

Project Flourish Evaluation Plan

Background and Context of the Program

Project Flourish is an apprenticeship program designed to develop early childhood specialists through a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training, mentoring, pay increases when benchmarks are reached, and, upon graduation, professional certifications. Project Flourish seeks to lower the known barriers for entry-level childcare workers in the state, such as lack of transportation, pace of classes, and limited English proficiency, that often prevent workers from obtaining the necessary requirements to advance in their field. The program also aims to support transitioning to college for workers who do not have a post-secondary degree. Ultimately, Project Flourish is working to improve retention in the childcare workforce and strengthen the childcare sector overall.

As the Project Flourish leaders noted, there was a shortage of labor in the early childhood development workforce even prior to the pandemic. As such, one of the policy issues the program intends to address is the lack of quality child care in the state. Currently, child care is not publicly subsidized to adequately cover the “true” cost of childcare which includes a “high-quality, developmentally appropriate, safe, and reliable child care staffed by a professionally compensated workforce” (Center for American Progress, 2021). By tailoring the implementation of the program to address the unique characteristics of entry-level incumbent workers, program leaders are meeting the demand for a greater supply of child care workers in the state.

Project Flourish also seeks to address the workforce and economic development needs of communities that have been underrepresented in state-sponsored initiatives in the past. Modeled after traditional apprenticeship programs, which have historically served construction and the trades – jobs generally held by men – Project Flourish is funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) to target industries that pay low wages, employ women, and/or primarily employ people of color. The childcare sector in Massachusetts meets this criteria. Looking at this issue more broadly, it is important to recognize that there is a “historical and pervasive undervaluing of labor performed by people of color and especially women in the United States” (McLean, 2021). Despite the emerging critical need for the childcare workforce to have the “capacity to provide culturally responsible and relevant experiences in early care and education settings,” as well as be highly skilled and competent to teach and care for young children, child care workers still remain one of the lowest-paid occupations (Paschall, 2020). Regardless, research suggests that there is a willingness among childcare workers to advance in the field. Workers who identified as a person of color, who spoke a language other than English, had lower rates of bachelor’s degree attainment were more likely to engage in professional development opportunities (Paschall, 2020).

To better support and meet the needs of the childcare workforce, Project Flourish leaders are seeking an evaluation to understand student attrition and the reasons why employer partners and mentors are unable to attend required meetings and fully support students while in the classroom. Program funding is contingent on achieving an 80% graduation rate, and while the program has

successfully graduated two cohorts to date, issues regarding student retention and employer partner and mentor participation seem to be limiting factors to graduating the necessary number of students required for funding and ultimately, program success.

Program Description and Logic Model

Project Flourish is a multi-dimensional assessment that combines classroom teaching, vocational training, professional guidance, and practice time to help practitioners and increase their employee retention rate. The Apprenticeship program offers more possibilities for a long-term career path. Project Flourish is committed to achieving benefits for members of all roles. From the Apprentice standpoint, the program is committed to improving the professional and educational level of childcare service personnel as well as solving the problems faced by the early childhood education workforce in society. From the Mentor and Employer Partner perspectives, the program is committed to improving the retention rate of early childhood education personnel in the local community; strengthening the long-term benefits of early childhood education to local children and families. Project Flourish's long-term goals and impacts include increasing state, and eventual national, financial support as well as the attention of local voters. In addition, the Project Flourish program is strengthening the influence of policy decisions affecting the childcare workforce, removing and breaking down barriers to higher education, earning higher salaries, and improving quality of life.

