

2026

MRTQ PDN Professional Development Needs Assessment Report

This report was produced by the Catherine Cutler Institute's Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) and was conducted under the auspices of the Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Funding for this report was provided by State of Maine contract number CT 10A 20240212000000002211. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Maine Office of Child and Family Services, nor the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Executive Summary

Background

Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) exists to increase the knowledge, quality, and professionalism of all early childhood education and out-of-school time providers in the state of Maine. Operating out of the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine through funding from Maine's Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services, MRTQ PDN has cultivated an ecosystem of professional excellence to support quality improvement of childcare programs through services that include consultation, training, a professional development registry, credentials and pathways to career advancement, apprenticeships, a consumer education website for parents seeking quality childcare options, and a statewide quality rating and improvement system.

MRTQ PDN conducts a biennial Professional Development (PD) Needs Assessment to better understand the training, technical assistance, and overall professional development needs of early childhood education (ECE) and out-of-school time (OST) professionals in the state of Maine.

In 2026, 788 responses were analyzed to understand the landscape of needs and support continuous quality improvement for existing offerings. These responses represented providers from all 16 Maine counties, setting types, and positions.

Key Findings

- Top demand for training and technical assistance by topic areas were: challenging behaviors, social and emotional learning, leadership and business practices, inclusion, and outdoor and nature-based learning.
- Providers have a strong preference for on-demand training over other formats.
- Providers desire more on-demand training to support accessibility and inclusion in their programs.
- Options for virtual and in-person consultation meet provider needs. Email consultation and resource sharing are highly valued supports providers seek through MRTQ PDN technical assistance.
- Early-career providers show the highest interest in pursuing a Maine Credential.
- Director, Preschool, and Family Child Care Credentials are of most interest overall.
- Peer-to-Peer Networks with setting and age-group specific topics return the most interest and time investment from providers.

The insights gained from the analysis of the PD Needs Assessment offer a window into the current interests and professional development needs of ECE and OST providers across the state. With this knowledge, offerings can be better tailored and targeted to meet the diverse needs of the workforce.

Overview and Method

Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) conducts a biennial Professional Development Needs Assessment to better understand the training, technical assistance, and overall professional development needs of early childhood education (ECE) and out-of-school time (OST) professionals in the state of Maine. The Professional Development (PD) Needs Assessment is conducted via an electronic survey and is disseminated during the months of April and May. In 2026, information and the link to the survey was shared with providers via the weekly *Shortcuts* newsletter, MRTQ PDN social media, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and DOE listservs, and to memberships of Maine Association for the Education of Young Children and Family Child Care Association of Maine through their channels.

The PD Needs Assessment survey consisted of seven sections which were compiled and reviewed by MRTQ PDN staff, MRTQ PDN Advisory Council, and Maine Department of Health and Human Services / OCFS leadership:

- Work setting and position
- Technical Assistance
- Peer to Peer Networks
- Training
- Credentials
- MRTQ PDN communications
- Demographic information

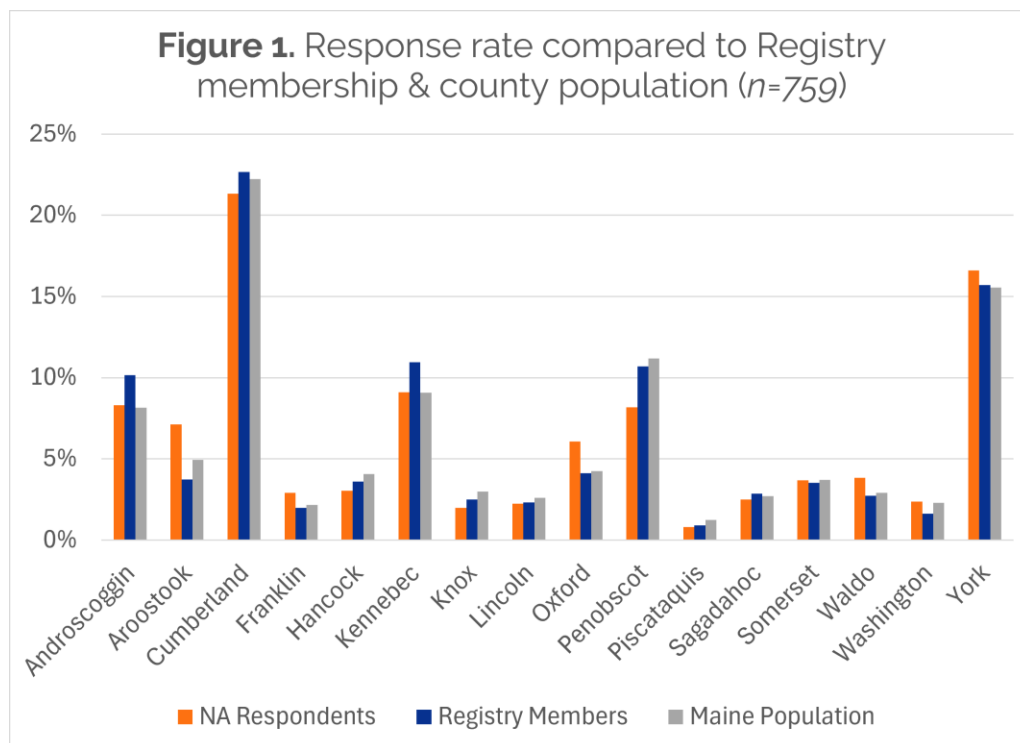
MRTQ PDN received 1,133 responses to the survey; of these, 788 met the threshold of sixty percent or more complete to be used towards analysis in this report. This is a 77% increase in responses from the 2024 PD Needs Assessment, which analyzed 445 responses. The 2026 PD Needs Assessment survey was professionally translated and available in five languages in addition to English: Arabic, French, Portuguese, Somali, and Spanish.

