

➤ Resources and Support for High-Quality, Individualized Professional Development: Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

For children in Virginia’s publicly funded pre-K programs, in-person classrooms closed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continued into Fall 2020, most school divisions started virtually, with a few divisions offering hybrid and in-person options. In partnership with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Advancing Effective Interactions and Instruction (AEII) Initiative at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) worked with Virginia’s early childhood leaders and teachers in state-funded PreK programs to provide high-quality early learning experiences to support children’s school readiness skills in this challenging health crisis. The goal of the [AEII initiative](#) is to support quality improvements in teacher-child interactions and instruction through effective, individualized professional development for teachers. AEII supports professional development efforts by providing resources and consultation services. This brief highlights the ongoing support and resources provided in collaboration with Early Childhood leaders and teachers to enact **high-quality, individualized professional development (PD)** in the 2020-21 school year and how lessons learned are translating into future work.

In partnership with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Advancing Effective Interactions and Instruction (AEII) Initiative at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) worked with Virginia’s early childhood leaders and teachers in state-funded PreK programs to provide high-quality early learning experiences to support children’s school readiness skills in this challenging health crisis.

High-Quality Supportive Resources for All: The ECE Resource Hub

AEII developed the new online [Early Childhood Education \(ECE\) Resource Hub](#) to provide ECE teachers and leaders with free and public access to high-quality resources to foster children’s social-emotional development. A “Topic of the Month,” highlighted a social-emotional skill with a focus on equity and inclusion. Adaptations for virtual, hybrid, and socially-distanced classrooms and ways to connect with families were provided. For each Topic of the Month, the AEII team reviewed an extensive list of resources for content and to ensure an emphasis on equity and inclusion. Across the 2020-21 school year, the team reviewed, modified, and loaded over 150 resources into the ECE Resource Hub site (see Table 1 for an overview). These resources were distributed to ECE leaders in a monthly email newsletter, which leaders could then forward to their teachers. The monthly emails will continue in the 2021-22 school year and will highlight existing resources on the Hub, as well as new infant and toddler resources.

Table 1
ECE Resource Hub Overview

Resource Type	Function of Resource
COVID-19 Adaptations	Adapt teaching to work with students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes in-person, virtual, and hybrid models.
Trauma-Informed Practice	Incorporate trauma-informed practice when working with students. Supporting teachers to work with students who may be going through traumatic events.

Resource Type	Function of Resource
Equity and Inclusion	Advance equity and inclusion when working with students. Emphasizes racial equity, inclusion of students with disabilities, and equitable learning opportunities for dual language learners.
Family Connections	Encourage teachers to involve families in supporting social-emotional skills at home. Includes videos and articles for families, or teachers, along with guiding questions for teachers to work with these families.
Books and Activities	Use books, activities, and games to support specific social emotional skills. Authors and illustrators of books were from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.
Leader Resources	Guidance for leaders on how to use the ECE Resource Hub materials to build practice-focused Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), including tips and templates for small group PD sessions.

Professional Development Collaboration to Utilize the ECE Resource Hub

In addition to making the ECE Resource Hub publicly available, AEII provided multiple professional development opportunities to increase effective use of the resources in early childhood education (ECE) programs. Three are highlighted here.

PD Reflection & Planning Process

The AEII team worked with division leaders to use data to plan effective and individualized PD to improve teachers' practices and children's outcomes. In 2020-21, divisions completed a personalized [PD Reflection & Planning form](#) to self-assess their progress on [Six Elements of Effective PD](#) and create a plan to enhance PD effectiveness in one or more areas. The team created videos and accompanying resource guides for each element of effective PD. A new webpage for [Planning Effective Professional Development](#) was created to house the modules and guides for ease of accessibility.

Partnering with Leaders through Professional Learning Communities

AEII developed a four-part Professional Learning Community (PLC) series and offered four small group sections to leaders interested in utilizing the Considering Equity resources on the ECE Resource Hub. The learning objectives of this series are to: (1) support leaders in considering their own experiences with equity/inequity to be better prepared to facilitate teacher/staff discussions on these topics, (2) connect leaders across the state who have aligned equity goals to facilitate cross-division collaboration, and (3) increase the probability of leaders' use of the Considering Equity resources on the ECE Resource Hub.

