



## **Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training (ACCEPT) Project**

### **ACCEPT Project Employer Survey Summary**

#### **Gaston Community College**

**March 2015**

The faculty from Gaston College and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) are currently collaborating to infuse early intervention and early childhood special education content, instruction, and practices into early childhood education coursework within the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree program in Early Childhood Education offered through Gaston College. Faculty from Gaston College and UNC Charlotte ACCEPT Project team members collaborated to select special education resources that would be included in Gaston College early childhood courses. Collaboration included creating, for each core course within the early childhood program, infused course syllabi designed to reflect special education content and activities infused before and after participating in the ACCEPT Project. At the beginning of the spring 2015 semester, a survey was administered to employers to assess their perceptions of the importance for and preparedness of Gaston employees relative to ACCEPT Standards.

The ACCEPT Standards represent a set of skills or competencies that all project partners believe are critical to promoting the development and learning of children with diverse abilities. The task of creating these standards began with ACCEPT university faculty members reviewing personnel preparation standards, competencies, and evidence-based practices as well as position statements published by professional organizations such as Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Division for Early Childhood (DEC), and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Faculty members compiled a list of 74 personnel standards derived from eight sources (Chandler, Cochran, Christensen, Dinnebeil, Gallagher, Lifter, Stayton, & Spino, 2012; Chopra, DiPalma & Banerjee, 2011; Council for Exceptional Children, 2004, 2009; Division for Early Childhood (DEC) & National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009; Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell, 2001; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009; Soukakou, 2012).

Faculty then rated each standard based on the following questions:

1. In how many of the eight sources was this or a similar standard recommended?
2. Does this standard address the following:
  - a. The right of every infant and young child and his or her family to participate in a broad range of learning opportunities and environments as full members of high quality early childhood programs and services;
  - b. An infrastructure of systems-level supports promoting the collaboration and coordination of individuals' and organizations' efforts to provide inclusive services to children and families;

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- c. The use of strategies, equipment, materials, and technologies to accomplish instructional objectives when teaching children with diverse abilities.

During this process, standards were merged, scores were assigned, and a final list was then presented to a team of early childhood special education experts who evaluated the research supporting each item. After several modifications, a final list of ACCEPT Project Standards with 24 focus items organized under eight topic areas was approved by the team as well as all ACCEPT Project partners at that time. These ACCEPT Standards of Practice may be retrieved from <http://www.acceptproject.org/>. All items on faculty, scholar, parent, and director surveys and all questions posed during instructor, scholar, and parent interviews and focus groups directly addressed the importance of educators acquiring these skills, the perceived readiness to teach them, and/or the confidence to use them while working with young children.

### Participants

Gaston College leaders e-mailed 14 child care program directors and coordinators in their service area to request responses to the online ACCEPT Project employer survey. Those contacted included 13 child care employers that provided practicum sites during the current semester or in a previous semester, and the remaining 1 represented other employers that have worked with Gaston College staff on their teachers' education needs. Of the 14 directors and coordinators contacted, 2 responded yielding a 14% response rate.

### Procedure

To assess employers' perceptions, we developed a brief survey using Likert-type scale ratings with the stem: "Please provide a rating for each item based on your perception of the importance for success in your workplace" and "...the preparedness of Gaston-educated employees" (see Table 1). The response choices for importance were (a) not very important, (b) somewhat important, (c) important, and (d) very important; and, those for preparedness were (a) not very prepared, (b) somewhat prepared, (c) prepared, and (d) very prepared. Gaston leaders disseminated the survey online via *SurveyShare*. To obtain importance and preparedness summary scores for subsequent analyses, we averaged responses across the eight items within each area.

### Design and Data Analysis

We calculated means, standard deviations, and percent responses for each importance and preparedness item. We also obtained descriptive statistics on topic scores and compared average ratings using a dependent group *t*-test, effect size statistic, and 95% Confidence Interval. To compute effect size (*ES*), we corrected for the correlation between the importance and preparedness ratings as follows: difference between means was divided by the pooled *SD*/square root of  $2(1-r_{xy})$  (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981).

### Results

Rating percentages, means, and standard deviations for employer perceptions of importance and preparedness across core topics of ACCEPT Project infusion are in Table 1. All core topics were perceived as important or very important and average ratings were above 3.6 on the 4-point scale. Preparedness

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ratings were generally lower (*Range* = 2.64-3.07) than those for importance; however, the average ratings were above 2.5 on the 4-point reflecting general perceptions between somewhat prepared and well prepared. Overall, importance ratings ( $M = 4.00$ ) were higher than ratings of preparedness ( $M = 2.50$ ).

### References

Glass, G. V., McGaw, B., & Smith, M. L. (1981). *Meta-analysis in social research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

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Table 1

*Employer Perceptions of Importance for and Preparedness of Employees from Gaston on ACCEPT Project Core Topics*

Topic	Importance						Preparedness					
	%NVI	%SI	%I	%VI	M	SD	%NVP	%SP	%P	%VP	M	SD
1. Know and share the laws, policies, procedures, and ethical principles that support and protect children birth to 5 with disabilities.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	2.50	.707
2. Develop and use instructional strategies to meet the needs of individual learners.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	2.50	.707
3. Build skills that promote child development and learning and that lead to life and school success.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	50.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	2.00	1.414
4. Engage in instructional planning using data to develop and implement activities and lessons that engage all learners, provide increased feedback, and reinforce skills and concepts.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	2.50	.707
5. Use assessment data from multiple sources to create, modify, and adapt a safe learning environment that promotes the achievement of all learners.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	2.50	.707
6. Build academic skills and promote successful social interactions for all children.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	3.00	.000
7. Build child, family, and community relationships that promote child development and learning.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	50.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	2.00	1.414
8. Engage in professional and ethical practice at all times.	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.00	.000	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	3.00	.000

*Note.* **NVI** = Not Very Important, **SI** = Somewhat Important, **I** = Important, **VI** = Very Important; **NVP** = Not Very Prepared, **SP** = Somewhat Prepared, **P** = Prepared, **VP** = Very Prepared