

**Hillsborough Early Learning Network:  
Evaluation Report, Year 1 Pilot  
(2018-2019)**

**University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning  
and Yale Child Study Center**

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## Overview

In Florida, there are approximately 1.2 million children under age five, with over 300,000 living below the federal poverty line. The first years of life are critical in building the emotional and cognitive foundations for future success, with children requiring exposure to rich, stimulating environments to ensure optimal learning and development. Up to 800,000 young children need child care daily, yet fewer than half of children in Florida have access to quality environments that foster growth of the skills needed to succeed ([www.earlylearningflorida.com](http://www.earlylearningflorida.com)).

The University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning has created significant positive impact on program quality (Rodgers et al., 2016, 2017) through the Early Learning Florida professional development system, which includes blended, competency-based professional development opportunities for teachers and directors, a rigorous early childhood coaching certification, communities of practice (CoP) facilitator training, and leadership development training. This systems-reform strategy has been implemented through broad partnerships across Florida and has had a dramatic impact on early childhood practice in the state. An evaluation on this innovative program, with Yale University as evaluation consultants, has provided evidence of the link between quality job-embedded professional development, improved teacher-child interactions and improved child outcomes (O’Keefe, 2017; Rodgers et al., 2017).

Based on these results, the Vinik Family Foundation and the Helios Education Foundation has provided a significant investment to bring the Early Learning Florida professional development system to the Tampa area, and build, implement, and evaluate a national prototype of early childhood professional development that will transform the practice of teachers and child outcomes in Hillsborough County. The Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) is designed to demonstrate the life-changing impacts on child learning and development when the most effective professional learning supports, critical system and policy elements, and strategic partnerships are simultaneously leveraged in one community. The HELN initiative is a systems-wide intervention administered at the provider level (teachers and directors in early childhood centers and family child care homes). These interventions consist of participants engaging in face to face, online and blended professional development and instructional support that are offered by the UF Lastinger Center. Goals for this innovative, community-based partnership included:

***The development of a national prototype professional learning system*** for early childhood educators that provided a comprehensive array of high quality supports, courses, training, coaching, resources and other assistance. This system was built to provide teachers and center directors with personalized, differentiated learning pathways to improve practice and child outcomes.

***The creation and utilization of a custom-developed, state-of-the-art digital platform*** that houses professional development courses, content and resources, an array of virtual supports such as coaching and Communities of Practice, and provides seamless opportunities for connecting with peers in professional networks.

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***The development of collaborative partnerships with families, teachers, directors, and community members through embedded, targeted innovations and collective impact activities that can be scaled,*** intentionally building the skills of directors to be strong managers and instructional leaders, the skills of teachers to create transformative learning experiences for children birth through age five, and create opportunities for families and teachers to come together around how to support the needs of young children in fun and meaningful ways.

***The integration of community structures and supports*** so this initiative is fully integrated into the fabric of early learning organizations in Hillsborough County to ensure a unified approach in Hillsborough County toward quality improvement in early childhood education programs so practitioners consistently experience the best professional development opportunities available.

Based on these goals, this report is a summary of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) year 1 pilot evaluation (2018-2019) lead by researchers from the University of Florida in partnership with Yale University. This evaluation study examines if early learning provider participation in HELN has an effect on participant knowledge gain; change in practices and beliefs; implementation of effective teaching and leadership practices; and improvement in teacher-child interactions.

## Findings Summary



### IMPACT ON PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE GAIN

The results of this evaluation study provided evidence of the following positive outcomes from the HELN year 1 pilot:

- All HELN participants experienced knowledge gain from completing HELN courses, with participant course mastery rates above 50% on average, and pre/post knowledge assessment gains averaging around 30%.
- In program experience surveys, Director participants reported an average gain of 31% in overall knowledge and skills gained in program participation. More importantly, directors in the Spanish language leadership group showed higher improvement of 42% average, compared to directors in the English language group (26%).
- Spanish-speaking participants, which represent an underserved educational population in Hillsborough County, reported the highest mastery rates in courses (over 90%), and the most knowledge gained from pre to post assessment (37%). In addition, Spanish speaking participants spoke of transformational changes to their educational beliefs and practices from participating in HELN.



### IMPACT ON TEACHER AND DIRECTOR BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

- Director participants reported gaining knowledge and skills around leadership capacity, collegial and collaborative relationships, and knowledge of practice, with communication strategies learned in HELN professional development determined as most impactful in their daily practice.
- Teacher participants reported gaining knowledge around communication with parents, family engagement, knowledge and skills about health, safety, and nutrition, and professionalism.



## IMPACT ON PROVIDER QUALITY

- The HELN Year 1 provider attrition rate of just over 20% was well below the state average of 40% attrition after one year of participation in state quality improvement initiatives (Rodgers et al., 2018), showing that HELN programmatic implementation and targeted professional development activities resulted in less teacher and provider turnover implementation.



## HELN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IMPROVEMENT

Pilot evaluation results also revealed evidence of the following challenges with HELN year 1 implementation and needs for improvement:

- All participants reported that time was the biggest challenge to participating in HELN year 1. Directors reported struggling with job responsibilities, and course flexibility and deadlines. Teachers reported challenges with balancing course work, job responsibilities, and attending other HELN professional development activities.
- Many HELN participants reported struggling with technology access and capacity needed for HELN participation, including the Lastinger Flamingo Learning Platform, which was in its pilot phase during year 1, as well as MyTeachingStrategies® platform to use Teaching Strategies GOLD. Challenges reported included not being able to access the Flamingo system, “glitches” within courses such as videos that did not play correctly, and course instructor challenges with grading and feedback.
- Implementation challenges reported by stakeholders included lack of planning time and collaboration for Lastinger and other community partners, lack of communication regarding program goals and timelines, and lack of cohesion with other community programs to improve quality and capacity within Hillsborough early learning providers.

## Background: Hillsborough Early Learning Network

The UF Lastinger Center began their early learning work with Hillsborough County in 2014, as part of a state quality improvement initiative with Lastinger’s signature early learning professional development system, Early Learning Florida, to provide high quality professional development opportunities to early learning educators in the area. In partnership with Hillsborough County’s Early Learning Coalition and Hillsborough County Public Schools, the Lastinger Center facilitated two coaching cohorts and two Community of Practice (CoP) cohorts in the Tampa area. The coaching cohorts provided an avenue to prepare a new cadre of certified early learning coaches to support local practitioners, while CoPs provided the opportunity for practitioners to collaborate with peers to reflect on course content, applied strategies, and data through discussions and protocols guided by UF certified facilitators. As a result of this program, over 20 new early childhood coaches became certified that year, with an additional cohort added in 2015-2016.

To support the ongoing implementation of Early Learning Florida work in the county, representatives from the UF Lastinger Center and key stakeholders from Hillsborough County, including ELC leadership and coaches, met regularly to share experiences, confirm the reliability of certified coaches practice over time, and better understand the early learning needs in the community. From this work, the Hillsborough Early Learning Network evolved to connect early learning educators with high-impact trainings, coaching, career advancement opportunities, and a learning community that provides targeted support for their work with young children.

## CONTEXT: CURRENT EARLY LEARNING DEMOGRAPHICS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

The total population for the zip codes currently served within HELN is approximately 520,000 with approximately 31,804 children between the ages of 0 - 5. The current enrollment number for early childhood programs (programs before kindergarten) is 6,403. The ethnic demographics range significantly between zip codes. As an example, the highest percentage of each ethnic group in a few of the zip codes served is reflected in Table 1.

ZIP CODE	% WHITE, NON-HISPANIC	% HISPANIC	% BLACK	% OTHER
33614	23.7	62.5	11.6	2.2
33549	67.7	18.6	8.6	3.1
33605	16.3	27.3	55.7	0.7
33511	49.5	25.8	17.3	7.4

Table 1. Ethnic demographics in HELN sample zip codes\*

\*Demographic data (2017) retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-profiles/2017/>

\*Child care data (2019) retrieved from: <https://childcarecenter.us/>

Similar to the ethnic composition of each zip code, significant differences are observed between regions. Approximately 30% of the population served by HELN participants speaks a language other than English at home and 17.7% of the population was born in a foreign country. The highest and lowest rates of English spoken at home across the communities served by HELN participants are included in the Table 2.

ZIP CODE	% SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME	% SPANISH SPEAKING	% OTHER LANGUAGE	% FOREIGN BORN
33614	60.6	55.9	4.7	38.6
33596	14.4	9.2	5.2	9.8

Table 2. Percentage of English spoken in homes served by HELN providers\*

Mobility data included reflects the rate at which households move outside of their zip code within a given calendar year. Overall, considering mobility for children is important as high mobility rates can result in disruptions in care, mobility rates were fairly uniform between zip codes, with the percent of people living in the same residence as the previous year ranging from 74.6% - 89.3%. This mobility rate is helpful to the project's learning as we are better able to track children's learning and development data throughout the initiative's duration. The education rates for members of each zip code over the age of 25 are also illuminating. Research shows that the children of parents with higher levels of education also tend to complete more schooling. The highest and lowest rates for achieving these educational milestones are included in Table 3.

ZIP CODE	% OF THE POPULATION WHO GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL	% OF THE POPULATION WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER
33596	96.2	45.2
33602	91.4	53.2
33619	76.3	15.5

Table 3. Education milestones in HELN population\*

The median income for the communities currently served by HELN is \$49,355. The median income by zip codes range from \$26,121 to \$96,297. For this analysis, a closer look at the rates of poverty and other indicators that could adversely affect children, including the percent of people living below poverty, the percent of children living below poverty, the percent of households receiving government assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the percent of children under 19 with no health insurance was done. The regions with the most contrast are provided in Table 4 to illustrate the diversity of population served by HELN participants.

\*Demographic data (2017) retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-profiles/2017/>

\*Child care data (2019) retrieved from: <https://childcarecenter.us/>

ZIP CODE	% HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP	% PEOPLE BELOW POVERTY	% CHILDREN BELOW POVERTY	MEDIAN INCOME
33605	39.8	36.6	56.8	\$26,121
33596	3.1	4.1	4	\$96,297

Table 4. Financial indicators and poverty rates for HELN areas\*

There is a total of 361 Early Childhood Care Centers and 337 Family Childcare Homes in the HELN network regions. The childcare providers range in size significantly, from under 10 students to over 100 students. There is also a range in concentration of centers between zip codes. Zip codes with the highest and lowest number of child care options are included in the Table 5.

ZIP CODE	EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS	FAMILY CHILDCARE HOMES
33615	41	45
33543	7	1

Table 5. Zip codes with highest and lowest number of child care centers\*

## Study Methodology

The Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) evaluation is a research study lead by researchers from the University of Florida in partnership with Yale University. This evaluation study examines if early learning provider participation in the Hillsborough Early Learning Network has an effect on participant knowledge gain; change in practices and beliefs; implementation of effective teaching and leadership practices; and improvement in teacher-child interactions.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework that informed the research design for this study is based on research of quality early childhood educational settings; the examination between provider quality and improvement in child outcomes; synthesis reports on the current state of early childhood professional development; and research on core theories of action to produce teacher change in practice and improve children's learning. The theory of change includes a number of assumptions based on existing research (See Appendix B for detailed research that supports these assumptions.)

\*Demographic data (2017) retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-profiles/2017/>

\*Child care data (2019) retrieved from: <https://childcarecenter.us/>

## LOGIC MODEL

Based on the stated goals of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network, the following logic model (see Figure 1) summarizes inputs, professional development interventions, short term outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and overall impact of the HELN initiative.

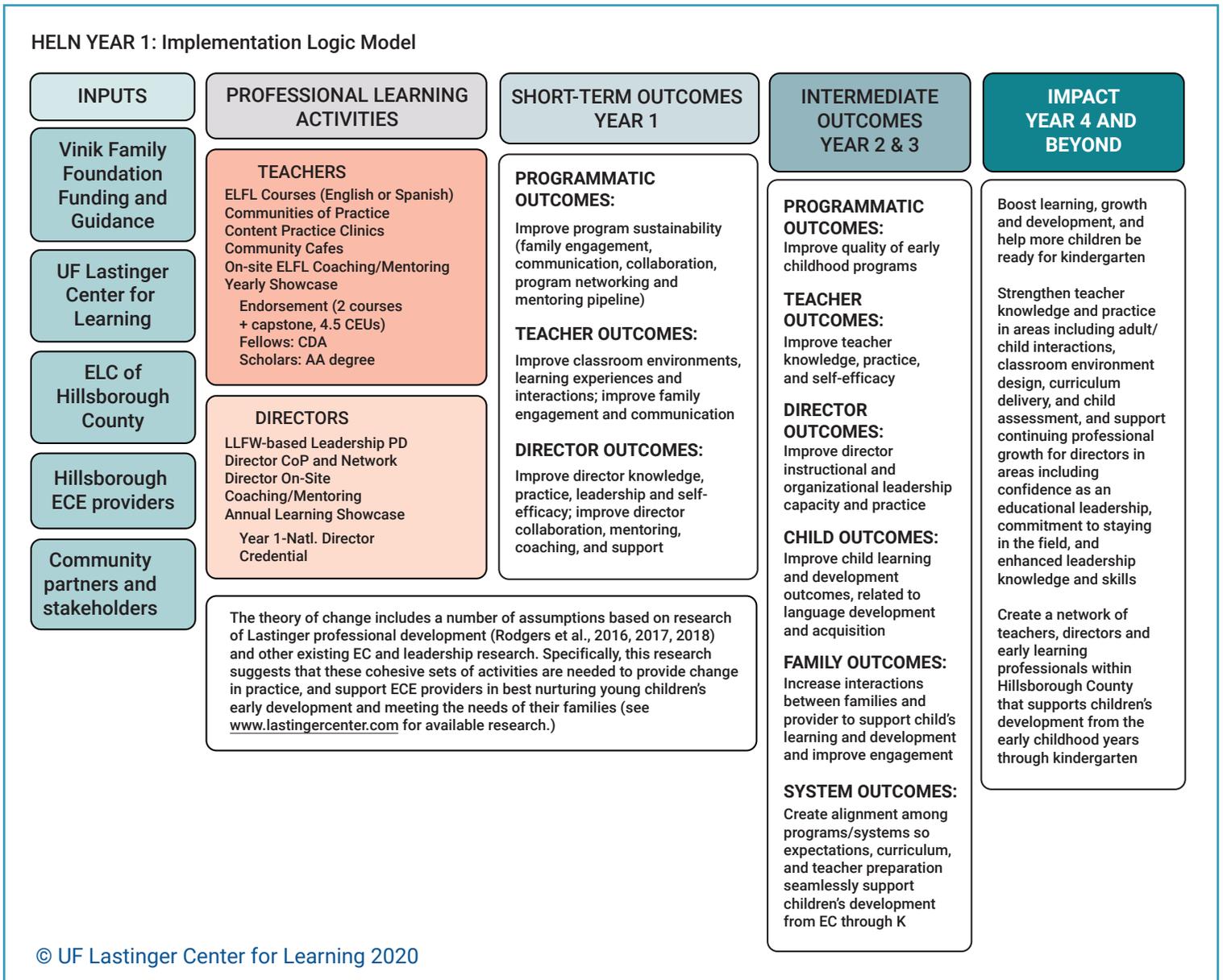


Figure 1. Hillsborough Early Learning Network Logic Model

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTIONS FOR YEAR 1 PILOT (2018-2019)

Due to several challenges with initial recruitment and retention of providers, the following shifts in Year 1 logic model and evaluation design occurred:

- Due to the shift from full implementation to pilot status for 2018-2019, baseline CLASS assessments were collected for all HELN year 1 providers, in order to show provider quality growth in year 2. CLASS® scores for the majority of providers were obtained from the Early Learning Coalition in the fall of 2018 as a result of participation in other quality initiatives (ELPFP or School Readiness), and thus, no post-scores were collected to examine overall program improvement during year 1.
- HELN year 1 providers were provided licenses, technical assistance and access to the Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD) child assessment tool, but were not accountable for providing child observation data for the Y1 evaluation due to practitioners' lack of knowledge, capacity, and challenges with assessment system technology. During this pilot, Teaching Strategies introduced a new online platform (MyTeachingStrategies), and thus, providers required extensive training and practice with this new tool. Therefore, HELN providers implemented GOLD in year 1 as a "practice year," in which teachers and directors learned the system through targeted coaching by HELN instructional specialists, and practiced completing and uploading observations in the online GOLD system to achieve fidelity of implementation. Thus, there was no child outcome data for analysis in this pilot evaluation.
- The HELN evaluation originally called for a pure research design comparing control and treatment provider groups to understand growth from HELN interventions. However, due to the existence of multiple early learning professional development and quality improvement programs in addition to HELN within the Hillsborough community, no control group providers were available.

