

Status Report: Early Learning in South Dakota

In the fall of 2018, the South Dakota Department of Education developed a survey. The purpose of this survey was to ascertain the status of early learning in the state of South Dakota. The intent was to gather and share information with stakeholders about the landscape of early learning and preschool programming efforts across South Dakota so policy makers and educational leaders can make informed decisions regarding early childhood education. The data in this report is purposely presented without conclusions or recommendations – this is a status report.

The survey was delivered via email to 254 public elementary administrators across the state of South Dakota. These 254 elementary administrators represent 149 public school districts. Some districts have more than one elementary attendance center. Of the 254 surveys delivered, 189 were completed (74% response rate). The responses are representative of [138 districts](#). For the purposes of this survey, 189 respondents contributed data representative of 138 public school districts. No non-public, BIE or Tribal School information is included. It is important to note data from this survey was self-reported.

Survey respondents were provided with the following definition of preschool. *“For the purpose of this survey an early learning or preschool student was defined as a child who is at least three years of age on or before September 1st, is not enrolled in kindergarten, and is receiving early childhood educational services (not including Part B 619).”*

An estimate of the number of children that meet this definition is 12,500, according to [2018 South Dakota Kids Count](#) data. In 2018, South Dakota public school systems reported a kindergarten student population of 11,798. Not all preschool-aged children will enter the public school system as kindergarten students. Some are homeschooled or enter private, BIE or Tribal School systems. The South Dakota Department of Education student information systems allows schools to report preschool learners. In 2018, South Dakota public school systems reported a preschool population of 3425 students. Some schools are choosing to utilize public funding to serve these young learners, while some are using private funds and others are using a combination of funding mechanisms. At the time of this report, South Dakota does not provide per pupil funding for pre-school students through the state education funding formula.

The following report contains all of the survey questions offered to respondents. In some cases responses are summarized to provide the most relevant and concise data, in other cases specific numbers and percentages are reported. Where appropriate and useful, links point to additional web-based information with more detail.

Q1) What is the name of your school district?

One or more respondents reported from [138 South Dakota public school districts](#).

Q2) What is the name of your elementary school? (If you oversee more than one elementary, please complete a survey for each building)

The respondents provided data from [187 unique attendance centers](#). In some cases one respondent provided data for more than one attendance center.

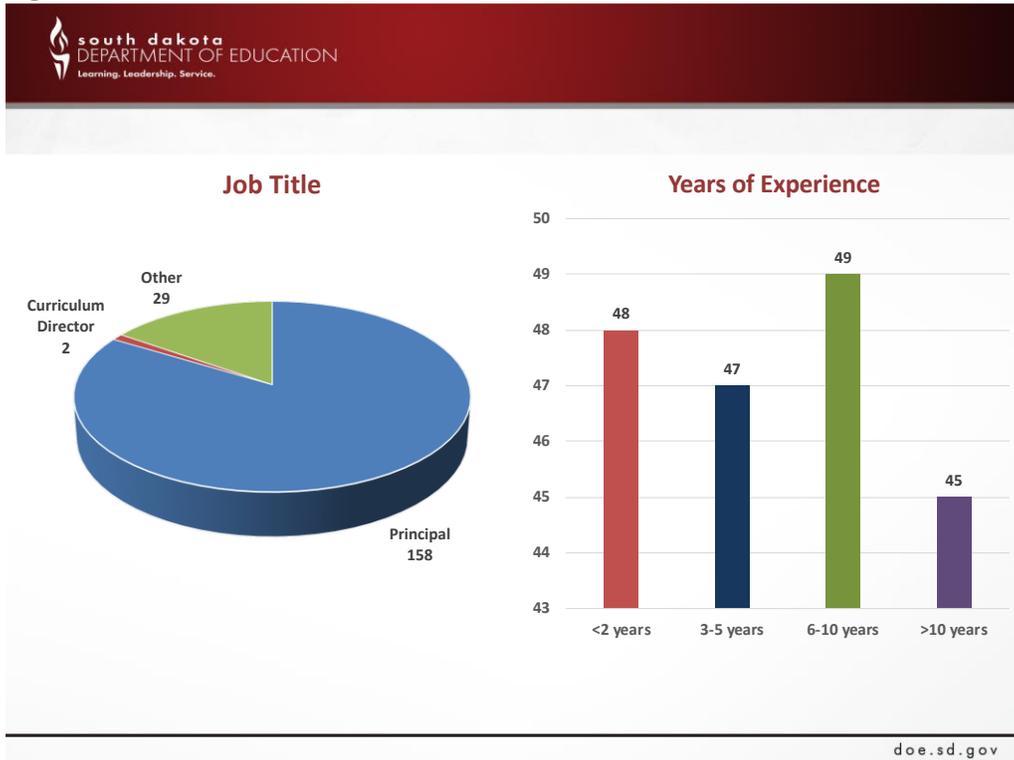
Q3) What is your job title?

Of the 189 respondents, 158 identified themselves as a principal (see Figure 1).

Q4) How long have you worked in this role?