Two focus groups were conducted with existing communities of practice (CoP). One was conducted with the in-person CoP in Farmington, the other was a virtual statewide CoP for

family childcare providers. In total, 21 providers participated in the focus groups. Providers in focus groups were asked for their perspective on training and technical assistance offerings available through MRTQ PDN and were asked to reflect on some of the initial findings of the PD Needs Assessment.

The Respondents

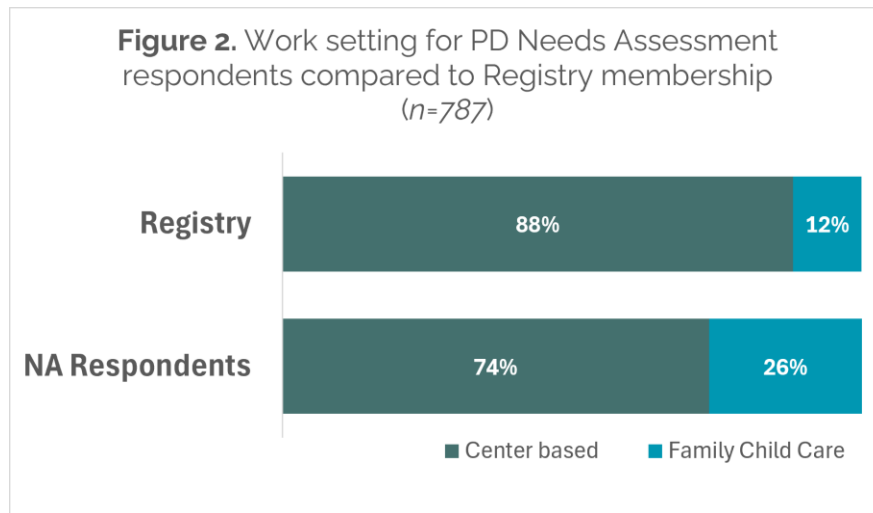
Survey respondents represented providers from all 16 Maine counties, and the response rate was closely aligned with the proportion of Maine’s population and Registry membership from each county (Figure 1). Cumberland and York counties represented the largest proportion of responses and Piscataquis County represented the smallest.



Center-based providers were the majority of respondents (74%), with family childcare representing about a quarter of respondents (26%) (Figure 2). Family childcare providers are overrepresented compared to Registry membership where they represent only 12% of active, employed providers in the Registry. Directors and Owners represented 42% of the responses; Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers represented 33% of respondents.

When asked about their MRTQ Career Lattice level, 83% of respondents indicated they know their current level, compared with 71% in 2022 and 79% in 2024. This year, 63% of providers

felt they knew the steps required to move up on the Career Lattice, which is about even with results from 2024.