Based on these shifts in research design, the following questions were used to understand this pilot investigation:

1. What is the impact on teachers' knowledge from participation in online professional development courses as assessed by course pre and post knowledge assessments, completion and mastery rates?
2. What are HELN participants perceptions of intervention implementation quality and benefits, and challenges of participation?
3. What are lessons learned from the Year 1 HELN Pilot implementation with regard to program design, delivery, and impact?

To impact significant change in program quality, an integrated system of professional development interventions and resources were implemented to support transformational change in teacher and leadership practice. Interventions included face to face, online and blended professional development both at the teacher and director level provided by the UF Lastinger Center instructional specialists,

and coaching provided by UF Lastinger Certified Early Learning Coaches based at the Hillsborough ELC. Teachers followed one of two sequences that aligned with their current child population (Infant/Toddler or Preschool), and directors participated in the Lastinger Instructional Leadership Program. These interventions are described in the following section:

**Early Learning Florida (ELFL) courses:** Participants engaged in two Early Learning Florida courses during the year 1 implementation. These competency-based, online and blended professional learning courses are aligned with Florida state standards, CLASS® domains, Head Start standards, NAEYC standards, and Florida's core early learning competencies. Successful course completion (80% score overall) results in earning IACET Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The first course cycle ran from January through March of 2019, with cycle two launching in early April and concluding in late May/June, 2019.

To accommodate dual language learners within the program, translated versions of courses were available for teachers in Spanish (Designing Infant/Toddler Learning Environments; Supporting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers; Using Observation to Inform Individualized Instruction in Preschool) or courses in English with Spanish subtitles (Preschool Health, Safety, and Nutrition; Health, Safety, and Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers). For directors, ELFL courses in the Instructional Leadership Program were also offered in English, with the option of taking English courses with a Spanish speaking instructor (See Table 6 below for a complete list of Early Learning Florida courses and enrollment for HELN Year 1).

**Content practice clinics:** Teachers and directors had the opportunity to engage in three subject-specific interactive professional development sessions called content clinics. Each in-person session took place at the Hillsborough Early Learning Coalition on a weekday evening and was designed to guide participants through strategies that that would connect with their coursework and provide further support. Due to low attendance rates, the first content clinic was cancelled (Social-Emotional Development, March, 2019). The second clinic, Family Engagement, occurred in late April had improved attendance. The third content clinic, which was facilitated by the Early Childhood Council and focused on trauma informed care, was also available in Spanish, and was the most attended clinic with 20 participants.

**Coaching supports:** Working in partnership with the Hillsborough ELC, a team of five UF Lastinger Certified Coaches were deployed to provide on-site implementation support, technical assistance, and coaching to teachers and directors to transform teacher practice through evidence-based, discussion-driven strategies. Coaches made regular monthly visits to HELN providers during which they provided: technical assistance for practitioners to gain access and navigate the ELFL courses; instructional coaching and modeling; and support around Teaching Strategies GOLD implementation.

**Access to Quick Teaching Tips:** As part of the HELN early learning online platform (Flamingo), teachers had access to hundreds of short videos (approx. 3-5 minutes) demonstrating strategies for teachers of birth-5 years old-across all domains of children's development. Each video is narrated by an expert early learning instructor to call attention to specific techniques that the teacher or caregiver is using and an explanation of its importance in child outcomes by development.

**Vinik Fellows guided support:** Participants were provided the opportunity to complete their Child Development Associate (CDA) degree, considered the most commonly earned credential in early childhood education and the first step in education and career advancement within the profession. This group of participants, dubbed Vinik Fellows, were provided with guided support by Lastinger Instructional Specialists in completing the credential to ensure success.

**Instructional Leadership Program:** Program directors participated in a year-long program designed to improve instructional and organizational leadership capacity. Beginning with a kickoff event in February to establish collegial relationships and provide a framework around directors' professional learning, participants engaged in multiple collaborative activities with peers and facilitators to learn target skills for how they can support and improve teacher practice in ways that directly lead to improved instructional and child developmental outcomes. Over the course of the program, directors completed two ELFL courses (Professionalism; Effective Operations) which also included four online Communities of Practice virtual meetings; five on-site coaching support visits by an ELC coach, and five face-to-face sessions facilitated UF Lastinger Leadership Coordinators at an off-site location.

**The Early Childhood Leadership Capstone Project:**

Directors who completed the Leadership Development Course (Professionalism and Effective Operations courses) had the option to complete the capstone project. The capstone project consists of providing reflection, evidence, and examination of growth as an early childhood leader. It includes evidence of implementation of the tools, skills, and leadership dispositions that are consistent with the professional development provided by Lastinger.

**Annual HELN Learning Showcase:** All participants were invited to attend the HELN annual learning showcase in August, 2019 to share their learning and experiences through courses, trainings, and other professional development with peers as well as local, state, and national stakeholders. One director and one teacher from each participating program from year 1 were invited to attend, as well as providers who were interested in participating in year 2. Facilitated in both English and Spanish, this showcase engaged participants at all levels in collaborative activities to reflect on their learning, celebrate their achievements as a group, further articulate their professional goals, and envision a career pathway for success, with over 50 participants in attendance.

ELFL COURSES	COURSE ID	ENGLISH	SPANISH	TOTAL
Designing Infant and Toddler Learning Environments	ITLE	19		19
Diseñando Entornos de Aprendizaje para Bebés y Niños Pequeños	ITLES		7	7
Effective Operations in Early Care and Education	ECOECE	15	1	16
Effective Operations in Early Care and Education (Spanish Closed Captions)	ECOECES		8	8
Infant Toddler Health, Safety, and Nutrition	ITHSN	20	8	28
Preschool Growth and Development: Maximizing Learning Experiences	PGD	16	1	17
Preschool Health, Safety, and Nutrition	PHSN	22	9	31
Professionalism in Early Childhood Education	PECE	18	10	28
Utilizando Observaciones para Informar el Cuidado y la Enseñanza Individualizada de Niños Preescolares	PKOS		6	6

Table 6. HELN Year 1 Early Learning Courses and enrollment

## DATA SOURCES, INSTRUMENTS AND COLLECTION

The following quantitative and qualitative measures were used to investigate the HELN year 1 pilot evaluation research questions:

**Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®):** CLASS® measures the quality of teacher-child interactions. CLASS® pre- and post- observations assessed the quality of classroom interactions. CLASS® differs from other program quality measurement tools that focus on the content of the physical environment, available materials, or a specific curriculum. For CLASS®, the physical environment (including materials) and curriculum matter in the context of how teachers put them to use in their interactions with children. The CLASS® observation tool is organized to assess two or three broad domains of interactions among teachers and children, depending on which age group is assessed. The Infant CLASS® tool measures the Responsive Caregiving domain; the Toddler CLASS® tool measures Emotional/Behavioral Support and Engaged Support for Learning domains.

The Pre-K CLASS® tool is divided into three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each of these domains contains specific dimensions that examine classroom interactions. Within the Emotional Support Domain, dimensions include positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspective. Within the Classroom Organization domain, dimensions include behavior management, productivity, and instructional

learning formats. Within the Instructional Support domain, dimensions include concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling (Teachstone, 2016).

The Toddler CLASS® tool is divided into two domains: Emotional and Behavioral Support, and Engaged Support for Learning. Each domain is divided into dimensions that examine classroom interactions. Within the Emotional and Behavioral Support, dimensions include positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for child perspectives, and behavior guidance. Within the Engaged Support for Learning domain, dimensions include facilitation of learning and development, quality of feedback, and language modelling (Teachstone, 2016).

HELN network programs were required to have CLASS® observations between August and October, 2018 to establish a baseline of teacher-child interaction and program quality, and then have continued CLASS® observations for the duration of their participation (pre/posts for Year 2 and Year 3). For year 1, observations were performed by both external ELC and UF assessors.

**Teaching Strategies GOLD® child observations and assessments:** Teaching Strategies GOLD® combines authentic observational assessment with performance tasks for selected objectives in literacy and numeracy. It can be used with any developmentally appropriate curriculum and is available in toolkit form and online. The online version can aggregate data for groups of children at the class, program, site, or district or coalition level. According to recent research (Heroman et al., 2010; Lambert, Taylor & McGee, 2010), this system has been found to yield highly reliable scores and teachers are able to make valid ratings of the developmental progress of children. The purpose of the instrument is to assist teachers in planning appropriate experiences, individualizing instruction, and monitoring and communicating child progress to families and other stakeholders. The measure is intended to be inclusive of ELLs (English language learners) and children with disabilities as well as typically developing children and those who demonstrate competencies beyond developmental expectations. For HELN Year 1 implementation, providers were given access and technical assistance to implement the GOLD tool, and completed a practice year learning the system, performing sample observations, and understanding the complex online platform in order to achieve fidelity of implementation. No child observation data was analyzed for this year 1 evaluation.

**Early Learning Florida course knowledge assessments:** The direct effect of professional development on teacher knowledge was measured with a pre- and post-knowledge assessment embedded in each Early Learning Florida course. These knowledge assessments evaluate the teacher's knowledge with respect to the standards of early childhood education knowledge and course content and objectives. Each course contained between eighteen and twenty-four multiple choice questions. The same test was administered at during the introduction cycle of each course, and again as the final course cycle. HELN participants completed two courses, from January-March, 2019, and from March-June, 2019, and thus completed two cycles of pre/post course knowledge assessments for this evaluation.

**HELN participant experience surveys:** Participants in HELN year 1 completed a post-program experience survey after successfully completing the HELN year 1 program. This outgoing survey measured perceived value of learning experiences and impact on teacher learning, practice, and program quality, and offered data for triangulation with qualitative interviews in providing depth and value of participant experience. Surveys were created for director and teacher participants, and were available in Spanish or English. Because some family child care owners chose to complete teacher Early Learning Florida courses, these director/owners completed the teacher survey.

- The director survey consisted of three sections: section one required directors to rate their knowledge and skills before and after HELN year 1 program based on a five-point Likert scale with one and five indicating the lowest and the highest amount of knowledge and skills, respectively; section two of the director survey contained open-ended questions about their experience and perceptions to this program; and section three was designed for directors who have taken teacher courses and contained Likert-scale questions asking about their knowledge and skills before and after HELN year 1 program and open-ended questions about their experience with the courses.
- The teacher survey consisted of two sections: section one contained questions about changes in teachers' knowledge and skills before and after HELN year 1 program on five-point Likert scale; and section two consisted of open-ended questions asking about their experience and perceptions of the HELN program.

Survey design was created following Desimone's (2009) model for evaluating professional development, and surveys were given at the participants' convenience in written form. Surveys were administered to all year 1 participants in October, 2019.

**Qualitative interviews and focus groups:** In May, 2019, all HELN providers who were in the process of completing the year 1 HELN program were identified and selected for individual and focus group interviews with criterion sampling (Glesne, 2006), which required that participants had successfully completed their first ELFL course, and were in the process of completing their second course and capstone projects. Participant recruitment emails were sent to all programs and participants were registered on a first-come, first-serve basis for in-person qualitative interviews, which were completed in June, 2019. 21 year 1 participants were interviewed by UF research staff, of which eight interviews were completed in Spanish. In addition, focus groups of stakeholders, including three early learning community leaders, and seven members of the UF HELN implementation team (coordinators, coaches, instructors, and PD facilitators) were completed in order to provide a systems' perspective of implementation of the year 1 program. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, and all recordings were destroyed per UF IRB policy of confidentiality.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### CLASS® assessments

Provider baseline quality was assessed based on CLASS® assessments collected by ELC assessors, and was quantified based on a composite score. Calculation of this composite score was guided by the definition from Florida's Office of Early Learning (Florida Office of Early Learning, 2019) which uses the following metric:

$$\text{Composite} = \frac{\text{Sum of ratings over assessment cycles across classrooms}}{\text{No. of items over assessment cycles across classrooms}}$$

where the ratings of negative climate were excluded from the calculation.

### Course knowledge assessments

The analysis related to ELFL courses was based on rich descriptive statistics and consisted of the percentage of HELN year 1 practitioners shown mastery on ELFL courses and the mean scores of pre- and post-assessment and the related percentage of knowledge gain for respective courses.

### Participant experience surveys

Due to participants completing surveys in writing, researchers scanned surveys, and then created de-identified tables of survey answers to be analyzed. In order to understand experiences with and perception of the received training, participant responses were synthesized. Specifically, rich descriptive statistics (frequency of choice for each response category and the associated percentage) and the associated visualization were produced for each survey question. In addition, content analysis was performed on open-ended questions.

### Qualitative interviews and focus groups

Qualitative analysis occurred in three phases using an inductive interpretive analysis approach (Hatch, 2007; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013). After all participant interviews were completed, transcripts from interviews were separated by group (participants, community leaders, and implementation team) and analyzed individually for initial common themes and descriptions according to research questions to determine patterns related to study objectives. Researchers convened to discuss and debate initial thoughts and reflections on participant data and reach consensus on understandings present in this first phase of analysis.

Phase two of analysis consisted of researchers creating condensed codes using data analysis software HyperRESEARCH to code interviews according to research questions. After this second phase, researchers again convened to discuss analysis codes, and further reduced data to salient themes and quotes related to each code. This comprehensive analysis of each participant's entire data set as well as researcher memos ensued repeating these procedures and condensing data into emerging codes and phrases related to this study's objectives. From this data reduction, a third phase of analysis occurred in which case "stories" were written for stakeholder participants to summarize findings from these experiences. These vignettes were member-checked by participants to promote trustworthiness and rigor in research.

### Concurrent triangulation analysis (mixed-methods)

In an effort to fully explore the relationships and phenomenon under study in this evaluation, a triangulation method of research was used by combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to compensate for the weaknesses and blind spots of both research methods (Cresswell, 2003; Flick, 2009). These methods remained autonomous and occurred side by side, with their meeting point being the study objectives of this investigation. Within this study, triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods focused on three categories of sample groups: teachers and directors; Spanish speaking and English speaking practitioners; and family child care homes and child care centers. Once case and group qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed, all data were reduced and analyzed further to explore outcomes in which quantitative and qualitative results converged and confirmed conclusions, were complementary to each other to lead to a fuller picture, and also diverged and provided contradictory evidence. From this triangulation analysis, typologies were developed and linked to the broader study objectives (Flick, 2009).

### PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

Figure 2 displays the geographic locations of Year 1 HELN providers. Participant criteria for year 1 of HELN was based on the following:

1. Programs must be located in the following zip codes: 33602, 33603, 33604, 33605, 33607, 33610, 33614, 33615, or 33634
2. Programs must not be active in ELPFP (Early Learning Performance Funding Program) or other statewide funded initiatives.
3. Community providers must serve at least 10 children during the 2018-2019 school year, and family child care homes must serve at least four children, ranging in age from birth - 5.
4. Programs must be state licensed with no Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) licensing violations.
5. Programs must have both director and teacher participation unless they are a family child care home and the director/owner fulfills both of these roles.

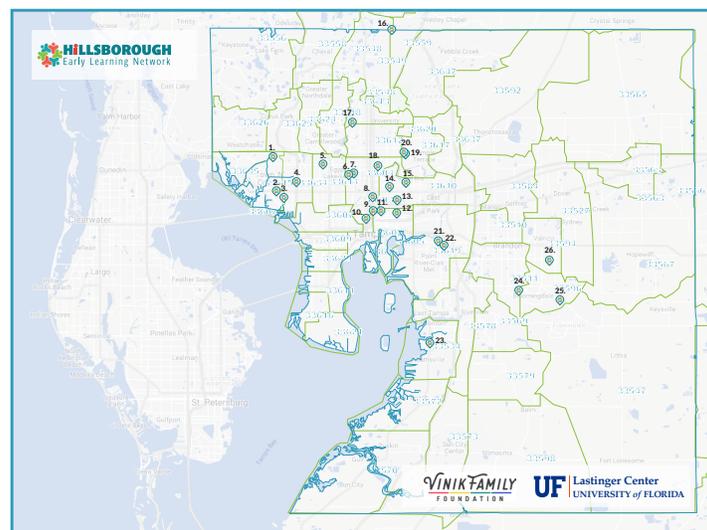


Figure 2. HELN Year 1 provider locations by zip code in Hillsborough County

### **HELN Year 1 Programs**

Beginning in July, 2018, over 40 early learning providers submitted applications to participate in HELN, of which 30 programs were selected and enrolled, which included 16 family child care homes, and 14 child care centers. This representative sample was determined based on statistics from Hillsborough County (Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County, 2018) which showed that approximately 75% of all licensed providers are family child care homes. From August, 2018 to June, 2019, 24 early childhood centers remained active in Hillsborough Early Learning Network, with only a 20% attrition rate which is less than the 40% average attrition rate of other statewide quality improvement initiatives (Rodgers et al., 2018). Across child age groups (including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers), 14 centers reported an enrollment ranging from 4 to 27 children, 4 centers enrolled less than 50 children, and 4 centers enrolled over 50 children.

