenging, and its effect on faculty workloads.
- **Q3:** Third-quarter surveys included questions about use of the Coaching Companion, our online video-sharing platform, as well as other features built into EarlyEdU courses.

Sampling frames and questions were mostly the same for Q1, Q2, and Q3 surveys in 2018-19 and 2019-20, with some adjustments.

Students

From autumn 2018 through summer 2020, a total of 1,303 ECE students enrolled in EarlyEdU courses responded to our surveys. During the first semester of this period, faculty distributed questionnaires directly to students; later, surveys were embedded into course materials.

In the next two sections of this report, we discuss what we learned from the surveys. After a short review of the characteristics of faculty respondents, we share what we learned about how they are using EarlyEdU resources and the impact they believe the EarlyEdU resources are having on student experience and opportunity.





Faculty Characteristics and Impressions

Alliance members have access to in-person and online courses, the Coaching Companion, annual EarlyEdU Institutes, and a multimedia library. As Table 1 illustrates, 753 survey respondents identified themselves as faculty, most indicating they were tenured or tenure-track faculty or adjuncts.

Table 1. Types of Faculty Responding to Surveys*
Reported as percent responded

	Q1	Q2	Q3
Tenure-track or tenured	37.5	57	54
Adjunct	27.3	17	25
Long-term contract faculty (e.g., lecturer)	5	8	8
Other	30.25	14.41	10.82

*Faculty who responded “other” to this question included administrators, coaches, and consultants.

Faculty respondents were overwhelmingly female, white, non-Hispanic, and English speaking. Student surveys revealed that students were a more ethnically and racially diverse group than faculty. (see Table 2).

Table 2. Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Characteristics
Reported as percent responded

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Students
Identified as female	95	99	95	96
Identified as White	78	87	72	49.5
Identified as non-Hispanic, Latinx, Spanish origin	93	90	84	68.7
Reported speaking English as a primary language*	95	89	86	85.1

Table 3. EarlyEdU Resources Faculty Report Using
Reported as percent responded

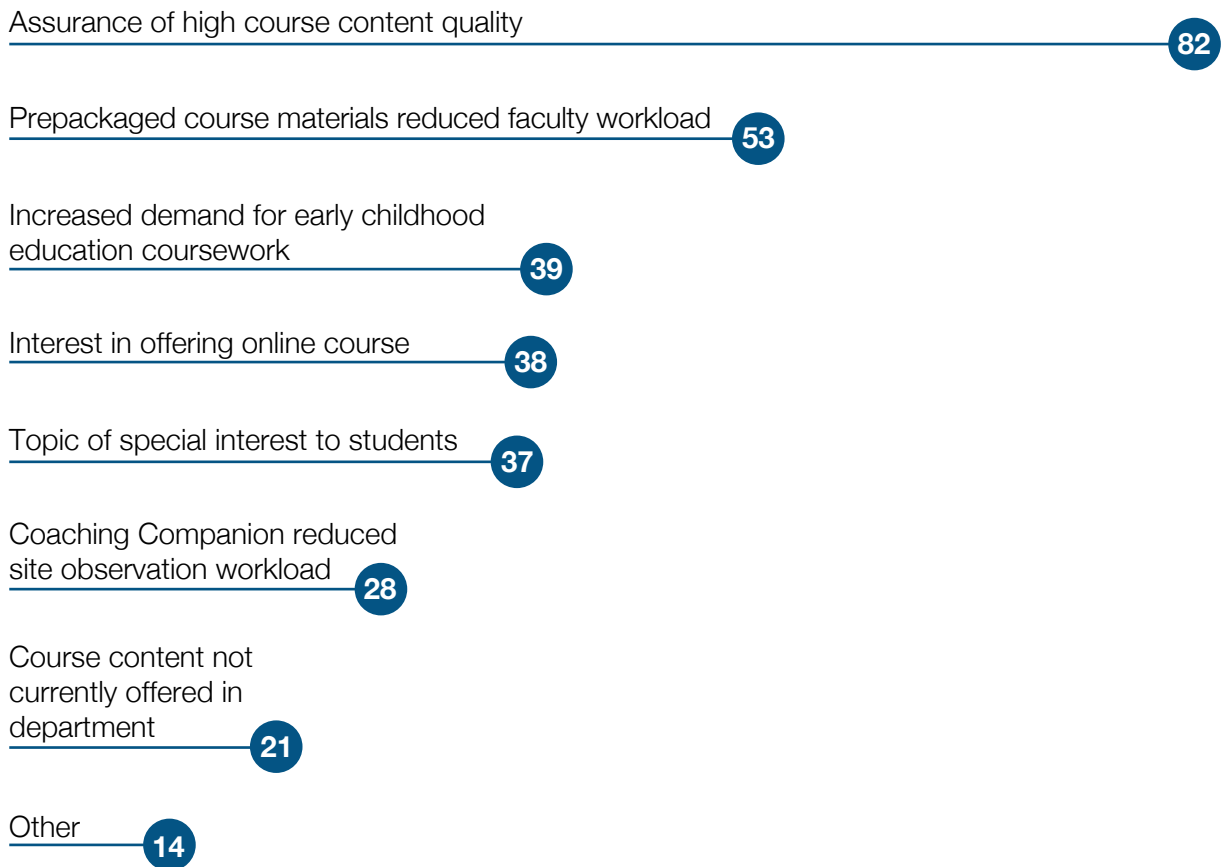
Resource	Percent
Multimedia library on member site	40.0
Outline course materials	34.8
Coaching Companion	24.4
Other resources on the member page	20.3
Faculty/instructor community of practice	17.4
Attendance at an EarlyEdU institute	13.8
In-person course materials	12.2
Participated in Effective Online Teaching course	11.7

* A third (33%) of respondents to this question indicated they had not yet used any EarlyEdU resources.

In response to open-ended questions, faculty commended the EarlyEdU Alliance for providing “inspirational” and “valuable resources,” including courses that have improved the quality of their instruction and are “fun to teach.” They praised “support that is always there and appreciated” as well as the “valuable perspectives” gained by faculty and students alike as they worked through the courses. One faculty member summed up this view: “My teaching is much better because of my work with you.”

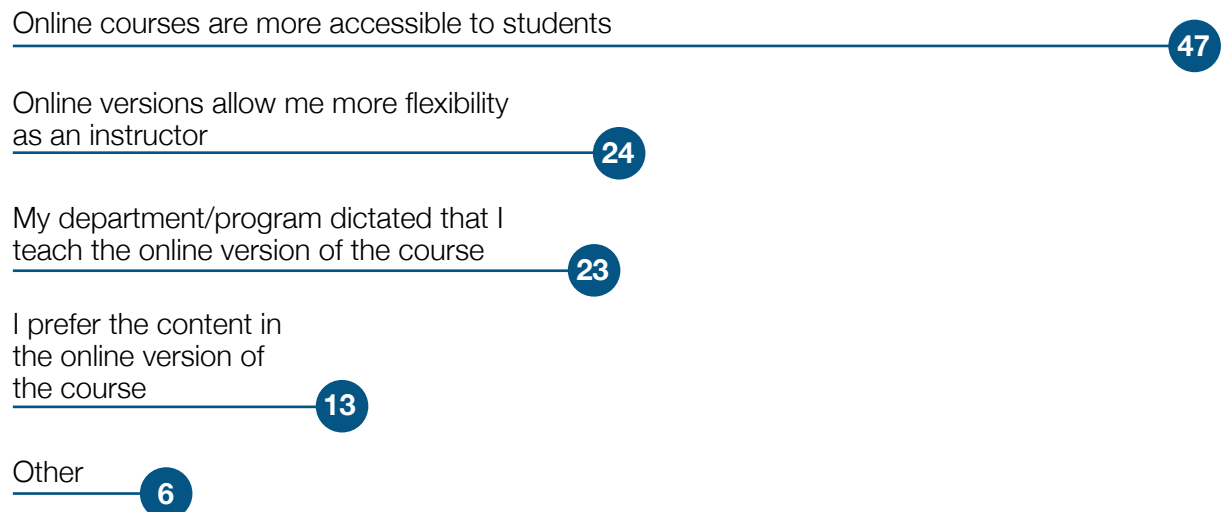
We sought information from faculty about the number of EarlyEdU courses they taught and which courses they used most often. The mean number of courses faculty reported delivering was 4.38. Most faculty reported delivering 1-3 courses. However, many taught far more, including eight faculty respondents who told us they had taught 19 courses each.