Of the 189 respondents, 48 have 2 years or less of experience, 47 have 3-5 years of experience, 49 have 6-10 years of experience, and 45 have 10 or more years of experience (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

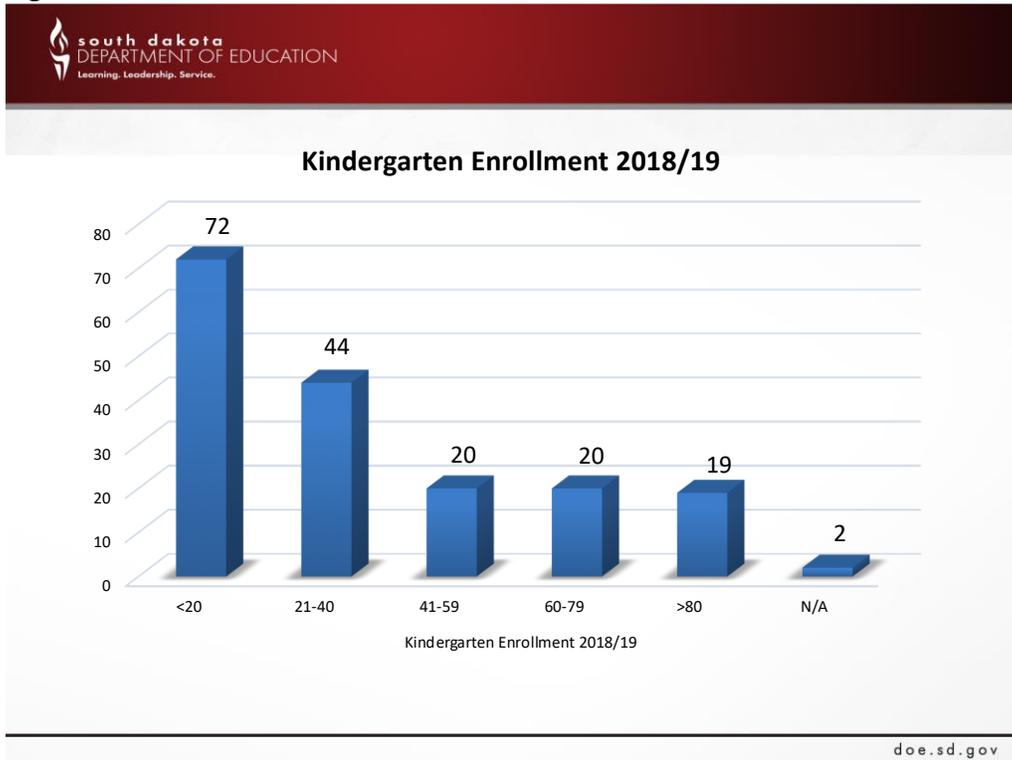


Q5) How many kindergarten students did you have enrolled in your building at the beginning of the 2018/19 school year?

Of 177 responses, 72 respondents reported 20 or less students, 44 respondents reported 21-40 students, 20 respondents reported 41-59 students, 20 respondents reported 60-79 students, 19 respondents reported 80 or more students, and 3 respondents reported this question was not applicable (see Figure 2).

It is unclear if respondents were only reporting for their attendance center or for their entire district. It is possible some of this data is duplicated for individual districts. A more accurate count of public school kindergarten students is available from the K-12 data center and is [duplicated here](#) for convenience while reading this report. The total number of kindergarten students in public schools as of the 2018 census data is 11,798.

Figure 2

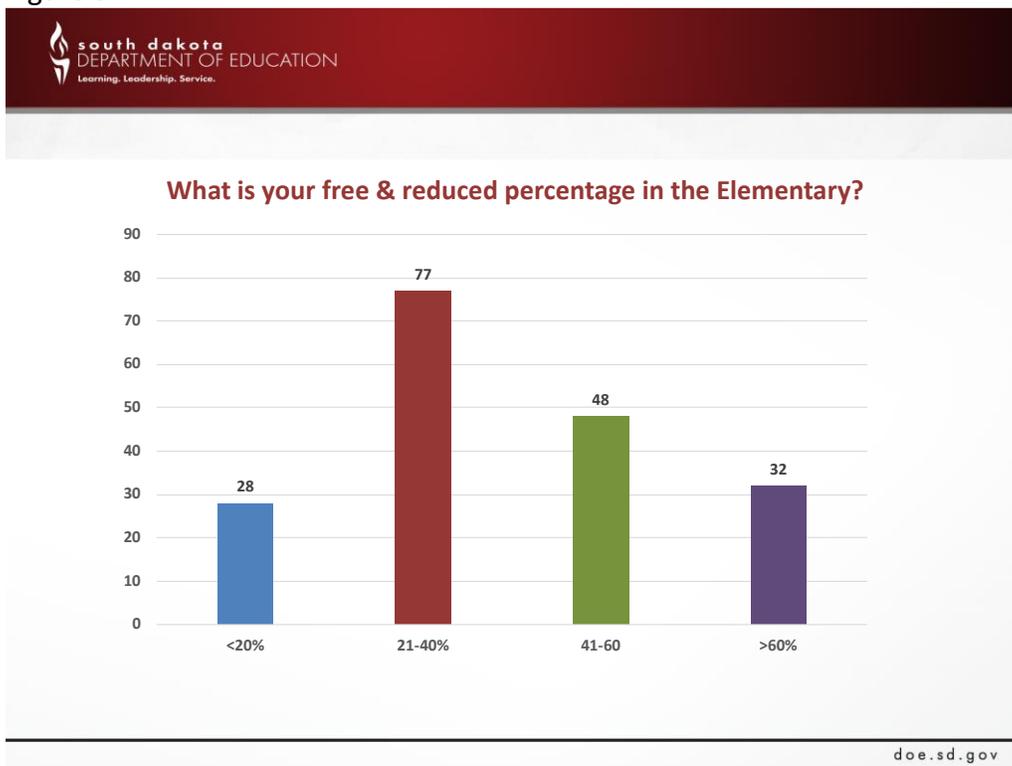


Q6) What is your free & reduced percentage in the elementary?