The Project Flourish program is structured to measure the progress of their internal operations, show their Apprentices' development, and to obtain their short-term and long-term goals. The Logic Model included below illustrates the overall structure of the program in detail. Each cohort of twenty Apprentices goes through a 10-month course of classroom instruction while completing their on-the-job training. They follow the Apprenticeship Competency Checklist under the guidance of their Mentors to address and strengthen predetermined critical skills. Short-term outcomes of adhering to more standardized practices include a better understanding of Apprentice and Mentor expectations and alignment with Employer needs, earning their support. Long-term outcomes would include readily available and data-informed reevaluation of the program's components. Impacts of the program include large-scale systemic changes within education and all the issues currently preventing groups from pursuing a career in early childhood education and development. The potential of Project Flourish is clearly defined by thorough evaluation, the return on investment of stakeholders, and more possibilities in the future.

Inputs/Program Investments	Outputs Activities / Stakeholders	Outputs/ Short-term Outcome	Outcomes/ Long-term Outcome	Impact
<p>Funding from Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)</p> <p>Staff Expertise (Program Directors, Employer Partners, Mentors, Instructors)</p> <p>Office Resources</p> <p>Community Partnerships</p>	<p>2,000 hours of on-the-job training in addition to textbook reading and homework assignments.</p> <p>Regular meetings for employer partners and mentors.</p> <p>In-classroom check-ins between Apprentices and Mentors.</p> <p>Complete the competency and skills checklist and revisit any items that were not completed satisfactorily.</p>	<p>Increases in completed required hours by entry-level childcare workers.</p> <p>Increases in the competencies and skills demonstrated by the childcare workers.</p> <p>Increases in number of participants who complete the program.</p>	<p>Increases in number of participants enrolled in post-secondary studies.</p> <p>Increases in the number of apprentices, employer partners, mentors, etc. who participate in the program.</p> <p>Improvement of quality of life for participants</p> <p>Continued state-funding for Project Flourish</p>	<p>100% recovery of the 80% loss of childcare workforce in MA (2020)</p> <p>The MA childcare workforce represents more diverse, highly educated, and well-funded career field membership.</p> <p>MA communities and family well-being are improved by greater access to early education institutions.</p> <p>Project Flourish’s non-traditional apprenticeship model is replicated in other states, increasing visibility to policy-makers critical to matters concerning childcare and early childhood education.</p> <p>Accreditation received by Project Flourish graduates is honored at local colleges who receive support during any future enrollments in pursuit of higher degrees.</p> <p>Graduates receive higher incomes, improving their living</p>

Evaluation Purpose and Priority Questions to be Addressed

The purpose of the Project Flourish evaluation is informed by the three, overarching priority questions regarding how to improve Apprentice retention, Mentor support, and Employer Partner

participation. Addressing each of these questions using surveys designated for program participants should follow a method of relating each survey question back to one of the priority evaluation questions. Maintaining the survey as an accurate reflection of program performance relies on each question's relevancy and identifiable link back to one of the three main priorities.

Given the requirement that 80% of each cohort must complete the program to secure program funding, finding ways to improve Apprentice retention is of peak importance. Focusing on creating an environment for success while anticipating that unforeseen events will impact each Apprentice's ability to continue takes special consideration when program funding is at stake. Apprentice Survey questions should reflect individual experiences with the classroom and on-the-job training expectations, the level and accessibility of the instruction material, and their feelings of self-efficacy to complete each phase of the program. Specified solutions developed from identifying common points of contention could mitigate elevated non-completion rates.

Another major question addresses whether the Project Flourish Mentors have the support, time, and understanding needed to execute their tasks throughout the program. Mentors are charged with observing their assigned Apprentice execute training items from the Competency Checklist, rank their performance on a scale from 0-2, then submit monthly progress reports to the Project Flourish leadership. Mentors must also make time to speak with their Apprentices to ensure their understanding of each training item as well as their overall progress. These requirements can be overwhelming for Mentors, especially when their workplaces are geographically separated from their Apprentices. Mentor Survey questions should focus on identifying program inefficiencies that impact Mentor performance. Decreasing stressors while improving the Mentor experience would stem from using questions determining how best to provide easy access to training materials, standardize the grading-scale in accordance with defined program expectations, and increase opportunities to make and submit Apprentice observations.