### **HELN Year 1 Participants**

Based on the enrollment data from year 1 ELFL courses, 87 early childhood practitioners enrolled for nine ELFL courses (six English and three Spanish courses). According to group data, the majority of the practitioners (36%) self-identified as LatinX; 31% self-identified as Black or African American; and 22% self-identified as Caucasian/White. A small number of practitioners reported multi-racial (4%), and about 7% chose to not identify their ethnicity. In addition, 69% of practitioners reported English (69%) as their primary language, and 29% considered themselves Spanish speakers. Of the practitioners who reported Spanish as their primary language, 84% took at least one Spanish version of an ELFL courses (including a pilot hybrid English course with Spanish subtitles).

With regard to participant education levels, 24% of practitioners reported holding a child development associate (CDA) credential, and 17% earned a high school diploma or GED. There were also 24% of the practitioners holding a college or equivalent degree (13% bachelor's degree and 10% associate degree). Additionally, about 3% of participants were graduate degree holders.

### **HELN Year 1 Program CLASS® Quality Levels**

As shown in Table 7, a total of 232 CLASS observations were collected from 58 classrooms from 24 HELN early childcare providers. The number of collected observations varied from 4 to 20, and the CLASS composite scores ranged from 2.63 to 5.32. As a basis of comparison, according to OEL's definition of tiers of provider quality (Florida's Office of Early Learning, 2018), the majority of the HELN providers were considered in the middle to high quality range. On average, the CLASS composite is 4.10 which corresponds to Tier 3 of the OEL's provider quality system. Specifically, there are 17% of the HELN year 1 providers qualified for Tier 4 (4 providers; CLASS composite 5.00-5.99), 42% qualified for Tier 3 (10 providers; CLASS composite 4.00-4.99), 33% qualified for Tier 2 (8 providers; CLASS composite 3.00-3.99), and 8% qualified for Tier 1 (2 providers; CLASS composite 1.00-2.99).

PROVIDER ID	NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS	NUMBER OF CLASS OBSERVATIONS	CLASS COMPOSITE SCORES
1013	1	4	5.32
1018	4	16	5.18
1029	5	20	5.11
1006	4	16	5.07
1016	4	16	4.98
1004	1	4	4.93
1017	2	8	4.64
1001	1	4	4.61
1028	3	12	4.56
1015	4	16	4.15
1002	1	4	4.14
1009	1	4	4.11
1019	1	4	4.11
1027	5	20	4.08
1023	1	4	3.89
1021	3	12	3.78
1005	1	4	3.61
1014	1	4	3.58
1030	3	12	3.48
1012	2	8	3.32
1011	1	4	3.19
1024	4	16	3.08
1022	3	12	2.88
1010	2	8	2.63

Table 7. Number of CLASS observations

## **FINDINGS**

Based on this evaluation study's objectives, researchers used quantitative and qualitative measures to examine if early learning provider participation in the HELN year 1 pilot had an effect on participant knowledge gain; change in practices and beliefs; implementation of effective teaching and leadership practices; and improvement in teacher-child interactions. Results from these measures are presented in the order of research questions.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE FROM PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES AS ASSESSED BY COURSE PRE AND POST KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENTS, COMPLETION AND MASTERY RATES?**

Based on the ELFL course data collected from January to June 2019, Table 8 and 9 were produced to show the percentage of mastery and the average gain in knowledge in HELN year 1 courses. Mastery is determined by practitioners achieving an overall 80% in the course, and completing all the assignments and assessments. Mastery is considered a better indication of overall knowledge gain by practitioners than pre/post knowledge assessments due to the longitudinal calculations of effort throughout the entire course. Participants engage with their instructor and peers in online discussion posts, reflection activities, and strategy planning forms, as well as a final project and post knowledge assessment throughout a course's duration.

According to Table 8, the percentages of mastery varied from 33% to 71% for credential capstone courses, from 56% to 83% for English courses, and from 86% to 100% for Spanish courses. Regardless of the types of ELFL courses, the majority of participants showed a mastery rate higher than 50%. Further, Spanish courses presented a mastery rate close to or above 90%, and was higher relative to the mastery rate on the corresponding English course versions. Given the fact that this is a pilot year for HELN and the Lastinger Flamingo Online Learning Platform, some participants and course instructors experienced difficulty in seeing or updating their grades due to system challenges. Thus, the data below reflects this with impacted participants labeled as 'pending'.

COURSE NAME	MASTERY	NON-MASTERY	PENDING	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF MASTERY
<b>Credential capstone course</b>					
ECLD-CAP	5		2	7	71%
ITF-CAP	2	6	1	6	33%
PKF-CAP	3	1	1	5	60%
<b>English courses</b>					
EOECE	9	7	1	16	56%
ITHSN	24	4	1	29	83%
ITLE	16	3	2	20	80%
PECE	17	9	1	28	61%
PGD	10	6	3	17	59%
PHSN	24	4	3	31	77%
<b>Spanish courses</b>					
EOECES	8			8	100%
ITLES	6		1	7	86%
PKOS	6			6	100%

Table 9. Percentages of HELN year 1 practitioners mastery on ELFL courses

In addition, as shown in Table 10 (and Figure 3), improvement in practitioners' knowledge was observed on all courses based on pre and post knowledge assessment score growth. Knowledge gain is calculated as the percentage of change in mean assessment score relative to the pre assessment score. Accordingly, the magnitude of gain in knowledge varied from 9.75% to 36.38% for English courses, and from 10.31% to 72.45% for Spanish courses, with an average HELN practitioner knowledge assessment gain rate of 29.5%. Specifically, for English courses, Professionalism in Early Childhood Education (director version) presented the greatest improvement in knowledge (36.38%), and for Spanish courses, Effective Operations in Early Childhood Education (director version) presented the greatest improvement in knowledge, with 72.45%.

COURSE NAME	NUMBER OF COURSE USERS		MEAN ASSESSMENT SCORE		KNOWLEDGE GAIN (%)
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
<b>English Course</b>					
EOECE	12	10	63.33	82.67	30.53%
ITHSN	34	48	72.47	84.35	16.39%
ITLE	18	17	66.89	87.76	31.21%
PECE	36	19	55.89	76.22	36.38%
PGD	16	12	64.00	83.33	30.21%
PHSN	32	46	78.13	85.74	9.75%
<b>Spanish courses</b>					
EOECES	8	8	49.00	84.50	72.45%
ITLES	6	6	64.67	71.33	10.31%
PKOS	8	6	55.83	71.67	28.36%

Table 10. Scores on pre and post knowledge assessment for HELN year 1 practitioners.

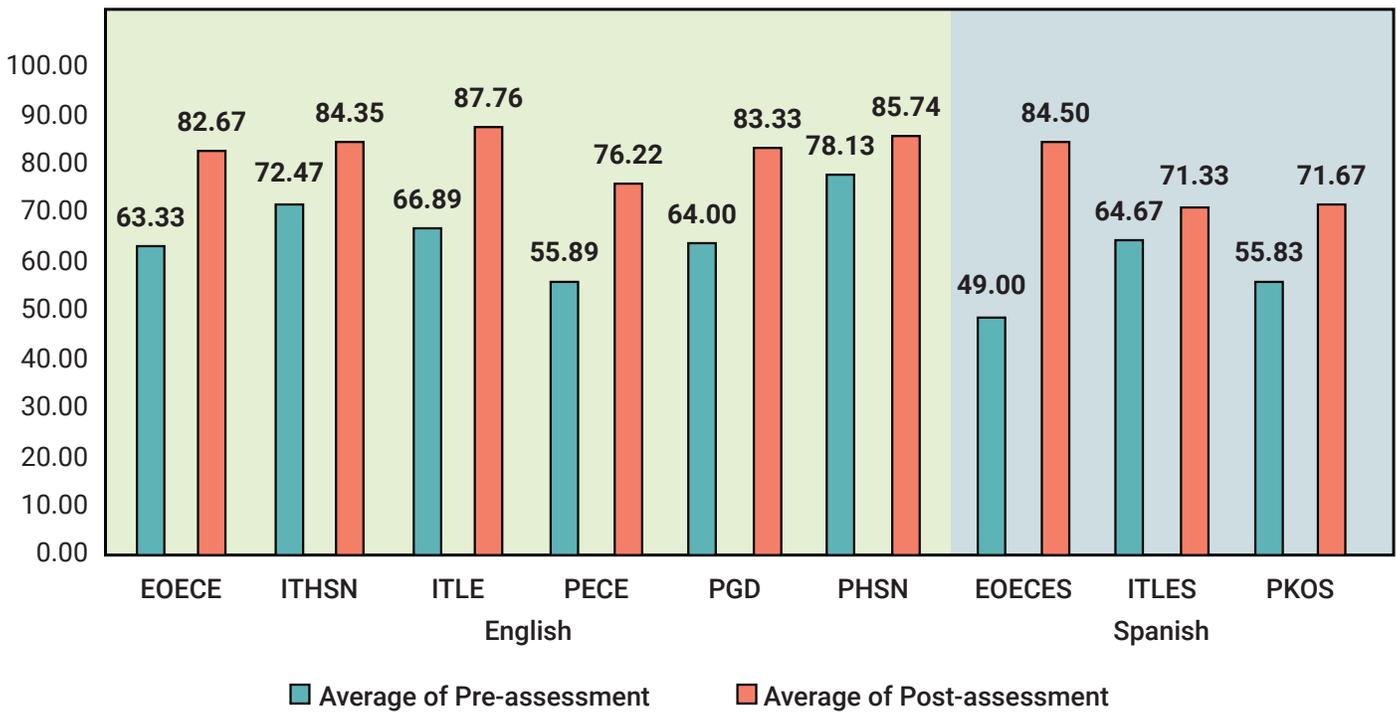


Figure 3. HELN Year 1 pre and post knowledge assessments scores

## RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE HELN PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION QUALITY, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATION?

### Director Participants

#### The HELN Instructional Leadership Program

Based on results from the HELN participant experience surveys completed by directors (see Appendix C for surveys), eighteen directors completed the participant experience survey, which is a 100% response rate. The majority of directors completed the survey in English (67%), and six directors (33%) completed the survey in Spanish.

#### Director knowledge and skills before and after the HELN year 1 program

On the HELN participant experience surveys, directors were asked to rate their knowledge and skill levels before and after participating in the HELN program on nine separate categories covered in the HELN professional development content in the Instructional Leadership program: Professionalism, Leadership, Research and Evaluation, Observations and Assessments, Communication, Knowledge and Application, Advocacy and Ethics, Cultural Responsiveness, and Collaboration.

Based on participants' self-reported data from these surveys (Table 11), directors who participated in Year 1 HELN reported an average score of 3.59 and 4.69 on their overall knowledge and skills before and after their participation in HELN, respectively. This gain corresponds to 30.65% improvement in their overall knowledge and skills from participation. For directors in the English language group, average scores of their overall knowledge and skills are 3.70 before and 4.66 after participation, with a corresponding average gain of 26.03%. More importantly, directors in the Spanish language group reported average scores of their overall knowledge and skills starting at 3.33 and ending with 4.73, showing an average participation gain of 42% improvement.

	AVERAGE SCORE		% GAIN
	Before	After	
All Directors	3.59	4.69	30.65%
English	3.70	4.66	26.03%
Spanish	3.33	4.73	42.00%

Table 11. Change in directors' perceptions of their overall knowledge and skills before and after Year 1 HELN project

As displayed in Table 12, all directors reported positive changes in all domains related their knowledge and skill acquisition after Year 1 HELN participation, with average increments varying from 15.38% for Advocacy and Ethics to 47.92% for Research and Evaluation.

DOMAIN	Before	After	% GAIN
Advocacy and Ethics	4.06	4.69	15.38%
Collaboration	3.88	4.81	24.19%
Communication	3.93	4.80	22.03%
Cultural Responsiveness	3.69	4.63	25.42%
Knowledge and Application	3.38	4.69	38.89%
Leadership	3.13	4.56	46.00%
Observations and Assessments	3.88	4.75	22.35%
Professionalism	3.38	4.81	42.59%
Research and Evaluation	3.00	4.44	47.92%

Table 12. Change in directors' perceptions of their knowledge and skills before and after Year 1 HELN Project

As shown in Table 13 and Figure 4, positive gains were observed for directors in both language groups in the nine knowledge domains that were addressed in program objectives. For directors in the English language group, the percent of gain varies from 15.77% for Observations and Assessments, to 42.86% for the Leadership domain. For directors in the Spanish language group, the increment ranges from 14.29% for Advocacy and Ethics to 144.44% for the domain of Research and Evaluation. For the latter in particular, directors in Spanish language group reported an average score of 1.8 on the Research and Evaluation domain before their participation in Year 1 HELN project, and an average score of 4.4 for post participation on the same domain which is nearly 2.5 times as many as their initial rating. This corresponds to an increment of 2.6 on Spanish directors' knowledge in Research and Evaluation, which is about 1.44 times as many as the initial rating.

Comparing two language groups, directors in English language group displayed more gains in Advocacy and Ethics and Collaboration domains, while directors in the Spanish language group showed more gains on all the domains: Communication, Cultural Responsiveness, Knowledge and Application, Leadership, Observation and Assessment, Professionalism, and Research and Evaluation. Of these, Spanish directors showed the most significant gain in the Research and Evaluation domain.

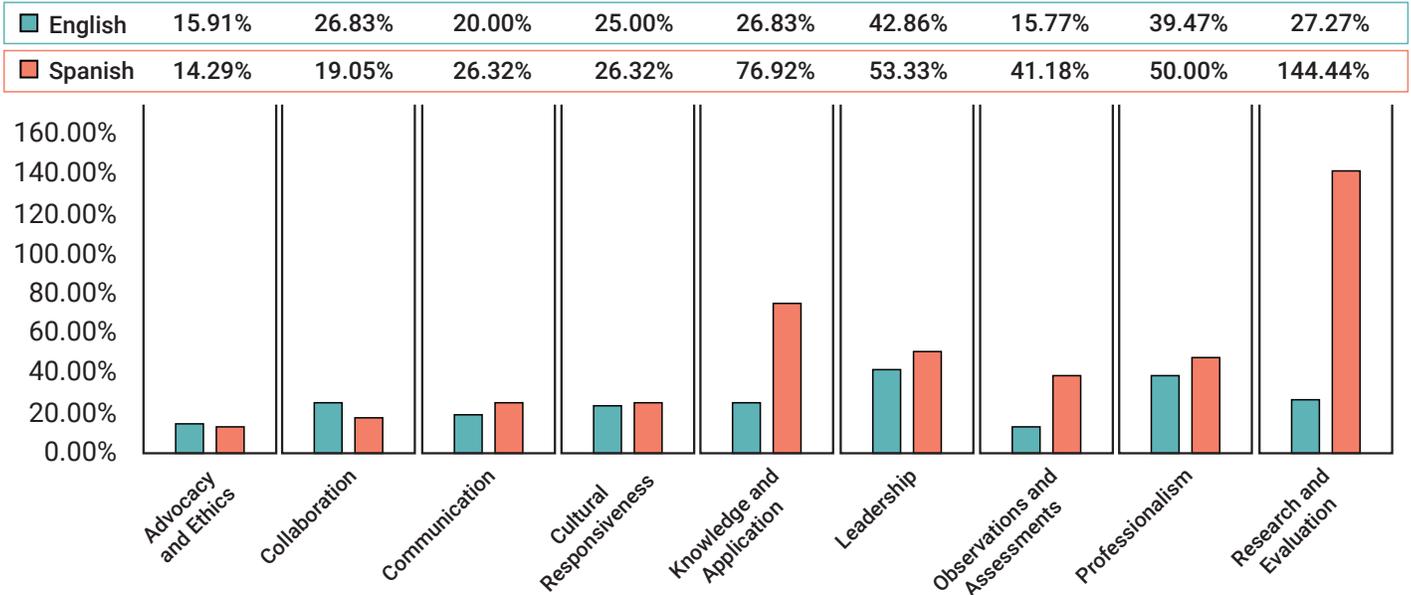


Figure 4. Changes in directors' perceptions of the their knowledge and skills before and after Year 1 HELN project

LANGUAGE GROUP	KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN	AVERAGE SCORE		% GAIN
		Before	After	
English	Advocacy and Ethics	4.00	4.64	15.91%
English	Collaboration	3.73	4.73	26.83%
English	Communication	4.00	4.80	20.00%
English	Cultural Responsiveness	3.64	4.55	25.00%
English	Knowledge and Application	3.73	4.73	26.83%
English	Leadership	3.18	4.55	42.86%
English	Observations and Assessments	4.08	4.73	15.77%
English	Professionalism	3.45	4.82	39.47%
English	Research and Evaluation	3.50	4.45	27.27%
Spanish	Advocacy and Ethics	4.20	4.80	14.29%
Spanish	Collaboration	4.20	5.00	19.05%
Spanish	Communication	3.80	4.80	26.32%
Spanish	Cultural Responsiveness	3.80	4.80	26.32%
Spanish	Knowledge and Application	2.60	4.60	76.92%
Spanish	Leadership	3.00	4.60	53.33%
Spanish	Observations and Assessments	3.40	4.80	41.18%
Spanish	Professionalism	3.20	4.80	50.00%
Spanish	Research and Evaluation	1.80	4.40	144.44%

Table 13. Changes in directors' perceptions of the their knowledge and skills before and after Year 1 HELN project

**Directors’ most impactful strategies and challenges in HELN year 1 program**

When asked about specific strategies that were most impactful for directors during the HELN program, directors mentioned communication strategies as most impactful (as seen in Figure 5): twelve directors (67%) mentioned **communication with others** as the most impactful part of the program; eight directors (44%) reported the impact of the program in **communicating with their teachers** and four directors (22%) highlighted the program’s contribution to **communicate with families**. When asked about the challenges of participating in HELN, many directors (44%) reported that time was the biggest challenge with the program, including time to finish course assignments, complete classes, or attend face-to-face sessions (see Figure 6). Directors’ suggestions to improve the program included allocating more time to complete courses, and refining the Flamingo platform to be more user-friendly.