Figure 2. Factors Contributing to Decision to Offer EarlyEdU Courses
Reported as number of respondents



Based on 188 respondents. Those faculty answering "other" offered reasons including compliance with NAEYC standards, interest in innovation including video, interest in practice-based assignments, and their desire to participate in a "national project."

Figure 3. Faculty Reasons for Teaching Courses Online
Reported as number of respondents



Based on 68 respondents.

Faculty told us that without the option of online courses, many of their students would face long commutes to colleges and universities offering ECE courses. When asked about this problem, more than half of faculty respondents (51.4%) reported that they had students who would travel more than an hour in each direction to attend classes. In response to open-ended questions, some faculty members mentioned student commutes of more than 50 miles. (We asked students directly about this issue, and we discuss their responses in the student survey section that follows.)

One of EarlyEdU's key goals is to improve access to higher education for non-traditional ECE students. Faculty members described to us the myriad ways EarlyEdU courses—particularly online courses—help them reach non-traditional students and others who would otherwise miss the opportunity to participate in teacher preparation programs in college and university environments. Among the groups of “new” ECE students faculty told us have connected with EarlyEdU resources are those

- Already working in the field—in programs, centers, and family child care homes—who juggle tight schedules and their own childcare needs and who require courses they can take at times convenient for them. “I love that [EarlyEdU] offers a more flexible schedule for busy students who may need to work during the day when we typically offer classes,” a faculty member told us.
- Living rurally, often considerable distances from campuses, for whom affordable online learning is essential. Faculty members pointed out that some rural students would be forced to commute up to five hours in each direction to access traditional ECE programs.
- Just a few course credits short of completing degrees and would have otherwise waited months or a year to take the requisite courses in the same local institutions.
- Needing course and scheduling flexibility to complete their degree work across states or jurisdictions.
- Experiencing health issues or who have special needs preventing them from attending brick-and-mortar programs.

Faculty Reflections about Teaching Online

Faculty offered some overarching reflections about teaching online courses. Faculty responses were collected before pandemic distancing restrictions were in place. The responses identified benefits and challenges for both student learning and faculty pedagogy.

“I believe that the undergraduate students need an orientation course on how to navigate an online course and submit a variety of online assignments. Early childhood educators can get frustrated and drop the course, when in fact they are excellent early childhood teachers and capable of mastering the course content.”

“Many students think that online classes will offer them the flexibility of not having to attend classes. What they don’t fully take in is the fact that there will be a whole lot of work that they have to do on their own. They are often resentful when I assign classroom or observation-based assignments... So, many enroll, [but] many are not successful.”

When college and university faculty teach EarlyEdU courses, they embrace a competency-based approach, new technologies, and new ways to disseminate best practices. Many faculty members responding to our survey reported that they have mastered new developmental theories, developed confidence teaching in different learning settings, and have learned new ways to connect with diverse groups of students. As one faculty member noted, “I provide more diverse approaches... to delivering content in ways beneficial to diverse learners.”

“I liked how each class period resulted in the students leaving with some basic but clear and practical information that they could use the next day at work.”

Other faculty observed that EarlyEdU courses had inspired them to design their own curriculum, either by taking advantage of the multimedia library resources and embedding them in new courses or by providing practicum options that students already working in the field could complete “within their environments.” Several faculty members praised EarlyEdU courses for their focus on evidence-based yet practical teaching strategies.

Even with most faculty using the courses as they were designed (84%, see Figure 4) we wanted to know more about the work they put into making the courses fit in their context. Nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of the faculty who reported using EarlyEdU courses told us they had been able to use them without making substantial changes to course materials. At the same time, most faculty (63.6%)

said that teaching EarlyEdU courses required “some extra work” compared with other courses they had taught, and 17.8% said EarlyEdU courses required “a lot of extra work.” Faculty described additional tasks required as organizing, editing, and updating course materials; adapting the number of course sessions to align with quarters or semesters; and adjusting course materials to different delivery types (online, in-person, or hybrid).

EarlyEdU courses support new roles for instructors who use them. One is the role of coach, which the courses’ structure and the Coaching Companion platform facilitate. Faculty told us that the coaching makes lessons “deeper and more focused” and that they have learned “more and better ways to embed peer engagement into online courses.” Other faculty members reported achieving a greater understanding of “research-based materials and application of best practices” as well as new ways “to generate communication with and among students.” One faculty respondent reported discovering ways to make content “more accessible and relevant.”

We also asked faculty to share their experiences with each EarlyEdU course they were teaching. The following three charts summarize what they told us about their preparation and confidence in teaching each course, the courses’ impact on student learning and acquisition of effective teaching practices, and the appropriateness and value of course content.



Faculty Reports and Impressions

Figure 4. Course Ease of Delivery and Supports
Reported as percent of respondents providing given response

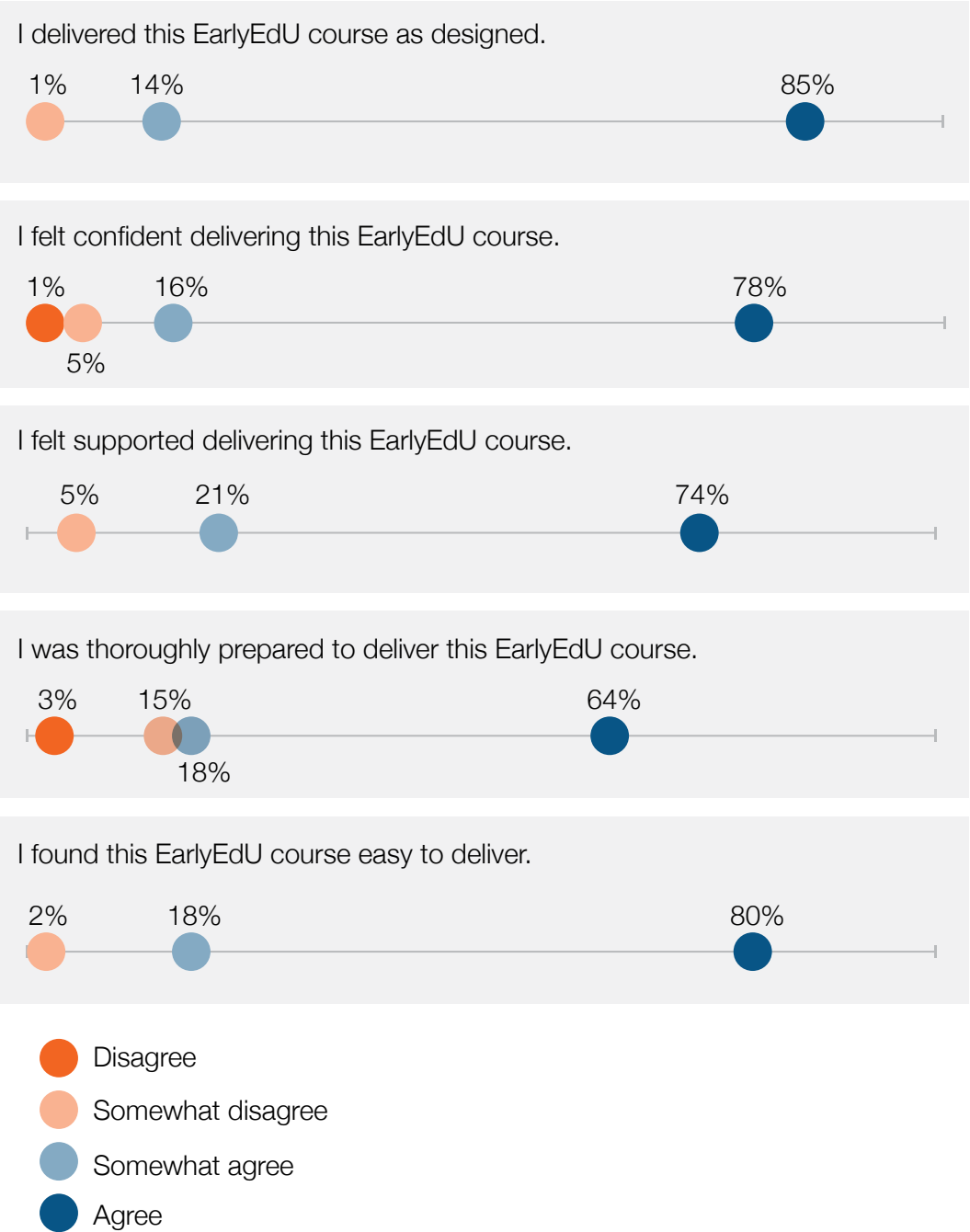


Figure 5. Course Impacts on Student Knowledge and Skills
Reported as percent of respondents providing given response