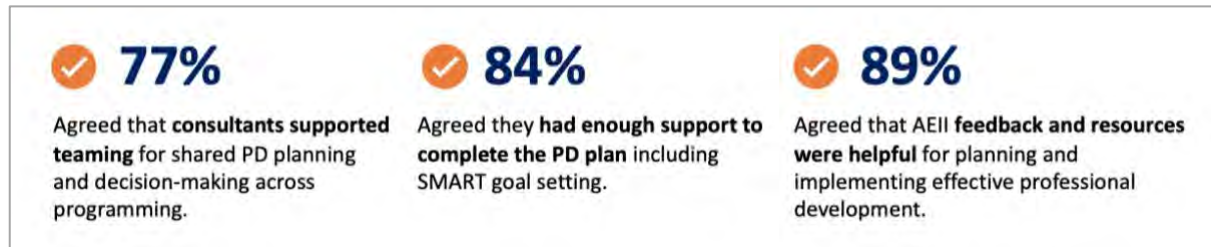
Collaborating to Provide Virtual Coaching for Teachers

The virtual and video-based coaching focused on children's social-emotional needs and inequities exacerbated by COVID-19. Coaches collaborated with teachers to bolster teacher well-being and promote equitable social-emotional teaching practices in their classrooms. The coaching followed a scope and sequence that corresponded with ECE Resource Hub Topics of the Month. Coaches held coaching sessions via web-based platforms on an every-other-week schedule, with two sessions focused on each topic. They also held "coach-leader coordination sessions" three times across the year to align supports to teachers and to promote leaders' support for the coaching initiative.

Leaders’ and Teachers’ Perceptions of Resources

Across the range of services and supports provided, early childhood leaders and teachers reported high levels of satisfaction and usefulness with the experiences. For example, Figure 1 shows leaders feedback on the PD examination and reflection process.

Figure 1
Leader Feedback on PD Reflection and Feedback Process



Specific to the Professional Learning Communities, leaders consistently agreed that the experience helped prepare them to have discussions about race and equity and provide related PD to their teachers. As shown in Figure 2 and in their comments in Table 2, leaders were also satisfied with their PLC experience and appreciated the fit of the equity focus with their division’s goals.

Figure 2
Leader Reports on the Extent to Which PLC Learning Objectives Were Met

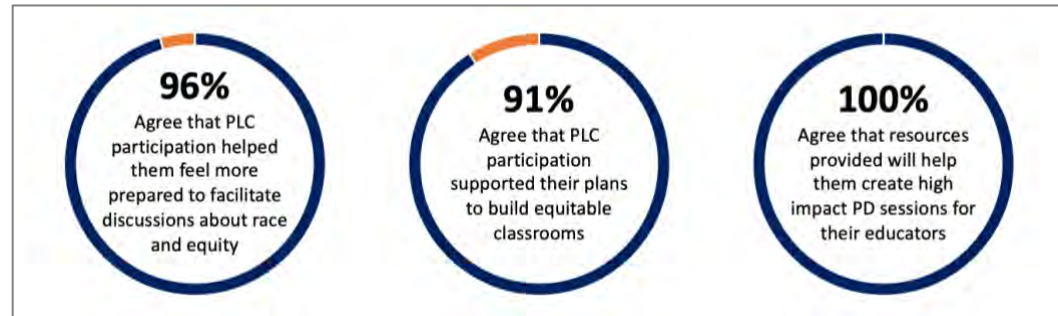


Table 2
Selected Leader Quotations from Survey: PLCs

Type of Resource/Support: Professional Learning Communities	
Leader Quotations	<p><i>“It was beneficial to collaborate with colleagues from other districts who also serve preK students and families... It was really wonderful to have all early childhood leaders together in a small professional learning community to learn from each other. The resources were useful and all things I can turn-key to the staff.”</i></p>
	<p><i>“The way the information was presented was so lovely. It was respectful of where people are and from the very first meeting gave practical advice about how to respond to conversations, biases, and perspectives. This experience did not make people feel shameful about where they might be but instead moved them forward in their thinking, perspectives, and growth. It was empowering, necessary, and highly respectful of all.”</i></p>

Specific to coaching, teachers on average had eight coaching sessions across the 2020-21 school year. As noted in Figure 3 and in their comments shown in Table 3, teachers reported that coaching was beneficial to their practice.