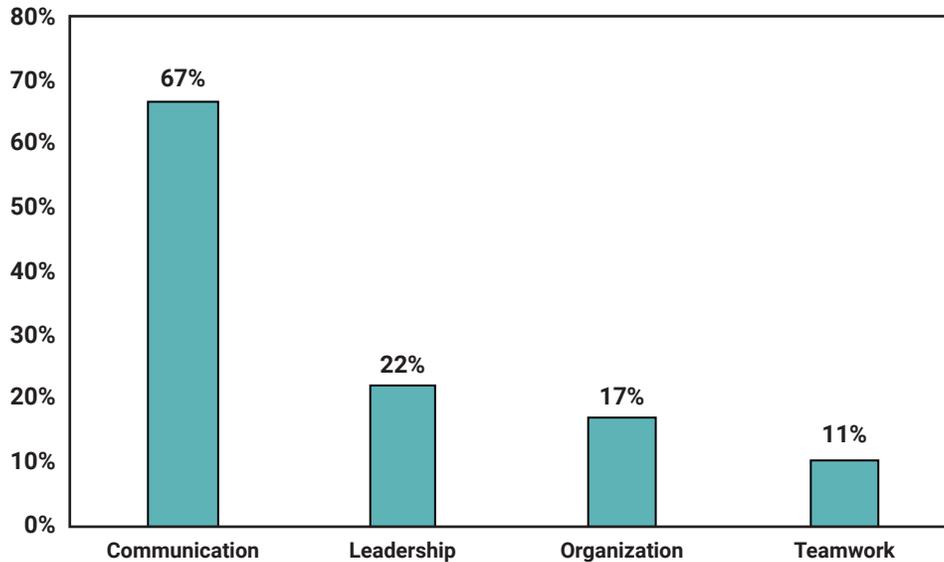


Figure 5. Director reported most impactful strategies learned in HELN year 1 program

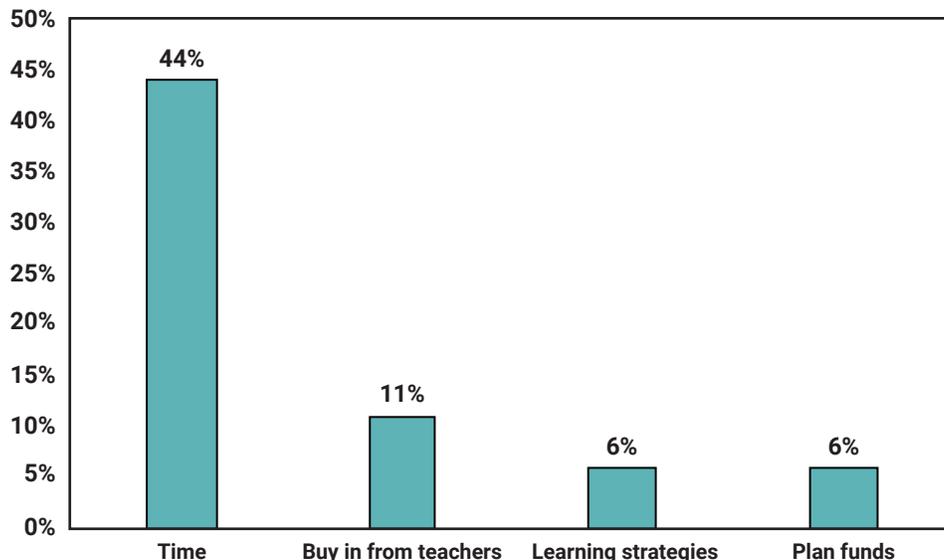


Figure 6. Director reported biggest challenges experienced in HELN year 1 program

## Teacher Participants

### Early Learning Florida Professional Development

Thirty-six teachers completed the participant experience survey, which is also a 100% response rate. Most of the teachers completed the survey in English (78%), and eight teachers (22%) completed the survey in Spanish.

### Teacher knowledge and skills before and after the HELN year 1 program

On the HELN participant experience surveys, teachers were asked to rate their knowledge and skill levels before and after participating in the HELN program on seven separate categories covered in HELN professional development content in Early Learning Florida courses: Professionalism, Health, Safety and Nutrition, Learning Environments, Growth and Development, Communication, Cultural Responsiveness, and Collaboration. Similar to directors, teachers self-reported relatively high perceptions of their knowledge and skills before and after the (HELN) Year 1 program (*Mean* > 3). Also similar to directors, teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills were higher after the program for all the dimensions (see Figure 7). Of these categories, teachers rated Professionalism, Growth and Development, and Collaboration as the most improved categories relating to their acquired knowledge and skill level from participating in Early Learning Florida courses.

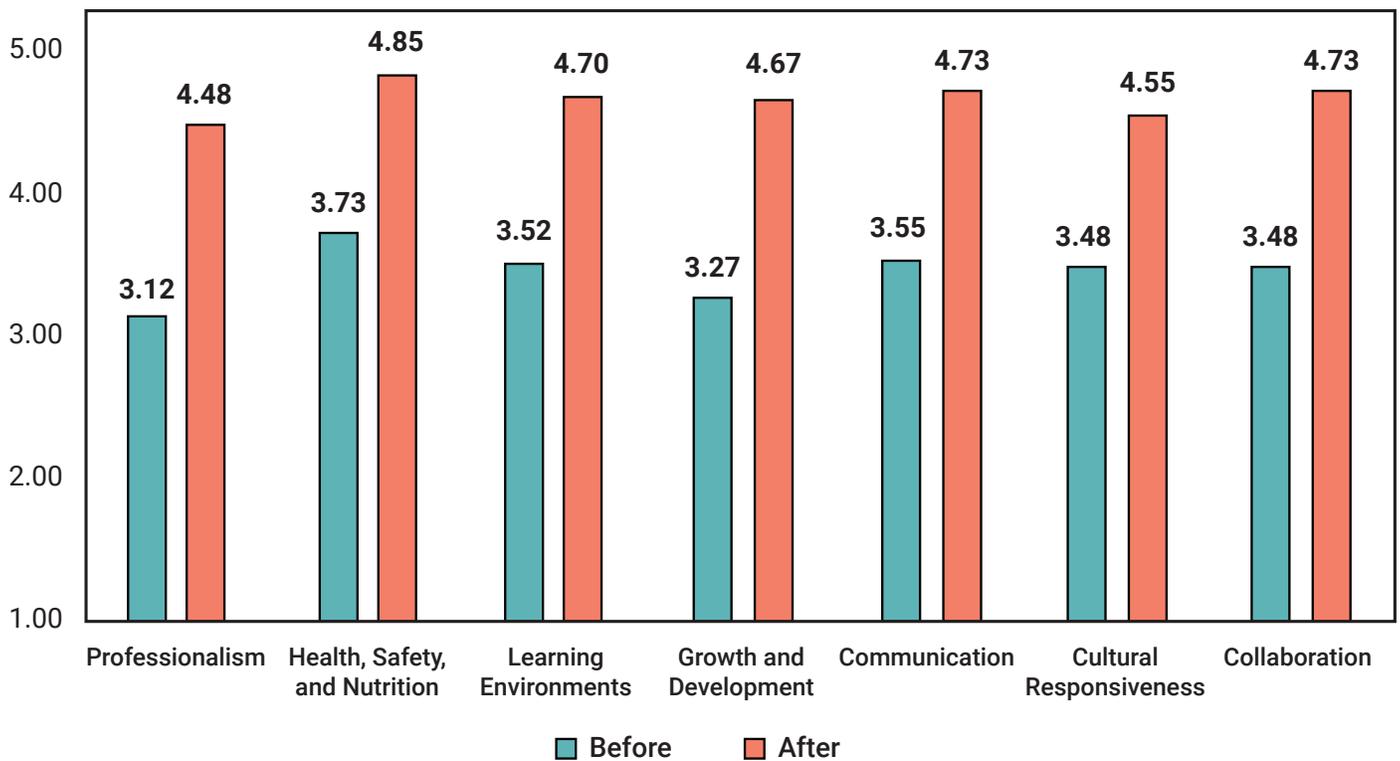


Figure 7. Graphical representation of Section 1 on teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills before and after the HELN Year 1 program

**Teachers most impactful strategies and challenges in the HELN year 1 program**

When asked about specific strategies that were most impactful, six teachers (17%) mentioned **communication with parents and family engagement** as most impactful, while six teachers (17%) mentioned strategies around **health, safety, and nutrition** as most impactful.

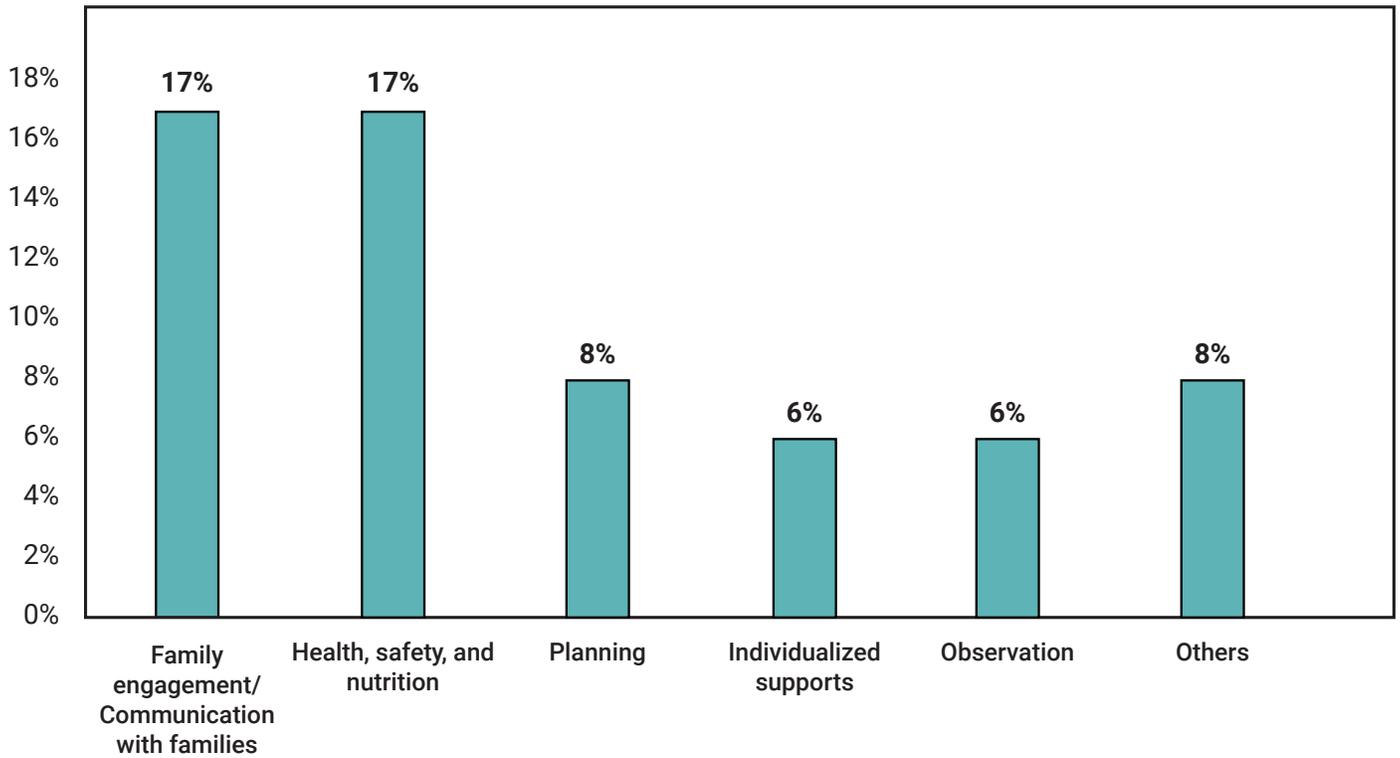


Figure 8. Teacher reported most impactful strategies learned in HELN year 1 program

As for challenges of year 1 participation, teachers echoed directors' responses, with eleven teachers (31%) reporting that time was the biggest challenge with the program. This was explained by teachers completing these courses on top of other professional and personal responsibilities (e.g., more than one job, studying part-time to finish a degree, taking care of their own children). Teachers suggestions to improve the program included better communication and more availability with course instructors, increasing the flexibility of the course (e.g., allow more than one week per lesson or to work ahead if desired), and translating all resources to teachers' native language (Spanish).

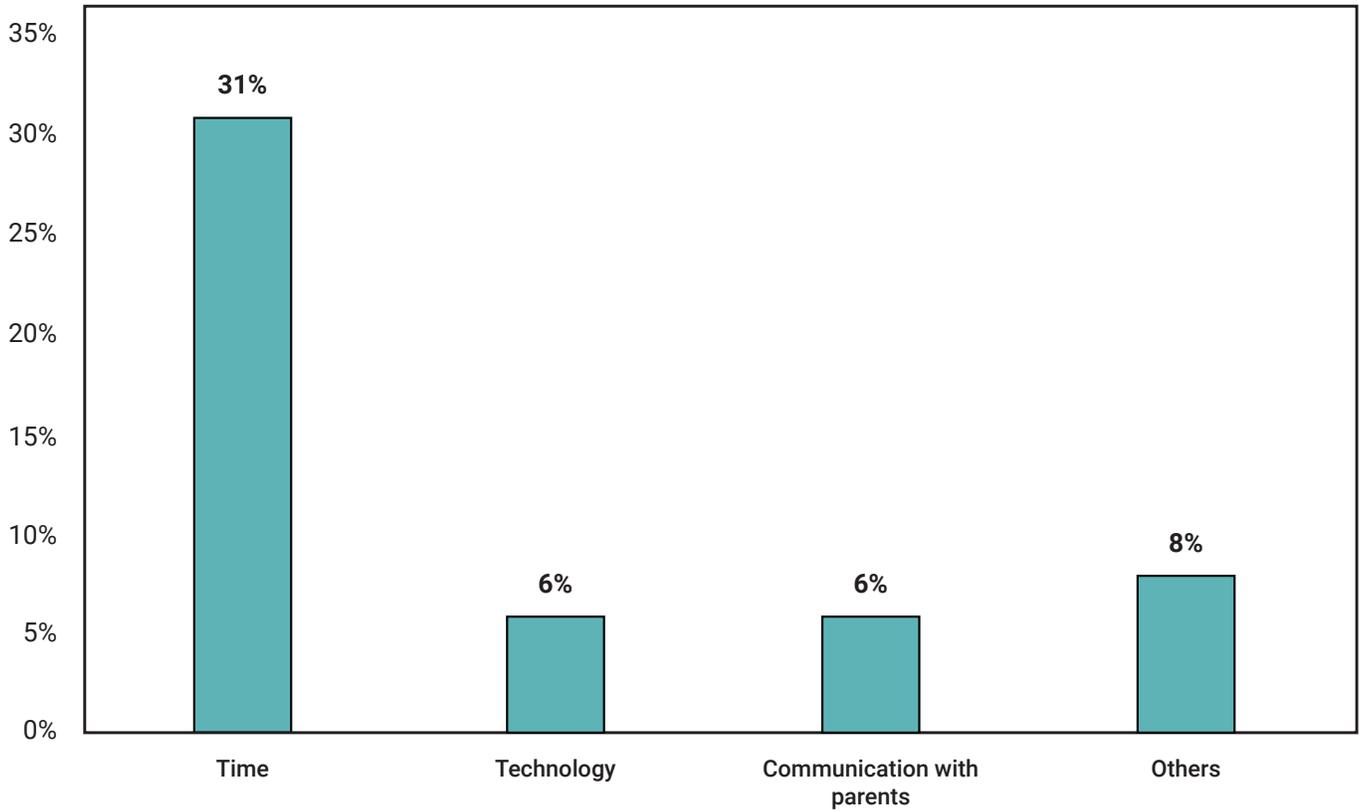


Figure 9. Teacher reported biggest challenge experienced in HELN year 1 program

**Spanish teachers’ increased knowledge and skill gain from Early Learning Florida course participation**

An important finding is that HELN teachers who completed the survey in Spanish (Spanish speaking or bilingual teachers) reported lower perceptions of their knowledge and skills before the (HELN) Year 1 program ( $M < 3$ , scale 1-4, 5-point Likert scale), when compared to their English peers ( $M > 3.3$ , scale 1-5, 5-point Likert scale). However, after the (HELN) Year 1 program, teachers who completed the survey in Spanish rated their knowledge and skills similar to their English peers (see Figure 10), showing a larger improvement and gain in knowledge and skill acquisition.