Free and reduced lunch percentages were reported to be less than 20% by 28 of the respondents, 21-40% by 77 of the respondents, 41-60% by 48 of the respondents, and more than 60% by 32 of the respondents (see Figure 3).

It is possible some of this data is duplicated for individual districts as more than one respondent reported from some districts.

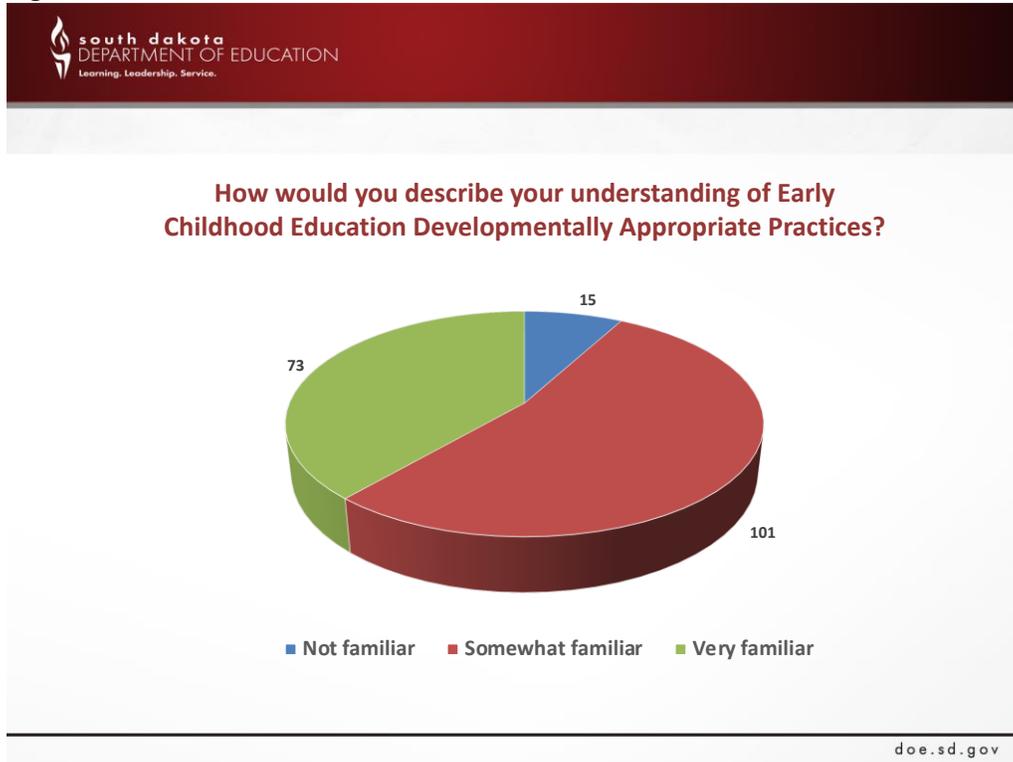
Figure 3



Q7) How would you describe your understanding of Early Childhood Education Developmentally Appropriate Practices?

In regard to familiarity with appropriate early education practices, 73 respondents reported they were very familiar, 101 reported they were somewhat familiar, and 15 were not familiar (see Figure 4).

