PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:
CENTRAL NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTOR NETWORK

2018
Prepared by The Focus Group Consulting
Executive Summary

This report outlines findings from the 2018 program evaluation conducted for the Early Childhood Mentor Network (ECMN) at the Central New Mexico Community College. Starting in 2016, the Program operates as a mechanism for workforce development, to train and support current early childhood educators in an effort to foster improved skills and abilities while simultaneously driving improved preparation of the next generation of early childhood educators.

This evaluation examined outcomes across four dimensions to support workforce development.

1. Improving workforce development for early childhood educators.
2. Improving college student preparation for the early childhood industry.
3. Improving early childhood program quality.
4. Maintaining the program operational effectiveness of the ECMN.

Findings reveal strong value both to mentors and to students in driving current skills as well as fostering relevant knowledge and abilities for growth. Mentors reported higher positive feedback in response to the value of student mentorship versus cooperating teachers. Mentors further reported gains in both perceived confidence and direct early childhood education skills as well as strong appreciation for the value of the professional community created by the ECMN. Participating mentors reported higher likelihood of remaining as educators (over cooperating teachers) that increased further for mentors who remained in the program.

The ECMN was found to promote a positive experience for students pursing a degree in early childhood education (matched with mentors) in terms of perceived skills as well as perceived support. Respondents spoke at length to the value of the preparation in entering the field with sufficient skills to support quality education. College students placed at sites with mentors reported greater perceived confidence (over those placed with non-mentor educators) in their classroom management abilities as well as greater understanding of specific early childhood education skills and techniques.
The ECMN was found to drive early childhood program quality as measured against skills and abilities of educators. Findings show increase in knowledge, skills, and abilities in classroom management, mentorship, and education techniques as compared against cooperating teachers placed with practicum students. Further, directors spoke to the value of the Program and skills gained (via their staff) both through the content as well as through the meetings (mentors attended) with the most positive feedback in response to: 1) that they would recommend that staff continue participate as mentors to practicum students, 2) that they would recommend to other directors that their staff participate as practicum mentors, and 3) that they see the ECMN as a workforce development pipeline.

These findings speak to the overall value and success of the ECMN as a strong program asset to current and future educators in skill development and – as a more intangible asset – in terms of professional community to support early childhood education. Respondents interviewed spoke heavily about the challenges of early childhood education, notably the lack of external respect for early childhood education and the burnout given the demanding work. The ECMN was found to be a buffering factor against these inherent industry pressures through three critical aspects.

1. The ECMN was found to promote stronger skills training and preparation to be an educator, which improved both training and preparation but also the perceived rigor of the field.
2. The ECMN and the community it supported fostered a strong sense of professionalism among educators and the early childhood community as a mechanism to deconstruct negative stereotypes and drive perceived confidence.
3. The ECMN community acted as a professional support mechanism and industry learning opportunity to further promote the rigor of early childhood education and also to elevate the industry.
Thus, the ECMN acts as a strong buffer against the critical elements that contribute to educator attrition. This then builds credibility among those in the industry (current and future educators) as well as externally from other elementary educators, parents, stakeholders, and sponsors.

From these findings, this report recommends that there be a continued and sustained commitment to the ECMN – as it expands and scales across the state – as a viable and successful investment for workforce development of quality early childhood educators.
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Introduction

Early childhood education is a critical service with strong demonstrated evidence [on the effect of standardized measures] in improving intelligence and academic outcomes, positive impact on cognitive effects, and reductions in personal and social problems over a 10–25 year period. Yet, early childhood educators have a 30% annual attrition rate creating challenges in delivery of these essential services both in terms of content retention and experience towards quality. Further, this creates teacher shortages and in turn, supply shortages for services, specifically (and acutely so) in New Mexico.

The Early Childhood Mentor Network (ECMN) at the Central New Mexico Community College addresses these challenges through a structured education and training program for workforce development that supports existing educators with online and in person training and then matches early childhood education students at practicum placements to foster mentorship, education, and ultimately improved education and retention.

This report outlines a program evaluation conducted on the ECMN in early 2018. The goal of this report is to evaluate and demonstrate the effectiveness of the ECMN measured against four key evaluation dimensions meant to highlight the ability of the ECMN in supporting and growing early childhood education in New Mexico. These goals reflect key needs areas within the industry.

1. Improving workforce development for early childhood educators.
2. Improving college student preparation for the early childhood industry.
3. Improving early childhood program quality.
4. Maintaining the program operational effectiveness of the ECMN.