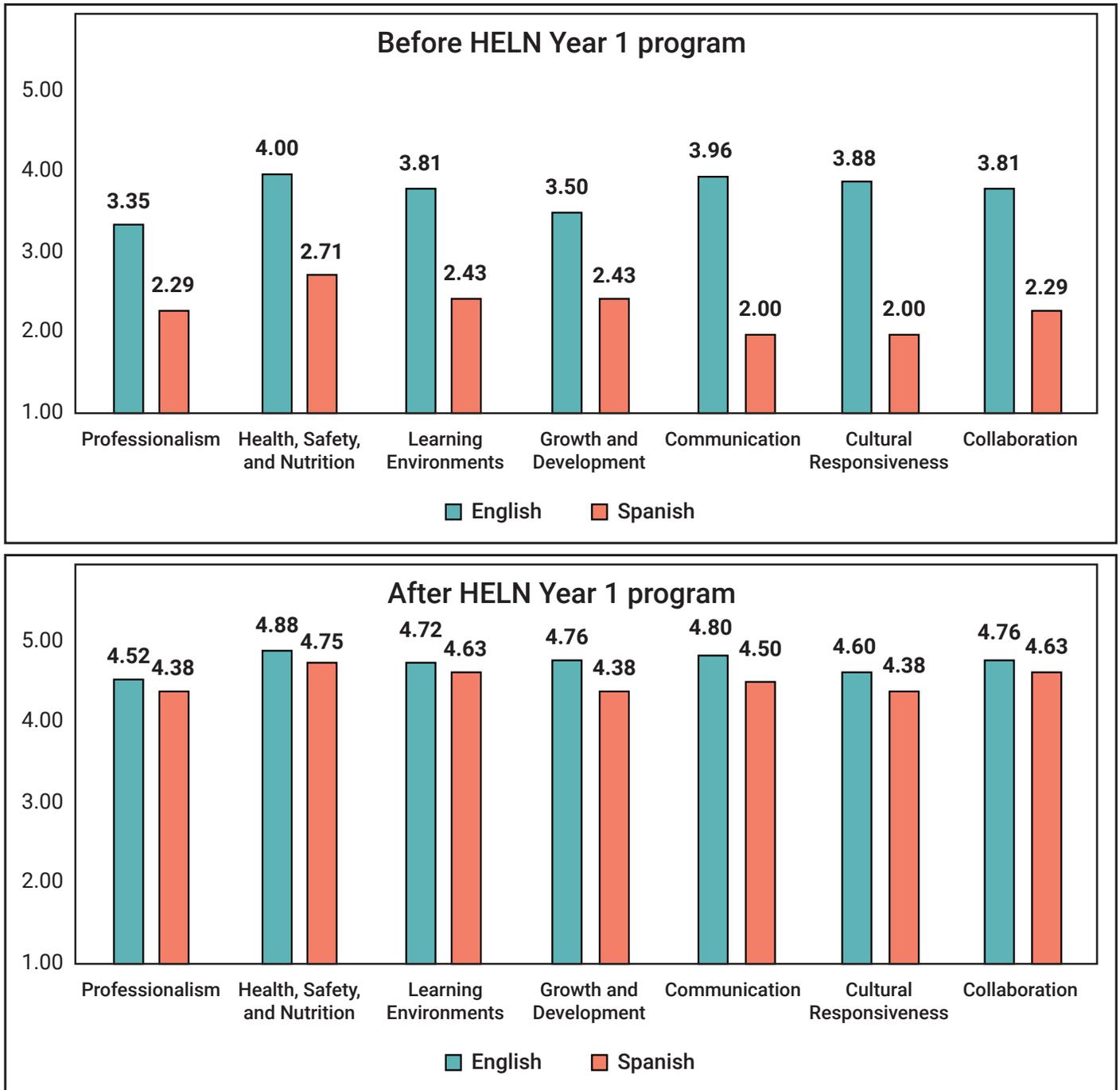


Figure 10. Graphical representation for Section 1 on teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills before and after the HELN Year 1 program by language of survey administration

## HELN PARTICIPANT CASE STUDIES

Themes of participants' experiences based on interviews and focus groups also focused around similar themes reported in surveys, which include: (1) increased professionalism and intentional practice; (2) culturally sustaining practices positively impacting classroom environment and family engagement, and (3) challenges with lack of time/supports to fully engage in learning experiences. These themes are present throughout all participant interviews, and will be evidenced through these narratives.

### Spanish Family Child Care Home Provider (Teachers #27 & 37)

As a mother-daughter team, Mairelys and Elena bring a lifetime of early childhood care experience to their family child care home. As professionals in Cuba, both women earned college degrees in the field of education: Mairelys completed a five-year degree in primary education, and her mother and partner, Elena, served as a professor of education for 32 years after completing her doctorate in Pedagogical Science. Although their education and experience brought them respect and status in their home country, as immigrants to the U.S., they struggled to translate their history to professional opportunities in the United States. Mairelys described often feeling like, "a lot of times we don't know how to face certain things, what's in order and what is not," both in the cultural expectations for normal business operations and teaching practices.

Mairelys and her mother decided to participate in HELN as a way to engage with professional learning and, as Mairelys described, activate their minds because she said, "when you don't get involved with anything, and time goes by ... you become a babysitter because your mind is not activated, it's not developing." It was important to her that they develop the skills they needed to be successful teachers and business owners. She illustrated how participation in the HELN leadership courses impacted her understanding of American early child care, including one specific practice to support high quality programs– fundraising:

For example, I am talking about fundraising. And you don't know those work because you come from another country, you didn't grow up here. These courses allow you to learn that it is part of a business, so [Effective Operations] was very good for me.

Before engaging in the program, Mairelys also grappled with the intersection of the cultures and habits of her children's families and her need to set professional boundaries:

I have kids here that, when we met them for the first time they had certain habits ..., like not showing up on time, and that was difficult for me. After the course, I got the strength to say 'No, this is my job, it is my business, and the success of this depends on me being able to set rules and regulations and to limit them'...These courses help you to develop your mind...in a really professional way.

Mairelys found reassurance in herself as a professional in the lessons learned from discussion with her peers during Communities of Practice and the discussion boards in the Early Learning Florida course, Professionalism. These collegial conversations, which often took place both in English and Spanish, helped her “to be more confident, stronger, and to feel that what you are doing is okay. It gives you the tools to improve it, to enrich it”. Often isolated as a FCCH owner, she valued the opportunity to engage with others in a supportive, linguistically and culturally diverse environment that honored dual-language learners. This gave Mairelys what she described as an important opportunity to practice conversational English and improve her understanding of idioms to support her children’s English language development.

Though she was able to participate in all of the face to face opportunities, making time for this priority was a challenge for this FCCH owner and her mother who offer care in their home Monday through Friday for up to twelve hours a day. Furthermore, while she enjoyed the opportunity to engage in English language dialogues, Mairelys elected to enroll in the Spanish versions of her coursework which she thought would be a more effective way to learn the material. However, she found this came with several challenges that were a result of content problems within the courses themselves. In particular, within the Spanish version of the course “Effective Operations”, she was surprised and frustrated to find that she struggled to reach mastery on the exams: “What really, really shocked me? The final exams. I have a degree in Education... a five-year college degree. It was my first time ever suspending an exam... I felt frustrated.”

Her frustration continued when she returned to the course content to review the material and try the exam again, she found that the transcriptions in one of the cycles within the course did not correspond to the cycle. Though Mairelys did work with peers and her instructor to eventually overcome the mistakes within the transcription of the course and obtain mastery, the time and effort it took to eventually discover mistakes that were beyond her control left her feeling frustration.

Elena, who described her role as supporting Mairelys, noticed that specific changes in the ways she engaged with families impacted her sense of purpose and professionalism:

When the parents come in at first, they don’t appreciate that you’re telling them that you’re going to teach their children...But when they start seeing that the kid tells them, in both languages, [that they] know the colors, that they wash their hands, that they want to sing a song to them...they begin to appreciate you a little bit more...[And the parents notice] they are learning something new so they pay more attention to them; they are students for them!

Establishing relationships with families, especially at drop off and pick up, was one significant new practice that Elena adopted. This practice created opportunities for her to better understand her children’s needs and improve their learning environment:

You don’t say [anymore] ‘Oh, this kid is crying.’ No, you say, ‘Ok, let me see why he is crying.’ Maybe he is sleepy. I will ask his mom to tell me about his night, ‘how was everything, is everything all right?’ I may find out that this kid is going to be restless because his father didn’t sleep at home and what he needs is a hug or something else. These courses help you develop your mind and to be able to interact with the children.

Currently in the process of adding a significant addition on to her home in order to meet the growing demands in her community for quality child care, Mairelys believes access for professional development that “brings us outside of our four walls...[and gives] new motivations” is especially important for family child care homes. She explained, “I think every family child care home needs to get some courses like this one.”

### Center Director (Director #6)

For center director, Quinita, early child education has been a professional passion for nearly three decades. Her program, which serves between 50-75 families with children from birth to age 5, has been in the Hillsborough area for 37 years but experiences significant staff turnover, a common challenge for all child care facilities. This leadership challenge has left Quinita searching for ways to develop the skills she needs to “work with staff and encourage them...to make sure they have good moral” and to motivate her teachers to “see something different that [they] can pull into [their classrooms]”.

As a participant in the HELN Instructional Leadership Program, Quinita found what she was looking for in face to face meetings for her cohort, Early Learning Florida course content, and individual coaching sessions. For example, the collegial environment and interactive learning activities in face to face meetings modeled the learning environment she wanted to create in her own staff meetings. One strategy Quinita adopted to improve communication and moral at her center was the Lastinger Leadership Framework, which was presented in one of the early professional development experiences. In this framework, the THINK strategy helps all participants in a dialogue establish expectations for communication and Quinita described how this had meaning for her work with her teachers.

I use the THINK strategy from one of the face to face sessions in my meetings with the staff. It really helps you think before you speak on something. At every staff meeting we review it. It begins with ‘T’, is what the person saying true? Then ‘H’, is that helpful? Whatever you’re gonna say to somebody, is it gonna help the parents, the children? ‘I’ for is it inspiring? And then ‘N’ is it really necessary for you to say that? You know, sometimes you have to think about if something is really necessary. Maybe we shouldn’t even say that. And then ‘K’ is kind. Are you being kind, ‘cause people need kindness. Everyone needs kindness.

Quinita described a significant change in her administrative skills as well that impacted the overall quality of her program. During face to face meetings and discussions with her peers, she developed new, practical ideas about working with families. Although parent engagement is an area in which she continues to struggle, Quinita described learning new practices to implement daily that made small changes in her ability to communicate with parents about their child’s development. Because she had never had any formal training to prepare her from the shift from classroom teacher to director, Quinita described feeling a profound impact on her daily practice as a result of participating in the *Professionalism* course:

Professionalism is more about the things I do on a daily basis. I am really like the Director of Operations. Talking with the teachers, making sure lesson plans are good, coming up with staff meetings and the agenda. So this class was so helpful for me because a lot of what I do is working side by side with the staff. I had never really had any training for that.

One struggle that Quinita and her teachers faced at the outset of their participation in HELN was navigation of the Early Learning Florida platform and courses. Two of the teachers in her center struggled to access their courses and needed technical assistance from their coach and Early Learning Florida instructors. When they were finally able to log in they found themselves three weeks behind the cohort. Frustrated with the lack of progress and access, these teachers abandoned the program with no intention to return in year 2.

Although Quinita had no trouble accessing the courses, the limits set by the synchronous course schedule sometimes left her feeling frustrated. For example, because of her personal and professional schedules, some weeks she found herself “going at a faster pace” but constrained to participate in the discussion board because other students had not yet entered their discussion posts. In addition, at times when she could predict that her upcoming schedule would be daunting, she wished she could work ahead when she had room in her schedule.

Coaching provided the most supportive level of professional development Quinita needed to implement real changes in her program. Through one on one visits with her coach, Quinita began to see more clearly how to effectively and reliably implement the child assessment tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD. Working with her coach, she learned to transition from using GOLD as a teacher to managing the platform as an administrator with an eye on whole program improvement. This further aided Quinita in using GOLD reports in collaboration with teachers to support child learning:

I think it did help [the teachers]. They were kind of confused in the beginning on how to use it. But once they got a handle on it, it did help them with helping the children with different activities, individual planning because sometimes you can do things as a group, but sometimes you need to pull a child to the side and work with them on a different level. So that was helpful to them.

Her staff, some of whom were also taking part in the teacher track for HELN, began to turn to her for ideas about their own coursework or teaching practice, a new normal which Quinita enthusiastically embraced. The collaborative relationships between the teachers and herself provided organic opportunities for Quinita to move more freely in and out of the classrooms where she could encourage and praise the staff:

I think it helped a lot to be able to just show them that you're not always walking in looking for something negative. You're looking for something positive that they're doing like 'Oh, I seen you in circle time and the kids were really involved.' And just seeing them light up like, 'Oh, she seen that. She is not coming in to say something negative.'

As a result of participation in the HELN Instructional Leadership Program, Quinita established a clearer role for herself as a leader in her center. Although she is still worried about some aspects of her practice including teacher retention, she believes the training she received gave her “a lot of information and really applied to her day to day life” and plans to continue her professional development with the program through its second year.

### **Child Care Center (Director #5, Teachers # 8, 36, 38)**

The director and staff at one large early child care center serve approximately 90 children from infant to Pre-K in Hillsborough County. Owner and director, Sandy, believes that ongoing professional development is a fundamental part of a successful early childhood program and regularly seeks out opportunities for her teachers to enroll in relevant courses and workshops. Sandy and three of her teachers participated in the HELN program; however, Sandy was unable to complete the coursework or attend the Community of Practice meetings for directors because of a personal issue. Even though all three participating teachers from this center had earned their CDA and one had a Director’s Credential, they each described their participation in HELN as having an impact on the intentionality of their teaching practice that resulted in improved child outcomes and overall program quality.

All three teachers described HELN coursework as an important “refresher” for prior knowledge that renewed their commitment to their practice and reminded them of the best-practices they had learned during their CDA trainings. For example, Pre-K teacher Myra who took the Spanish version of “Using Observation to Inform Individualized Instruction in Preschool”, shared that prior to the courses she had been on autopilot when creating lessons and preparing for the day, but she began teaching with more intention after completing the program.

Before, maybe I didn’t have the right motivation, and I’d do the activities just for the sake of it. But now I fully prepare. I have everything ready and we can explain to the parents what activities we’re doing so they know how we’re gonna work that particular day ... so they know what we’re doing on the classroom and I feel better organized (Spanish translation).