The third priority question addressed by the evaluation is how to encourage Employer Partner interaction and participation with the Apprentices and their processes. Employee Partners are driven to participate in Project Flourish by a need to provide effective and efficient professional development to their employees. Investing in the skills and career longevity of their eligible staff members is critical to their individual workplaces as well as the success of the program. Survey questions for Employer Partners would be focused on what the Employer derives from his or her participation in the program. Any indicated lapses between expectations and results may lead to a better understanding of how to earn continued partnership and improve the quality of the relationship, thereby increasing participation.

Evaluation Design, Data Collection Methods, and Data Analysis Plan

The evaluation plan requires both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data will be collected through survey responses from current and past program participants including those who did and did not complete the program. The survey will be administered electronically to try to guarantee anonymity in the event that non-anonymous responses may discourage participants from reporting candidly. To give ample time and opportunity for respondents to complete the survey, the survey will be available on a computer or tablet at employer partners and will also be emailed to the participants, both past and present.

A Likert scale will be used to collect the quantitative data and open-ended questions will be used to collect qualitative data. The risk of incomplete data is high, particularly reaching out to enrollees from past cohorts. Because filling out a survey will likely present additional work for participants who have already committed to an already demanding program, incentivizing the completion and submission of the survey will be discussed with Project Flourish leadership.

Secondary data will include any data that Project Flourish leaders may have collected from previous cohorts. This includes graduation rates, interviews, and any other evaluation data that they may have gathered in the past. Analyzing this data might shed light on the differences or similarities of students located at particular employers or in classrooms with particular instructors, or paired with particular mentors. Secondary data analysis will also look at results from previous checklists to identify any particular points of attrition and any areas that yielded lower scores or were commonly revisited by participants.

The sampling strategy used for the evaluation is purposeful, criterion sampling. In the case of Project Flourish, due to the size of the program and the relatively small numbers of program participants, the criterion for the population frame is participation in the program in any capacity. This would include either employer partner, mentor, student, or instructor – regardless of whether they completed the program or not. This particular criterion, of program participation regardless of completion, is important to this evaluation because it would present key information in understanding student attrition and employee partner and mentor engagement, or lack thereof. The aim is to lean towards an “information rich” strategy for collection being that Project Flourish has only completed one full cohort of 20 Apprentices, which limits the availability of information. Utilizing a purposeful, criterion sampling will also allow all involved participants to communicate their experiences and opinions of the program.

The limitations of this plan include the difficulty of securing survey participation from participants currently enrolled in the program and those that have already left prior to completing the program. Project Flourish leadership has also shared the difficulty of communicating with participants by email which may limit options for engagement. Self-reporting in surveys is often non-reliable and people’s interactions with a program can shift their attitude towards the program overtime. However, given that there have only been a couple of cohorts, it is worth attempting to reach out to participants as much as possible and maximizing the relatively small number of respondents to provide meaningful data that may influence future program improvement..

Plan for Dissemination and Use of Findings

In considering the dissemination of the evaluation and making decisions around the use of its findings, we’ve reached a critical point in the evaluation plan. It’s essential that the execution of this phase is tied to the purpose of the evaluation and the program and stakeholder’s priorities. The goal is to remain intentional about the dissemination process so that it supports the use of the evaluation results for program improvement and decision-making. When considering the primary audience for the dissemination, the choice will be the Project Flourish leadership. They have remained the main source of contact at the program, as well as maintained discourse in all things concerning Project Flourish. A collaborative and participatory relationship was pursued throughout the planning phase of the evaluation and the intention was to gather as much

pertinent, and relevant information as possible to increase the chance that the results will be used.