By achieving success across these four dimensions, the ECMN demonstrates value in building the early childhood education industry in New Mexico as an instrument for workforce development. The report below highlights the evaluation process and findings in achieving success across these goals.

Background

The goal of the ECMN is to develop a strong professional network of mentors to support CNM student education and thus support meaningful education for early students. This in

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turn develops a strong pipeline of educators into early childhood education and promotes retention of current teachers.

The theory of action model for the ECMN was developed in 2017 and highlights the short term, mid term, and long-term outcomes from the ECMN (table 1). These highlight the long term intended impact from the ECMN in terms of quality education, retention, professionalization, and professional growth.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Mid Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Long Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Mentors feel more recognized as high quality educators</td>
<td>Higher quality early childhood education in early childhood centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop positive relationships with students</td>
<td>• Mentors and students experience greater job satisfaction</td>
<td>• Greater retention of high quality early childhood teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn new strategies to support (adult) student learning</td>
<td>• Mentors and students stay in the profession longer</td>
<td>• Professionalized childhood education workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create learning opportunities and environments for students</td>
<td>• Mentors become early childhood education leaders</td>
<td>• Sustainable structures and opportunities for ongoing professional growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitate reflective dialogue with students</td>
<td>• Mentors increase their salary capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are more collaborative Students</td>
<td>• Students become more effective early childhood education teachers and graduate with greater skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase their knowledge and skills in early childhood education teaching</td>
<td>• Practicum faculty develop positive relationships and increased communication with mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gain real classroom experience to improve practice</td>
<td>• Early childhood centers receive more skilled and high quality staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn from experienced early childhood educators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are more collaborative and reflective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grow in attitudes, perceptions, and self-efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase their knowledge and skills in early childhood education teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Centers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receive greater professional development opportunities for staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improve staff skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase faculty buy-in</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ECMN promotes a call for current early childhood educators to apply to the program in spring/early summer (for fall entry). There is an initial orientation in the fall, which is required for all current and former mentors. Qualifications include (at minimum) an Associates degree in early childhood education, three years in the field, and the support of their center director (in the form of a letter of support).
There are three program requirements for participating mentors: an online class in the fall and spring of their first year, monthly meetings, and hosting of a practicum student. The directors of the sites participate in the director network (discussed below).

Course 1 is offered in the fall while Course 2 is offered in the spring. Course 1 examines the role of a mentor in education and highlights skills and tools for mentorship. Course 2 builds on this base and focuses on self-reflection to build meaningful relationships with co-workers and adults. Both courses support mentors in giving and receiving feedback and providing coaching to colleagues. Students receive a grade for the courses and must submit assignments (homework and projects) to be graded.

Mentors are designated according to “Gear”. Gear 1 mentors refers to mentors that are in the first year of their program. Gear 2 mentors refers to mentors that have been in the program for two years thus they are more experienced in the program. There are 10 meetings for mentors to attend including five in the fall and five in the spring. Meetings are a mechanism to build and foster community (discussed further below as a main instrument to build professionalism within the industry); they are a forum for shared learning and leadership as Gear 2 mentors co-lead on rotating topics. This is a powerful professional development opportunity as mentors build meaningful collaboration through coaching and group consultation to address challenges in practice. Meetings are very well received among mentors with an 88% total attendance rate over the length of the program since 2016. These meetings are for all mentors (Gear 1 and Gear 2). Faculty from CNM also attends these meetings. They do so for an opportunity to learn about practicum placements and support the mentors as they work with practicum students. This provides an opportunity for CNM faculty to learn from current practitioners in the field through reciprocal mentorship relationships. Further, they attend to answer questions to students, provide guidance and support, and build community with mentors. This helps foster and further support the professional development of the ECMN.

The third component of the ECMN is mentoring students from CNM who are placed at their center. Historically, mentors have supported CNM students in their first participating semester but moving forward, it is intended that during the first fall semester, mentors concentrate on learning through meetings and the coursework and then accept CNM students in the spring. CNM students are placed at practicum sites utilizing mentors first and then meeting additional demand with educators that the program coordinator has a relationship with (called cooperating teachers). Many practicum students have heard about the mentor network and express an interest in joining the ECMN upon graduation; thus there is a continued development pipeline for participants.
Mentors have received up to $500 for participating (per semester) in the ECMN. This included $100 for all the meetings, $100 for hosting a student, and $300 for taking the class. This has been reduced over time. Mentors receive a certificate from the Children, Youth, and Families Department of the state of New Mexico. This certification is only offered via the ECMN and the intention is that the certificate can hold more weight for stipends and support in the future. Historically, the ECMN has had funding to offer ad hoc trainings to mentors, participation in conferences/trainings, and attendance at national conferences. This has been dependent on available resources.