The second teacher, Becca, who worked in the 2 year-old class had been with the center for two years, but had over 25 years’ experience as an early childhood educator, and was the most experienced of all three teachers. Even with her experience, Becca confessed that she had become complacent in her practice and that participation in the HELN program renewed her commitment to intentional teaching. The strategies presented in the online courses inspired her to practice them in her classroom.

I would literally try the strategies to see how it would work out. For example, I recently changed my classroom around because they said it would change the environment. I had the blocks and the cars mixed in together, but then I separated them and now the cars are not blocking the blocks. Now I know which kids are playing with the blocks and which ones are playing with the cars. Even though that looks like a little thing, it helps a lot. I don’t have a lot of kids, but these kids are toddlers and they are all over the place. It is very important for me to make sure each child is getting what they need.

Pre-K teacher Elise also spoke about a shift in her intentionality as a result of her training to implement the child assessment tool Teaching Strategies GOLD in her classroom. A 20-year veteran of early childhood education, Elise described herself as a “lazy” person who “just did what she was told” regarding her education and practice. The picture she painted of her teaching practice showed a teacher just going through the motions every day, doing the bare minimum to get by in her professional development activities and teaching. She lacked the motivation to take ownership of her planning and the decisions she was making about her children. However, using GOLD forced her to focus her attention on each child as an individual:

I was like, ‘Guys, this is a lot of stuff I don’t care about.’ But then when it all started to fall into place, I realized this was a lot of stuff that was helpful. Why isn’t anybody doing this? GOLD was a great tool, a great gift... When I was graphing for it, I would notice when a kid couldn’t do something. It made me look at everybody more individually.

Once she began to notice the children as individuals with specific learning needs, she started to consider how her planning could support student learning to improve child outcomes.

It helps us fill the gaps. Not everybody is doing the same thing at the same time. Before, I would just have the kid who couldn’t keep up sit separately and play or watch us and think that when he was ready he was going to say, ‘Ok, I am ready.’ But if I can plan ahead of time when I start getting information about the children, I can make every second count. When you know where they are, you can plan for it and don’t waste a moment.

Director Sandy noticed how the changes in her teachers’ motivation and professionalism has manifested in increased collaboration and collegiality among the staff: “I think they’re communicating more. They’re talking about what they’re gonna do. That, to me, is magnificent. It’s more of a how can we do this? Or here, these books are better for your kids.” Teachers also described their experiences with coaching as a “check in” or “technical assistance” that supported their access to the online coursework. For this center, the HELN coursework and instructors who supported this intervention had the most relevant impact on their daily practice.

Across all three teachers in this center, lack of time to engage in face to face professional development provided the greatest challenge to access. However, one teacher experienced her own unique challenges as well. For Myra, taking the directors courses in Spanish provided a unique challenge. As a Spanish speaker, she thought enrolling in the Spanish versions of the courses was the obvious choice. However, she explained that the nuances of language from various Spanish-speaking cultures can create problems with meaning in context – and the translations within the course often failed to match her understanding.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE YEAR 1 HELN PILOT IMPLEMENTATION WITH REGARD TO PROGRAM DESIGN, DELIVERY, AND IMPACT?**

Because HELN was created to be an innovative program that was embedded in every level of the Hillsborough community, and integrated Lastinger initiatives into collective impact strategies with community partners, structures and supports, the perspective of Hillsborough early learning leadership, and HELN implementation and ELC staff was integral to determine the impact and effectiveness of the Year 1 pilot on participants, and to understand program improvements in order to create a wider reach. These interviews and focus groups investigated implementation and delivery of the HELN year 1 program, and examined successes, challenges, and changes for future implementation of year 2 and beyond. The following themes are presented in order of program implementation and impact.

#### **Implementation Theme 1: Successful practices and outcomes from Year 1**

When asked about specific successes related to participant outcomes from the HELN year 1 pilot, the majority of participants in implementation focus groups spoke highly of two elements of the HELN program: (1) the Instructional Leadership Program, and (2) the availability of adult dual language learner supports including ELFL courses, resources, and facilitation of professional development in Spanish. All staff discussed directors' increased leadership capacity building, and culturally collective practice due to responsive facilitation. One implementation participant described this powerful work with directors:

It was really amazing to see these directors, who had never been exposed to a lot of the content we were providing... light up and learn that they were indeed professionals, and had the ability to impact their teachers... and the children in their programs with simple, effective strategies for organization and communication. What I loved most was watching them connect with each other during our meetings, even with a language barrier sometimes, and they would realize how similar their work was, and how much peer support mattered to solve their dilemmas (Implementation Focus Group 2).

A finding which echoes results from HELN participant surveys is the impact of providing Spanish speaking providers the ability to learn in their home language, and the power of this learning to change teacher and director practice. One of the bilingual HELN coaches spoke of this power:

The thing that really touched me was the fact that the directors had the chance to understand what leadership is, and they became so confident. This concept of leadership and how to guide the teachers was new, because the language barrier often contributed to the feeling of unprofessionalism and lack of respect these ladies felt. Both leadership courses and the leadership framework were eye openers for them and it showed in the way they handled themselves (Implementation Focus Group 4).

**Implementation Theme 2: HELN participant selection and CLASS® cutoff should be revised for benefit of ALL, especially most marginalized, provider base.**

During HELN implementation team focus groups, several participants voiced the need to determine the “sweet spot” of quality needed for provider success, but also push the envelope and really improve quality for those providers that are forgotten or have little capacity for this work. As evidenced by HELN year 1 provider baseline scores, the majority of providers in year 1 are considered to be middle to high quality based on CLASS® composite scores. One member of the HELN implementation team stated:

We know from our research around our professional development that we cater to providers that already have capacity, and have specific organizational structures, like a strong director and teachers with experience, because these things are really needed to manage this work. But what I wonder is, what about the providers that are struggling to obtain this quality in the first place? Do we need to adjust this model equitably and provide more intentional strategies to those providers that don't make that 3.0 composite score? (Implementation Focus Group 2).

One early learning leader also echoed this statement, and presented this dilemma that many ELCs are facing:

I think all coalitions are a little bit in this quandary as to increasing quality, but also encouraging providers who have less capacity. We know that we have got to do a [quality improvement plan] with those 25 centers that have CLASS composite scores less than 3 but greater than 2.51. Our current QIP is geared to bootstrapping those problems, but we are scratching our head about serving centers approaching a score of 4 with bootstrap strategies, like the basics of how you interact with kids and run a center. What's the best way to meet all these centers' needs? (Implementation Focus Group 4).

Many members of the implementation team agreed with this assessment and provided suggestions for future recruitment and implementation which included: completing more discovery research to understand provider “overload”; customizing HELN professional development based upon CLASS composites, and creating other potential measures to understand impact and outcomes, such as intake assessments and self-studies; and examining and revising the HELN PD model to be more tiered with specific levels based on quality that are more culturally responsive, supportive, and sustaining to create on ramps for this work for providers who are struggling with quality and organizational structures.

**Implementation Theme 3: HELN partnership roles, responsibilities, decision-making and communication needs to be clearly defined for efficiency and provider success.**

Because the HELN program integrated professional development specialists and leadership from the UF Lastinger Center, the Hillsborough ELC, and other early learning organizations, several stakeholders mentioned that communication within and between partners from the top down and bottom up was critical for efficiency and success. For example, it was determined that ELFL course instructors were unfamiliar with the HELN Content Clinics, and were not notified about specific topics being covered

in these clinics beforehand. An instructor stated, “If we knew that they were talking about trauma-informed care, we could have tied in content with courses and helped teachers understand how to connect this content with their practice” (Implementation Focus Group 3). In addition, micro-credential capstone projects were added to the HELN curriculum at the very end of the program in May, and participants were unaware of this requirement and timeline when applying for the program.

During focus groups with ELC staff, it was determined that coaching goals and responsibilities were not clearly defined, and there was double coverage on some coaching content, such as Teaching Strategies GOLD®, with both ELC coaches and HELN instructional specialists. Coaches also discussed a need to redefine coaching roles, supervision, professional development, and implementation goals to best serve HELN providers. Suggestions from ELC coaches and HELN staff to remedy this included: access to all program data by all implementation staff, such as coaching logs, schedules, and provider CLASS scores; more intentional communication strategies regarding professional development needs with all organizations; and more time for collaborative planning and preparation to fully provide targeted support for providers.

**Implementation Theme 4: Timeline and content of HELN professional development should be adjusted to reflect the needs of participants.**

As described earlier in participant survey results, the most challenging aspect of participating in the HELN year 1 program was time to complete coursework, implement strategies, and attend professional development activities in addition to directors and teachers’ professional responsibilities. This theme was echoed by all HELN implementation staff. An implementation staff member stated, “We need to move from reactive stance to proactive stance, allow ourselves the time and space to do this right, and give these providers the time and space to truly dig into this work deeply” (Implementation Focus Group 1). As staff reviewed results from practitioner interviews during focus groups, one participant agreed:

A lot is being thrown at these practitioners, and we need to think about paring down, offering courses based on CLASS® outcomes, and giving them time to integrate these strategies into their practice. We shouldn’t follow OEL’s ELFL course schedule, but instead create a specific schedule for HELN providers on their timeline” (Implementation Focus Group 5).

**Overall Program Impact Theme: There is a need for a county-wide, systems approach to create impact and ensure sustainability for early learning quality improvement in Hillsborough County.**

All HELN stakeholders who were interviewed agreed that trusting partnerships with community programs and organizations are critical for success, and sustainability. A HELN implementation staff member described the beginning of recruitment for year 1 with an apt metaphor:

When we first came into Hillsborough, I think we thought that we could just pick up all these providers because we were UF, and we worked here in the area with coaching, but what we found was there were about 1000 cooks in this kitchen. All these programs were trying to achieve many of the same things, and providers I think are feeling ‘improvement fatigue’ and getting

confused with what program required what activities...and you have to have capacity to build capacity (Implementation focus group 2).

Hillsborough early learning leaders echoed this statement as well. As one early learning leader pointed out, the HELN initiative is touching less than 10% of the programs in Hillsborough County, but touching them in a significant way with a lot of programmatic content:

HELN is very good with programmatic support. I guess my question is, why can't we just all get in the same pool and work on this stuff together? Programmatically, there are different things that are better for people that are at various stages of continuous improvement. But we haven't quite figured out which programs fit best with which CLASS score (Implementation focus group 4).

Several stakeholders suggested that current structures need to be aligned like a menu for providers to be able to meet their needs and not overlap efforts or incentives, so these programs stop fighting for providers, and we create more collective quality improvement instead of "spot welding" to increase capacity.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on this evaluation study's objectives, researchers used quantitative and qualitative measures to examine if early learning provider participation in the HELN year 1 pilot had an effect on participant knowledge gain; change in practices and beliefs; implementation of effective teaching and leadership practices; and improvement in teacher-child interactions. Data collection from these sources outlined results regarding all participants in the HELN year 1 pilot, and provided evidence for how this program was experienced by participants, what impact this program had on participant learning and practice, and what successes and challenges occurred during this year 1 implementation.

The results of this evaluation study provided evidence of the following positive outcomes from the HELN year 1 pilot:

- The HELN Year 1 provider attrition rate of just over 20% was well below the state average of 40% provider attrition after one year of participation in state quality improvement initiatives (Rodgers et al., 2018).
- All HELN participants experienced knowledge gain from completing HELN courses, with participant course mastery rates above 50% on average, and pre/post knowledge assessment gains averaging around 30%.
- Spanish-speaking participants, which represent an underserved educational population in Hillsborough County, reported the highest mastery rates in courses (over 90%), and the most knowledge gained from pre to post assessment (37%). In addition, Spanish speaking participants spoke of transformational changes to their educational beliefs and practices from participating in HELN.

- Director participants gained knowledge and skills around leadership capacity, collegial and collaborative relationships, and knowledge of practice, with communication strategies determined as the most impactful in their daily practice.
- Teacher participants gained knowledge around communication with parents, family engagement, knowledge and skills about health, safety, and nutrition, and professionalism.

There were also results found that provided evidence of the following challenges with HELN year 1 implementation:

- All participants reported that time was the biggest challenge to participating in HELN year 1. Directors reported struggling with job responsibilities, and course flexibility and deadlines. Teachers reported challenges with balancing course work, learning the technology, incorporating job responsibilities, and attending other HELN professional development activities.
- Many HELN participants reported challenges with the technology needed for HELN participation, including the Lastinger Flamingo Online Learning Platform, which was in its pilot phase during year 1, as well as MyTeachingStrategies® platform to use Teaching Strategies GOLD. Challenges reported included not being able to access the Flamingo system, “glitches” within courses such as videos that did not play, shifts in deadlines within course structures, and challenges accessing grades and instructor feedback within the system.
- Implementation challenges reported by stakeholders included lack of planning time and collaboration with Lastinger and other community partners, lack of communication regarding pilot program goals and timelines, and lack of cohesion with other community programs to improve quality and capacity within Hillsborough early learning providers.

These findings were consistent through the entire sample of participants, and results provide support to this study’s theory of teacher change, as well as a causal link from quality professional development to increased practitioner knowledge and improved practice. A limited discussion of these findings will provide further explanation of these outcomes, and also highlight specific areas needed for further investigation to track these results.

### **Improvement in teacher and director knowledge, capacity, collaboration and practice**

As stated in the findings section, all participants reported gaining knowledge from HELN participation, and this was supported by course data, survey data, and interview data. Within the HELN Instructional Leadership Program, many of these directors gained knowledge, but more importantly, spoke of changed beliefs about their profession, their leadership skills, and their need to collaborate with other providers in the area. Face to face director professional development sessions revealed that the majority of these directors and FCCH owners had never thought of themselves as instructional leaders, and this shift towards self-efficacy created a trickle-down effect of professionalism, organization, communication, and collaboration with their staff and peers. Teachers also spoke of increased professionalism, but spoke more of useful classroom strategies than shifts in beliefs. While directors received transformational learning from their in-person professional development sessions, this element was lacking with teachers, who struggled to attend in-person PD activities. This finding represents an opportunity for future implementation to determine what professional development and support best fits teachers within this program.

Another interesting finding was that CLASS composite baseline scores didn't necessarily correlate with the amount of knowledge that these practitioners gained. Previous research has shown that providers with higher CLASS quality generally know more about content and best practices, and therefore, do not gain as much knowledge as providers with lower CLASS scores who have had less exposure to quality learning opportunities (Rodgers et al., 2017, 2018). However, this is not the case for HELN providers. For example, providers who had higher CLASS composite scores (above 4.0) had the same overall knowledge gain and mastery rates as those with lower CLASS scores, showing that even those providers with "quality" ratings have the need for quality professional development that is targeted to their daily practice, and that targeted programmatic support, such as technical assistance and coaching, are critical for sustained improvement. While this finding is unconfirmed with post CLASS score data, this presents a future research opportunity to connect the level of CLASS quality gain with knowledge gain in future HELN implementation years.

### **Increasing the confidence, capacity, learning and professionalism of Spanish-speaking providers**

An unintended and powerful finding from this pilot evaluation is the transformational learning achieved by Spanish-speaking directors and teachers. These practitioners showed significant gains in knowledge, leadership capacity, change in beliefs, and self-reported improved practice from all data sources in just one year of implementation. Despite reported challenges such as Spanish course assessment issues, nuances in Spanish translations, Spanish subtitled courses that were inaccurate in terms of matching content with subtitles, and multiple challenges accessing the Flamingo learning system, these practitioners achieved over 90% mastery in courses, and spoke highly of their collaborative ability to problem solve and learn within this program. In addition, this group of providers represented the majority of Vinik Fellows who are continuing their learning journey, and applying for career pathways to higher educational attainment.

What is most important about this finding is the illumination of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining strategies within the HELN program in order to help these providers, who are often forgotten in quality improvement initiatives due to language barriers. This represents a tremendous opportunity for future implementation, growth and research with this population to inform best practices for dual language, and bilingual adult learners, as well as the children they serve.

### **A True Implementation Pilot**

Once the shift in implementation of HELN from pure design to pilot design occurred, this allowed the implementation team, as well as participants, the ability to learn, make mistakes, gather data, and understand those mistakes and successes in real time in order to provide the most powerful programmatic effects. This occurred within every level of the system, from the online platform to professional development sessions. For example, Lastinger's Flamingo Online Platform was piloted during this year 1 implementation, and this resulted in several challenges, but helpful learning experiences for Lastinger technology staff, implementation team, course instructors, and participants. As participants worked within the system, several data points were collected to determine such metrics as what specific course structures were most helpful (videos, examples, discussion forums), which course cycles were most difficult for practitioners, and which assignments and strategies provided the most impact, or were not useful in daily practice.

