

Infant Toddler Specialization Post-Training

Cohort 3 Report

February 2025



OchsCenter

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Infant Toddler Specialization Training program was developed by CCR&R staff and coaches to enhance the knowledge and practical skills of infant and toddler educators in early childhood development. Designed for early childhood educators seeking specialized training without necessarily pursuing higher education through TECTA or a college degree, this program offers a structured curriculum that integrates training with Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA), commonly referred to as coaching. This approach ensures the effective application of learned concepts in the classroom.



By combining training and coaching, the program aims to elevate the quality of infant and toddler care across Tennessee. Its key objectives include increasing educators' awareness of their role in child development, expanding their understanding of early childhood best practices, and promoting the use of developmentally appropriate strategies. By strengthening educators' knowledge and confidence, the program not only enhances classroom instruction but also fosters a greater sense of professionalism. This, in turn, contributes to lower turnover rates among child care providers, creating a more stable and enriching environment for young children.

The third cohort of educators who completed the Infant Toddler Specialization Training Program participated in six virtual training sessions over a three-month period, delivered via the Zoom platform. Following each session, educators engaged in individualized coaching and Technical Training Assistance (TTA) provided by CCR&R coaches to reinforce and apply their learning in real-world settings. As part of the program, educators also had the opportunity to implement LENA Grow® (Language ENvironment Analysis) in their classrooms, receiving coaching on its use. LENA Grow® is an advanced tool designed to measure and enhance verbal interactions between educators and children, fostering language development in early childhood settings.

Upon successful completion of the program, educators were honored in a graduation ceremony recognizing their achievements. Additionally, each educator, along with their

center or family/group home, received a \$1,000 stipend to support the purchase of classroom materials, further enriching the learning environment for young children.

CCR&R engaged the Ochs Center to conduct an external evaluation of the program to guide improvements and strategic enhancements. As part of this evaluation, a web-based survey was administered to program participants three months after the training concluded. The survey aimed to gather feedback on the training format and topics, as well as to solicit recommendations for program refinement. The survey link was distributed via email to 72 educators who had completed the Infant Toddler Specialization Training Program. The survey received responses from less than half of the recipients, yielding a response rate of 41.7%. A copy of the survey instrument, along with the results, is provided in Appendix B of this report.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The majority of survey respondents (86.7%) indicated that they currently teach infants and toddlers. The educators who participated in the survey represented a diverse age range, with an average age of 40.4 years. The youngest respondent was 21 years old, while the oldest was 62 years old. Less than one out of ten educators had less than 2 years of experience as an educator. Findings suggest that child care educators with fewer years of experience are more likely to have worked exclusively with infants and toddlers. In contrast, those with more years of experience have typically taught a broader range of age groups, including both infants and toddlers as well as school-aged children (see Figure 1).

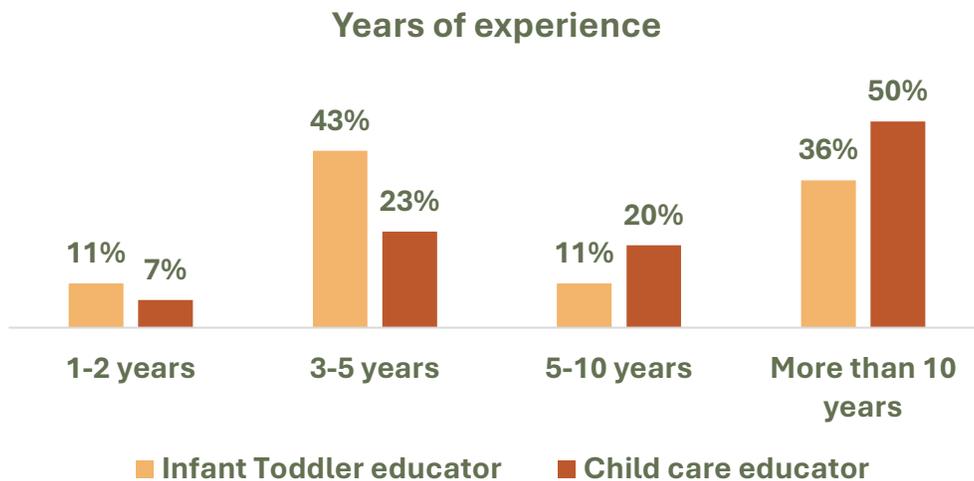


Figure 1: Years of Experience

CURRICULUM

The Infant Toddler Specialization Training curriculum consisted of three components: six two-hour sessions of virtual training, follow-up TTA or coaching, and LENA Grow®. A graduation ceremony was hosted at the conclusion of the training.