It is anticipated that the program will expand in several key ways. Mentors will be trained as mentor leaders to build a pool of individuals who can support current mentors who are facing challenges. This coaching network will complement the existing support mechanisms in place. Further, as the program expands in geography, the meetings will utilize virtual mechanisms to allow their participation. It is anticipated that there will be a train-the-trainer model to develop non-Albuquerque based monthly meeting to be led by regional mentors. This will allow for continued scalability of the program.

The Director Network is an additional resource whereby site directors both from the participating centers as well as those who are interested in collaboration are invited to meetings with guest speakers and topical areas of focus relevant to center administration. This includes grant writing, administrative duties, and other relevant topics. There are six director meetings during the school year. These director meetings will be continued as a value-add (on a voluntary basis) based on the relevance of content.

The program has created a strong community of educators who can support each other and who can support future educators in the field. This evaluation is intended to measure how participants and CNM students have responded to this comprehensive and diverse program.

**Approach**

The evaluation methodology for this project involved utilizing a Theory of Change approach, which first established an understanding of the vision for early childhood education among key stakeholders and funders in the field. These key interviews established the four dimensions that have been described above and reflect an alignment between program goals and key stakeholder interests. After establishing the four program goals, the following data collection strategy was crafted with a focus on three
key beneficiaries of the program: mentors (i.e. current educators), students (CNM college students in early childhood education), and directors.

### Research Strategy

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objectives Goal: does mentorship show value to justify expanded and continued expense</th>
<th>Objective Description</th>
<th>Collection Mechanism(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assess mentor engagement</strong></td>
<td>Are mentors engaged and is their ongoing participation?</td>
<td>Post program online survey delivered at the conclusion of the program in April focusing on engagement (monthly sessions and online class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assess mentor change of practice</strong></td>
<td>Do mentors practice differently as a result of the program?</td>
<td>Post program online survey delivered at the conclusion of the program in April focusing on content knowledge (monthly sessions and online class) in alignment with program rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus 1: Mentor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assess mentor program retention</strong></td>
<td>Do mentors remain in the program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assess mentor retention in their industry</strong></td>
<td>Do mentors remain in the industry as ECE? Do they have upward mobility?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assess mentor agency</strong></td>
<td>Do mentors feel more prepared to be an ECE? Do they have more agency towards work as an ECE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Focus 2: College Student</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assess program engagement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assess program satisfaction and learning outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Do students feel satisfied by the program and content in preparation to be an ECE?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following data collection strategy was used to evaluate the three focus dimensions above (mentor, student, and director). This also included faculty interviews to substantiate student feedback and provide an additional validation step.

### Data Collection Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Data Collection Mechanism</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Qual.</th>
<th>Quant.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Post program survey (Gear 1)</td>
<td>Gear 1 mentors</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control post program survey (cooperating teachers)</td>
<td>Coordinating teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key interviews (Gear 1)</td>
<td>Gear 1 mentors</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former mentor employment survey (Gear 2)</td>
<td>Gear 2 mentors</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exit tickets</td>
<td>Gear 1 mentors</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Post program survey</td>
<td>Students at ECMN sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Central New Mexico Community College

Early Childhood Mentor Network
| Control post program survey (based on matched data) | Students not at ECMN sites | X |
| Post practicum program survey across 2017–2018 cohorts | All CNM practicum students | X | X |
| Key interviews (ECMN site students) | Students at ECMN sites | X |
| **Directors** Post program survey (ECMN sites) | All program participants | X |
| Key interviews (ECMN sites) | Directors at ECMN sites | X |
| **Faculty** Key interviews | CNM faculty | X |

The data collection strategy involved both qualitative and quantitative research. This included 20 semi-structured interviews with mentors, students, directors, and faculty evaluating program satisfaction, participation drivers, agency, and attrition/retention within the industry. Survey responses are shared further below.

Both exit tickets for mentors as well as the post–practicum program survey included both qualitative and quantitative responses. The exit tickets provided meaningful feedback on perception of programming, value of the content, and perceived value in practice. The post practicum program survey delivered to CNM practicum students included the same questions delivered to students over three cohorts thus providing longitudinal data on outcomes.