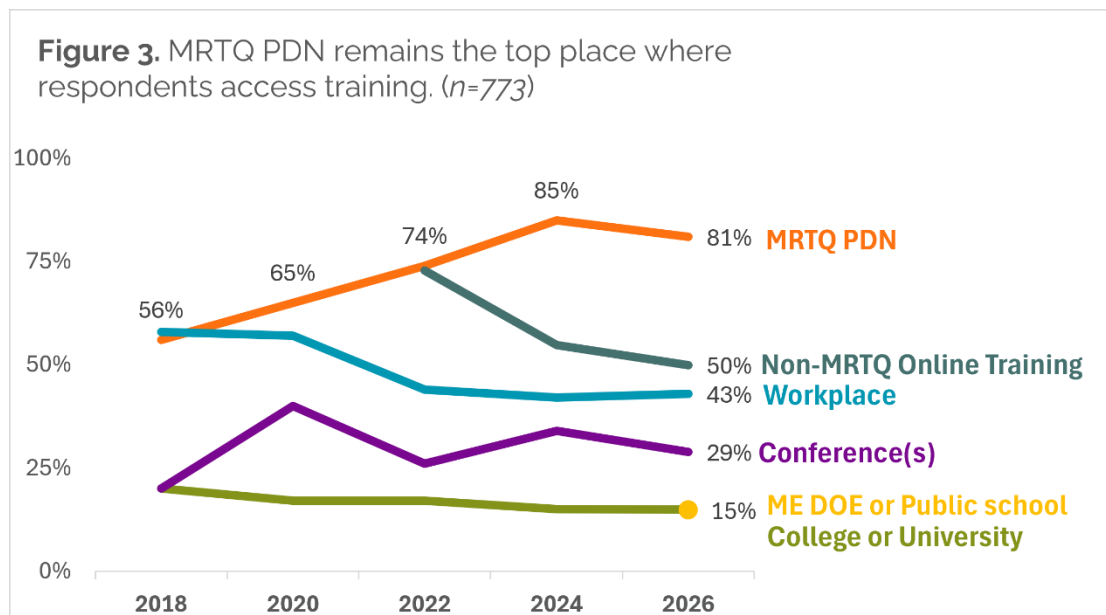
This year, the PD Needs Assessment asked for languages used at home and in the workplace. For both, the top languages for respondents were English, American Sign Language, Spanish, and French (Table 1). These top four languages align with the results of the 2024 PD Needs Assessment, with Spanish moving slightly above French this year.

Table 1. Languages used at home and in the workplace (n=690)

Language	Used at Work	Used at Home
American Sign Language	17.7%	7.8%
Arabic	0	0.3%
Chinese	0	0.2%
English	95.9%	95.9%
Farsi	0.1%	0.3%
French	1.0%	1.0%
Kinyarwanda	0.1%	0.2%
Kirundi	0	0.2%
Lingala	0.4%	0.3%
Passamaquoddy	0.3%	0.2%
Persian	0.1%	0.3%
Portuguese	0.6%	0.5%
Somali	0	0.2%
Spanish	2.0%	2.1%
Vietnamese	0	0.2%

Training

MRTQ PDN continues to be the most common place for respondents to access training to support their professional growth needs (Figure 3). Other sources of training remained relatively stable from previous PD Needs Assessments. Overall, 86% of respondents agreed that they have used something they learned from an MRTQ PDN training in their work.



Each year, the PD Needs Assessment survey provides a set of topics and asks providers to rank them based on their interest in each. Across all responses, the top three ranked topic areas this year remained consistent compared to the 2024 PD Needs Assessment:

- ★ Challenging behaviors
- ★ Social and emotional learning (SEL)
- ★ Outdoor and nature-based learning.

Training interests differed by position or years of experience, but not by much, with largely the same topics but in a slightly different order between groups. Directors/Owners ranked training about outdoor and nature-based learning and positive childhood experiences slightly higher than respondents in Assistant or Lead Teacher roles. Respondents in Assistant Teacher roles showed interest in adverse childhood experiences and children with disabilities (Table 2).

Table 2. Training topic interest by position (n=620)

Assistant Teachers	Lead Teachers	Directors/Owners
1. Challenging behaviors	1. Challenging behaviors	1. Challenging behaviors
2. Social and emotional learning	2. Social and emotional learning	2. Outdoor and nature-based learning
3. Outdoor and nature-based learning	3. Outdoor and nature-based learning	3. Positive childhood experiences
4. Adverse childhood experiences	4. Positive childhood experiences	4. Social and emotional learning
5. Children with disabilities	5. STEM	5. STEM

The interest in training on challenging behavior and social emotional learning aligns with MRTQ PDN training completion records from fiscal year 2026 with “Social and Emotional Learning: Birth through Age 5” and “Positive Supports and Challenging Behaviors” being the second and third most completed MRTQ facilitated trainings (25% of completions, cumulatively), behind only IT MELDS (24% of completions) (Table 3).