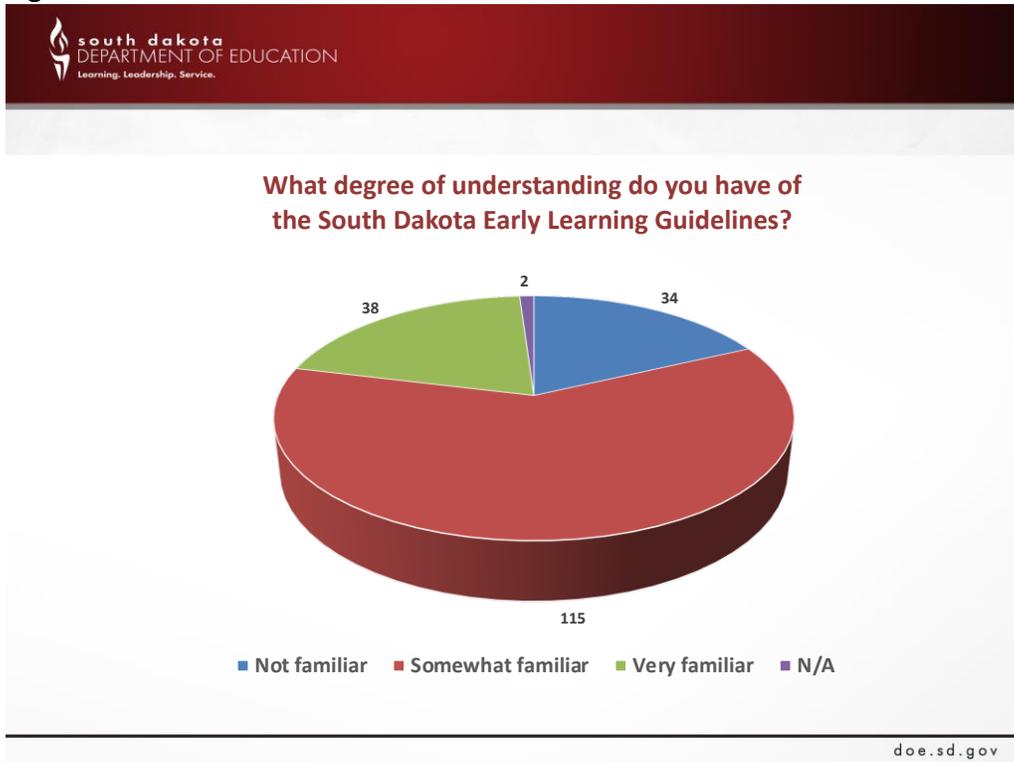
Figure 4



Q8) What degree of understanding do you have of the South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines?

For 2 respondents this question was not applicable, 38 respondents reported they were very familiar, 115 were somewhat familiar, and 34 were not familiar (see Figure 5).

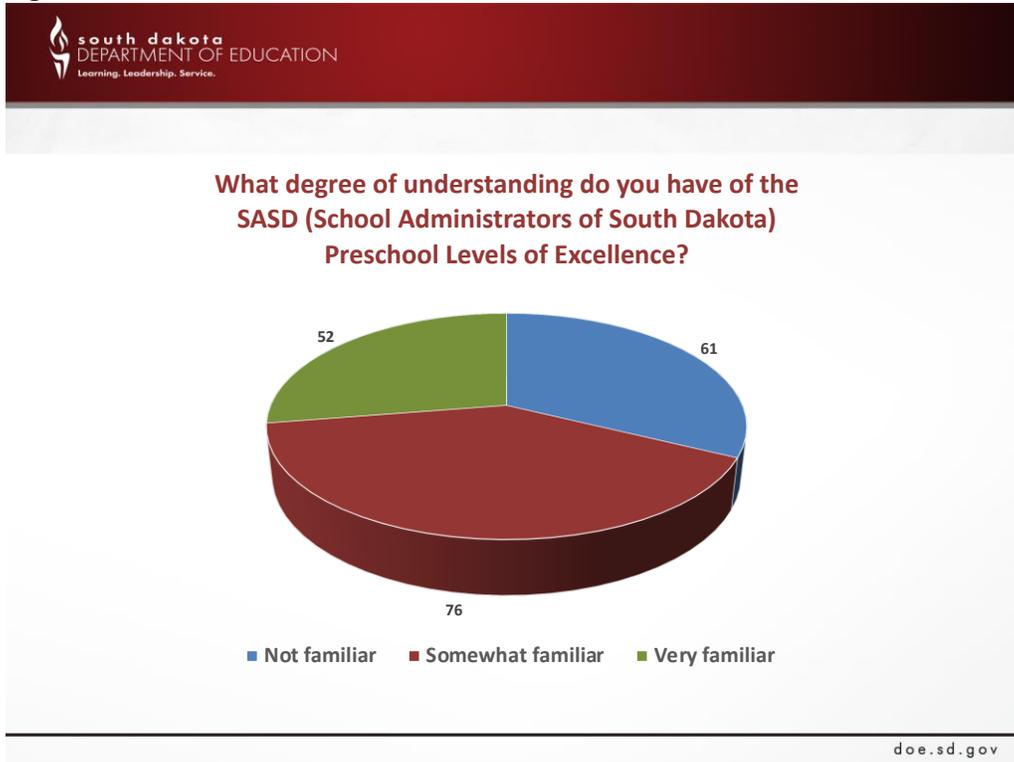
Figure 5



Q9) What degree of understanding do you have of the SASD (School Administrators of South Dakota) Preschool Levels of Excellence?

Respondents reporting they were very familiar with the Preschool Levels of Excellence numbered 58, 76 were somewhat familiar, and 61 reported they were not familiar with these guidelines (see Figure 6).

Figure 6



Q10) Does your school collect information about early childhood education prior to school entry?

Of those responding to this question, 120 reported they do collect information. A total of 68 respondents answered that they do not collect information, that they collect other information, or that they were unsure.

Q11) What information is being collected?

Of those collecting information, the following list is a representative sample of the types of information that are collected.

- IEP information, involvement
- Age, IEP, Head Start information
- SPED information/early intervention.
- birth certificate, shot records, transportation and bussing
- Address, phone numbers, shot records etc.
- Information of academic skills
- Location of preschool setting and years the student was enrolled.
- Pre-K experience or exposure
- We coordinate with Head Start in our area and share educational information. We also work with Birth to three program and share developmental milestone data.