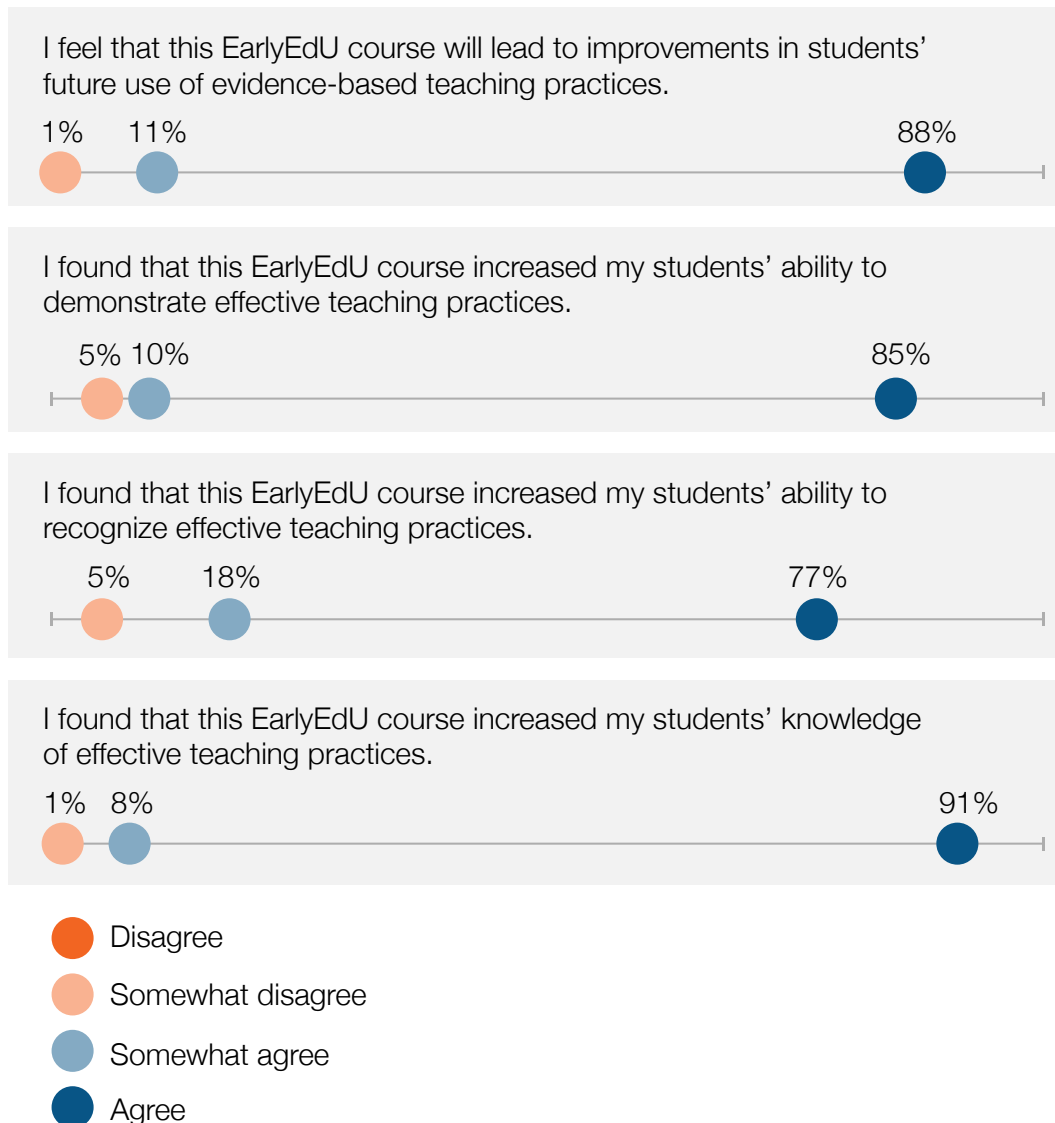
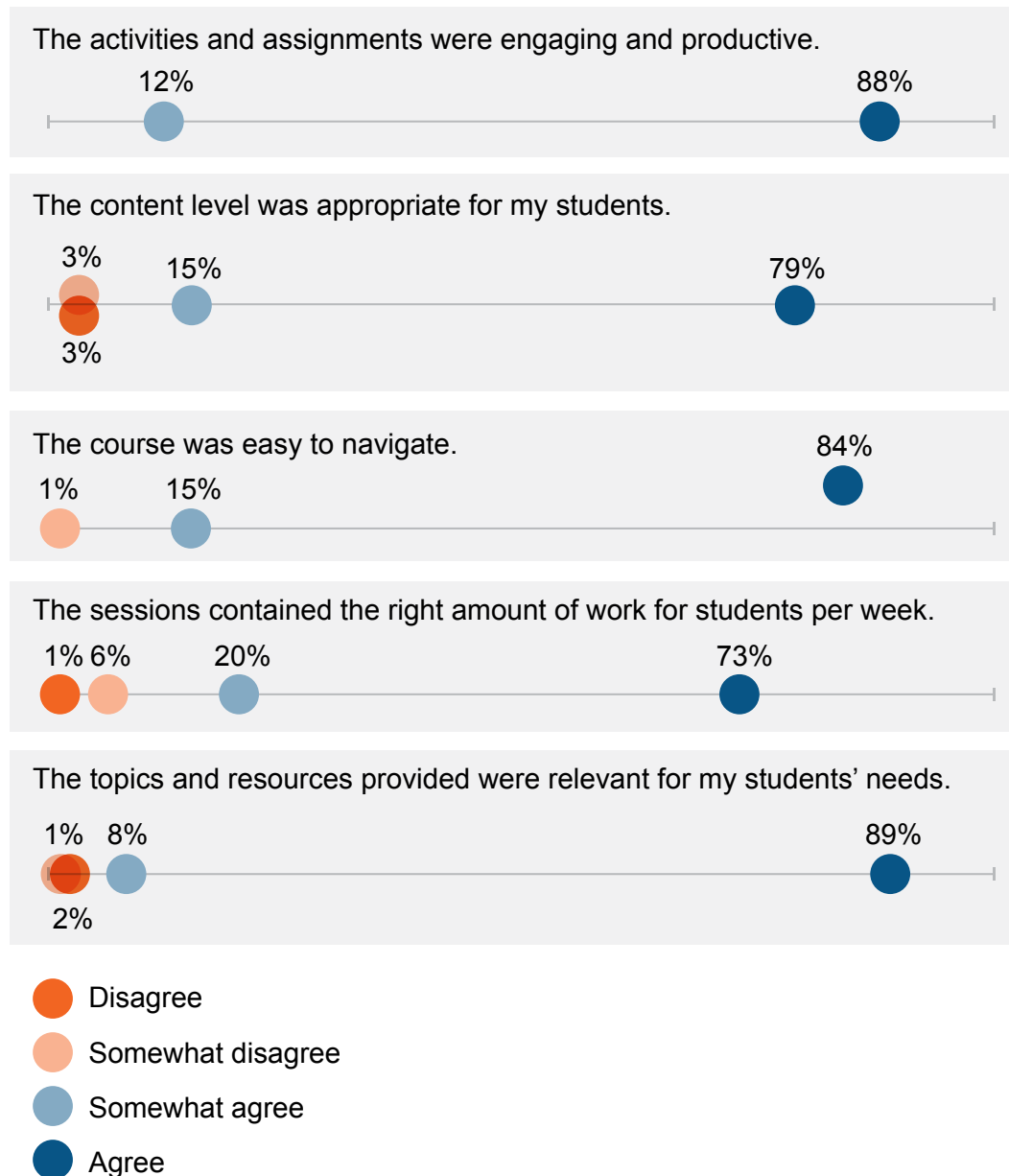


Figure 6. Appropriateness of Course Content for Students
Reported as percent of respondents providing given response



Many faculty members suggested adjusting EarlyEdU materials to integrate more movement and interaction during class, use fewer PowerPoint Presentations and offer better technical support.