It was evident that during the planning phase that the Project Flourish leadership had particular interest in the results that would be gathered from the current cohort because one of the priority questions to be answered was around Apprentice retention. So effort will be made to prioritize the release of those results first. The benefit of sharing this initial release is due to the opportunity it will bring in enabling the support of program improvements that can be made prior to the next cohort. It will also provide an opportunity to demonstrate the program's value and impact and create further interest in the additional findings that the report will bring. So due to the time sensitive nature of the particular interest in the current cohort, the best way to deliver the results from the Apprenticeship survey would be in the form of a *results fact sheet* that will include a breakdown of the total number of completions, the percentage analysis of responses for each question, and a collection of written responses if applicable. This fact sheet will be delivered by email for quick and easy access.

The remaining results of the evaluation will be made available soon after the release of the initial factsheet. This will include the survey responses collected from past cohorts, the Mentors, and the Employer Partners, as well as what has been gathered from secondary data sources. The mode of dissemination that will be used to deliver the remaining results will be through an oral PowerPoint presentation. This will contain visual representations of collected data and highlights of key findings to create impact. The oral presentation will allow for further explanation of the in-depth analysis that led to the results and provide an opportunity to exchange discourse on the findings.

To encourage the use of the findings, it's essential for both leadership and evaluators to each take personal responsibility in seeing this final stage through. A plan can include the creation of additional tailored mini evaluation reports that would be released to the Project Flourish Leadership. These reports would address specific stakeholder information needs that would include a deeper results analysis that answers the question of support needs for Mentors, and for Employer Partners, a results analysis that answers the question of barriers to adequate participation. Furthermore, to encourage use, Project Flourish Leadership can be assisted with identifying various ways that the evaluation findings can be applied to improve their program and they can also review the findings and recommendations in regularly scheduled meetings with their program staff and volunteers.

Audience	How to share results
Project Flourish Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Fact sheet via email● Mini evaluation reports via email● Oral PowerPoint presentation via a scheduled virtual meeting

Bibliography

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Appendix

Table 1. Suggested questions to create surveys for each role.

Evaluation Questions	Performance Measure	Methods	Data Source	Time Frame
Rate your perception of the checklist.	- Likert scale of 1-5: 1 = clear, manageable, 3 = neutral, 5 = overwhelming, unmanageable	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
How easy is it to reference or use the checklist while on-the-job?	- Likert scale of 1-5: 1 = easy to 5 = difficult)	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
At what point during the workday do you use the checklist?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
At what point during the workday do you meet with your student or mentor?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
How are you able to incorporate the checklist into the workday?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
How do you wish you were able to incorporate the checklist into the workday?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
On any given day, do you know what tasks in the checklist you are expected to complete/you expect your student to complete?	- Yes or No	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
During the workday, is there scheduled time to meet with your mentor/ student? Why or	- Yes or No	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program

Rate the frequency of meetings (too few, too many, just right...)	- Likert scale of 1-5: 1 = too few, 3 = just right, 5 = too many)	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
Rate the amount of homework (Too little, too much, just right...)	- Likert scale of 1-5: 1 = too little, 3 = just right, 5 = too much)	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
<i>For employer partners and coaches:</i> what content do you wish was covered at the meetings?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
How many classes or meetings have you been unable to attend? What was the reason?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
<i>For students and mentors:</i> are you located in the same classroom as your student or mentor?	- Yes or No	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
Which of the following has made participating in the program difficult?	- Multiple choice (check all that apply): <i>the frequency of class and/or meetings, transportation to work, homework assignments, program pace, language and reading proficiency, completing the check-list while on-the-job, meeting with my mentor or</i>	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
Which of the following has made participation in the program easier?	- Multiple choice (check all that apply): <i>the frequency of class and/or meetings, transportation to work, homework assignments, program pace, language and reading proficiency, completing the check-list while on-the-job, meeting with my mentor or</i>	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program

Why did you leave Project Flourish?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
What was the most effective component of Project Flourish?	- Open-ended question	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program
Rate the level of support provided by program participants.	- Likert scale of 1-5: 1 = not supported to 5 = very supported)	Survey	Current and past program participants (students, mentors, and employer partners)	3, 6, and 9 months after the cohort completes the classroom portion of the program