

Consultation on Mentorship Programs Summary

Supporting Mentorship in the Profession

The College of Early Childhood Educators' Strategic Plan 2022-2027 includes the goal of proactive public protection, with two objectives focused on equipping and supporting practice excellence and building a resilient and sustainable profession. The second strategic goal is to support collaborative leadership and engagement, with one objective aimed at embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work, and another, to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with stakeholders, the profession and the public.

In order to meet these goals and objectives, the College is committed to supporting mentorship in the profession, consulting and collaborating with sector partners regarding mentoring programs for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and early years professionals.

Consultation & Engagement with Sector Partners

Following the results of mentoring program surveys that were sent to all Service System Managers (SSMs), post-secondary institutions and school boards in the winter and spring of 2024, the College held targeted consultations from October to November of 2024 through surveys and interview-style meetings to address gaps in knowledge and to gather more information about existing mentoring programs for early years professionals.

Three surveys were newly developed and completed, and 12 interviews were conducted with a mix of sector partners, including: Service System Managers, post-secondaries, professional associations, professional resource centres, Indigenous professional learning centres, researchers and the Ministry of Education.

Highlights from the Data

Presence of mentoring programs and collaborations

- All but one survey respondent stated they have a mentoring program
- Collaborative mentoring programs are the norm

Focus, aim and target audience

- The primary aim of most mentoring programs is workforce retention
- Other priorities include creating a welcoming space, a sense of belonging and professional growth

- Most include a wide target audience (e.g. RECEs, supervisors, students, non-RECEs, experienced and novice)

Definitions of mentoring

- No single definition of mentoring exists but there is a wide use of reciprocal learning and mutual exchange of knowledge
- Building caring and trusting relationships and creating a sense of belonging are seen as first steps to conceptualizing and engaging in mentoring

Program delivery and successes

- Priority placed on in-person, face-to-face delivery
- Multi-modal approaches common: peer-to-peer, mentor-mentee pairings and communities of practice
- Reciprocal learning, responsive relationship building and creating a sense of belonging
- Successes and sustainability due to funding support, flexibility and choice in accessing programs, and participants committed to time requirement

Resources required and challenges / barriers to program delivery

- Ongoing need for funding
- Geographical and regional challenges
- Mixed access to digital and technological tools and resources
- Gaps in leadership engagement and support for mentors
- Collaboration, creating new partnerships and communication and promotion of programs

Supporting equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging and reconciliation

- Many highlight funding and professional learning agreement requirements with respect to supporting EDI and reconciliation
- Some note direct action, critical self-reflection, open dialogue, and work to counter biases, address systemic inequities and oppression
- Broad focus on welcoming and inclusive programs that support a sense of belonging for diverse participants

Mentoring program policies, evaluation frameworks and outcomes and findings

- Few formal evaluations with some in development and planned for 2025
- Feedback surveys, focus group and communities of practice
- In-program modifications and improvements that are participant-led and responsive to community needs
- Anecdotal outcomes highlight improving workforce retention, breaking down silos, fostering belonging, developing professional identity and empowering leadership.

Mentoring Program Key Themes

Based on the mentoring program surveys conducted in the winter/spring of 2024 and the new survey and interview data collected during the targeted consultations in the fall of 2024, several overlapping key themes emerged and are common to multiple survey and interview question topics on mentoring programs.

- Collaboration
- Reciprocity
- Multi-modal and communities of practice
- Workforce retention and belonging
- Accessibility and commitment
- Flexibility and responsiveness

Moving Forward

To continue work on the objectives in the College's Strategic Plan 2022-2027, the College will focus on activities such as:

- Communicate with sector partners to share information collected about mentoring programs across the province.
- Continue to gather information related to mentoring in ECE through various perspectives (e.g., RECEs, employers, organizations supporting diverse groups/experiences).
- Employ research, consultation findings and key themes to inform the scope of future College activities to support mentorship in the profession.
- Engage with the Ontario Mentorship Collaborative to support activities related to the planning and implementation of a Mentorship Symposium in 2025.

Have questions?

If you have questions about this project, or wish to provide information about what's happening in your organization or community related to mentorship in early childhood education, please contact the Professional Practice department practice@college-ece.ca.