When explicitly asked about measures that would improve implementation of the EarlyEdU online courses, faculty members primarily mentioned issues of technology and content. Several faculty members suggested that they needed more technical support using the Coaching Companion and integrating course elements with campus learning management systems such as Canvas. The system now requires “tiresome multiple logins,” and users struggled to upload videos to the program website and download articles. Faculty responses noted problems with assignments that “do not apply to students not working in centers,” “too much lecture content,” and course content that “is hard to accomplish in an 11-week session.”

When prompted to suggest additions to improve the value of course content for their students, faculty also mentioned:

- “More theoretical child development content.”
- “More guidance in ‘describing the process of observation.’”
- “More discrete modules for [use across] curriculum.”
- “More reference to ‘identity development, stereotype threat, and other barriers to student success in math and science.’”
- “Coverage of infants and toddlers.”

According to some faculty members, instructors also raised the issue that EarlyEdU materials are not always aligned with local program requirements and state policies. One instructor noted: “I felt I needed to add in QRIS content as this is what our county Office of Education has requested we cover.” While faculty raised some concerns and offered suggestions, faculty feedback reinforced the positive impact of EarlyEdU courses.

EEdu Courses

- Becoming a Teacher Leader
- Child Development: Brain Building*
- Child Observation and Assessment*
- Children’s Health and Well-Being
- Cognition and General Knowledge*
- Culturally Thriving and Socially Just Early Childhood Education
- Engaging Interactions and Environments*
- Executive Function and Approaches to Learning
- Family Engagement
- Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning
- Infant Mental Health*
- Intentional Teaching
- Learning with Digital Media in Early Childhood
- Positive Behavior Support for Young Children*
- Practice-Based Coaching*
- Resilience and Wellness for Educators*
- Supporting Children Who Are Dual Language Learners*
- Supporting Language and Literacy Development in Preschool*

*Available for online delivery



Faculty Use of Four Key EarlyEdU Course Elements

Faculty members were asked about their experiences using specific elements included in EarlyEdU courses. A summary of their responses follows.

1. The Coaching Companion™

This video-sharing and coaching platform, used by students to watch videos of their teaching practices and provide and receive feedback, is closely linked with EarlyEdU courses and the Intentional Teaching Framework that supports them. The web-based Coaching Companion allows teachers to reinforce evidence-based practices—thereby uniting theory and practice from the onset of courses. The instructor participates as a job-embedded coach, identifying effective practices using videos students provide of their student-child interactions—thereby increasing the value of coaching as a powerful professional development tool.

General Overview of Coaching Companion Implementation

IHEs	Students	Courses	Videos	Assignments
47	3,299	528	13,248	1,125

We asked faculty if they had used the Coaching Companion during the past 12 months as part of their own or EarlyEdU classes. About 71% told us they had used the platform with EarlyEdU courses, other courses, or some combination. Of all those faculty who reported using the Coaching Companion previously, about half (52%) told us they are currently using it. A few respondents reported using the tool in 10–29 courses with the bulk of respondents using it in fewer than 10 courses and most using it in only one course.

Using open-ended questions, we asked faculty who told us they had not used the platform to tell us why. Most of the faculty members who answered this question cited administrative and scheduling issues, such as lack of support from their college or university and poor alignment with their campus learning management systems. Several faculty members who spoke to us said they were new to EarlyEdU and its tools and had not yet had the opportunity to learn about Coaching Companion, much less implement it in their courses. Some mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had recently disrupted their teaching schedules as well as any plans to implement Coaching Companion. Some instructors reported that they use other platforms, including Zoom, the Blackboard learning management system, the Swivl distance learning system for feedback, and the Canvas platform “to collaborate 1:1 as well as small group face-to-face meetings.”

Several faculty members told us that they continue to provide feedback through traditional methods, including “hands-on coaching,” “discussions, journals, and assignments,” “reading and commenting on their fieldwork journals or reflection assignments” and “written observations.”

Most faculty pointed to specific benefits of using the Coaching Companion in their classes. Nearly all (98.9%) agreed that the platform saves them time on site visits. Faculty also expressed nearly unanimous agreement on the value of Coaching Companion in providing an opportunity to observe individual students’ teaching practices more frequently, enabling instructors to tailor student observations to specific topics and course content, supporting an interest in trying out new technology, providing students an opportunity to develop observation and feedback skills, and building a sense of professional community.

When we asked faculty members who had used Coaching Companion about its impact in improving teaching practices and student learning, they gave the platform consistently high marks.

93%	Agreed that it was helpful for identifying/describing teacher practices
93%	Agreed it was useful for developing new insights into teacher practices
88%	Agreed it promoted a sense of community among students
92%	Agreed it improved students’ skills in observation and feedback
90%	Agreed it was useful for having students practice teaching skills

In responses to open-ended questions, several instructors praised the video-sharing platform as “a great tool,” “a wonderful way for our students to send video of lessons they are doing,” its ease of use “to support teaching and

learning practices,” for providing “a safe environment for all students to work cooperatively,” and for providing “secure and confidential video storage.”

At the same time, instructors reported a range of challenges with the technology, from difficulty logging in with a password to navigation problems and insufficient support. Several expressed concerns that the Coaching Companion was not user-friendly for instructors or students. The most frequently mentioned problem concerned uploading videos—“It takes a long time”—and unreliable internet connections. Some respondents told us that technical challenges diminished over time for both faculty and students. Finally, some offered suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the platform, including installing a mechanism to document and track logins and posts, achieving better integration with campus learning management systems, and providing “a clear point of contact for participants who are experiencing difficulty and [need] a prompt response.”

2. Communities of Reflection and Practice (CORPs)

The CORPs provide students with the benefit of social interaction with their peers, shared interests, and conversations about practice. They also facilitate student connections to assignments and readings. Through the CORPs, students engage in productive discussions about their practice and develop important communication skills essential to effective performance in the field.

Administrative data from Coaching Companion users reveal that of all the assignments used by instructors, nearly half (49%) were CORP assignments with students discussing and reflecting with their peers on videos they or their instructors shared. The Coaching Companion includes several different assignment types that allow for various ways of developing reliable observation and practice providing and receiving feedback. Regardless of the specific features (e.g., play by play, multiple-choice questions, commenting), assignments are either one-on-one between the instructor and an individual student or CORP assignments with small peer groups engaging in the content together.

Student Engagement with CORP Assignments

Using CORPs	Comfortable with CORPs	Comfortable supporting student sharing of feedback	Comfortable providing feedback
51.5%	92.4%	96.2%	96.7%

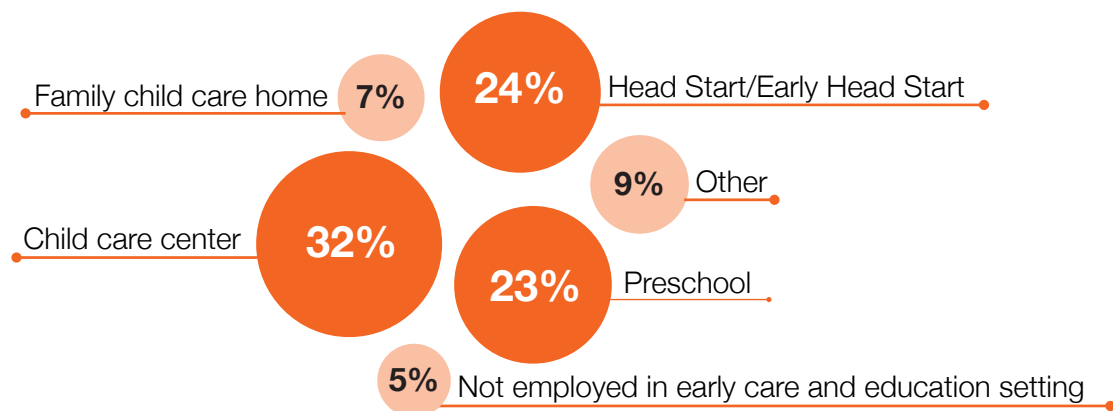
Instructors praised the CORP assignments in their open-ended questions. “I appreciate the ability to upload videos and engage in CORPs activity,” said one. Another suggested that EarlyEdU “implement a feature that sends student notifications when CORP members post.”

