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Purpose: Explore the components of the Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) Early Childhood Educator I-BEST program.

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Expected Outcome: Better understanding of the SFCC Early Childhood Educator I-BEST program in the context of early childhood educator workforce needs in New Mexico.

Santa Fe Community College – Early Childhood Educator Programs – Integrating Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) and Bilingual Early Childhood Certificates

Background

The National Conference of State Legislatures' international study of world-class educational systems, *No Time to Lose*, identified four common elements for educational success, the first of which is that students come to school ready to learn and extra support is given to struggling students so that all have the opportunity to achieve high standards. The New Mexico Legislature has steadily increased early childhood appropriations, particularly for prekindergarten, over the last eight years as a means of ensuring students are ready for kindergarten, particularly at-risk students. A large body of literature suggests quality prekindergarten has long-term impacts, particularly for students from groups traditionally considered at-risk, such as English learners and low-income and minority students. In New Mexico, multiple reports from the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) have consistently found that participation in prekindergarten improves educational outcomes and attendance through the eighth grade.

In 2017, LFC found the achievement gap was eliminated for students who participated in both prekindergarten and the K-3 Plus program, which provides an extra 25 days of educational instruction prior to kindergarten through third grade.

Research suggests teachers matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling. Thus, a quality workforce is essential to the success of New Mexico's early childhood programming. New Mexico has a limited workforce qualified in early childhood education and differences in prekindergarten teacher licensure requirements between Public Education Department (PED) and Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) –funded prekindergarten programs. Currently, lead teachers in PED public school programs must have a bachelor's degree and hold a teacher's license in early childhood education, but lead teachers in private prekindergarten programs administered by CYFD do not. New Mexico needs programs to facilitate growth in the prekindergarten teacher workforce, as well as the early childhood workforce at large, particularly programs that lead to a bachelor's degree or licensure in early childhood education, or both.

The I-BEST in Early Childhood Education program at Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) allows SFCC students to complete the coursework necessary to apply for a

New Mexico Child Development Certificate, a CYFD-awarded certificate for early childhood teachers, in as little as two to three semesters. This I-BEST Program is part of SFCC's Adult Education programming, and is designed to allow students to complete their college certificate; improve their reading, writing, mathematics, and English skills; and obtain a high school equivalency credential, if needed, simultaneously. Programs such as these are essential for expanding New Mexico's early childhood education workforce.

SFCC's Early Childhood Education I-BEST Program

A growing body of research indicates tremendous value in recruiting people from communities with teacher shortages to transition into teaching, as these teachers often mirror the community demographically and are often more likely to stay in the community. SFCC's Early Childhood Educator I-BEST program is just one example of "grow-your-own" teacher education programs in New Mexico working to address teacher shortages, retention issues, and teacher diversity. Other community colleges, such as Central New Mexico Community College, also offer a pathway to an early childhood credential through the I-BEST program. Additionally, many four-year postsecondary institutions have "grow-your-own" teacher education programs, such as the Educators Rising program at New Mexico State University. Financial support is also offered through Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) scholarships, which offer financial support for tuition, books, release time from work, and bonuses or raises for staff currently working in an early childhood education program who wish to pursue an associate-, bachelor-, or graduate-level degree in early childhood education.

Available Certificates through SFCC's I-BEST Program:

- Nursing Assistant
- Phlebotomy
- Medical Assisting
- Community Network Security Certificate
- Early Childhood Development
- Community Health Worker

I-BEST Consortium

The Early Childhood Educator I-BEST program is part of SFCC's larger I-BEST Consortium. The I-BEST program is a nationally recognized model, developed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, designed to improve students' literacy and work skills so that students can earn postsecondary credentials, get living wage jobs, and begin working in their chosen field quickly. All I-BEST classes are small, with 12 to 15 students, and have two instructors that teach together in a manner designed to be easy to understand with typical classroom instruction partnered with real-life learning activities. I-BEST provides an academic support class to guide students through lessons, activities, and terminology. In addition, I-BEST students receive individual academic advising to help them learn to balance their coursework with their other commitments, including a study plan designed specifically for their unique needs. Advisors also offer I-BEST students help with career and academic planning, as well as financial aid guidance and support. Students are further supported through an I-BEST learning community that fosters connections with other adult students who are facing similar challenges. By the end of two to three semesters, I-BEST students can complete a postsecondary certificate, improve their academic skills, and get their high school equivalency credential, if needed.

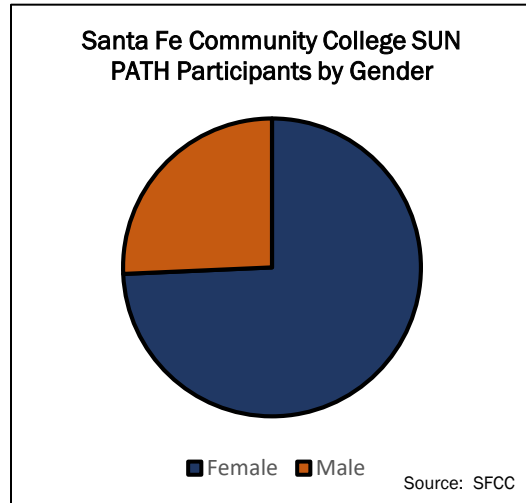
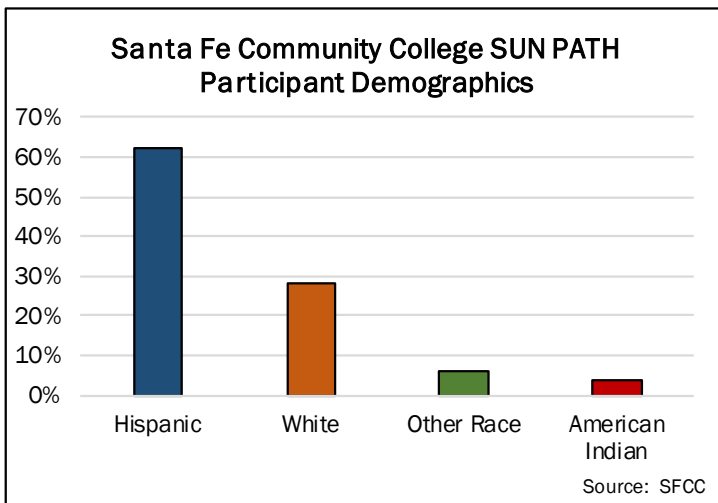