VIRTUAL TRAINING

The virtual training covered six key topics, each serving as the focus of discussion and activities during the individual training sessions. Survey respondents were asked to provide their opinions on whether each topic should be retained for future cohorts. Overall, there was **strong support for all training topics** to be included in future sessions, with particularly high endorsement for *Oral Language and Literacy* and *Health and Safety in the Classroom* (see Table 1).

Table 1: Training Topics

Training Topic	Yes	Maybe	No
Brain Development and DAP	90.9%	9.1%	-
Infant and Toddler Oral Language and Literacy	96.6%	3.4%	-
Brain Development for Infants and Toddlers	93.1%	3.4%	3.4%
Brain Development Part 2 – Support Similarities and Differences	85.7%	10.7%	3.6%
Including Children with Disabilities	89.3%	7.1%	3.6%
Health and Safety in the Infant Toddler Classroom	96.4%	3.6%	-
Protective Factors	92.9%	7.1%	

When provided with the opportunity to suggest additional topics to be included for future cohorts, respondents identified the following topics:

- How to better address challenging behaviors
- Focus on toddler specific topics such as transitions



- Lesson planning that includes language – including sign language, math, science, and music
- How to create better learning environments

One educator suggested that a focus on how to practically transfer what was learned in the training into the classroom would be beneficial.

“How best to implement all of the things we learned in the course. it would have been a great addition to the end of the training.”

Survey respondents were also asked to provide feedback on the delivery of the training. The instructional format included whole-group virtual presentations led by instructors, followed by breakout sessions designed to foster small-group interaction. These **breakout sessions** provided educators with opportunities to **exchange** effective classroom strategies, **share** valuable resources, and **discuss** best practices. Participants reported that the training sessions were engaging and informative. Many noted that they were able to apply insights gained from their peers to enhance their own classroom practices (see Figure 2).

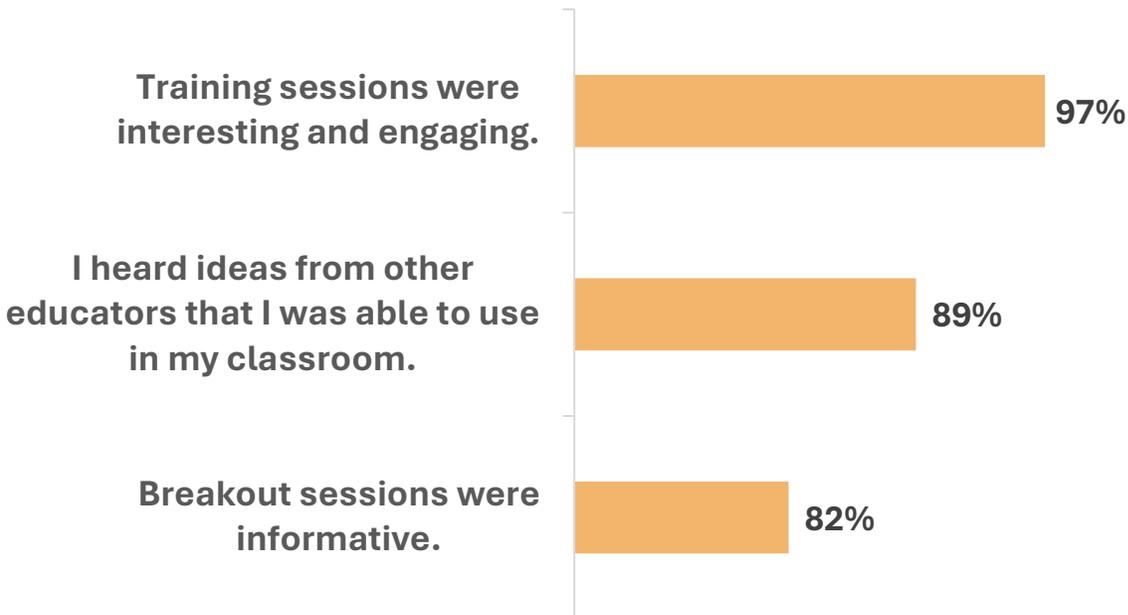


Figure 2: Training Sessions

Given the extensive experience of many participants in the child care profession, it is not surprising that only one in three educators (32.2%) reported the training content as entirely



new to them. However, repeated exposure to key concepts can serve as a valuable refresher, reinforcing best practices and reigniting enthusiasm for the profession.