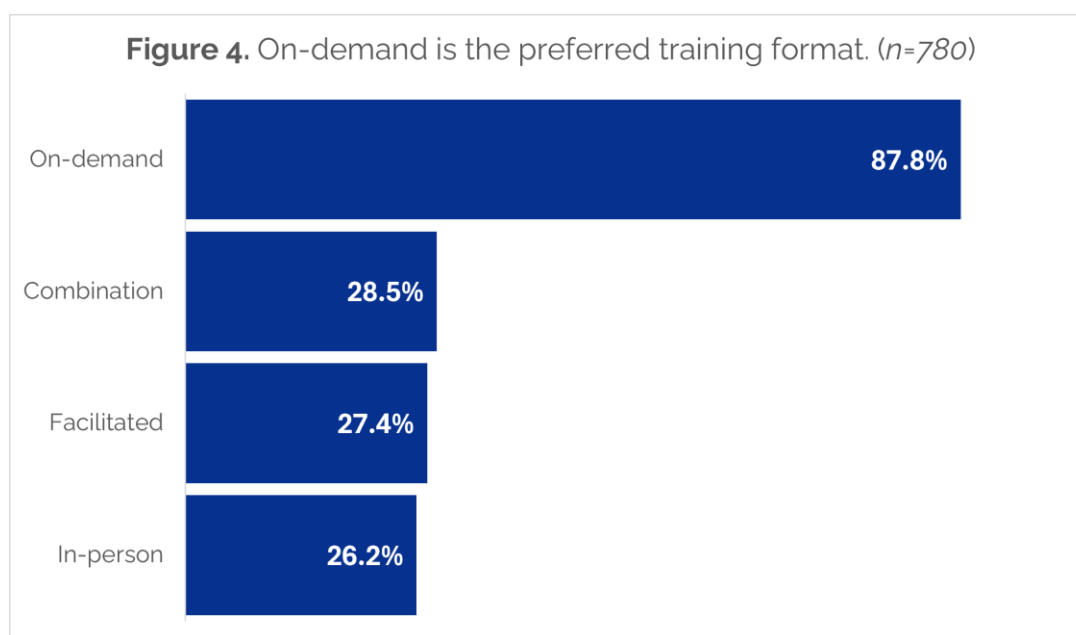
Although challenging behavior ranked high in the training topic section, during focus groups, providers shared that they place more value in consultation and peer-to-peer feedback to get support with challenging behaviors than in training. If seeking training specific to challenging behaviors, providers said that a focus on personal reflection and wellness is more valuable as a support than trying to teach to each specific challenge. One provider said, “helping providers understand what their triggers are and why they react the way they do – some self-reflection,” is best to support dealing with challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Table 3. Top 5 requested training topics overall from the PD Needs Assessment compared with top completion rates for facilitated training in FY 2026

PD Needs Assessment	MRTQ PDN Facilitated Training
1. Challenging behaviors	1. IT MELDS
2. Social and emotional learning	2. Social and Emotional Learning: Birth through Age 5
3. Outdoor and nature-based learning	3. Positive Supports and Challenging Behavior
4. Positive childhood experiences	4. Foundations of Health, Wellness, and Safety
5. Adverse childhood experiences	5. Caring for Infants, Toddlers, and their Families

Training Format

When asked about preferred training format, 88% of respondents preferred on-demand training (Figure 4). Hybrid, facilitated, and in-person training formats were relatively even, with in-person training being the least preferred format (26%). In focus groups, participants agreed that they enjoy the interaction that comes from facilitated training, but on-demand is an essential option. One participant said, “On-demand is super helpful to have as an option so that I can do it when it’s convenient for me and my schedule.”



A focus group of providers that participated in an in-person community of practice expressed that they saw value in each type of training format depending on content. The providers shared that they would consider location, timing, and other participants when deciding if an in-person training would be a valuable use of their time. The people are what they value most, sharing it is “the consistency of the group, familiar faces” that keep them coming back to an in-person offering.

When asked specifically about supports to improve accessibility for children with disabilities, 72.4% of respondents indicated the desire for more on-demand training.

Many providers highlighted the need for more free, high-quality, on-demand training to be made available through MRTQ PDN. One provider said, “It would be nice to have on-demand training for credentials rather than zoom or in-person training. I would be interested in completing my Director and Preschool Credentials if I could do it at my own pace.”

Key Insights:

- Most providers are interested in training on challenging behaviors, social and emotional learning, and outdoor and nature-based learning.
- Though challenging behavior is a top request, providers indicate that consultation and peer-to-peer conversations better support addressing specific situations.
- Strong interest in more on-demand training related to accessibility and support for children with disabilities.
- Providers prefer on-demand training over other formats.