The SUN PATH Program. SFCC's I-BEST program received funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant until the grant expired on September 30, 2018. The grant was administered through the SUN PATH program, a partnership between the New Mexico Higher Education Department, the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, and New Mexico Healthcare Employers. The SUN PATH program was funded by the \$15 million TAACCCT grant from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2018. The goal of SUN PATH was to provide funding for community colleges, employers, and workforce agencies that create pathways to high-skill, high-wage jobs that have a lasting impact on workforce education. Since the grant's expiration, there is no longer a SUN PATH consortium across the 11 New Mexico colleges that received grant funding. However, as the lead institution for grant recipients, SFCC is piecing together certain components of SUN PATH across the state to enable these institutions to continue to work together.

SUN PATH Partner Community Colleges

- Santa Fe Community College: Lead Institution
- Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque
- Eastern New Mexico University, Roswell
- Eastern New Mexico University, Ruidoso
- Mesalands Community College, Tucumcari
- New Mexico State University, Alamogordo
- San Juan Community College, Farmington
- University of New Mexico, Gallup
- University of New Mexico, Los Alamos
- University of New Mexico, Valencia
- University of New Mexico, Taos

Since the SUN PATH program began four years ago, SUN PATH exceeded almost all of the identified performance targets proposed in the TAACCCT grant. According to the *Improving Lives Strengthening Healthcare: Year 4 Sun Path Consortium Progress Report*, in total, across all programs, SUN PATH served 4,266 students, with 2,792 program completers, or 65 percent, and 3,125 credentials earned, or 73 percent. Of those 4,266 students, 604 students, or 14 percent, became employed after program completion, and 2,022, or 47 percent, who were already employed received a wage increase post-enrollment. Prior to SUN PATH, students in the adult education system had limited access to credit bearing training programs. According to the progress report, analysis shows that for every \$1 invested in the SUN PATH program, \$2.22 was returned in higher wage earnings in New Mexico. I-BEST students make up 27 percent of SUN PATH students. At SFCC, the average age of participants was almost 33 years of age. Participants at SFCC were mostly Hispanic and female.



SFCC's I-BEST program also receives program support and professional development from the national I-BEST network at their own cost.

I-BEST in Early Childhood Education

SFCC's Early Childhood Education I-BEST program is designed to provide students with the necessary coursework to apply for New Mexico's CYFD-awarded Child Development Certificate for early childhood teachers. The New Mexico Child Development Certificate exceeds the requirements of the national Child Development Associate credential. The Child Development Certificate is specifically designed to prepare graduates to work in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, but graduates can work in a variety of early childhood education settings, including CYFD-funded prekindergarten programs as an assistant teacher. All certificate coursework credits apply towards an associate's degree in early childhood education. SFCC works with Santa Fe Public Schools to ensure alignment in early childhood education training with the public school system.

Students also benefit from the Early Childhood Center of Excellence at SFCC, a laboratory school for early childhood and teacher education. The Early Childhood Center of Excellence both demonstrates and replicates high-quality early childhood services through Kids Campus. Kids Campus is a year-round early education and prekindergarten program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. SFCC's teacher education programs, including the Early Childhood Education I-BEST program, often use Kids Campus for educational purposes such as observations, projects, and practicum and field experience.

Like all I-BEST programs, SFCC's Early Childhood Education I-BEST program is specifically geared towards adult students. For this reason, most courses are scheduled in the evening so that students can take care of other commitments during the day. Early Childhood Education I-BEST program cohorts are designed to be small, with a typical cohort of only 12 to 15 students. Students share coursework with their cohort so they not only benefit from small class sizes, but also from the comradery facilitated by shared experience. The strength of the Early Childhood Education I-BEST learning community is evident in the fact that very few students have dropped out of the program.

English as a Second Language Program. SFCC also offers the Early Childhood Education I-BEST program in Spanish, generally with all the same coursework and requirements of the English program but with the additional requirement that students must also take English language classes. Upon enrollment, students take the ACCUPLACER assessment in both English and Spanish to ensure students are placed into English language courses that are appropriate for their skill level. If needed, students are also able to earn their high school equivalency credential simultaneously, or complete remedial coursework. The English as a second language program was developed at the request of a student. SFCC is now serving their third cohort of bilingual students. Each cohort is limited to 25 students, and there is always a waiting list. The program is specifically designed to not only

The ACCUPLACER is a computer-adaptive assessment from the College Board that evaluates student preparedness in reading, writing, and mathematics for introductory college courses.



prepare future early childhood educators, but also to move students towards increased English language proficiency through six levels of English classes.