Q12) Is your school currently entering information into the recently added "Early Learning" tab in Infinite Campus?

Only 8 respondents reported yes on the question. The other 181 reported this was not applicable, they were unsure, or no. Respondents were able to offer additional comments. The two comments below are representative of many of those comments.

- I was not aware that the tab had been added to IC.
- We don't see an Early Learning Tab in Infinite Campus

Q13) What assessment does your district use as your kindergarten screener?

The Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) was reported as the primary screener, with 69 respondents identifying this assessment. The remaining respondents use a combination of district/teacher developed assessments or other assessments. A sampling of some of the other assessments are listed below.

- Batelle
- Dibels
- Brigance
- KRT (Kindergarten Readiness Test)
- Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale
- Our teachers do an individual assessment right before school starts. This is not consistent across all schools.

Q14) How does your school define kindergarten readiness?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below.

- 5 years old by Sept 1st and potty trained.
- Age requirements along with information provided by the DIAL screening.
- Kindergarten readiness is defined by a student's ability to score well on the following topics covered by our District Assessment: Letter and phonemic identification, number identification, counting to 20, cutting, writing.
- Students having basic academic and social/emotional skills.

Q15) Please describe how kindergarten readiness information and expectations are communicated to parents &/or other early learning professionals?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below.

- After a short screening we conduct an exit meeting with the parents/guardians.
- Doesn't exist.
- Information is communicated through the school website, in transition meetings, phone calls and at screenings. Often times a flyer is sent out to those that we know are going into K. We also involve parents in transition planning meetings.
- Our preschool teacher works closely with parents. She sends a letter out to preschool parents outlining expectations.
- Our Title I staff contact local daycares and preschools to collect data along with using parent input and our kindergarten screening data.

Q16) Do you feel local preschool staff know the expectations of students entering kindergarten?

It is important note this is a question based on perceptions about the knowledge level of a third party.

The results are as follows:

Yes, Completely Aware = 61 respondents

Yes, Mostly Aware = 51 respondents

Yes, But with room for improvement = 38 respondents

No = 6 respondents

Q17) Describe ways your school promotes collaboration and sharing of information among preschool programs and kindergarten staff?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below. Most districts report that at a minimum they hold a yearly transition meeting.

- A Transition Day was held to transition new preschool students to attend Kindergarten class for one day.
- As part of our schoolwide Title I transition plan, there will be a meeting organized among school district staff, local daycares, members of the health organizations in town.
- I believe there is a disconnect.
- Our preschool is run by our district which means we share information frequently.
- The kindergarten teacher and preschool teacher work closely together when it comes to sharing and collaborating. Their rooms are next to each other so it is very nice that the preschool students see the kindergarten teacher on a regular basis.
- We do not currently have a structure for this.

Q18) What opportunities does your school offer to promote preschool to kindergarten transition?

The vast majority of respondents reported they hold kindergarten classroom visits. The second most frequent response indicated schools hold family nights.

Q19) What suggestions do you have to enhance the collaboration between local Preschools and Kindergarten staff?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below.

- Collaboration
- Have preschool funded and take place in the school.
- Formal collaboration opportunities.
- I would love to be able to offer a preschool service to our community in the form of a 1/2 day for students who are not fully ready to take on kindergarten concepts and curriculum.
- Our Preschool is part of our elementary school.
- School districts need to reach out as I feel some preschool teachers/directors are intimidated by public school policies and procedures.
- Shared professional development focusing on the development of early learning practices and consistency that bolsters smooth transitions.
- There needs to be more conversations between staff and district expectations of readiness.

Q20) Are you aware of any Preschool programs operating within your district's boundaries which are not operated by your school or district?

No = 78 respondents

Yes = 76 respondents

Q21) Please list any early learning preschool programs you are aware of and contact information if available.

This question was an extension of question #20. Respondents were invited to list programs of which they are aware. The listing is not provided as it would be out of context unless extensive information about the respondent and location of the respondent was also provided.