Recommendations:

- Continue to provide high quality on-demand training and consider expanding offerings for Credential earners.
- Provide more offerings of *Creating Quality Outdoor Spaces*.
- Prioritize on-demand offerings in the development of new training.

Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance (TA) was described in the PD Needs Assessment survey as “targeted, customized support for program-related issues by MRTQ PDN ECE Program Quality Specialists who have content knowledge and experience working with children and adults.” With this information and any other background information they previously had about MRTQ PDN

Technical Assistance, PD Needs Assessment respondents indicated their top needs for TA support, and the method of how they would best like to receive that support.

The areas where providers were most interested in accessing technical assistance were:

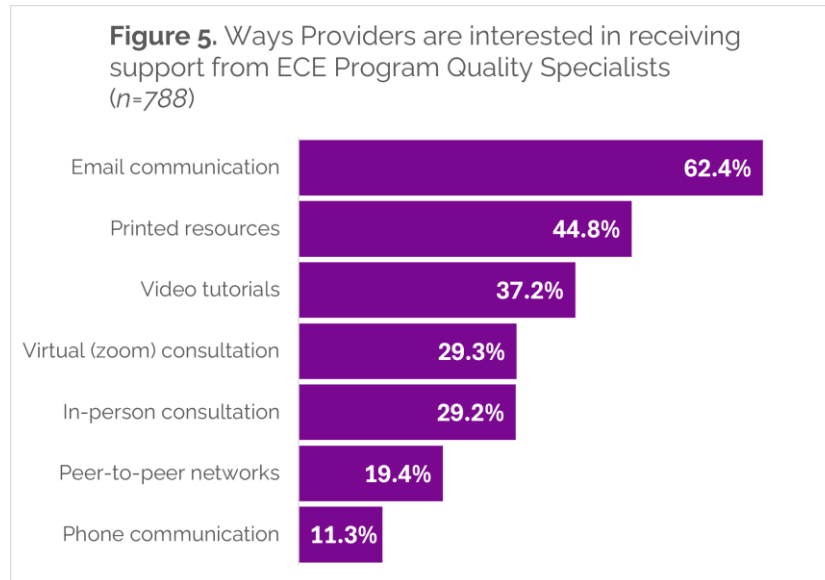
- ★ Child specific challenging behaviors
- ★ Staff support for challenging behaviors
- ★ State subsidies and food programs
- ★ Professional development and training
- ★ Rising Stars for ME

The topics requested somewhat align with the consultation requests the Technical Assistance team receives regularly. In state fiscal year 2026, the top reasons for a consultation request were challenging behavior, accreditation, and credential support (Table 4). Providers from the focus groups that had experienced MRTQ PDN consultation highly valued receiving support from ECE Program Quality Specialists for their program- or classroom-specific needs.

Table 4. Interest in TA support from PD Needs Assessment respondents compared to actual consultation requests in FY 2026.

PD Needs Assessment	MRTQ PDN consultation requests
1. Child specific challenging behaviors	1. Challenging behavior
2. Staff support for challenging behaviors	2. Accreditation
3. State subsidies and food programs	3. Credential support
4. Professional development and training	4. Teaching practices
5. Rising Stars for ME	5. Program management (policies/procedures)

The preferred method of support ranked email communication as the most preferred (62%), and about 30% of respondents had interest in in-person or virtual consultation (Figure 5). This aligns with the type of support that is currently offered through the MRTQ PDN Technical Assistance team – in state fiscal year 2026, ECE Program Quality Specialists provided nearly 900 email or phone consultations in addition to the 209 in-person or Zoom consultations.



Of MRTQ PDN consultation, one provider commented on the importance of receiving support that is separate from the State’s regulatory compliance function, “I loved having fresh eyes on my program. I’m in there every day, all day, 50 hours a week, so having somebody fresh, but not judgy come in and be able to look at things... It was really nice knowing that they aren’t coming in to pick things apart... It’s just supportive – coming in to check things out and help.” Another provider shared about her experience with an MRTQ PDN ECE Program Quality Specialist: “She took my big ideas and she made them manageable for me.”

Peer-to-Peer Networks

In addition to consultation, MRTQ PDN ECE Quality Specialists also facilitate peer-to-peer networks. When asked to recommend future topics for peer-to-peer networks, over 180 respondents provided recommendations. There were around 30 distinct topic ideas represented by the comments. Some of the top themes in recommendations were:

- ★ challenging behaviors
- ★ leadership, business practices, and staff communication
- ★ inclusion and accessibility
- ★ outdoor and nature-based learning
- ★ family engagement and communication
- ★ support for staff mental health and burnout.