The collection mechanisms highlighted above included quantitative surveys delivered to stakeholders. They were primarily delivered on the likert scale. Key responses were measured against statistical significance to highlight perceived improvements among mentors, students, and directors. A quantitative survey was developed for former students to evaluate long-term job retention but due to data collection challenges, there was not a significant enough volume of responses to include it in this report.

**Findings**

The findings presented here are broken out across the four dimensions (as discussed above) to demonstrate success in improving early childhood educator workforce development:

1. Improving workforce development for early childhood educators.
2. Improving college student preparation for the early childhood industry.
3. Improving early childhood program quality.
4. Maintaining the program operational effectiveness of the ECMN.
Qualitative and quantitative results highlight responses from the targets along those four dimensions focusing on program opportunities as well as common themes found among respondents (in terms of perception and value). Figures below highlight key findings across these dimensions with [notably] meaningful findings identified from the qualitative interviews.

**Workforce Development**

Findings from the surveys highlight three powerful themes within workforce development: skills development, value of the professional community, and retention of educators.

**Skills and Training**

Survey findings demonstrate that mentors found strong value in the trainings and developed relevant skills as a result of the program. Findings suggest this across both perceived confidence as well as direct skills learned through the program. The most positive feedback (in the likert scale) among Gear 1 mentors was found in response to the following statements:

- I find value in the mentor meetings.
- The ECMN content (meetings, online course, etc.) has positively impacted my role as an early childhood professional.
- I feel as though being a mentor helps me be a better educator.

These responses were substantiated through qualitative data as well as higher likert scale responses among Gear 1 mentors versus cooperating teachers. Mentors said,

> The mentor network has increased my confidence as a teacher leader, and made me feel more committed to the profession.

> I was a classroom teacher for last 20 years and saw this as a learning opportunity to expand my practice but actually it was validating towards what I already knew which was very powerful.

> I feel as though mentoring CNM practicum students in my classroom has helped me be a better educator.

Further, key statements regarding workforce development relating to training were found to be significantly higher among mentors versus cooperating teachers. Figure 3 (below)
highlight these differences also reflecting attrition and positive perception on the overall program.

![Cooperating Teacher vs. Gear 1 Mentors (Statistically Significant Differences)](image)

Gear 1 mentors reported higher overall responses across survey questions versus cooperating teachers even when removing for likelihood of retention which was higher among mentors than cooperating teachers (figures 4 and 5 in appendix). Among cooperating teachers, there was a markedly low response for the question as to whether having a practicum student was a positive experience. Removing this data point as well, the cooperating teacher responses were still lower than mentors.

**Professional Community**

The second key theme within workforce development was the considerate value of the professional community created through the ECMN. Mentors reported that they felt that the mentor network provided not just a learning opportunity but also an opportunity to build relationships with other educators. As one mentor stated it promoted a “stronger sense of belonging”. As discussed below, this was found to be a significant buffering factor against strong perceived lack of respect among educators by parents and the broader community for early childhood education. One mentor shared,

> Thank you for this opportunity to expand my knowledge and expertise and to develop meaningful relationships with fellow educators.

While another reported,
The mentor network made me feel part of a broader community that was respected. I feel like an educator and now this makes me feel that others see me that way as well.

Further, many mentors reported that the program improved their personal growth (and self reflection), which added to the overall community and professionalism. One respondent said,

The program has made me more self-reflective in my teaching practice. I am a more intentional teacher and bring that reflection to my peers. We are talking in a way about our work that we never did before.

Another mentor spoke about how the community created has developed new processes that they had not considered before. One said,

I now find time to talk to others and build connections. I never thought about the need or value to network but I realize that we are part of a community like any other. We need to build these relationships to make the industry stronger.

Retention

The third relevant theme found within workforce development was retention. The most salient finding is in response to the question asked across cooperating teachers, Gear 1, and Gear 2 mentors regarding the likelihood of leaving the industry in the next six months.

Findings above show a decrease in likelihood of attrition over time in the program. This has limitations in that mentors self select participation based on engagement and are retained in the program for similar reasons. In spite of that, mentors experience the same pressures that non-mentors experience in terms of the core challenges to retention: pay,
burnout, and (most pronounced) a lack of industry respect for early childhood education. This profound finding highlights the continued value of building a mentor network potentially as a buffering factor against attrition. This is examined further below in the Discussion section.