3. Practice-Based Assignments

This important element of the EarlyEdU approach provides opportunities for students to learn and apply the theories and effective teaching practices presented in courses. In these assignments, students take videos of themselves applying the strategies learned in class to their work with children in classrooms and other early learning environments. Students then share them with their instructors and peers. EarlyEdU courses incorporate practice-based assignments so that students can make early and robust connections between their coursework and experience in the field. The practice-based assignments also provide a mechanism for students to reinforce intentional teaching practices.

Faculty members shared with us which childcare and educational environments students are using to conduct their practice-based assignments.

Figure 7. Environments Where Students Implemented Practice-Based Assignments



4. Video Exemplars

Most faculty (84%) using EarlyEdU courses reported using this tool in their teaching. The video exemplars demonstrate optimal student-child interactions and reinforce understanding of evidence-based practices.

Several faculty members agreed that students appear more confident in conducting their assignments when they debrief using video exemplars. The videos are “one of the best features of the materials provided,” one instructor told us. Another faculty member explained, “It is so important for students to hear the instruction, see it in the videos, talk about it in class, and go out in the field to observe, work, and practice it.”



Student Perspectives

ECE students at 48 colleges and universities across the country completed our surveys, many of whom participated in pilot projects designed to align higher education and training in innovative ways. (Several of these projects are discussed in the second EarlyEdU impact paper, Equity-Driven Early Childhood Teacher Preparation: Stories from the Field.) Of the 1,478 student respondents, more than half attended community colleges. About a fourth of responses were from students attending the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, CA, a federally recognized Hispanic-serving institution serving approximately 12,500 students, a third of whom attend full-time.

One of the aims of EarlyEdU is to reach nontraditional students. Responses to our surveys indicate that we have succeeded in this goal.

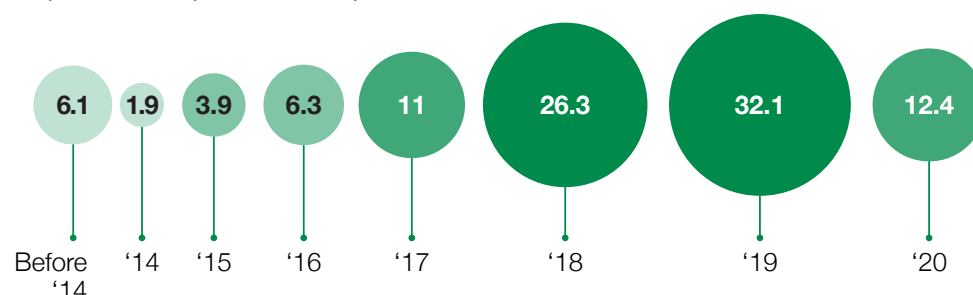
Student Demographics

Age (mean)	Have associate degree	Have bachelor's degree	Degree holders have ECE (or related) credential
33	14.2%	26.4%	57.9%
Part-time student, employed full-time, single parent, with dependents			
70.2%			

Some student respondents indicated that they began to pursue certificates and degrees as long ago as 20-30 years. However, most students told us that they had embarked on higher education courses to reach these goals in the past five years.

Figure 8. Calendar Years Students Began Pursuing Certificates or Degrees

Reported as percent responded

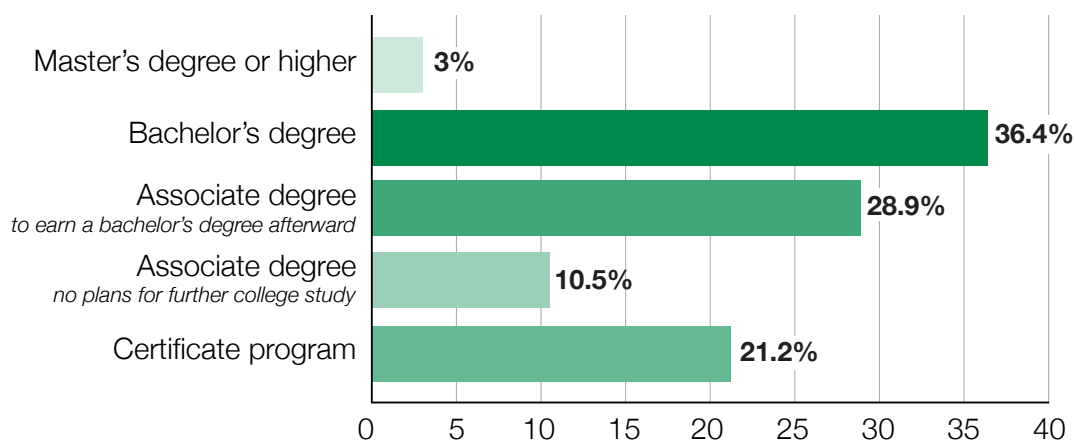


Students provided a range of answers to our question about why they were taking EarlyEdU courses. A majority (88.8%) explained that they were taking the courses to fulfill requirements for additional degrees or certificates—ranging from CDA® certification to master's degrees. Students mentioned other reasons as well, including:

- Continuing education: “I need 30 hours of training a year for my license.”
- Broadening knowledge: “I want to know as much as possible about child development and teaching strategies.”
- To keep abreast of changes in the field: “The media has become a focus in a lot of children’s lives, and I wanted to learn the benefits of digital media.”

When asked what type of credentials they were working toward, most students indicated a bachelor’s degree.

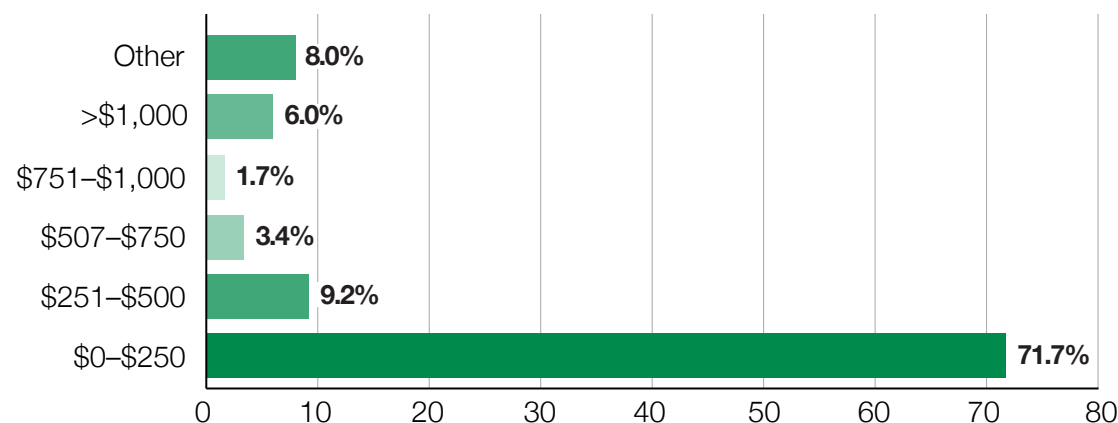
Figure 9. Types of Certificates or Degrees Students Are Pursuing



We asked students to tell us the subject of the certificates or degrees they were working toward. Most (88.8%) were seeking credentials in early childhood education. Students seeking degrees from fields outside ECE represented a broad range of backgrounds, including business, journalism, law, and public health. Students provided a wide range of answers in response to when they anticipated completing their new certificate or degree. Most students anticipated working toward their degrees for another one to three years. The largest group (28.6%) expected to be pursuing their degrees for another two years.