These top recommendations align with some of our current offerings, such as the communities of practice (CoPs) specifically for Directors or Family Childcare providers, or those interested in

nature-based learning. In state fiscal year 2026, MRTQ PDN also offered related peer learning communities (PLCs) including “Overcoming Teacher Burnout in ECE Book Club,” “Leadership Mini-Topics,” and “Inclusion Book Club,” among others that align with some of these top requests.

In the focus groups, several providers shared that the topic is the key factor in their decision to join a peer learning community. It needs to be specific and align with their role and setting. For example, one provider shared excitement about a new MRTQ and Maine ECO Book Club focused on nature-based learning for infants and toddlers which she felt directly aligned with her work and made the time investment worth it.

There are some similarities across the requested topics for peer-to-peer networks and training. Some that stood out in requests for peer-to-peer networks were leadership and business practices, inclusion and accessibility, family engagement, and support for staff burnout (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison of top topics requested for peer-to-peer networks and training in the PD Needs Assessment

P2P Network Topic	Training Topic
1. Challenging behaviors	1. Challenging behaviors
2. Leadership, business practices, and staff communication	2. Social and emotional learning
3. Inclusion and accessibility	3. Outdoor and nature-based learning
4. Outdoor and nature-based learning	4. Positive childhood experiences
5. Family engagement and communication	5. Adverse childhood experiences
6. Support for staff mental health and burnout	6. STEM

Key Insights:

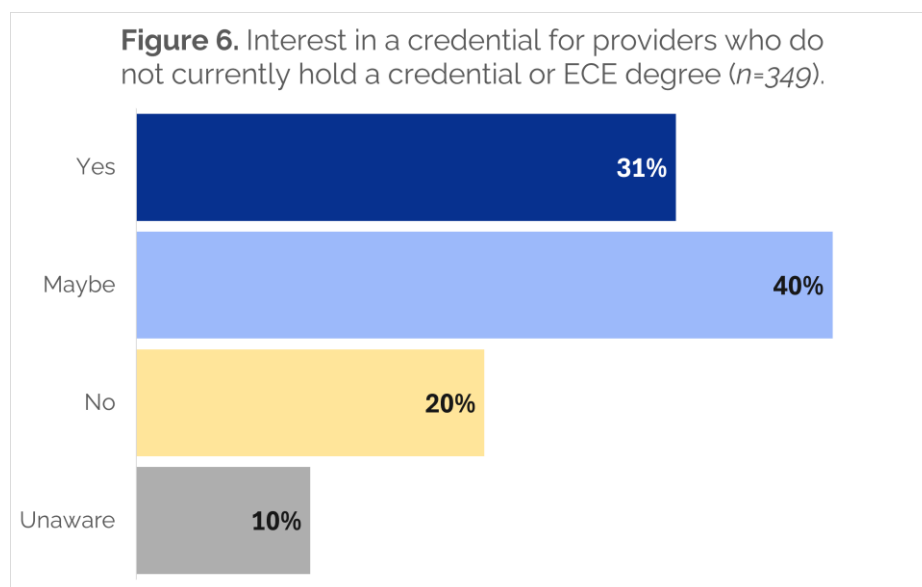
- Providers highly value the ability to receive email and in-person consultation from MRTQ ECE Program Quality Specialists.
- Despite an increasingly digital world, ECE providers still desire printed resources to support their work.

Recommendations:

- Continue to provide a variety of methods of engagement in TA offerings including in-person and virtual consultation as well as email support and sharing of resources.
- Have resources available for providers that are quick and easy to digest such as printed resources or video tutorials.
- Continue to provide topic-specific peer-to-peer networks that encourage providers to commit their time and energy.