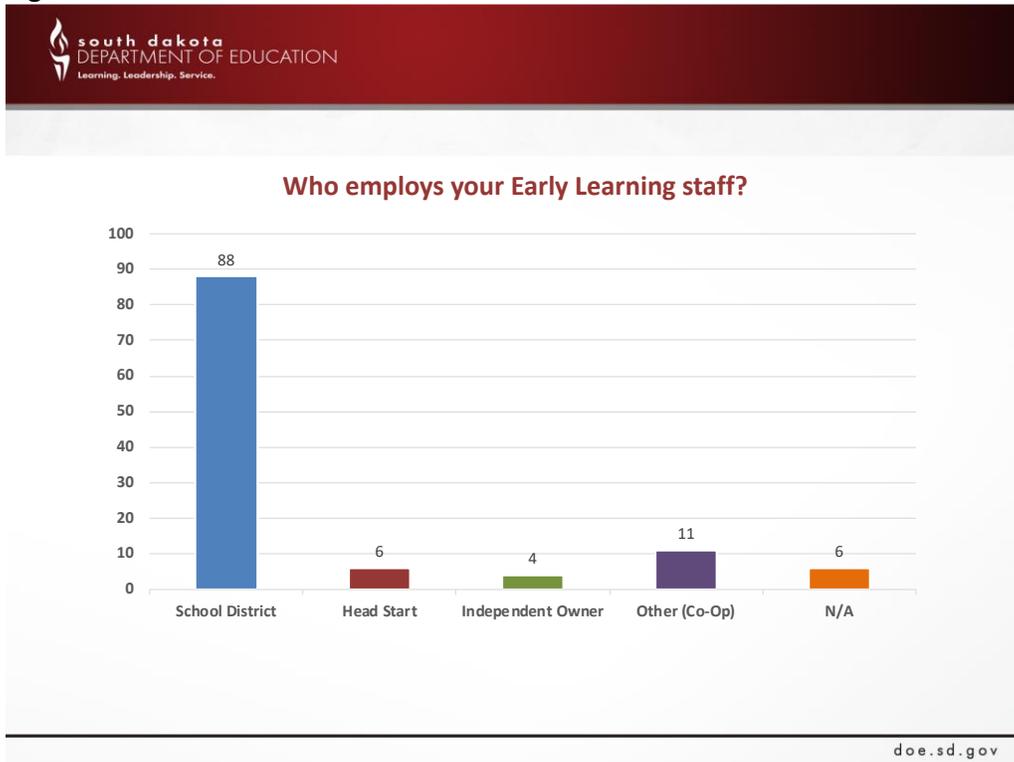
Q22) Does your school offer any of the following early learning programs onsite? (Select all that apply)

- Preschool = 95 responses
- Head Start = 17 responses
- Head Start Blended Program = 12 responses
- No = 1 responses
- Other = 33 responses

Q23) Who employs your early learning staff?

School districts were the primary employer with 88 respondents reporting, 6 respondents reported Head Start employs early learning staff, 4 respondents identified independent owners, 11 others and 6 N/A (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



Q24) How is your onsite preschool funded? (Select all that apply)

Responses are as follows:

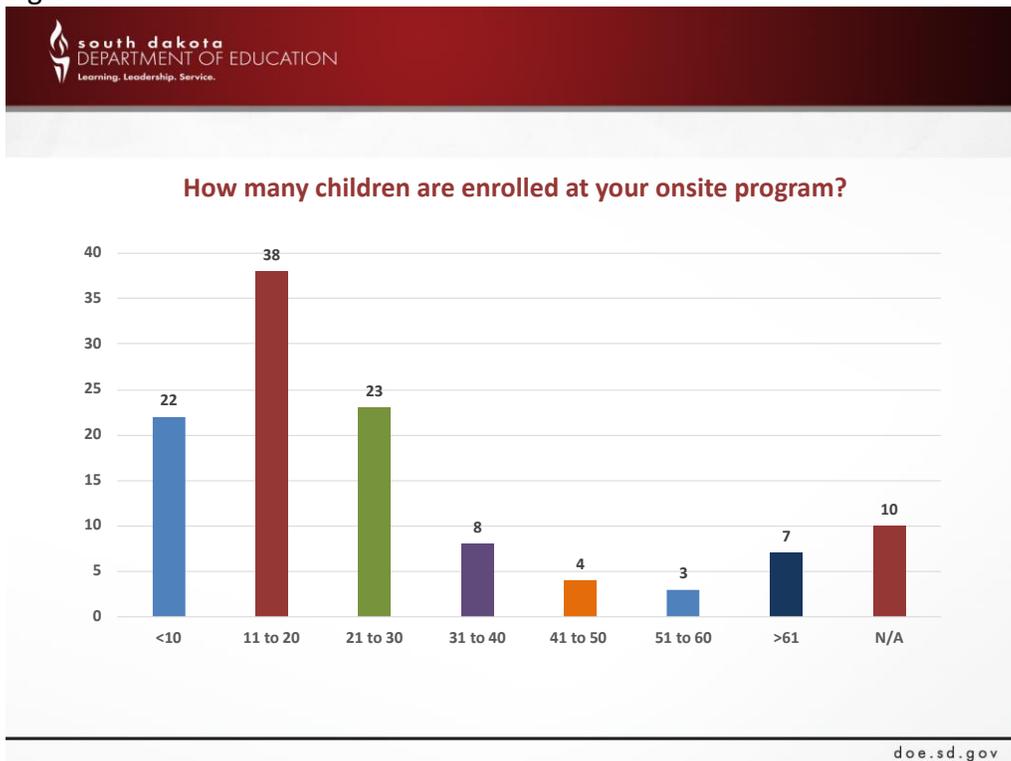
- District Funds (Title, SPED, Gen. Ed., other) = 59 responses
- Combination of 2 or more selections = 31 responses
- Parent Fees (sliding fee scale, scholarship) = 9 responses
- Other, including fundraisers = 8 responses
- Head Start = 3 responses

Q25) How many children are enrolled at your onsite program?

Respondents reported as follows (see Figure 8):

- Less than 10 student = 22 respondents
- 11 to 20 student = 38 respondents
- 21-30 students = 23 respondents
- 31-40 students = 8 respondents
- 41-50 students = 4 respondents
- 51-60 students = 3 respondents
- More than 61 students = 7 respondents
- NA = 10 respondents

Figure 8



Q26) What ages are served in your onsite early learning program? (check all that apply)

Programs serve students age 3 to 5, with 4 year-old being the primary participant.