Cost remains a key barrier to higher education attainment for students in the ECE field, so we asked students several questions about the financial barriers they face as they pursue new certificates and degrees. We asked students first about the cost of the EarlyEdU course they were currently taking.

Figure 10. Full Cost of Current EarlyEdU Course



Some of the students who responded “other” to this question reported costs ranging from hundreds of dollars per course credit to several thousand dollars for a full semester’s tuition. Not surprisingly, 65% of students responding to our survey told us they receive financial aid, including academic scholarships, Pell Grants, and Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) grants and loans. Asked about the final costs associated with their current EarlyEdU course, 80.9% told us their out-of-pocket costs amounted to \$500 or less after accounting for financial aid. Several students told us that a key incentive to taking EarlyEdU courses was that they were “free” or very low cost.

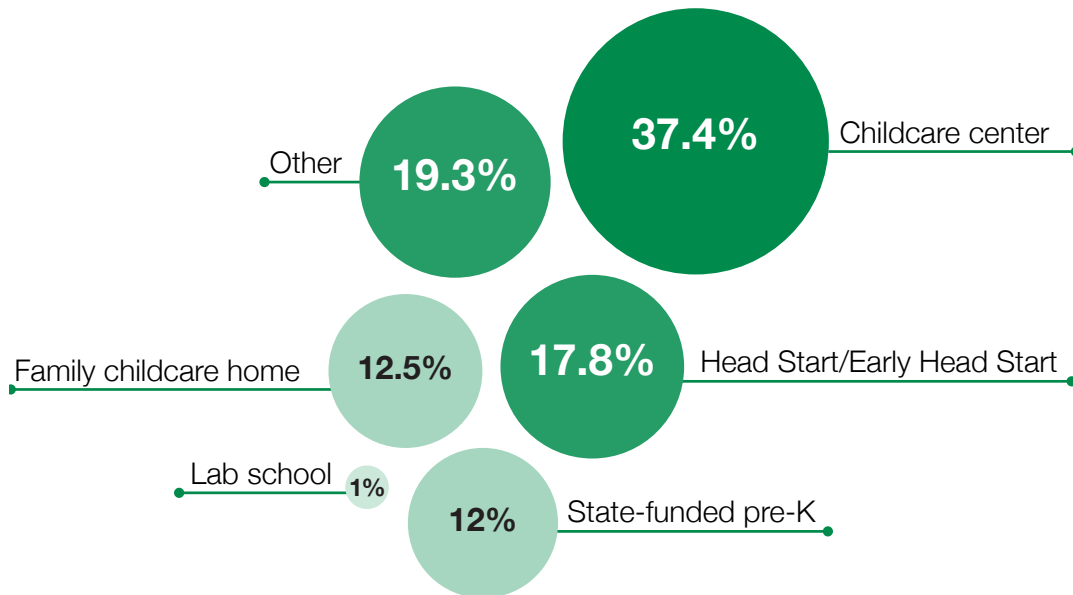
Not surprisingly, students responding to our survey reported substantial work and study responsibilities.

Student School and Work Life

Full courseload	Employed	Employed, working < 20 hours/week	Full-time student, working full-time in ECE setting
45%	82.4%	79.7%	70.4%

Most of the employed students are already working in an early childhood setting.

Figure 11. ECE Settings Where Students Predominantly Work

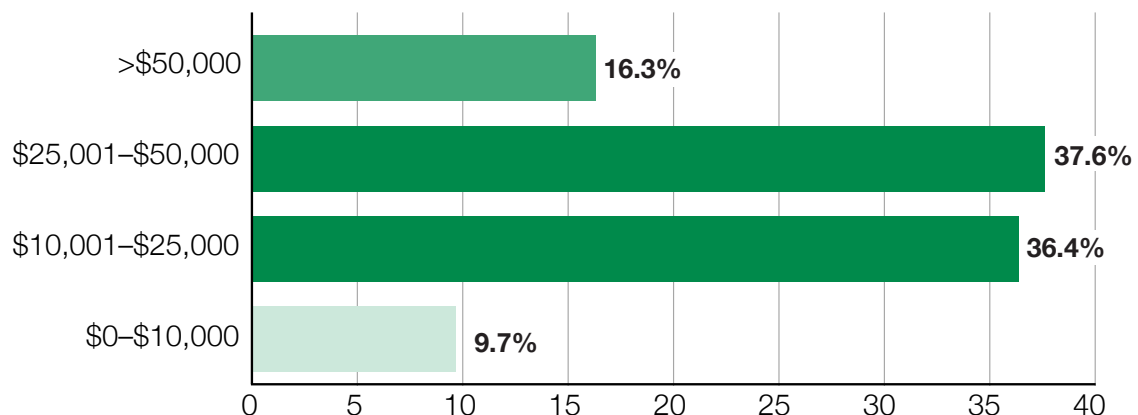


Students already working in ECE were asked to tell us their job titles. The top three categories were “lead teacher” (50.9%), “assistants” (33.1%), and administrators (10.5%). These respondents reported, on average, 17 students in their care.

About 1 of every 6 student respondents (16.6%) responding to our survey told us that they were volunteering or interning in early childhood education settings such as child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start programs. These students reported, on average, 14 students in their care.

Student respondents were also asked to tell us about their incomes.

Figure 12. Incomes Reported by Students Already Working in ECE



We asked students how EarlyEdU courses have informed or otherwise affected their practice. Among their responses, students told us that the skills they were developing had encouraged them to try new approaches in the classroom, to manage tantrums and other behavior challenges, to create welcoming environments, and to build their skills for observation and reflection. Several students told us they had the opportunity to apply their new skills “all day,” “all the time,” or “every single day” when working with young children. Several students mentioned new and effective communication strategies during interaction with children and, on occasion, their parents.

A prominent feature of all EarlyEdU courses is the use of video to capture and study students’ teaching practices. Among students taking our survey, 45.5% reported participating in video recordings at their worksite, and 13.7% told us they used video in volunteer or internship settings.

One of the ways EarlyEdU works to improve access to higher education for ECE students is to offer online courses. Most faculty responding to our survey said improving access was the top reason they were interested in teaching online. Student respondents were asked the length of their commute to attend in-person classes. Some students reported traveling considerable distances to in-person classes, including 15 students who reported traveling more than 20 miles to class.

Several students credited the online option with allowing them to take college-level courses in the first place. “Having access to class instruction in an online format is making higher education doable for me,” said one.

In responses to open-ended questions, students repeatedly mentioned the convenience and flexibility online courses afforded them. “I work full-time and have children of my own,” explained one student in an answer typical of many respondents. “It is wonderful [to be able] to complete classwork after hours and on weekends.” Several students credited the online option with allowing them to take college-level courses in the first place. “Having access to class instruction in an online format is making higher education doable for me,” said one. Other students pointed to savings in commuting time and “gas and travel expenses,” the value of “more time studying and less time driving,” the opportunities “to get to know my peers better online through discussion boards,” and the freedom online courses offer to “work from any location” to meet degree requirements. “Even if I move to a different state,” one student explained, “I can still work on my degree.”

We asked students whether their EarlyEdU courses were meeting their needs and in what ways. A significant share of respondents told us it was too early into the course to know.

Overall, students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to pursue higher education through EarlyEdU courses or characterized their experiences as breakthroughs.

- “From this class, I learned how to observe children in an effective way.”
- “Even though some of the assignments were difficult, I enjoyed every moment.”
- “I really didn’t think I could do this course because it’s been such a long time since I have taken any college classes or schooling. I was nervous, but the instructor has been wonderful, and the course has been amazing, and I have learned so much! I couldn’t have done it if it wasn’t offered online. Thank you a million times!”
- “I hope this [type of course] will allow many more nontraditional students like me to be able to participate. I also appreciated the support I received from my college instructor and my mentor...They really wanted me to succeed. I will not let them down.”

A small percentage of student respondents found guidelines for assignments to be unclear, instructors to be poorly organized, support to work with technology lacking, and courses to be “labor intensive” or “time consuming.”