In addition, the HELN Early Learning Florida and Instructional Leadership courses were also piloted within this year 1 system, and thus, data gained in real time around course content, structures, assignments, instruction, and participant knowledge gain was vital to improve courses for year 1 as well as future participants. An example of this was with the HELN English courses with Spanish subtitles, which were created as a bridge for Spanish providers who wanted to take the English course, but didn't have the language fluency to understand specific content around practice videos. Through pilot evaluation data sources, it was determined that several of the Spanish subtitles did not match the content in English videos, and as a result, these courses were removed from the system for review and improvement.

Another HELN pilot implementation strategy was using local Lastinger Certified Coaches from the Hillsborough ELC in tandem with Lastinger instructional specialists as implementation partners to support providers. This partnership revealed the critical element of local knowledge and building trust with providers in order to serve them throughout this innovative program. ELC Coaches worked side by side with Lastinger instructional specialists to support bilingual and Spanish providers, as well as try to determine pathways for future success. Without this collaboration, survey and interview data reveal that most providers who have given up and dropped from the program during the first course term due to several challenges and frustrations. This finding provides evidence to underscore the importance of local partnerships and organizational structures to improve provider quality.

## **STUDY LIMITATIONS**

### **Provider Recruitment and Research Design**

Several limitations related to provider recruitment include shifts in organizational structure, discrepancies in incentives for stakeholder participant groups, and the lack of control groups. A primary limitation to recruitment was a lack of clear communication with providers and stakeholders at the beginning of the recruitment process. As a result of shifts in the organizational structure that included a lack of clarity in the roles for coaches and key personnel, participants did not have a clear understanding of all the components of HELN or what the program was offering over time. A second limitation to recruitment was that, while incentives were offered to providers for participation in this study, they were significantly less than those offered by some other local initiatives and teachers were not directly compensated. Control groups are particularly important when factors, in addition to the intervention under study, can affect the outcome of interest. The lack of a control group in this study creates a limitation that can make it challenging to draw meaningful conclusions.

### **CLASS® Assessments**

One limitation of using CLASS composites is that high aggregated CLASS scores at the provider level does not indicate that there is a positive relationship between individual teacher CLASS scores and academic achievement of the students within the provider. Making incorrect inferences about individual scores based on group scores is known as "aggregation fallacy".

Another limitation is potentially related to the fact that CLASS assessments are implemented based on external observers that in HELN year 1 are observers from ELC. For ELC designated observers,

little evidence has been documented regarding the training they have received to qualify for a CLASS observer or the evaluation of the consistency and objectivity in their observations, which may collectively introduce rater effects in CLASS assessment.

A third limitation is the fact that CLASS scores are collected at only one assessment wave in HELN year 1 program, which consequently limits the analysis to descriptive statistics based on this one set of scores. In the subsequent program years, the year 1 CLASS data shall be treated as the baseline scores in statistical analysis that control for the effect of prior provider quality differences. In addition, for subsequent program years, analyses also should be planned based on individual classroom scores which may provide more informative results. Finally, though the OEL's calculation of CLASS composite was used in this report, there is little research evidence that has been reported to discuss the related impact. Further empirical studies are strongly recommended.

### **Lack of Child Outcome Data**

A limitation related to the investigation of program effects on child outcomes is due to the lack of Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD) child assessment data. Although HELN year 1 providers were provided licenses, technical assistance and access to the Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD) child assessment tool, the lack of requirement for providing child observation data created a gap in data collection at the provider level because some providers did not use the tool for assessment. In addition, there was considerable qualitative evidence that the child assessment data that was collected at the provider level from the year 1 implementation was unreliable and incomplete. These discrepancies provide support that GOLD may not have been implemented as an authentic assessment as it was intended.

### **Knowledge Assessments**

A limitation of the knowledge assessment analysis is that the gain from pre-test to post-test cannot be compared across courses, because the course assessments are not uniform, contain different content and number of questions, and may have different difficulties, which are unknown.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

A limitation of qualitative interviews was that participation in this study was voluntary. While the interviews represented geographic and program diversity of HELN participants, interested practitioners self-selected to be interviewed, and may not be characteristic of all practitioners.

### **The Hawthorne Effect**

A key limitation to qualitative data is the power dynamic of the researcher-participant relationship, which may contribute to the Hawthorne Effect, in which participants believe their performances were changed because they were being interviewed and observed regarding those changes. To alleviate this effect, all interviews were conducted by research team members who did not have previous relationships with participants, and challenging data regarding lack of positive improvement was included in analysis. All interviews and correspondence were scheduled at participants' convenience, and trust and rapport established as much as possible by providing resources and words of encouragement and appreciation during interviews and meetings.

### **Self-Reporting**

Another limitation of this pilot evaluation study stems from the self-reporting of information from participants. There was no externally reliable data to show whether teachers were doing what they reported in their classrooms with the exception of CLASS® observations, which were not aligned with several interventions measured in this study such as change in teacher beliefs and implementation of practices. This study was concerned with the experiences and challenges faced by HELN stakeholders, and thus depended on personal feedback through interviews and surveys, and the integration and testing of ideas presented within the literature on early childhood teacher professional development.

## **IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Multiple studies confirm classroom quality predicts positive developmental and academic outcomes for children (Barnett, 2011; Curby et al., 2009; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009; Sabol, Hong, Pianta & Burchinal, 2013). Many authors emphasize the importance of training as a means of improving and maintaining educational quality (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2002; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006), and document the significant gains in the quality of teacher-child interactions that can be realized from these learning opportunities. In addition to improving instructional and classroom quality, system reform also requires the consistent and continuous improvement of interrelated parts of the system (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Therefore, improvement in early learning systems requires not only improvement in individual teachers, but in early learning leadership, communities, families, policy makers and all stakeholders.

The goal of creating the Hillsborough Early Learning Network was to develop a national proof point of an early learning professional development system in Hillsborough County which would impact the hardest to reach providers, and create impact in areas previously forgotten with statewide and other local initiatives. Evidence from this evaluation shows that this goal was achieved in year 1. Family child care home providers (FCCH), which are considered the most underserved provider population, but have the largest presence in Hillsborough county (75% of all licensed providers) have not been previously invited into formalized quality improvement programs, which usually recruit the top 25% of providers based on quality. This current system is not equitable in terms of support, access, or need. The HELN Year 1 program provided significant learning, change in practices, and improvement for these providers. More importantly, Spanish speaking providers represent an even smaller population, and this pilot evaluation has provided evidence that it is these providers who thirst for opportunity to improve and advance in this professional field.

### **Recommendations for Future HELN Implementation**

After careful confirmation with stakeholders across the Hillsborough Early Learning Network, multiple rounds of feedback, member-checking and triangulation of data, researchers have created recommendations for future implementation of HELN through identifying specific improvements to program structures and professional development options. It should be noted that due to the timeline of the completion of this evaluation and the start of the second year of implementation, several recommendations are post-programmatic and therefore provided for improvement in the following year or for general systems improvement.

### **Intake Processes**

As discussed previously, initial recruitment was a one-size-fits all program for teachers and directors. Though the design included Coaching as an intervention, the researchers found that coaches were utilized significantly more often for technical assistance than for coaching around teaching strategies and practice. To provide more effective individualized instruction to meet the needs of practitioners, initial intake processes should include a needs assessment that provides feedback on participants' technological readiness to engage in online, independent learning and professional development experiences. In addition, CLASS scores should be utilized to provide more personalized learning pathways to focus on the specific needs each provider through aligning CLASS scores and course objectives to improve those scores.

### **Expand Time for Implementation**

Teachers and directors indicated that the demands created on their time were too great as a result of the initial roll out of the program and an actual timeline of five months for the first year implementation. Recommendations for future implementation include expanding the timeline for Year 2 with courses beginning in September, 2019 and continuing through to July, 2020.

### **Deepen Collaboration with ELC**

There is a need for a county-wide, systems approach to create impact on early childhood education for Florida's children. Building on the relationships with the ELC that have been developed during Year 1 implementation, current structures should be further aligned to create more a collaborative partnership with community programs and organizations that are critical for sustainable high-quality professional development to improve child outcomes.

### **Increased Spanish Participants, Courses and Resources**

Success indicators within the Spanish speaking population of participants in Year 1 and the overwhelming response from participants for increased Spanish-language professional development resources highlight a need to develop and provide high-quality, Spanish-language courses and resources. While it would be ideal to offer transcreated versions of all courses in Year 2, the time, labor and resources to accurately reproduce the resources and specific contexts of an English language course in Spanish can be financially prohibitive. Recommendations include a well-planned roll out of additional Spanish-language courses in addition to bilingual coaching and face to face professional development experiences.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As previously stated in this report, it is critical to evaluate this program design further to substantiate any relevant findings with more credible data and analysis. The results presented in this report provide a window into a systemic professional development reform initiative and suggest areas where current practices and structures could be strengthened.

A number of lessons can be gleaned from this evaluation study on all levels of this systemic approach to learning and these results support themes in current professional development research, including:

- the importance of valuing teachers and their time and effort;
- the importance of valuing cultural and linguistic differences in learning, teaching, and practice;
- the need for creating systemic capacity to provide quality professional development and the support to transfer that knowledge into quality teaching practices;
- the need for alignment of initiative goals, implementation, resources, and evaluation at all program levels;
- the emphasis on providing real time analysis, follow up, and continuous reflection and evaluation to inform development and create institutionalization of practices; and
- the importance of systems-level buy-in, partnership, support, and development to achieve educational objectives for all stakeholders (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001).

Implications for future research within the HELN program evaluation are extensive. Many topics merit further investigation, including:

1. The continued investigation and identification of promising practices of technical assistance and early childhood coaching that help create teacher and provider improvement in instructional outcomes, and the impact of a certified coaching model on teacher practice and improvement in children's learning;
2. The elements of online learning that create the most beneficial outcomes for teachers with regard to child-based outcomes, cultural and linguistic differences ; and
3. The impact of providing director leadership capacity and training in conjunction with teacher professional development to create quality instructional leaders within early learning classrooms.

Educational research is so often about the scores, the variables, and the outcomes, which are directly tied to funding and inputs, but often overlooks the voice of stakeholders and the needs of children. When engaging in this research, researchers were encouraged to find that teachers and directors spoke with confidence, professionalism, and pride about participation in this initiative and with excitement about the potential for continuing to improve their practice over multiple years of engagement and collaboration with others within their learning community. Though challenges were evident, views were positive, and in some cases, transformational. As one member of the community leadership stakeholder group aptly stated:

*In HELN, I am excited to be able to be a part of something that is truly a community collaboration, that supplements what we are getting from the state and federal government to try to help, doing positive things in early childhood which is challenging, but wonderful.*

It is our hope that as this research is analyzed, interpreted and discussed, it creates a larger conversation based on equity and excellence in implementation, and provides the springboard for further educational opportunity and advancement of Florida's early childhood educators.

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## APPENDIX A: EARLY LEARNING FLORIDA COURSE PROGRESSION

### Infant & Toddler Intermediate Courses

These courses help practitioners who work with infants and toddlers to grow their skills and knowledge on improving child learning and development outcomes. Each course is led by an experienced, Lastinger-certified instructor and may be taken in online-only format, with support from a coach, or with a Communities of Practice.

COURSE TITLE	CEU
Designing Infant and Toddler Learning Environments (English or Spanish)	2.0
Health, Safety, and Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers	2.0

### Preschool Intermediate Courses

These courses help practitioners who work with preschool children to grow their skills and knowledge on improving child learning and development outcomes. Each course is led by an experienced, Lastinger-certified instructor and may be taken in online-only format, with support from a coach, or with a Communities of Practice.

COURSE TITLE	CEU
Preschool Child Growth & Development	2.0
Preschool Health, Safety, and Nutrition	2.0
Using Observation to Inform Individualized Instruction in Preschool (Spanish)	2.0

### Director Intermediate Courses

These courses help directors to grow their skills and knowledge on instructional leadership and effective center management. Courses are led by an experienced, Lastinger-certified instructor and may be taken in online-only format, with support from a coach, or with a Communities of Practice.

COURSE TITLE	CEU
Effective Operations in Early Childhood (English or Spanish-closed captions)	2.0
Professionalism in Early Childhood Education	2.0

## **APPENDIX B: RESEARCH THAT SUPPORTS UNDERLYING THEORY OF CHANGE**

### **Research on Early Childhood Educational Quality and Child Outcomes**

Multiple studies confirm classroom quality predicts positive developmental and academic outcomes for children (Barnett, 2011; Curby et al., 2009; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009; Sabol, Hong, Pianta & Burchinal, 2013). For example, The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (2007) is a seminal study that examined children's experiences in early education settings and elementary schools across the country. After examining the educational experiences of over 1,300 children who were followed from birth through ninth grade academic year, researchers determined that quality interactions were a major component of successful educational outcomes, and specifically identified how teachers interacted with children as the main contributor to that quality (NICHD, 2007). Furthermore, targeted professional development helps teachers improve how they interact with children, leading to better child outcomes (Curby et al., 2009; Mashburn et al., 2008).

Quality of early child care programs can be discussed as structural quality and process quality. (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2015). Structural quality are elements that are evident in the environment and can be easily regulated by state or regulatory licensing, but are not necessarily dependent of human interactions (Cassidy et al., 2005; Winterbottom & Piasta, 2015). Factors such as teacher-child ratios and health and safety issues fall into this category. Process quality, however, requires human interaction, and targets specific teacher-child interactions and activities (Cassidy et al., 2005). Mashburn et al. (2008) indicates that the quality of teacher-child interaction in prekindergarten programs was a better predictor of children's school readiness than structural classroom quality. Process quality is considered more critical because it influences children more directly (Zellman, Perlman, Le, & Setodji, 2008).

A growing body of research has outlined positive relations between children who attend high quality preschools and higher academic performance and outcomes (NICHD ECCRN, 2003). The NICHD study of early child care (2003), found that high quality child care was significantly associated with cognitive development and language development. Children in high quality child care programs have been shown to have better language skills than children in lower quality preschools (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2015). Evidence from other studies (D'Amour, 2008; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001) also indicates that high-quality early childhood programs are beneficial for the cognitive and language development of children in high-needs environments, and these gains have been shown to continue in later school years.

### **Teacher Professional Development in Early Childhood Settings**

Educational research has identified the continuing development and learning of teachers as key to improving the quality of educational programs in the United States (Desimone, 2009; Putnam & Borko, 2000), and, as a result, creating effective professional development for educators has become integral in transforming all levels of education (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Professional development is especially important for those teaching the youngest and most high-need children in early learning

environments. Research links quality teacher education to children's positive early experiences and later success in schooling (Barnett, 2003; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009).

Due to varied levels of education, training and experience of early childhood teachers, there is a growing call in early childhood literature to determine what professional development experiences produce the highest quality early learning programs (Neuman, Roskos, Vukelich & Clements, 2003). Priorities include the importance of "teacher or caregiver-child interactions that are emotionally supportive, responsive to children's individual and developmental needs, and rich in their provision of support for children's exploration and understanding of new concepts" (Smith, Robbins, Schneider, Kreader & Ong, 2012, p. 4). Thus, professional development for early childhood educators should facilitate the acquisition of specific learning and social-emotional competencies in young children (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009).

A synthesis of studies examined the connections between program characteristics and environmental quality in early childhood settings, and found that teachers with more education and specialization in early childhood development had higher quality programs and engaged children in best practices (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog (1997) showed that teachers showed positive gains from professional development in the domains of roles (socializing, encouraging play, managing misbehavior); sensitivity (being responsive, not harsh or detached); and teacher talk (frequency and quality of verbal support and stimulation). Other studies (Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenburg, 2003; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000) showed a dramatic increase in children's language production as well as intensification of children's play after teacher training. There is also evidence that indicates the importance of connecting early childhood content and context in teachers' professional development, and researchers suggest that professional development should occur in the learning context of teacher practices in their classrooms, and not at off-site workshops or trainings (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). However, there is a growing consensus that existing early childhood professional development efforts at the national, state, and local levels are fragmented at best (Buyesse, Winton & Rous, 2009; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Winton & McCollum, 2008), and professional learning within teacher practice in early childhood classrooms is almost non-existent (Fukkink & Lont, 2007).

### **Quality Professional Development Research and Design**

Numerous studies have documented a causal link between improved teacher practice and improved child outcomes (Desimone, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2003; Mayer, 1998; Supovitz, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2002):

1. Teachers experience effective professional development.
2. Professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills and/or changes attitudes and beliefs.
3. Teachers use their new knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction or their approach, or both.
4. The instructional changes foster increases in student learning.