TTA OR COACHING

Following each virtual training session, educators met with CCR&R Infant Toddler Quality coaches to **discuss** the training content, **ask** questions, and seek **guidance** on implementing new strategies in the classroom. These coaching sessions provided educators with direct support in translating their learning into practice. Additionally, coaches had the opportunity to **model effective techniques** by engaging with children in the classroom, demonstrating best practices in real time (see Figure 3).

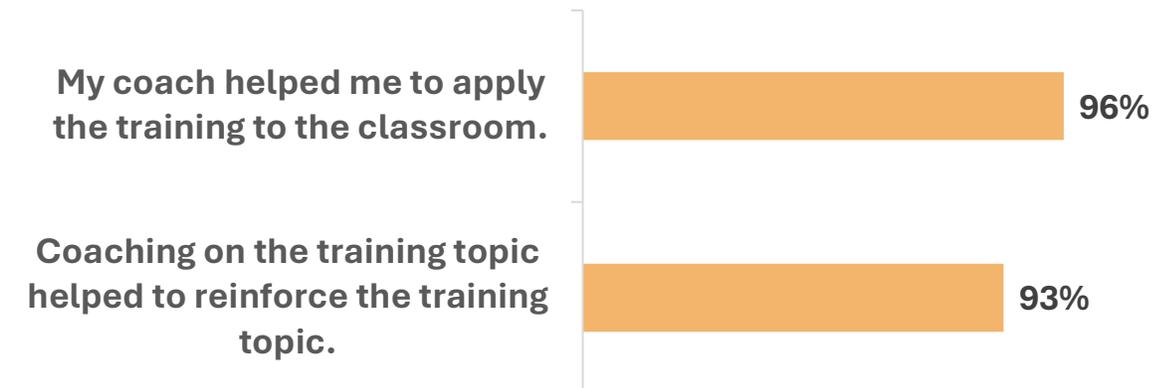


Figure 3: Coaching

When asked what they valued most about the training, many educators shared how important the time spent with their coach was to their overall experience.

“I loved being able to sit and talk to my coach each week.”

“My coach coming into my classroom and interacting with not only me but also my children.”

“Having my coach model things I had issues with.”



LENA GROW®

Language ENvironment Analysis (LENA) Grow® technology is the industry standard for measuring talk with children, which is a critical factor in early brain development. LENA



utilizes a small wearable device — often referred to as a “talk pedometer” — combined with cloud-based software to deliver detailed feedback that helps educators monitor and increase their interactive talk with children. Infant and Toddler educators were provided with the opportunity to utilize the LENA Grow® technology for five weeks during the Infant Toddler Specialization training. Most educators who

completed a survey (89.7%) incorporated LENA Grow® in their classroom during the training program. Nine out of ten educators (93.1%) who used LENA Grow® reported they made at least some changes in how they interact with the children because of the knowledge gained from the technology.

Few challenges were identified with using LENA Grow. Educators shared that putting the vests on each morning could be challenging and removing the vest during naptime could be problematic because of the frequency of naps for infants. Additionally, some educators expressed reluctance to use the technology, citing personal policies against allowing electronic devices in their homes.

“Nap times with the vests, having to take the recorders out every time a baby napped because they nap so often.”

“Kids would come in later so that would display lower results to someone who was exposed to more language by being there longer.”

“Do not require providers to participate in LENA. I feel this is a personal choice. Some Providers don't like devices in their homes.”

GRADUATION AND AWARD

A graduation ceremony was held at the conclusion of the training to **celebrate the educators' achievements**. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.0%) reported attending the ceremony. Additionally, the centers or homes where the educators were employed received a \$1,000 award to be used at their discretion. However, only half of the respondents (51.9%) indicated that they had received the award. Among those who did, the majority (71.4%) reported receiving guidance from their coach on how to utilize the funds. The funds were used to purchase age-appropriate books and toys. The funds were also used to purchase items needed such as a new stroller and table for meals.