Conclusions

When we launched EarlyEdU in 2015, our goal was to help lower barriers to higher education commonly encountered by the ECE workforce. For years, education policymakers had been working to raise standards and requirements for educators in childcare and preschool settings. EarlyEdU stepped in to make it easier for educators to meet these new guidelines by offering colleges and universities affordable, accessible, relevant, and effective course materials.

We recognize that the forces that restrict professionalization of the field persist. However, responses to our surveys of how ECE faculty and students are using EarlyEdU materials indicate that we are making progress in addressing two significant barriers: accessibility and relevance.

Accessibility refers to helping caregivers connect with the information, practice, and professional community they need to do their jobs well.

We have worked to improve the availability of ECE teacher preparation programs throughout the country by removing obstacles of cost and distance. Faculty and student survey respondents credited EarlyEdU courses— particularly those offered online—with making it possible for early childhood educators and non-traditional students to pursue courses and degrees. They shared with us the myriad ways EarlyEdU courses are facilitating access to instruction:

- through affordable and online courses that students can pursue without burdensome commutes
- by linking students with their peers and professional networks
- by supporting the use of new technologies to share teaching practices and feedback
- by providing flexibility to integrate higher education into students' own crowded work and family schedules.

Relevance refers to the ways course content meets students' needs—by connecting practice and theory, by using their own work settings as the center of their learning space, and by sharing knowledge and skills they can use in the classroom.

We have also designed our courses to align with degree and transfer requirements across systems and states, making it easier for students to assemble meaningful course credits and colleges and universities to fill gaps in coursework. In our surveys, students repeatedly told us that EarlyEdU courses had helped them complete long-sought certificates and degrees.

As we write this report in the autumn of 2020, the network of early childhood care and education providers in the United States is in a precarious state. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the many fiscal weaknesses of the nation's childcare and early education system. With the exception of publicly funded programs such as Head Start, the system is an unstable mix of private non-profit and for-profit programs that are often characterized by thin profit margins, low wages, and sudden closures.

The pandemic and the restrictions it triggered have shed new light on the problem of access to higher education and the need for teacher preparation programs to reach out to students where they live and work. It brought about a sudden shift to online learning. EarlyEdU courses, as well as our multimedia library and training webinars, have responded to these growing demands in ways that serve childcare providers in the field.

Societal crises often bring about creative public policy solutions. By uprooting systems of support for children and families, the pandemic may have demonstrated, as never before, the essential value of the early childhood educator workforce. The current crisis may also prompt a whole-picture perspective. If the time has come to reconsider our investment in early childhood care and education—to ensure a level of stability comparable to K-12 education—we must at the same time raise program quality and the capabilities of the nation's ECE workforce of 2 million. This objective aligns with the work of the EarlyEdU Alliance: By developing and sharing higher education resources to improve early childhood educators' knowledge and skills, we meaningfully raise our national investment in young children and their families.

Appendix

Alliance Membership

Alaska	
University of Alaska Anchorage	IHE4
Arizona	
Bevill State Community College	IHE2
The University of Alabama	IHE4
Trenholm State Community College	IHE2
University of Arkansas	IHE4
Northwest Arkansas Community College	IHE2
Arizona State University	IHE4
Central Arizona College	IHE2
Mesa Community College	IHE2
Mesa Community College	IHE2
Thunderbird School of Global Management Miami Campus	IHE4
Yavapai College	IHE2
California	
Brandman University	IHE4
Cañada College	IHE2
Cabrillo College	IHE2
California State University Channel Islands	IHE4
California State University San Bernardino	IHE4
City College of San Francisco	IHE2
College of Marin	IHE2
College of the Canyons	IHE2
College of the Desert	IHE2
Copper Mountain College	IHE2
Cosumnes River College	IHE2
Feather River College	IHE2
Fresno City College	IHE2
Hartnell College	IHE2
Imperial Valley College	IHE2
Los Angeles Southwest College	IHE2

Los Angeles Trade Technical College	IHE2
Merced College	IHE2
Merritt College	IHE2
Moorpark College	IHE2
Mt. San Antonio College	IHE2
Norco College	IHE2
Pasadena Area Community College	IHE2
Reedley College	IHE2
Sacramento City College	IHE2
Saddleback Community College	IHE2
San Francisco State University	IHE4
San Jose City College	IHE2
Santa Monica College	IHE2
Shasta College	IHE2
University of California at Berkeley	IHE4
Colorado	
Front Range Community College	IHE2
Delaware	
University of Delaware	IHE4
Florida	
Miami Dade College	IHE4
Hawaii	
University of Hawaii at Manoa	IHE4
Iowa	
Des Moines Area Community College	IHE2
Drake University	IHE4
Hawkeye Community College	IHE2
Kirkwood Community College	IHE2
North Iowa Area Community College	IHE2
Northeast Iowa Community College	IHE2
Western Iowa Tech Community College (WITCC)	IHE2

Idaho	
College of Western Idaho	IHE2
Illinois	
Heartland Community College	IHE2
Kaskaskia College	IHE2
Morton College	IHE2
Northwestern College	IHE4
Southwestern Illinois College	IHE2
Kansas	
Highland Community College	IHE2
Kentucky	
Henderson Community College	IHE2
Massachusetts	
Bristol Community College	IHE2
Holyoke Community College	IHE2
Massbay Community College	IHE2
Middlesex Community College	IHE2
Mount Wachusett Community College	IHE2
North Shore Community College	IHE2
Pine Manor College	IHE4
Plymouth State University	IHE4
Roxbury Community College	IHE2
Worcester State University	IHE4
Michigan	
Central Michigan University	IHE4
Washtenaw Community College	IHE2
Minnesota	
Fond Du Lac Tribal and Community College	IHE2
Minnesota State College Southeast	IHE4
Rochester Community and Technical College	IHE2
Missouri	
University of Central Missouri	IHE4
Mississippi	
University of Southern Mississippi	IHE4
Montana	
Dawson Community College	IHE2
Montana State University	IHE4
Salish Kootenai College	IHE2
University of Montana Western	IHE4

North Carolina	
Nash Community College	IHE2
Rockingham Community College	IHE2
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	IHE4
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	IHE4
Wake Technical Community College	IHE2
Nebraska	
University of Nebraska at Kearney	IHE4
New Hampshire	
Great Bay Community College	IHE2
Plymouth State University	IHE4
University of New Hampshire	IHE4
New Jersey	
Atlantic Cape Community College	IHE2
Passaic County Community College	IHE2
New Mexico	
Central New Mexico Community College	IHE2
Western New Mexico University	IHE4
New York	
Bank Street College	IHE4
Queens College, City University of New York	IHE4
Ohio	
University of Cincinnati	IHE4
Oklahoma	
Murray State College	IHE2
Oregon	
Chemeketa Community College	IHE2
Columbia Gorge Community College	IHE2
Mt Hood Community College Head Start	IHE2
Portland State University	IHE4
Rogue Community College	IHE2
Southwestern Oregon Community College	IHE2
Pennsylvania	
Arcadia University	IHE4
Clarion University of Pennsylvania	IHE4
Delaware County Community College	IHE2
Drexel University	IHE4
East Stroudsburg University	IHE4
Eastern University	IHE4

Edinboro University	IHE4
Harcum College	IHE2
Harrisburg Area Community College	IHE2
Keystone College	IHE4
Lehigh Carbon Community College	IHE2
Lock Haven University	IHE4
Northampton Community College	IHE2
Reading Area Community College	IHE2
Shippensburg University	IHE4
South Carolina	
York Technical College	IHE2
South Dakota	
South Dakota State University	IHE4
Tennessee	
Pellissippi State Community College	IHE2
Texas	
Austin Community College	IHE2
Cisco College	IHE2
Dallas County Community College District	IHE2
San Antonio Community College	IHE2
South Plains College	IHE2
Utah	
Salt Lake Community College	IHE2
Southern Utah University	IHE4
Utah State University	IHE4
Weber State University	IHE4
Westminster College	IHE4
Virginia	
James Madison University	IHE4
Vermont	
Champlain College	IHE4
Washington	

Big Bend Community College	IHE2
Columbia Basin College	IHE2
Highline College	IHE2
North Seattle College	IHE4
Pierce College - Washington	IHE2
Skagit Valley College	IHE2
Tacoma Community College	IHE2
University of Washington	IHE4
Whatcom Community College	IHE2
Chile	
Universidad Catolica del Maule	IHE4
Universidad de los Andes	IHE4

Executive Summary 2017-2018

The 2017-2018 internal evaluation of EarlyEdU explored the features of the EarlyEdU approach and its effectiveness in addressing barriers to higher education needs.