Based on this conceptual framework for studying teachers' professional development (Desimone, 2009), specific design features are critical to quality professional development intervention research. First, the issue of what treatment being studied in professional development interventions rests on two theories, the theory of instruction and the theory of teacher change. Theory of instruction is the link between the specific kinds of teacher knowledge and instruction (a specific set of instructional practices) emphasized in the professional development, and the expected changes in child outcomes. Theory of teacher change examines the features of the professional development that will promote change in teacher knowledge and/or practice including its theory about the assumed mechanisms through which features of the professional development are expected to support teacher learning (duration, span, elements of activities, and intermediate teacher outcomes). This model also operates using classroom context as an important mediator and moderator (Desimone, 2009).

Secondly, professional development research needs to address what should be measured, and how and when those outcomes should be measured (Supovitz, 2001). The "what" examines specific alignment between approaches of instruction. The "how" examines specific methodologies, such as observations, surveys, interviews and direct assessments to determine the alignment between the content of what is taught in the classroom and the changes in both teacher and student performance; and the "when" must allow for sufficient time between the professional development intervention and the measurement of the professional development impact. Therefore, during implementation years (when teachers are receiving interventions), studies should focus on increases in teacher knowledge and changes in teacher attitude, beliefs, and practices (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008).

Together, this research highlights key assumptions that underlie our research for this evaluation, which are: (a) early childhood education programs that are characterized by stimulating and supportive teacher-child interactions in classroom settings promote children's learning and school readiness; (b) quality teaching plays an immense role in children's early learning development; (b) professional development that occurs within the context of teachers' classrooms and contains both content and pedagogical knowledge may best support early learning teachers to apply knowledge into practice; and (c) the causal link between teachers' gain of knowledge and change in beliefs and practices to provide improved instruction requires the study of outcomes over a span of time that allows teachers to implement these changes.

## APPENDIX C: HELN YEAR 1 PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE SURVEYS

### HELN Year 1 (2018-2019) Participant Experience Survey (Teacher English Courses)

Thank you for your participation in the Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) Year 1 (2018-2019) program. To help us make sure this program accomplished the intended outcomes and goals, we are distributing this survey to understand your experience and learn about the benefits as well as challenges you incurred and how we can improve specific components of HELN for future cohorts.

This survey should only take 15-20 minutes of your time, and your answers will be completely confidential. Responses will be de-identified and only used for evaluation purposes.

Thanks in advance for your time and cooperation. If you have any questions about the survey or have any technical difficulties, please feel free to contact Lisa Sutter, HELN Coordinator, at [lsutter@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:lsutter@coe.ufl.edu) or Mary Kay Rodgers, the UF Principal Investigator, at [mkrodgers@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:mkrodgers@coe.ufl.edu).

**Begin here:**

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your primary language?**

English    Spanish    Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your current role in early childhood education?**

FCCH Owner    Director    Teacher

**Please select all of the choices that reflect language of courses you took:**

English version of Infant, Toddler, Pre-K, or Director Courses	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher		<input type="checkbox"/> Director
Spanish Subtitled Version, Pre-K only	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher		<input type="checkbox"/> Director
Spanish version of Infant, Toddler or Pre-K	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher		<input type="checkbox"/> Director

### SECTION 1

In this section, you will be asked questions about your knowledge and skills **before** and **after** participating in the Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) Year 1 program. In the BEFORE column, please think back to what you knew and practiced **BEFORE** you participated in this program. Rate the knowledge and skills you think you had before starting this program, with

- 1= lowest amount of knowledge and skills, and
- 5= highest amount of knowledge and skills.

Then, consider what you learned in this program. In the AFTER column, rate the knowledge and skills you now have after completing HELN Year 1.

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Professionalism</b> (Assess personal and professional training needs of myself, set goals, and take steps to promote professionalism.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Health, Safety and Nutrition</b> (Design safe environments; recognize and report abuse and neglect; understand regulations for a safe and secure environment; support healthy living and nutrition)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Learning Environments</b> (Create and maintain family partnerships; use rituals, routines, and schedules to support learning; create spaces for child success; provide a learning environment for child's language and literacy development; develop an individualized curriculum)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Growth &amp; Development</b> (Design a play experience that supports multiple learning needs; implement a learning experience using a universal design; integrate an interest area to support a child's cognitive development; plan a structured movement activity to support physical development)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Observation and Assessment</b> (Plan a screening process; write objective and accurate records; develop specific learning objectives based on children's strengths and needs; design classroom projects based on children's interests; understand the importance of home culture; engage children with special needs)	<input type="radio"/>									

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Communication</b> (Establish effective communication with my colleagues; provide frequent contact with families through a variety of communication strategies.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Cultural Responsiveness</b> (Model respect for and support of cultural differences, special needs, and diverse family structures; provide support to families and teachers to create a culturally rich environment.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Collaboration</b> (Understand processes for working together with other educators to tackle complex problems of practice)	<input type="radio"/>									

## SECTION 2

In this section, you will be asking questions related to your experience and perception to this program. Please answer these questions in the space provided. (Use back of the page if run out space.)

2.1) What was the most important and impactful strategy (or strategies) you learned from this program to help you become a more effective early childhood teacher?

2.2) What were your biggest challenges with this program? Why?

2.3) What specific structures of learning (such as in-person Content Clinics, online course system, in-person coaching) and tools (such as handouts, agendas, strategy planning forms, capstone assignments) were most helpful to you in this program? What structures and tools were not helpful or burdensome?

2.4) What can be done to improve this learning experience for future implementation of this program?

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!**

## HELN Year 1 (2018-2019) Participant Experience Survey

Thank you for your participation in the Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) Year 1 (2018-2019) program. To help us make sure this program accomplished the intended outcomes and goals, we are distributing this survey to understand your experience and learn about the benefits as well as challenges you incurred and how we can improve specific components of HELN for future cohorts.

This survey should only take 15-20 minutes of your time, and your answers will be completely confidential. Responses will be de-identified and only used for evaluation purposes.

Thanks in advance for your time and cooperation. If you have any questions about the survey or have any technical difficulties, please feel free to contact Lisa Sutter, HELN Coordinator, at [lsutter@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:lsutter@coe.ufl.edu) or Mary Kay Rodgers, the UF Principal Investigator, at [mkroddgers@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:mkroddgers@coe.ufl.edu).

**Begin here:**

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your primary language?**

English    Spanish    Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your current role in early childhood education?**

FCCH Owner    Director    Teacher

**Please select all of the choices that reflect language of courses you completed:**

English version of Infant, Toddler, Pre-K, or Director Courses    Teacher |  Director

Spanish Pre K Subtitled Version    Teacher |  Director

Spanish version of Infant, Toddler or Pre-K    Teacher |  Director

### SECTION 1

In this section, you will be asked questions about your knowledge and skills **before** and **after** participating in the Hillsborough Early Learning Network (HELN) Year 1 program. In the BEFORE column, please think back to what you knew and practiced **BEFORE** you participated in this program. Rate the knowledge and skills you think you had before starting this program, with

- 1= lowest amount of knowledge and skills, and
- 5= highest amount of knowledge and skills.

Then, consider what you learned in this program. In the AFTER column, rate the knowledge and skills you now have after completing HELN Year 1.

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Professionalism</b> (Assess personal and professional training needs of myself (and my staff if applicable), set goals, and take steps to promote professionalism in my program.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Leadership</b> (Apply the Lastinger Leadership Framework in my work)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Research and Evaluation</b> (Evaluate and apply current trends, research, and policy in early childhood education and revise practice as appropriate in my program.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Observations and Assessments</b> (Identify differences in screening and assessments, and use observation findings in planning and engaging in learning activities for children in my program.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Communication</b> (Establish effective communication with my staff (if applicable) and parents, and frequent contact with families through a variety of communication strategies.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Knowledge and Application</b> (Integrate knowledge of historical, philosophical, psychological, and social foundations of early childhood education into planning and decision-making for my program.)	<input type="radio"/>									

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Advocacy and Ethics</b> (Stand up for early care and education as a profession, and demonstrate awareness of moral responsibilities through my behavior as an early childhood leader.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Cultural Responsiveness</b> (Model respect for and support of cultural differences, special needs, and diverse family structures, and provide support to families and teachers to create a culturally rich environment.)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Collaboration</b> (Understand processes for working together with other educators to tackle complex problems of practice, and integrate tools and processes into my practice as an early childhood leader.)	<input type="radio"/>									

## SECTION 2

In this section, you will be asking questions related to your experience and perception to this program. Please answer these questions in the space provided. *(Use back of the page if needed.)*

2.1) What was the most important and impactful strategy (or strategies) you learned from this program to help you become a more effective early childhood teacher and/or director?

2.2) What were your biggest challenges with this program? Why?

2.3) What are you still wondering about? What do you still need to learn about leadership tools and processes?

2.4) What specific structures of learning ( such as Communities of Practice, online course system, in-person training sessions) and tools (such as handouts, agendas, strategy planning forms, capstone assignments) were most helpful to you in this program? What structures and tools were not helpful?

2.5) What can be done to improve this learning experience for future implementation of this program?

### SECTION 3

If you took any of the courses listed below, please complete this section.

**If you did not take any of these courses, you can stop here and have completed the survey.**

Early Learning Florida Courses:

- PreK Health, Safety and Nutrition
- Infant Toddler Health Safety and Nutrition
- PreK Growth and Development
- Infant Toddler Learning Environments
- PreK Observation (Spanish version)

Please think back to what you knew and practiced **BEFORE** you participated in this program. Rate the knowledge and skills you think you had before starting this program, with

- 1= lowest amount of knowledge and skills, and
- 5= highest amount of knowledge and skills.

Then, consider what you learned in this program. Rate the knowledge and skills you have now that you have completed the program in the **AFTER** column.

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Health, Safety and Nutrition</b> (Design safe environments, recognize and reporting abuse and neglect, understanding regulations for a safe and secure environment, support healthy living and nutrition)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Learning Environments</b> (Create and maintain family partnerships, use rituals, routines, and schedules to support learning, create spaces for infant and toddler success, provide a learning environment for language and literacy, develop an individualized and emergent curriculum)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Growth &amp; Development</b> (Design a play experience that supports multiple intelligences, implement a learning experience using a universal design, integrate an interest area to support cognitive development, plan a structured movement activity to support physical development)	<input type="radio"/>									

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Observation</b> (Plan a screening process, write objective and accurate records, develop specific learning objectives based on children’s strengths and needs, design classroom projects based on children’s interests and learning needs, understand the effects of home culture, engage children with special needs)	<input type="radio"/>									
<b>Communication</b> (Establish effective communication with my colleagues, and frequent contact with families through a variety of communication strategies.)	<input type="radio"/>									

If you took the Spanish versions of any of these courses, please respond to the questions in this section. **If you did not take any Spanish language courses, you can stop here and have completed the survey.** (Use back of the page if needed.)

2.6) How did completing this program, with courses, coaching, and materials, in your primary language (Spanish or English) help you learn more effectively? In what ways (if any) did these courses support your work with children in your learning environment who are dual language learners?

2.7 What barriers, if any, did you face with the base language in these courses (i.e. errors in translation, English only versions of resources or links to websites, subtitles in videos, etc.)

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2.8 In what ways, if any, did course learning activities or content conflict or challenge values or practices of your culture and/or community?

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!**

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

### Internal Leadership Focus Groups Protocol

#### Background:

- Tell me about your perceptions of the current ECE landscape in Hillsborough County, if applicable, and why you think the HELN is critical to provide learning outcomes.
- Describe your role in the first year of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network, and how you feel you contributed to this effort.
- How did your participation in various components of the initiative align with your expectations of this work?
- For your role, what were your biggest challenges of implementing this initiative?

#### Selection and Launch:

- Think back to the launch of Year 1: what specific elements do you feel were well received? What changes would you suggest for this year's launch and recruitment process based on this past experience?
- From your perspective, in what ways, if any, should participation criteria be changed from year 1 of this initiative? (prompt for mixed sites, level of quality, requirements for enrollment, outcomes)
- What incentives do you feel would be most effective in motivating providers to become a Hillsborough Early Learning Network member and remain in the program? (prompt for financial incentives/bonuses (teachers and directors), release/planning time, support and resources, other)
- How do you feel that the Hillsborough community leaders (school district, ELC, children's board) contributed to or challenged this effort for year 1?

#### Implementation:

- Based on your Year 1 experience, what did it look like from a practice standpoint to have several levels of an ECE system working and learning together? Provide some examples.
- Describe how the elements of courses, coaching, CoP, content clinics, and in-person PD facilitation worked together during Year 1. Where were the bumps, and where did things go smoothly? What components provided the most impact for programs?
- What was the most challenging part of the Year 1 implementation from the participants' perspectives? Where did they struggle the most?
- Describe some successes you have had from this Year 1 cohort.
- What would you change about program objectives for Year 2 based on your Year 1 experience?
- Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or questions you have that we haven't covered?

## Coaches Protocol

### Background:

- Tell me about your perceptions of the current ECE landscape in Hillsborough County, if applicable, and why you think the HELN is critical to provide learning outcomes.
- Describe your role in the first year of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network, and how you feel you contributed to this effort.
- How did your participation in coaching HELN providers align with your expectations of this work?

### Selection and Launch:

- What is your general impression of how the first year of this initiative went? Please provide examples of successes and challenges.
- From your perspective, in what ways, if any, should participation criteria be changed from year 1 of this initiative? (prompt for mixed sites, level of quality, requirements for enrollment, outcomes)
- What incentives do you feel would be most effective in motivating providers to become a Hillsborough Early Learning Network member and remain in the program? (prompt for financial incentives/bonuses (teachers and directors), release/planning time, support and resources, other)
- As external partners of this work that are engaged within the community, how do you feel these partnerships could be strengthened?

### Implementation:

- Based on your Year 1 experience, what did it look like from a practice standpoint to have several levels of an ECE system working and learning together? Provide some examples.
- Describe how the elements of courses, coaching, CoP, content clinics, and in-person PD facilitation worked together during Year 1. Where were the bumps, and where did things go smoothly? What components provided the most impact for programs?
- What was the most challenging part of the Year 1 implementation from the participants' perspectives? Where did they struggle the most?
- Describe some successes you have had from this Year 1 cohort.
- What would you change about program objectives for Year 2 based on your Year 1 experience?
- Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or questions you have that we haven't covered?

## Stakeholder Interview/Focus Group Protocol

### Background and Current Structures

- Tell me about your perceptions of the current ECE landscape in Hillsborough County (prompt for key players, previous and current initiatives/partnerships, timelines, outcomes)
- What programs or initiatives have emerged over the past few years as exemplars of excellence in ECE?
- What populations are NOT being served by any funded programs in Hillsborough? Where do gaps remain in terms of quality and equity?
- What challenges **currently exist in the ECE landscape** that impact your role?
  - *(During the initial interviews, members in the leadership FC described several challenges and needs for EC providers in this area. These included subsidy rates, the need for translation of trainings and materials for Spanish providers, multiple siloed initiatives, and the lack of participant access to or knowledge and experience with technology)*

### Expectations: Alignment and Moving Forward

- What was your role in the first year of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network, and how do you feel you contributed to this effort?
- How did your participation in various components of the initiative align with your expectations of the work? How did it differ?
- From your perspective, what were the biggest challenges of implementing this initiative?
- How has the work of the Hillsborough Early Learning Network added value to the overall landscape/goals that you have for quality improvement in your area that you mentioned earlier?
- What would you like to see as community priorities for this work as this second year moves forward? (prompt for each level of the system)
- What partnerships do you feel should be developed or strengthened to make this work successful?

### Hillsborough Early Learning Network Program Participant Selection

- From your perspective, in what ways, if any, should “Vinik site” criteria be changed from year 1 of this initiative? (prompt for mixed sites, level of quality, requirements for enrollment, outcomes)
- What specific demographics and locations would you like to see as part of this initiative that are not currently engaged or enrolled? (prompt for SR, high needs populations, cultural and linguistic diversity, cohort sample should mirror population sample, Spanish materials/facilitators/trainings)
- What incentives do you feel would be most effective in motivating providers to become a Hillsborough Early Learning Network member and remain in the program? (prompt for financial incentives/bonuses (teachers and directors), release/planning time, support and resources, other)

### Final Thoughts

- Who else do you think we should talk with to understand how best to improve the implementation of this initiative? (prompt for names of ELC staff, directors, teachers, families, community members)
- Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or questions you have that we haven't covered?