

MONTANA EC TRAINER/INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT REPORT—EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Information Gathering Process

In May 2009, early childhood trainers in Montana (250 - 300 trainers) were invited to complete an *Early Childhood Trainer/Instructor Development Survey*. The survey, funded by the Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP), was prepared by Child Care plus+ in anticipation of the creation of a trainer registry and comprehensive professional development system in Montana. The process included 1) five **telephone focus groups** with 29 trainers to identify trainer qualifications, professional development needs, and potential system components; 2) an **online survey** which used the items identified by focus group participants and asked for information about themselves and their training experience, current training events, professional development needs, and the level of importance of elements of being an effective trainer and specific components of an early childhood trainer system; and 3) a 1½ day

Trainer/Instructor Forum of 30 trainers to a) review survey results; b) create a common vision; c) make recommendations based on survey data; d) review other states' systems and Montana's plan for a quality improvement rating system; and e) participate in work groups addressing initial development of a trainer registry.

Fifty-six trainers (19 - 22%) took advantage of the opportunity to express their priorities and preferences by participating in the survey. Their responses provide information about themselves, their training events, their professional development preferences, and the level of importance to them of individual trainer qualifications and professional development topics. A detailed summary and analysis of these issues is included in the full report found at www.mtecp.org.

Early Childhood Trainers

Survey participants rated the importance of 39 items in four areas related to early childhood trainers: general characteristics; the training topic/content; adult learning principles; and local community experts, specialists, and state agency staff. Survey participants rated every item in this category as having above average importance. The five highest ranked items were: 1) trainer is enthusiastic; 2)

trainer displays professional and ethical conduct; 3) trainer is knowledgeable about content/topic; 4) trainer understands child development; and 5) trainer conveys a positive attitude about early childhood. The two lowest ranked items in this category were: 1) trainer has a degree/credential in early childhood, and 2) trainer has a degree in any field.

Early Childhood Trainer System

Survey participants rated the importance of 36 items in two areas related to the components of an early childhood trainer system: system components and documentation of qualifications. The highest ranked item was "trainer qualifications equal the depth and breadth of the training content (a trainer must be highly qualified to conduct advanced training)." The six items ranked below the median were (from highest to lowest): 1) independent assessment (systematic determination of merit, worth, and training abilities by a peer using a checklist of standards); 2) observation and assessment by a qualified independent

observer required as part of maintaining qualifications; 3) portfolio (organized presentation of an individual's education, work samples, and skills); 4) one set of requirements for every trainer (a trainer either qualifies to be in the system or they don't); and 5) requires renewal every year. The ranked items clustered somewhat below the highest possible rank. This makes it unclear which items survey participants considered highly important and thus necessary components of an early childhood trainer system. Further information may need to be gathered and considered along with these results before conclusions can be drawn.

Trainer Professional Development and Support

Survey participants rated the importance of 54 items in four areas related to trainer professional development and support about: general characteristics of early childhood trainers; early childhood topics/content; adult learning principles; and other types of education and support. Survey participants rated every item in this category well above average importance and of high importance. The two top ranked items were 1) displaying professional and ethical

conduct and 2) inviting participation and promoting interaction. The two bottom ranked items were 1) finding and working with a mentor and 2) teaching online courses. It could be concluded that survey participants believe that an early childhood professional development system that includes standards and requirements for trainers must also include support and resources for individuals to achieve and maintain those standards.

Trainers' Vision: *"Professional development specialists" in Montana are committed to using current knowledge and experience to offer ethical, accountable, relationship-based professional development that enriches the early childhood community and the quality of care and education for Montana's young children.*