The EarlyEdU Alliance®—a collaboration of early care and education experts and stakeholders from higher education, government agencies, and community organizations—supports pathways to relevant and affordable bachelor's degrees for early care and education (ECE) professionals. ECE professionals overwhelmingly represent a nontraditional student population compared with most undergraduates at colleges and universities. EarlyEdU creates course materials appropriate for this population and works to address the barriers of affordability, access, relevance, effectiveness, and connection that ECE professionals face when pursuing degrees.

The EarlyEdU approach emphasizes the importance of connecting course content with practice. In addition, EarlyEdU maximizes the use of video through the implementation of the Coaching Companion, a web-based video annotation learning tool that supports coaching in higher education. Courses incorporate the Intentional Teaching Framework and are designed to mobilize the most recent research-based ECE pedagogy and adult learning theory. Each course uses innovative technology to incorporate video, competency-based assignments, coaching, and opportunities for students to reflect and improve on their practices. There is an ongoing commitment to gather and integrate meaningful feedback from users to inform continuous improvement efforts.

EarlyEdU evaluations and reporting are funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Office of Head Start.

The EarlyEdU Internal Evaluation Study

The internal evaluation study explored fundamental questions related to the EarlyEdU approach utilizing administrative data, internal Coaching Companion data, and surveys conducted with Alliance members and their students. Focus of the evaluation included determining general membership, better understanding the use of the Coaching Companion, and learning more about who was using EarlyEdU materials, in what ways, and how their overall experience could be improved. Please note the composition of the sample and the low response rates for the student survey when interpreting the results.

Results

The internal evaluation study generated meaningful information about the extent to which EarlyEdU is reaching its target audience, including the degree to which it offers access and affordability, how the program is being received in the field, and the effectiveness of its elements. The findings contribute to the overall EarlyEdU story and inform ongoing improvement efforts.

Internal Evaluation

The internal evaluation explored the following:

EarlyEdU's reach and how it is being received in the field

- How many institutions and instructors are utilizing EarlyEdU materials? What are their characteristics?
- How many students are enrolled in EarlyEdU courses? What are their characteristics?
- How are EarlyEdU materials and supports being received by Alliance members and students?

Extent to which EarlyEdU is addressing common barriers to higher education and obtainment of bachelor's degrees

- Does EarlyEdU increase access?
- Does EarlyEdU increase affordability?
- Does EarlyEdU increase relevance?
- Does EarlyEdU increase effectiveness?

Findings

Findings, highlighted in the summary that follows, are categorized relative to the common barriers to higher education that EarlyEdU is working to ameliorate: reach, access and affordability, and effectiveness and relevance.

Reach

Findings indicate that:

- General membership included 51 institutes of higher education (IHE), 73 instructors, 129 courses, and approximately 2,064 students utilized EarlyEdU materials.
- The majority of instructors identified as white, female, English-speaking, and not of Hispanic ethnicity.
- Student demographics mirrored faculty in terms of gender and language. However, half identified as white, while just under half reported Hispanic ethnicity.
- Many instructors were delivering EarlyEdU courses for the first time.
- In general, students reported demographics and characteristics that align with or trend toward the target audience in terms of background, academic profiles, and employment profiles.
- Many students lived in rural areas.

Access and Affordability

Findings indicate that:

- EarlyEdU appears to be addressing some barriers that stand in the way of higher education.
- In general, student characteristics seem to align with the target audience.
- Many students work in the early childhood workforce while concurrently taking courses to fulfill requirements for a bachelor's degree.
- Online EarlyEdU courses appear to reduce barriers that students attribute to employment, scheduling, time, and transportation.
- Most students are using financial aid to pay for their courses.

Effectiveness and Relevance

Findings indicate that:

- In general, EarlyEdU is well received in the field, especially in terms of course content (prepackaged and high-quality materials that decrease workload). Instructors recognized that the competency-based approach of EarlyEdU supports student use of effective teaching practices.
- Instructors reported that teaching EarlyEdU courses highlight the importance of instructor feedback and frequent interactions with students.
- Most instructors report that EarlyEdU courses require some extra work compared to other courses they have taught, typically due to adapting the course to meet their academic calendar or delivery format as well as organizing, preparing, and adjusting course materials in general.
- The field is interested in additional options for online courses, materials developed for working with multiple populations (infants/toddlers, ADA, translation to other languages, differentiation, cultural/linguistic), and access to prepackaged assignments.
- Faculty require students to upload videos demonstrating their teaching practices (as per internal data collected from the Coaching Companion).
- Instructors find the Coaching Companion useful and beneficial, however, providing feedback is labor intensive.
- While the use of video feedback appears to be helpful and appreciated, the field could benefit from more support using the tool and technology in general.
- Specific enhancements to the Coaching Companion could include increased functionality/usability, alignment with other systems, guidance with assignments, video uploads, and clarity related to uploading videos from mobile devices.
- Overwhelmingly, students find that EarlyEdU courses meet their needs and are beneficial to them while carrying out their duties in the field/workplace.
- Students use the skills they are learning, are generally satisfied with the format of the courses, and feel supported by their instructors.

These findings contribute to understanding the reach of EarlyEdU and the effectiveness of the approach in enhancing higher education for the early learning field. While some barriers are addressed, others are still in need of attention.

2017-2018 Findings with Impressions of EarlyEdU in the Pilot Years

The start of the 2017-2018 academic year marked the beginning of our membership period and conclusion of our pilot period. Due to changes in membership structure and a responsive survey development effort (resulting in some incompatibility) during 2017-2018, we can only speak broadly to some ongoing themes and a few trends across the pilot period and this first year of membership. More substantial comparisons are planned for the current membership period; however, some past impressions related to the findings in this document are presented in the following section.

EarlyEdU Outreach and Onboarding

Findings indicate that:

- Across years, the assurance of high-quality courses and decreased workload due to prepackaged materials are reasons faculty chose to deliver EarlyEdU courses.
- In terms of instructor reach, there appears to be a high number of tenure track faculty and first-time users of EarlyEdU courses. Instructors indicated that they make the final decision to offer courses.

EarlyEdU Materials

Findings indicate that:

- Over time, course content has been well received, and faculty indicate that the courses foster active student participation.
- Enhancements to the Coaching Companion, as well as general technical support, may be beneficial.
- There is interest in materials with broader application and prepackaged assignments.

EarlyEdU in Practice

Findings indicate that:

- There is a need for adaptations prior to course delivery. Most often, this is due to shortening or lengthening the course to meet individual academic or session calendars.
- Adaptations to course length, along with the time required to review and provide feedback on videos, and general Coaching Companion needs, are consistently reported as requiring extra work compared to non-EarlyEdU courses.
- Difficulty with student fieldwork placement and securing video permissions continue.

2017-2018 Findings and Future Evaluation Efforts

These findings help to inform future evaluation efforts, including:

- Enhanced survey research efforts
- Increased utilization of secondary data
- Deep internal evaluation designed to understand implementation and impact
- Streamlining evaluation processes for specific populations
- Exploring course adaptation and implementation practices
- Utilizing additional internal data sources
- Partnering with other entities
- Demonstration of impact

2017-2018 Findings and Continuous Improvement

The EarlyEdU Alliance, built on research and experience in the field, aims to contribute innovative teaching, courses, and resources, and is committed to continuous improvement anchored in meaningful feedback from users. User feedback leads to actionable improvement efforts that can inform current and future course development practices.

Findings from our current survey results are already providing direction for the areas of focus for future internal improvement efforts including:

- Course development, instructional design, and outreach
- Coaching Companion
- Fidelity of implementation support
- Membership and reach
- Adjusting materials to lessen instructor workload



EarlyEdU Alliance

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