



# Summary Report for the 2020 National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute

The National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute has become one of the premier educational opportunities for anyone involved in the care and education of young children with special needs in inclusive settings. For 20 years, the Institute has drawn people from across the nation and around the world to Chapel Hill:

- to learn about the latest research findings, models, and resources that guide inclusive policy, professional development and practice;
- to develop collaborative relationships and cross-agency systems that support early childhood inclusion;
- to have the opportunity to meet, learn from, and problem solve with peers.

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute is the major sponsor and organizer of the Inclusion Institute.

**M**any thanks to all of you for your part in making the 2020 National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute a success. Your support and vision provided motivation to continue moving forward through challenging times. One message we heard across all fronts was that content addressing evolving needs around inclusion was critically important. Additionally, this year was somewhat complicated by the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. What was once going to be an in-person event rapidly shifted into a virtual one, complete with all the challenges of engaging our audience over Zoom instead of at the Friday Center. Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, though, the shift was a tremendous success. Here's what one participant had to say:

*Wow, that's all I can say. Never imagined anyone would be fully engaged or even want to attend hours of a virtual conference. But here we are, and I thoroughly enjoyed it!*

2020 included two exciting new developments, full scholarships for all participants and strategies for extending the reach of the Institute beyond our traditional audience.

## Scholarships

We would like to extend our tremendous appreciation to the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center for providing scholarships to Inclusion Institute participants. Among the many impacts of the pandemic on the early childhood field was financial stress and tight budgets, and ECTA's support made it possible for those working in inclusion on every level to

participate in the Institute this year. We look forward to continuing our partnership with ECTA in the future as our goals for high quality inclusion align so well with theirs!

### **Extending the Reach/Broadening Impact**

With encouragement from our planning team, advisory board, and partners we developed a plan for meeting needs around inclusion for an audience that includes but also extends well beyond our traditional participants. According to our vision, expanding the cause of inclusion involves two key steps: including all individuals involved with the process and promoting access to high quality resources for more of those individuals, even those who are geographically distant.

One key set of stakeholders who have been underrepresented at the Inclusion Institute in recent years is families of children with disabilities. To remedy this, we concurrently began reaching out to and publicizing the Institute to parents and caregivers, worked to bring in scholarship money, participation, and expanding session offerings that both spoke to and promoted leadership for families. Participation by families increased this year accordingly and we look forward to further expanding our work with these key stakeholders moving forward.

A silver lining of the pandemic was the focus on virtual sessions that provided access for a broad range of participants. Providing virtual sessions ensured that we had greater international participation this year by eliminating the need to travel. Also, nearly all sessions were recorded, thanks to the support of our amazing presenters, and are posted along with handouts on our website to provide free access for all. In future years, we intend to find new ways to engage with a geographically diverse audience that include the new technologies we used this year as well as hybrid options that will allow us to seamlessly blend in-person connection with virtual participation.

## Program

The live virtual sessions included opportunities for questions, interactions, and discussion with presenters as well as time to brainstorm with participants strategies for using the resources and recorded sessions to support their work. The program, while scaled back, provided participants with the opportunity to attend 7 live sessions plus the keynote and plenaries and to access recordings of an additional 7 sessions. Participants also have access to the recordings and handouts after the Institute so that they can share the information with colleagues at no cost.

The program included:

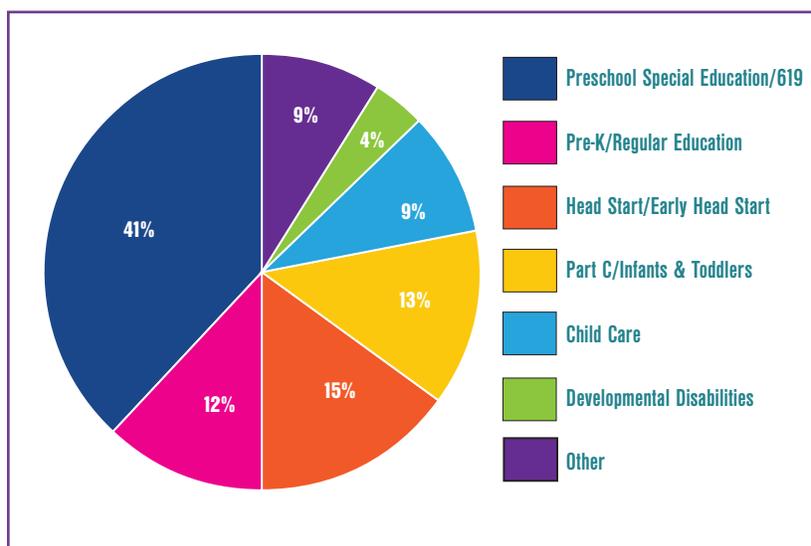
- 1 keynote
- 2 plenaries
- 14 concurrent sessions

In addition to content on inclusion, a strand on trauma and resilience, a requested topic, was woven throughout the 4 days. In future Institutes, we are excited to continue providing strands on highly relevant topics, as feedback on these threads has been extremely positive.