Q27) How many days of the week does your early learning program/preschool operate? (Please check all that apply)

Respondents reported services in a range of 2 to 5 days a week, with 69% of respondents reporting the range of 4 to 5 days a week.

Q28) How many hours per day does your early learning program/preschool operate?

More than half of program operate from 2 to 4 hours a day.

Q29) What is the teacher to child ratio in your early learning program?

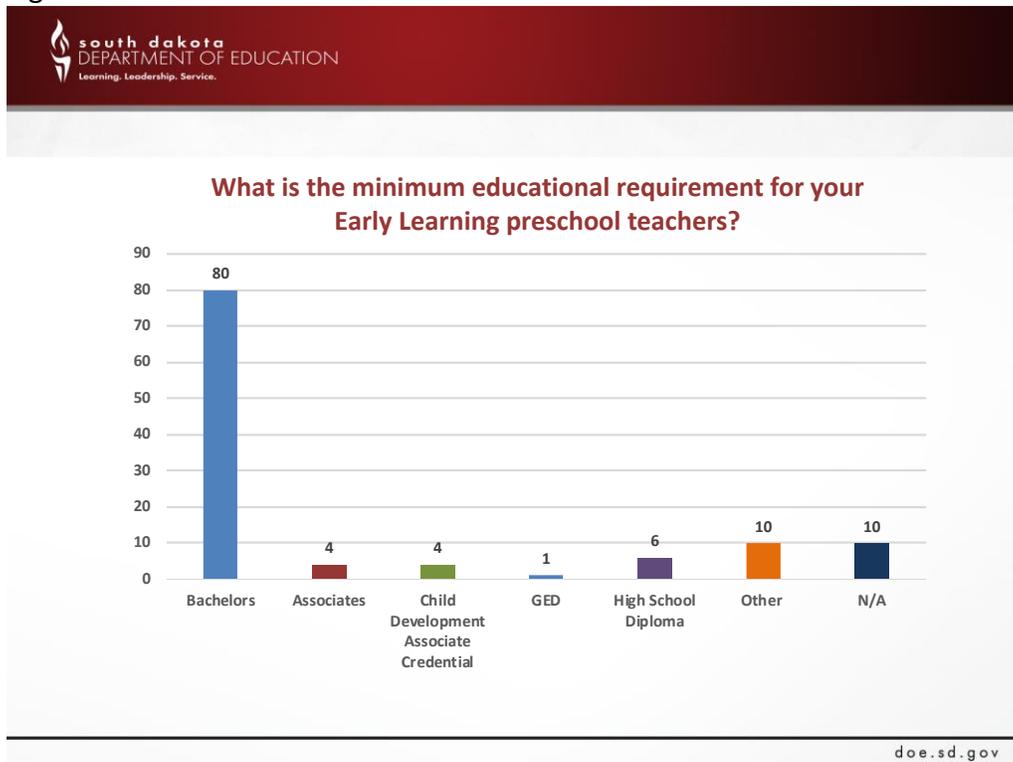
Respondents reported as follows:

- 74 respondents reported a teacher to child ratio of less than 1 teacher to 12 students
- 32 respondents reported a teacher to child ratio in the range of 1 teacher to 13-20 students
- 2 respondents reported a teacher to child ratio of over 1 teacher to 21 or more students

Q30) What is the minimum educational requirement for your early learning preschool teachers?

80 respondents report the early learning program in their district requires at least a bachelor's degree (see Figure 9).

Figure 9



Q31) What resources are used by your early learning program to inform curriculum development?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below.

- Early Childhood Learning Guidelines
- Head Start
- Handwriting Without Tears, Wonders Reading series
- Pearson's OWL program
- SD Early Learning Guidelines

Q32) What child assessments are utilized in your early learning program?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling representative of many responses is provided below.

- AIMSWebPlus
- DIAL screener
- Junior kindergarten assessment
- Head Start Assessments
- Teacher and District-made assessments
- NWEA
- BATTELLE Developmental Inventory
- Early Learning skills based assessment

Q33) Are students on an IEP integrated into the early learning program?

Respondents reported as follows:

Yes = 99 respondents

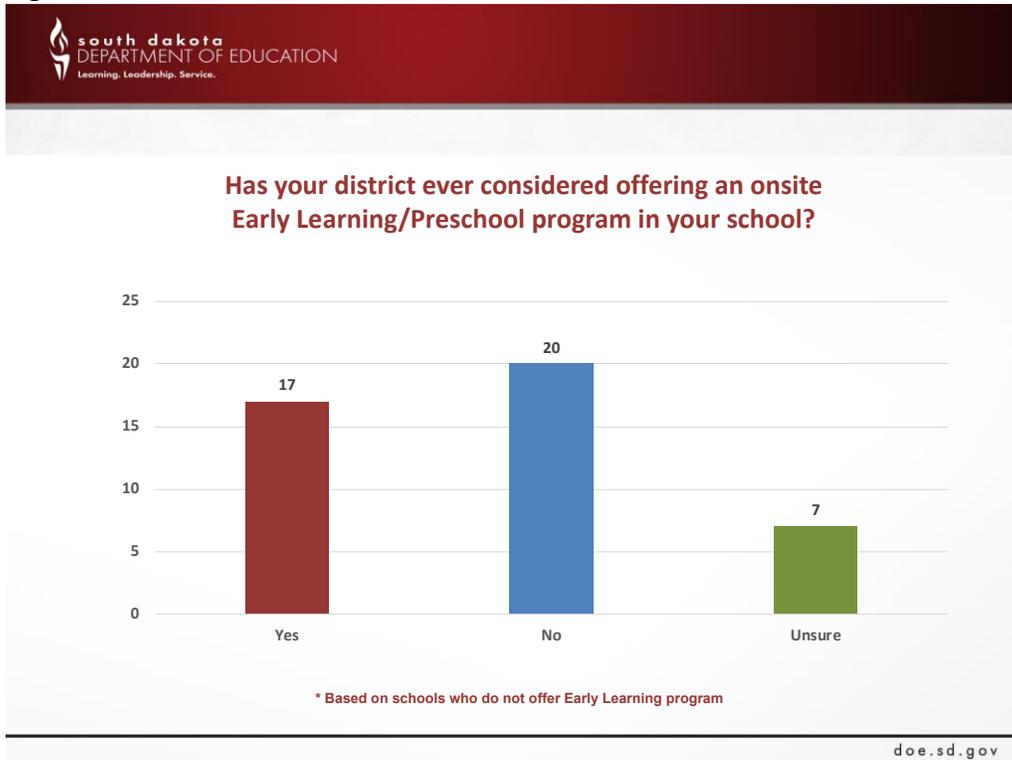
No = 9 respondents

Did not answer = 7 respondents

Q34) Has your district ever considered offering an onsite early learning/preschool program in your school?

This question was intended for respondents from districts that are not currently offering an early learning/preschool program. Of those responding, 17 said yes, 20 said no and 7 were unsure (see Figure 10).

Figure 10



Q35) Does your district have future plans to offer an onsite early learning/preschool program?

This question was intended for respondents from districts that do not currently offer programming. Of those that responded, 19 respondents were unsure about their plans, 21 respondents said no, and 4 said yes.

Q36) What are the barriers/challenges to offering an onsite early learning/preschool program in your school?

Common responses revolved around these three themes:

1. Funding
2. Space
3. Staffing

Q36) Would you like to add any additional comments concerning early childhood learning?

This was an open-ended item that generated a variety of responses. A sampling of responses is provided below.

- A preschool will give student more opportunities for moving their learning forward and to be prepared for kindergarten.
- A vital issue that needs to be front and center in our state.
- As an early childhood certified staff member, myself, I understand the importance of preschool. It is a huge part of educating students so that they are successful. It is hard to understand why this has been put on the back-burner.
- Early childhood is CRUCIAL for the future success of our kindergarten students. Parent education classes should also be a part of this program like it is done in Minnesota schools.
- Early childhood programs are vital to communities and children. I would like to see a push where the state helps the financial burden of school districts providing early childhood education.
- Funded pre-school in the state of South Dakota is a big need! I know the importance of these early years, and I paid a great deal of money for my own children. Not every parent is that fortunate to have the means to do so for their child. Five year olds without access to pre-schools are already behind their peers through no fault of their own.
- Getting children to preschool makes their transition to kindergarten smoother.
- I am very interested in adding a preschool at our Elementary. Many students at our school do not attend any sort of preschool center because of the distance of the preschool opportunities to the town. Poverty is an issue in the town as well. We have low numbers (currently possibly only 6 students who would qualify for next year) which makes a program tough to "sell." But it is greatly needed!
- I feel it is extremely important and would love to see a way for it to be expanded.
- I see the importance of the program, but wondering where funding could be found at this point.
- I think every elementary school should have their own preschool that is free.
- I would like to receive training on the Preschool Levels of Excellence. I have spoken to all of our preschools regarding these levels of excellence, however have not been able to be trained to assist our preschools.

- I would love to expand our program but we need funding for preschool to make that happen.
- I would promote the idea of a collaboration of preschools and the public schools to enhance the professional development and services for both.
- I would very much like to add a preschool program to our district and am open to discussions regarding this topic.
- If pre-school was fully funded, I feel our school district would be in support of a program.
- If there are resources out there about how to start a program, I would love to have access to it!
- If we want school districts to effectively run preschool programs, it has to be funded by the state, with an organized approach so all districts are working on the same page.
- It is critical to get all students engaged and have the ability to learn at an early age.
- It needs to be funded.
- It serves as the perfect transition to kindergarten. It's like having a kindergarten screening for the entire year.
- Kids are coming to school with less and less every year.
- The earlier we intervene with students the earlier they will succeed.
- The importance of early childhood learning can never be emphasized too much!
- This is a significant need for a district our size and for our state.
- This program is underfunded which at times can be a concern when the school has to discuss cutbacks to make the budget balance. We can definitely see the academic gains in students we have transitioned from preschool into kindergarten in our district.
- We feel a preschool program is very important and it readies the children for Kindergarten. We can really tell a difference if the child has not attended preschool prior to attending Kindergarten.
- We need to expose more students to early childhood learning prior to kindergarten.
- We would love to help ensure all of our students receive preschool opportunities.