While mentors, faculty, and directors spoke about pay as a key challenge in early childhood education, they similarly reported that it was a very transparent barrier to new educators. In other words, pay was not perceived to be exclusively a reason people leave as it was neither a reason people entered the field. One mentor reported:

| People get frustrated because they feel as though they are underappreciated. They are seen as babysitters and not educators. I know several people who left to go into elementary education because there is more legitimacy there. |

Another said,

| People leave when they see this as a temporary job versus a career path. It’s hard to see this as a career when there is not a community around you and when you are undervalued. |

Burnout was found to be a significant challenge similar to that of pay and respect as fundamental to attrition from early childhood education. Mentors and others interviewed spoke about the value in collaboration as a mechanism to support educators in managing industry challenges rather than alleviating those challenges. Thus the ECMN potentially acts as a buffering factor in this regard against the pressures inherent in the field. This too is discussed below in the Discussion section.

**College Student Preparation**

The second dimension against which this report examines success is the preparation of college students in entering the early childhood field. It is important to note that these college students represent a broad and diverse group of individuals. Many are already working in the early childhood field and range in age and background. Findings from this evaluation suggest that the ECMN provided an immense value in improving readiness and understanding to enter early childhood education and also potentially retained (early career) teachers better than otherwise.

In looking at Figure 2, when comparing the student responses among those that were placed at a practicum site with an ECMN mentor versus those that were not, the most significant positive variance was found in responses to two key statements.
• I feel confident in my ability to manage a classroom as a lead educator.
• I learned specific skills and techniques from my practicum mentor that allow me to be a better educator.

These two responses highlight both readiness and the skills associated with being a strong educator. These are further substantiated by interviews with faculty, mentors and students. As one respondent said,

A lot of people leave the field leave because they do not know what they are getting into. They are unprepared for the realities of being an educator.

Another said,

Students learn about what worked, what didn’t, and how to connect with parents. They learn how to be an educator in a classroom but having the opportunity to put that into practice with a mentor makes them think harder about what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Further, several of those interviewed spoke about how the initial turnover experienced in early childhood education is driven by people not understanding the industry. By providing the exposure to early childhood education through supportive practice, respondents spoke about the ability to retain educators longer and reduce early career attrition. Further, in the same way that there is a misperception among the broader community as to the value and role of early childhood educators, several of those interviewed reported the same misconception among college students entering the field. As one director said,

People sometimes think that this is just daycare and when they understand that this is education its hard to keep them. It is important to clearly show what education is like so they are entering with open eyes. This hopefully will keep them in the field longer.

A faculty commented that often college students were surprised just how hard it was to manage a classroom. Students interviewed strongly supported this point that by having stronger exposure to support in the classroom they were able to build tangible skills towards a deeper practice. As one student said,

The mentor was extremely helpful. We debriefed at the end of each day, which helped me understand what I was doing and where I could improve. At times I did not know how to manage student discipline, but having a seasoned mentor was very helpful.
Early Childhood Program Quality

The third dimension for the program evaluation was examining success across early childhood program quality. Some of these elements are captured in the mentor workforce development findings though this further highlights findings that show that the ECMN significantly improved the quality of current and future educators.

Figure 3 (in the appendix) highlights key differences between post survey response among cooperating teachers and ECMN mentors. While both high, mentors reported higher responses to the following statements that speak to improved program quality:

- I can support students with understanding current research and evidence based practices for early childhood education.
- I have a strong understanding of how adults learn.
- I feel as though I have learned new skills through mentoring CNM practicum students.

These responses highlight the improved perceived skills that drive quality education as a result of the ECMN. This was substantiated by directors at sites who reported the highest positive response (in the likert scale) to the statement that they would continue to recommend that their staff participate as mentors to CNM practicum students. When interviewed, directors spoke to the value of the program in improving program quality.

The program gave mentors the confidence to provide feedback to others. They understand where they lack skills and now have the ability to continue to learn how to be better educators.

My staff feels more empowered as a result of the program. They are more able to voice their needs and support each other.

In addition to the perceived self-confidence, site directors reported that the program helped their mentor staff improve their self-reflection. As one stated,

The ECMN allows my staff to understand their work and reflect on their teaching habits. They become better educators by understanding the process and not just the skills as an educator.