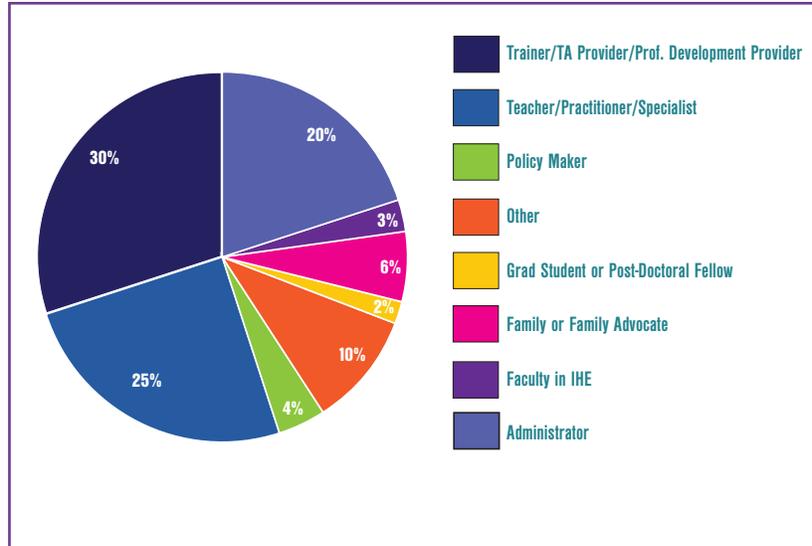
## Participants

We welcomed attendees from across the U.S. and across the globe, including Mexico, Turkey, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. One benefit of the virtual format was that it provided access for participants who would not have had funds or time to travel to NC; as an international attendee said, *“Thank you! It was well worth getting up at 3AM to be part of this presentation!”* We again achieved a balance of participants representing all of those who work together for inclusion (See Figures 1 & 2), these combined voices are what makes this conference unique and powerful.

**Figure 1: Percentage of participants representing one of seven sectors**



**Figure 2: Percentage of participants representing one of eight roles**



## Keynote and Plenaries

The stories shared by Bethany Van Delft Moffi, our keynote speaker, set the stage for the Institute. Bethany is a comedian, storyteller, and parent advocate who has been active in the special needs community since the birth of her daughter Lulu in 2011. Bethany's powerful stories highlighted the impact of collaboration and inclusion. In particular, we were excited for her to bring this perspective to this year's Inclusion Institute, given our emphasis on expanding family participation. Feedback suggested that Bethany's message resonated strongly with participants and underscored the idea that high quality inclusion involves all the stakeholders in a child's life:

- *The importance of family first was brought home with this speaker. I love how she emphasized that parents truly are their children's experts. I also enjoyed how she discussed collaboration is a journey.*
- *The Keynote was so needed. Between adjusting to a new work reality, social reality, and my well-being, it is easy to lose sight and it feels like running on empty or that no matter how much we do, it is never enough. Hearing Bethany's personal experience and thought provoking talk, helped me refocus as a professional and as someone who cares deeply about inclusion and leveraging par-*



*I appreciated the heaviness of the topic, and also the strategies provided. I am comfortable being uncomfortable and I was able to create action items to move forward in my understanding of inclusion.*

## Participant Ratings of the Institute

We gathered feedback on the overall Institute from an online survey and compiled ratings for each plenary, and concurrent session. Based on these data sources, participants rated all aspects of the Institute highly. Mean ratings of the overall Institute using a 1-5 scale, with 5 being highest, were 4.56 for the overall quality of Institute, 4.57 for the quality of presenters and resources, and 4.63 for the relevance of the information shared. The individual ratings for each session provided additional data on how the Institute hit the mark on topics and presenters, the summary means across concurrent sessions were 4.61 for quality and 4.66 for relevance. In addition, participants shared feedback and strategies for improvements to incorporate for the 2021 Institute.

One key takeaway from participants' comments was a commitment to spread the word, taking and sharing resources with other professionals and families. We believe that this year's Inclusion Institute provided participants with rejuvenating and uplifting messages that inclusion can happen anywhere, regardless of whether learning is occurring in schools, homes, or hybrid environments:

- *The discussion and resources were incredible! It was thought provoking and engaging. Will be really helpful in the inclusion work throughout our state!*
- *I look forward to sharing these resources. Left the session feeling uplifted and ready to go! I want an App that has Shana cheering my parenting on (just saying.)*
- *Thought provoking discussions on how coaches can help even great teachers 'stuck' in face-to-face teaching mode transition to effective virtual teaching.*

- *Although the conference was not in person, the Institute did not fail. I was eager to sign on everyday and was grateful it covered so many topics during the pandemic and how we can reach out and reach our students and families during this time. Thank you for all of the time and effort put in to making this a productive and helpful way to start the year to help meet the needs of our students and making sure we have the tools to help make remote learning inclusive!*

As we move forward, we realize there is still much for all of us to learn and to do in early childhood inclusion, particularly in this challenging time. We will continue to provide additional information and resources and are already beginning work on identifying presenters and sessions to fill these needs at the 2021 Inclusion Institute.

Thank you all for making a difference in the lives of professionals, children, and families near and far. We look forward to hearing about your work on behalf of inclusion over the next year and seeing you—online or in-person or hybrid format—in 2021.



—Tracey West (Institute Chair) and  
the Inclusion Institute Team  
*Adam Holland*  
*Lindsay Holland*  
*Barbara Lowery*  
*Sharon Palsha*  
*Taylor Simpson*

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Exceptional Children's Assistance Center

Family, Infant and Preschool Program (FIPP)

Kids Included Together (KIT)

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