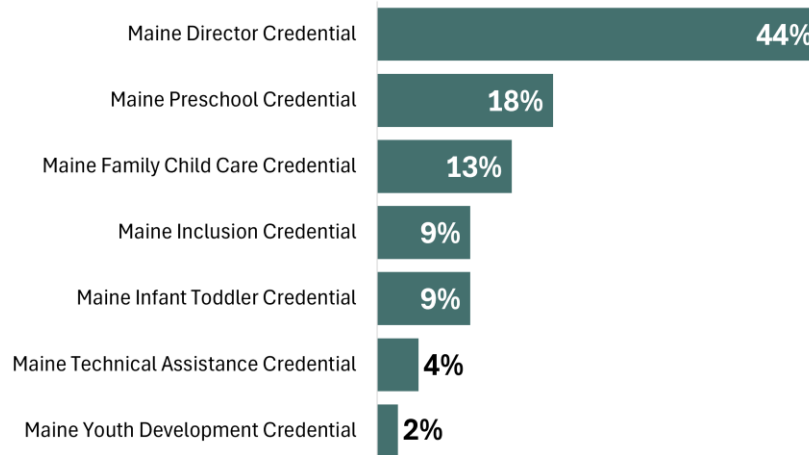
Credentials

Maine Credentials offer an opportunity for providers to focus their training and experience on a specific age group or setting, and gain professional recognition for their expertise, including advancement on the career lattice. Of respondents who did not already hold a credential or a higher education degree in ECE, 31% were interested in pursuing a credential, and 40% said they “maybe” would be interested (Figure 6). 20% were not interested in pursuing a Maine Credential. Of the “maybe” and “not interested” groups, two thirds were providers with 10 or more years of experience.



Amongst these 31% who were interested, the highest interest was in the Director Credential, followed by Preschool and Family Child Care Credentials (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Specific credential of interest for those who indicated interest in pursuing and do not already hold a credential or ECE degree ($n=97$)



When looking at credential interest by position or years of experience, the strongest interest in earning a credential is for providers early in their careers. Those providers with 0-10 years of experience have the greatest interest, with the peak being those with 5-10 years of experience (53%) (Figure 8). For those early career providers, there was most interest in Infant Toddler and Preschool credentials. For providers in the middle of their careers (10-20 years), interest was highest for the Director credential (34%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Interest in credential by years of experience (for providers who do not hold a credential or ECE degree) ($n=342$)

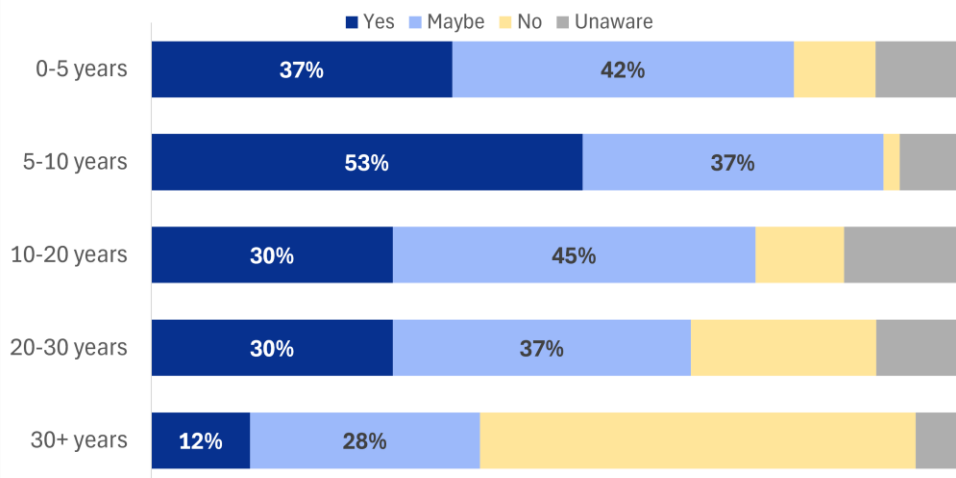
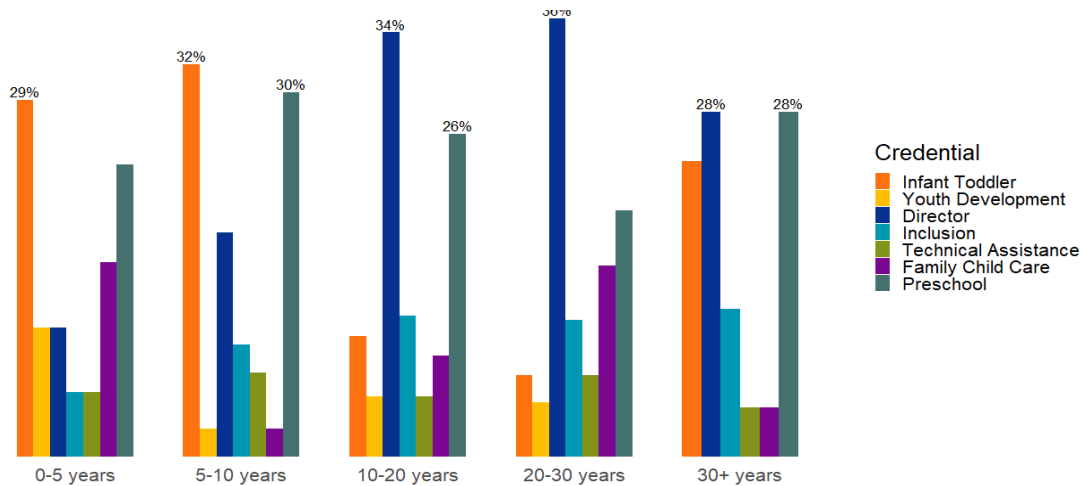