Mentors further substantiated that perspective as they reported that the ECMN helped raise their self-confidence and provided validation for their role and the industry (overall). Several mentors spoke about how this then raised the industry as it continued to improve the quality of the education provided. As one mentor said,

I feel more valued in my role because I feel as though I am a more valued educator. It builds the industry and makes us all better educators together and gives us more credibility.
As discussed above, this shared sense of value as a result of improved quality has downstream impact on retention among educators, which creates better [and lasting] educators that can improve the quality of education. As the ECMN workforce development program builds a stronger cohort of early childhood educator, there is a cyclical value to this workforce development that will be evident through early childhood education outcomes and directly measured value. Further, mentors reported that through improved education, skills, and practice, there is a stronger sense of value in the industry and enhanced accurate beliefs among the external community about the value of early childhood education.

Maintain Program Operational Effectiveness

The last dimension evaluated was the program operational effectiveness. Findings show strong satisfaction with the program and the value from mentors, students, and directors. Figures 4 and 5 (in the appendix) highlight differences between cooperating teachers and mentors with more positive responses to statement around the value of student mentorship. Further, directors spoke to the value of the program reporting highest positive responses to the following statement:

- I will likely continue recommending that my staff participate as mentors to practicum students.
- I will recommend to other directors that their staff participate as practicum mentors.
- The ECMN is a workforce development pipeline for new staff.

Mentors supported this perspective with strong qualitative responses highlighting that the program improved their practice and further that they found value in the programming. The high response rate among mentors, directors and students is a reflection and validation to the operational effectiveness of the ECMN in providing quality education and support. The summary table below highlights responses among mentors relating to perceived value of the program in achieving success across this dimension.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What information from the ECMN will impact your role as an early childhood professional?</th>
<th>How will you change your practice based on what you have learned?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It will improve my methods and to be more intentional in my classroom and with mentee.</td>
<td>• I will be more mindful and be able to actively listen to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How important it is to build strong relationships with mentees, co-workers and other professionals.</td>
<td>• I am better teacher – more professional, more open minded, and more wanting to do things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It helps me improve my purpose as an educator.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discussion

This evaluation measured the value of the ECMN as a workforce development program. It was framed against key interests of stakeholders in supporting early childhood educators and building a demonstrated program offering that can drive both quality and retention of current educators. The findings confirmed both goals and uncovered additional insight through key interviews that the community created can potentially drive great industry value and likely further reduce attrition all while bolstering the quality of educators in the field.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this project (including key funders), spoke about the drivers of attrition in the early childhood industry as primarily pay. Mentors, directors, and faculty interviewed all substantiated that pay is a significant pain point among educators though many further voiced that burnout and lack of industry respect (as educators) were two other main drivers against retention. In fact, most of those interviewed spoke more so about the negative impact of lack of respect as a stronger driver of attrition than pay. As one mentor said,

People do not enter early childhood education expecting high pay – it’s the lack of respect that they are somehow glorified babysitters that drives so much dissatisfaction. This program [the ECMN] helps legitimize us.

Findings from this report highlight (among mentors, directors, and faculty interviewed) that the mentor network not only provided high quality programming and increased job related skills but further that the ECMN greatly acts as a buffering agent against the pressures that drive attrition by supporting and facilitating better educators in their practice, providing better peer support, and facilitating better respect.

ECMN as a Buffering Factor: Better Educators

Interviewees spoke about the great value of the ECMN in promoting job-related skills and abilities. Mentors, directors, faculty, and students spoke at length that the ECMN
prepared both the mentor and the mentee to be effective educators and that it supported educators in refining their practice. Further, others spoke about the value in preparing educators (current and future) for the challenges of classroom management, peer support, parent management/communication, and various other educational literacy components. These opinions highlight a common belief that by driving the quality of the education, in turn, the program drives the quality of the educator and potentially the corresponding ability (and/or interest of that educator) in remaining in the industry.

The interviewees discussed that not only does the program support educators through improved skills preparation, but also perspective. Mentors and directors spoke about the shift from job towards career in the early childhood industry (which buffers against the respect challenges). They highlighted that many of their peers entered the field without an understanding of the realities of being an educator. Through the program content, meetings, and mentoring, there was a reported shift in perception from temporary job to career – mentors demonstrated to students the rewards of being an educator and what success could look like. As one mentor said,

| You can feel the energy in a classroom that is running smoothly and when the teacher has a passion for education. It is a certain type of learning environment and one that rubs off on others around you. |

This shared sense of value drives a shared sense of purpose. Interviewees spoke about this as a core buffer against the struggles that educators face in attempting to build respect within their practice and in the industry. As a faculty said, the ECMN drives the “evolution” within the industry in terms of building new standards for training and education both for continuing education and as preparation for new educators.