Figure 3
Teacher Feedback on Perceived Benefits of Coaching



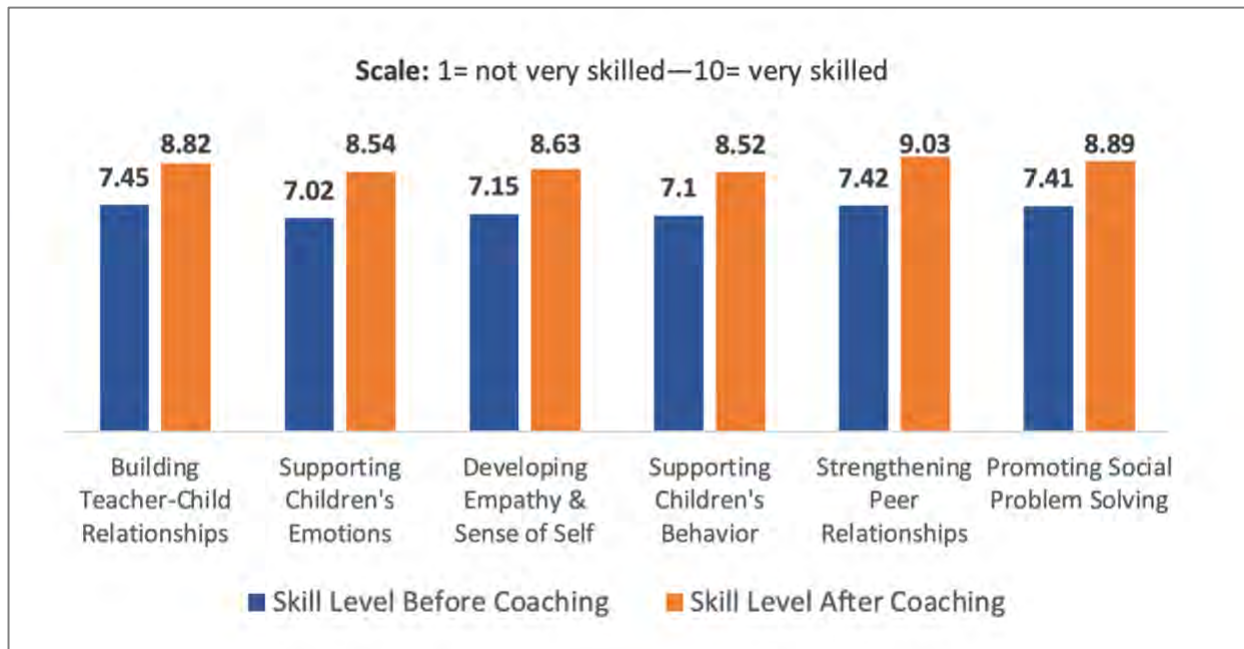
Table 3
Selected Teacher Quotations from Survey: Coaching

Type of Resource/Support: Coaching	
Teacher Quotations	<i>“Coaching encouraged me to reflect on classroom practices and how those practices can be altered to better meet the social and emotional needs of my students. Viewing the videotapes of my classroom was one tool that was helpful in the reflection process.”</i>
	<i>“I think it has made me stop and think about why a child may act a certain way. This only intensifies my desire to build good relationships with my students. If I know the student well, I can better understand how they are feeling and how to best work with them in the classroom so that they can be successful.”</i>

In addition, Figure 4 shows that teachers reported growth in their use of equitable social-emotional instructional skills following coaching.

Figure 4

Teacher-Reported Social-Emotional Instruction Skill Levels Before and After Coaching



Plans for 2021-2022 School Year

As noted here, the collaboration between VDOE and AEII allowed for a rapid response to the changing needs of the early childhood field. In partnership with early childhood leaders and teachers, together we were able to provide effective supports in these challenging times. In the 2021-2022 school year, we will expand support to birth-to-5 programs that receive public funding, including center-based care and family day homes and programs that serve infants and toddlers. Activities will build upon lessons learned from years of successful collaborations with school-based programs to expand supports to the broader ECE community. AEII will support leaders and educators to provide effective interactions and instruction in every early childhood classroom so that all young children are engaged in experiences that will help prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond. PD supports will be provided to advance equity and with an awareness of COVID impacts, ensuring the most programs and children possible benefit from supports.