QUALITY AND VALUE OF TRAINING

Educators who completed the survey were asked to evaluate the quality and value of the training. Overall, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with respondents expressing high satisfaction with all aspects of the program. Nearly all participants rated every component as *Good* or *Excellent* (see Figure 4).

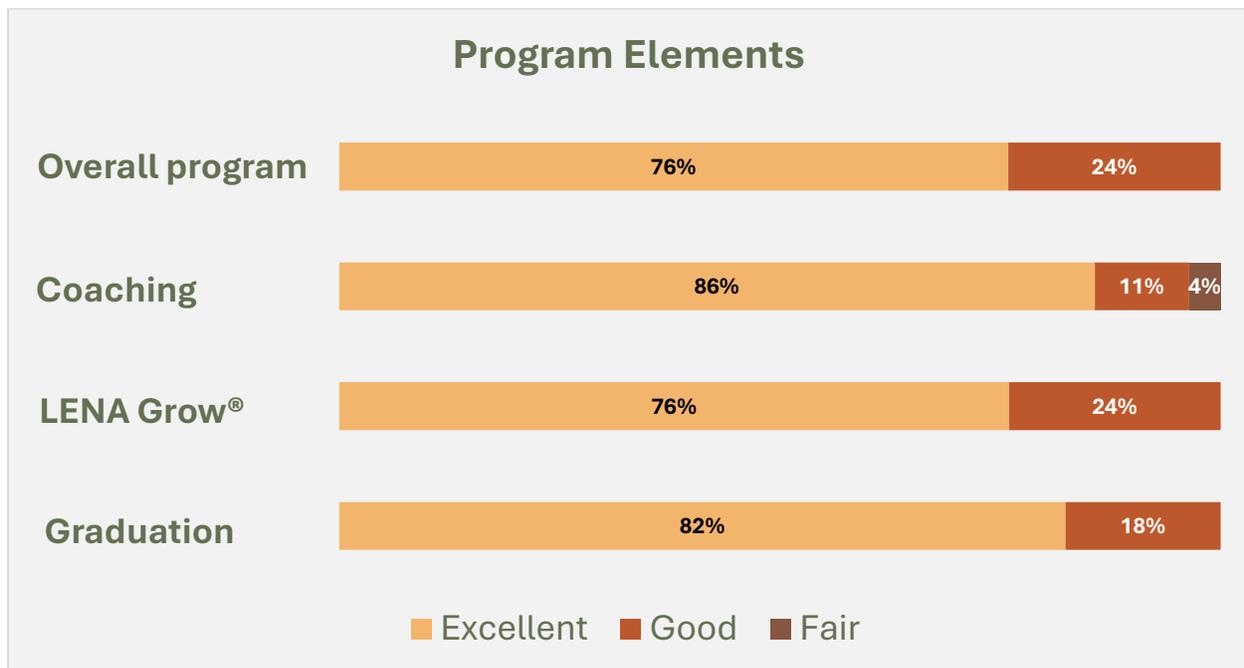


Figure 4: Quality of Program

Additionally, educators cited several examples about the value of the overall program. Specifically, 96.4% indicated that they were **able to adopt practices** learned from the



training by making changes in their classrooms. Moreover, 85.7% reported they had **gained confidence** in their ability to be an effective educator. Additionally, 96.4% of the educators who completed the training program were able to **serve as a change agent** by sharing what they learned with other educators (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Value of Program

“I appreciate that the program included both virtual and in-person training opportunities. Specifically, I loved how my coach came to see me in person at convenient times I chose. I also liked that I was able to work at my own pace, which really helped me learn the material effectively. I’m excited about all the ways I can apply this coaching to my own practice.”

Educators were able to provide several examples of changes they made in their classrooms and for sharing the information with other educators and families.

“I have changed arrangements in my room, added new songs, new lighting, and I talk to the babies much more.”

“Lots of language, talking, and engaging with the children, hopefully encouraging my coworkers when they are having struggles in their classroom.”

“I was able to teach my replacement as I moved into a new role.”



“The information that I gained. I shared with staff and sometimes parents.”

“I have applied what I have learned in my classroom by adding more materials that cater to each—an example of this is in books—making sure each child has a book available to them that represents them.”