**ECMN as a Buffering Factor: Better Respect**

A common thread found among those interviewed was the lack of perceived respect as educators. Many of those interviewed spoke about leaving early childhood education to become elementary educators because of the high(er) perceived value in that field. This lack of respect from other non–early childhood educators and parents was internalized by many of those interviewed. There was a strong sense that both new and existing educators misunderstand their own field and the value they provide to students as much as potentially those on the outside. Mentors spoke about educators that are hired having come without formal early childhood education and/or programmatic training who in many cases are not looking at the profession as a career. This was discussed as a negative
influence on the industry overall as it furthers incorrect beliefs about the intensity and value of early childhood education.

Counter to this, mentors spoke about the enormous impact that the ECMN has had on their own perception as well as peers in creating a positive and legitimizing value position for early childhood education. Many interviewed discussed how better educated college students fosters better equipped educators both in terms of actual quality and also perceive value from those on the outside. There was a cyclical element discussed to the program in that by creating a model that supports educators and builds a community of peers, it can drive both an internal and perceived sense of legitimacy. As one mentor said,

- The sense of legitimacy is sorely lacking. Its not that we are not legitimate, just that we see ourselves in a way different than we should. Being part of a professional community makes people feel as though we are doing something valuable.

This sense of value was seen across all ECMN program elements with greatest emphasis on the in person components: the meetings and the mentor community. Interviewees spoke about the direct mentoring of college students as a way to “practice what they are learning” but the professionalism (and in turn internalized respect) as driven by the community. As the goal of the program is (in part) to drive retention of educators, perception of value among mentors is as significant to the program as tangible outcomes such as training or pay, if it similarly reduces attrition.

**ECMN as a Buffering Factor: Better Support**

The third buffering factor provided by the ECMN is that of support to current educators. Beyond pay and respect, support is key in the industry as the challenges to being an early childhood educator are significant and ongoing. It is hard work without strong external respect which compounds the struggles that educators face. As one interviewee said,

- You really have to love it to stay since most things are working against you.

Mentors, faculty, and directors spoke about the ECMN as providing that lacking element of support. It has provided a way for current educators to learn from one another and support one another. One mentor said,
Social workers and mental health professionals have various groups to support them. Other teachers have associations and groups that they rely on for help. We need that same thing. If we want to be taken seriously and increase pay, long-term, we need things like this.

Beyond the professionalism that it sparks, the supportive community brings collaboration. Many spoke about the silos that exist within early childhood education. There are not mechanisms to share practices, discuss practice habits, and learn from peers. The ECMN in that sense, drives and facilitates stronger skills, professionalism, as well as shared learning and collaboration.

Through this multipronged value as a workforce development program, the ECMN acts as a buffer against the critical elements that contribute to educator attrition. This builds credibility both among those in the industry supporting internalized value among current and future educators as well as externally from other educators, parents, stakeholders, and ultimately programmatic sponsors.

**Spread and Scale**

It is intended that the ECMN spread and scale the workforce development program beyond the central New Mexico community across the state as a value to all early childhood educators. To achieve this scale, the ECMN plans to create a train-the-trainer program coupled with virtual learning opportunities and hub communities to leverage existing mentors and local capacity as a mechanism to support other educators outside of the central ECMN program office. Further by leveraging existing mentors and a collaborative and supportive infrastructure, the Program can bolster the professional community of early childhood educators thus improving the value.

**Recommendations**

This report highlights qualitative and quantitative findings from the program evaluation. Notably, the qualitative findings highlight more salient value in building a strong case for the program to expand in scope and size. The following recommendations reflect these themes provided by mentors, students, directors, and faculty.

1. **Community is Imperative.** This report and interviews conducted emphasize the immense value of the community created through the ECMN. There is significant (and necessary) attention paid to increasing pay among early childhood educators, while in addition, there could be significant value found in building up a stronger
early childhood educator community as a buffer against some of the inherent challenges in the industry. This may have a stronger return and impact.

2. **Expand Programming and Resources.** To achieve a broader community, there needs to be more resources spent on the Program to enhance the value to educators as workforce development model. Mentors spoke about the desire to have more programming, more training, and more opportunity for collaboration and then putting these learnings to practice through mentorship. Greater resourcing can expand the value and provide more training to in turn provide more practicum sites to students staffed by mentors.