Figure 9. Credential of interest by years of experience ($n=342$)



Key Insights:

- Nearly a third of providers that do not currently hold a credential or an ECE degree are interested in pursuing a Maine state credential.
- Early career providers (0-10 years) have the highest interest in pursuing a credential.
- Director, Preschool, and Family Child Care credentials are of the most interest overall.
- Early career providers (0-10 years) have the most interest in the Infant Toddler and Preschool credentials. Mid- and late-career providers (10-30 years) have most interest in the Director credential.

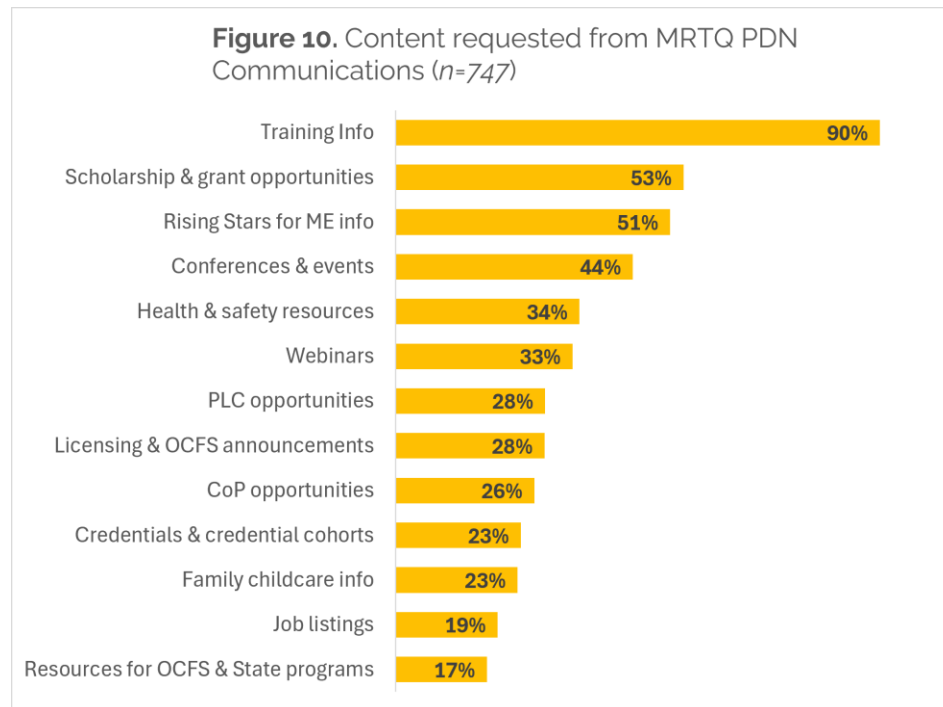
Recommendations:

- Increase marketing of Maine Credentials to early career providers, market specific credentials to target groups with highest interest.
- Continue to provide information sessions and resources to answer questions from providers who might consider pursuing a credential.

Communications from MRTQ PDN

Related to communication from MRTQ PDN, respondents highly ranked the MRTQ PDN website and the *Shortcuts* newsletter as their main sources of information. About the newsletter, one provider said, “I like receiving the newsletter because it always contains something that I need or am interested in!” Training information was ranked highest for the content that respondents

wanted to receive from MRTQ PDN, followed by grant and scholarship opportunities and Rising Stars for ME information (Figure 10).



Recommendations:

- Continue publishing *Shortcuts* newsletter for providers statewide.
- Utilize *Shortcuts* and other communication channels to highlight training opportunities.

Conclusion

Overall, the Professional Development Needs Assessment results provide a picture of the current interests and professional development needs of ECE providers across the state. The responses highlight the need for support around challenging behaviors, social and emotional learning, outdoor and nature-based learning, inclusion, and leadership and business practices. The results also provide a deeper understanding of how these needs vary between groups of professionals in different settings and at different career stages. These insights can strengthen the continuous quality improvement of existing professional development and technical assistance offerings and support the development of new offerings that are accessible, relevant, and aligned with the diverse experiences and needs of the ECE workforce.