CONCLUSION

The Infant and Toddler Specialization Training Program is a six-session course designed to provide educators with essential knowledge and practical skills to enhance their classroom practices. The program also fosters networking opportunities among educators across Tennessee, promoting collaboration and shared learning. To reinforce training concepts and best practices, participants engage in individualized coaching sessions with CCR&R coaches, ensuring the effective application of newly acquired knowledge and strategies. Additionally, educators have the opportunity to integrate LENA Grow[®] technology into their classrooms, further strengthening their ability to create a rich and supportive environment for early childhood development.

Educators were highly complimentary of the training program, offering few suggestions for improvement. Most found the training topics to be relevant and recommended their continuation in future cohorts. However, they suggested incorporating additional materials on lesson planning and behavior management to further enhance the program. Coaching played a critical role in supplementing the training, providing educators with practical support to implement best practices in their classrooms. Additionally, LENA Grow[®] heightened awareness of verbal communication in the classroom, encouraging educators to be more intentional in their interactions with children.

Ultimately, participation in the Infant and Toddler Specialization Training Program empowered educators, increasing their confidence in teaching infants and toddlers. The training equipped them with the tools needed to create positive changes in their classrooms, better meeting the developmental needs of the children. Furthermore, it instilled the confidence to share their knowledge with colleagues and families, extending the program’s impact beyond their own classrooms.



APPENDIX A

RESULTS OF INFANT TODDLER SPECIALIZATION TRAINING POST-TRAINING SURVEY

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
There was no overlap in topic areas or material covered.	3.6%	21.4%	14.3%	28.6%	32.1%
The material covered in the training was new to me.	10.7%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	17.9%
I used the information I learned to make changes in the classroom.	-	-	3.6%	50.0%	46.4%
Providing the course material a week before the training would have increased my learning.	-	10.7%	28.6%	35.7%	25.0%
I am a better educator because of this training.	-	-	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%
The training sessions were interesting and engaging.	-	3.4%	-	48.3%	48.3%
The breakout sessions were informative.	7.1%	3.6%	7.1%	50.0%	32.1%
I heard ideas from other educators in the training that I was able to use in my classroom.	-	-	10.7%	46.4%	42.9%
My director was supportive of my decision to participate.	3.6%	3.6%	14.3%	32.1%	46.4%
Completing this course makes me want to pursue further credentials like a CDA.	3.6%	7.1%	28.6%	21.4%	39.3%

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My coach helped me to apply the training to the classroom.	-	3.6%	-	28.6%	67.9%
Statewide training was more effective than regional training.	-	3.6%	35.7%	35.7%	25.0%
Grouping educators with similar years of experience would have made the training more effective.	-	17.9%	39.3%	21.4%	21.4%
I was comfortable using Zoom before I attended the Infant Toddler Specialization Program.	-	3.6%	-	39.3%	57.1%
I am more confident in my role as an educator after attending the Infant Toddler Specialization Program.	-	3.6%	10.7%	25.0%	60.7%
I have been able to share information I learned from the Infant Toddler Specialization Program with my co-workers.	-	-	3.6%	42.9%	53.6%
Coaching on the training topic helped to reinforce the training topic.	-	3.4%	3.4%	55.2%	37.9%
I prefer in-person coaching.	3.6%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	21.4%



APPENDIX B

INFANT AND TODDLER SPECIALIZATION TRAINING PARTICIPANT POST-TRAINING SURVEY

Signal Centers has contracted with the Ochs Center to conduct an evaluation of the Infant and Toddler Specialization Program that you recently completed. Your input will help to inform decisions about how future programs are designed. Please remember that all of your answers are confidential. Once you complete the survey, you will be entered into a drawing for a gift card.

First, we would like to ask a few questions about you and how you learned about the Infant and Toddler Specialization Program.

1. What age group(s) do you teach? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

1. Infants
2. Toddlers
3. 2-year-old
4. 3-year-old
5. 4-year-old
6. 5-year-old

2. How many years of experience do you have as a child care educator?

1. Less than a year
2. 1 – 2 years
3. 3 – 5 years
4. 6 – 10 years
5. More than 10 years

3. How many years of experience do you have as an Infant/Toddler educator?

1. Less than a year
2. 1 – 2 years
3. 3 – 5 years
4. 6 – 10 years
5. More than 10 years



4. How did you learn about the Infant/Toddler Specialization Program?

Now we want to ask you to share your thoughts about the content of the Infant/Toddler Specialization Training Program. Below is the list of courses/topics that were covered in the training. If you were asked to design this training for the future, please indicate whether or not the topic should be included.