3. **Build a Critical Mass Over Time.** By devoting more resources to the ECMN, it is anticipated that there would be in turn a pipeline of better-prepared future educators. Recognizing that to foster a professional community, it requires a critical mass of engaged members over a long period of time, the ECMN should be seen as a long-term value to the profession in the state of New Mexico. Resourcing for the ECMN should be provided not just as a temporal fix for workforce development, but in a lasting way to create a professional community that can improve the quality of education delivered. This in turn can bolster the industry driving respect and legitimacy.

4. **Communicate the Value.** The great value of the ECMN and its goals should be communicated externally to educators and parents alike. The accurate value of early childhood educators and the role of the professional community created by the ECMN can deconstruct negative stereotypes and strengthen the overall industry.

5. **Compensation is Critical.** As the ECMN helps escalate the industry, there is increasing need to improve compensation for early childhood educators. Corresponding to the growth in the professionalism of the industry and the retention of quality educators, early childhood education stakeholders should see this as an opportunity to bolster initiatives to increase compensation for educators. This will continue to sustain the momentum of the ECMN and its value to current and future educators and children.
Figure 3

Differences
Cooperating Teacher vs. Gear 1 Mentors (Statistically Significant)
I will likely continue serving as a mentor for practicum students.
I enjoy serving as a mentor for practicum students.
I have new leadership skills as a result of the ECMN.
I feel as though this program has prepared me to be a mentor to practicum students.
I find value in the mentor meetings.
I find value in the online classes.
I have a strong understanding of how adults learn.
I know how to model classroom management for a practicum student in my classroom.
The ECMN content (meetings, online course, etc.) has positively impacted my role as an early
I have skills now that I did not have before the ECMN program.
There are specific new skills and behaviors I have incorporated into my teaching style as a
I can support practicum students on how to encourage young children’s creative
I can mentor practicum students on how to develop warm family–teacher relationships.
I can support students with understanding current research and evidence-based practices
I can provide guidance, support, professional development, and mentoring to practicum
I have the tools and knowledge to teach practicum students how to be effective
I feel more valued as a professional educator after having participated in the ECMN.
I model a positive attitude in the workplace.
I see myself as a teacher leader.
I believe I can act as a coach and mentor to other teachers.
I feel as though being a mentor helps me be a better educator.
I believe I have the necessary skills to grow in my career.
I believe that my mentorship was a positive experience for the practicum student.
I believe that mentoring practicum students was a positive experience for me.
I have the job I want.
I hope to continue as an early childhood educator.
I anticipate leaving the early childhood field in the next 6 months.

Figure 4
Gear 1 Mentor (average 4.56 without final data point)
I will likely continue having CNM practicum students placed in my classroom.
I enjoy having CNM practicum students in my classroom.
I have a strong understanding of how adults learn.
I know how to model classroom management for a practicum student in my classroom.
I can support practicum students on how to encourage young children’s creative expression, including creative play.
I can mentor practicum students on how to develop warm family–teacher relationships.
I can support students with understanding current research and evidence-based practices for early childhood education.
I can provide guidance, support, professional development, and mentoring to practicum students.
I have the tools and knowledge to teach practicum students how to be effective educators.
I feel valued as a professional educator.
I model a positive attitude in the workplace.
I see myself as a teacher leader.
I feel as though I have learned new skills through mentoring CNM practicum students.
I feel as though mentoring CNM practicum students in my classroom has helped me be a better educator.
I believe I can supervise other teachers.
I feel as though having CNM practicum students in my classroom was a positive experience for my early students.
I feel as though mentoring CNM practicum students was a positive experience for me.
I have the job I want.
I believe I have the necessary skills to grow in my current career.
I hope to continue as an early childhood educator.
I anticipate leaving the early childhood industry in the next 6 months.
I have implemented what I learned through the ECNN at my institution. I think it’s worthwhile that I participate in the ECNN, and I engage differently with my participating staff now than they were when I participated in the early childhood workforce. My participating staff are better able to provide support to other teachers. There are specific new skills that the participating staff need to have. My participating staff want to continue to be mentors to my early students.

The ECNN content (meetings, workshops, etc.) has been very helpful to my participating staff. I believe that my participating staff have improved their practice. The ECNN provided new information to the online course, etc. My participating staff learned new information from the ECNN. My participating staff learned new information from the online course, etc. I will recommend to other directors that their staff recommend the ECNN.