Q5. Training topic	Yes	Maybe	No
1. Brain Development and DAP	1.	2.	3.
2. Infant and Toddler Oral Language and Literacy	1.	2.	3.
3. Brain Development for Infants and Toddlers	1.	2.	3.
4. Brain Development Part 2 – Support Similarities and Differences	1.	2.	3.
5. Including Children with Disabilities	1.	2.	3.
6. Health and Safety in the Infant Toddler Classroom	1.	2.	3.

6. What topics that were not included in this Infant/Toddler Specialization Program would you recommend for future trainings?

7. Overall, how would you rate the Infant/Toddler Specialization Program?

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor



8. How would you rate the coaching and Technical Assistance that you received during the Infant/Toddler Specialization Program?

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor

9. Did you participate in LENA Grow?

1. No
2. Yes

10. [IF YES] Overall, how would you rate your experience with using LENA Grow Live in your classroom?

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor
5. Not applicable

11. How much did you change how you interact with children in your classroom because of what you learned from LENA Grow?

1. Not at all
2. A little
3. Some
4. A great deal

12. What challenges did you experience with LENA Grow? _____

13. Do you plan to continue to use what you learned from LENA Grow in the future?

1. No
2. Yes
3. Maybe



Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

QUESTIONS WILL BE PRESENTED IN RANDOM ORDER	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
14. There was no overlap in topic areas or material covered.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
15. The material covered in the training was new to me.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
16. I used the information I learned to make changes in the classroom.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
17. Providing the course material a week before the training would have increased my learning.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
18. I am a better educator because of this training.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
19. The training sessions were interesting and engaging.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
20. The breakout sessions were informative.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
21. I heard ideas from other educators in the training that I was able to use in my classroom.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
22. My director was supportive of my decision to participate.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
23. Completing this course makes me want to pursue further credentials like a CDA.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.



QUESTIONS WILL BE PRESENTED IN RANDOM ORDER	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
24. My coach helped me to apply the training to the classroom.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
25. Statewide training was more effective than regional training.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
26. Grouping educators with similar years of experience would have made the training more effective.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
27. I was comfortable using Zoom before I attended the Infant Toddler Specialization Program.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
28. I am more confident in my role as an educator after attending the Infant Toddler Specialization Program.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
29. I have been able to share information I learned from the Infant Toddler Specialization Program with my co-workers.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
30. Coaching on the training topic helped to reinforce the training topic.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
31. I prefer in-person coaching.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

32. Different formats are being considered for future trainings. Which of the following formats would you recommend?

1. All training is done virtual
2. All training is done virtual with regional discussion groups to meet in-person



3. All training is done in-person
4. Hybrid – some trainings are done virtual and some are done in-person
5. Other – please specify:

33. What are your reasons for this choice?

34. How have you applied what you learned from the Infant/Toddler Specialization Training Program in your classroom?

35. What part of the training or coaching was most valuable to you as an Infant/Toddler educator?

36. Has your center received the \$1,000 award after you completed the Infant/Toddler Specialization Program?

1. No
2. Yes
3. Not sure

37. Did you receive any guidance from your coach about how to spend the \$1,000 awarded to your center after completing the Infant/Toddler Specialization Program?

1. No
2. Yes
3. Not sure

38. How were these funds spent?

39. What recommendations would you make to improve future Infant/Toddler Specialization Training Programs?

40. Were you able to attend the graduation ceremony?

1. No
2. Yes



41. [IF YES to 40] How would you rate your experience at the graduation ceremony?

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor

42. Finally, we have a few questions about you. In which county do you work?

43. What is your age? _____

44. What is the highest level of education or certification you have been able to complete?

1. Less than high school
2. High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
3. Vocational training
4. Some college courses but no degree
5. Associate Degree
6. Child Development Associate (CDA)
7. Bachelor's Degree
8. Graduate Degree

45. What field of study is your degree?

46. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please share any additional comments you might have about the Infant/Toddler Specialization Training Program.

