

The Partnership for Excellence in Early Childhood Education was created as a joint effort between Warren Wilson College, Verner Center for Early Learning, Buncombe County Schools, specifically Owen High School, and Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, to address the shortage of highly trained early childhood education professionals to work in early education and care in Buncombe County. The pilot project was in direct response to the Buncombe County Commissioners' strategic initiative in early childhood education initiated in December of 2017. The pilot project sought to:

1. Support a robust career track in the field of early education, with development ladders from entry level to highly educated, credentialed, and seasoned professionals.
2. Increase the availability of high quality early childcare and education with an emphasis on preschool programs.
3. Collaborate with community leaders and stakeholders for a coordinated systematic approach.

The pilot also intended to inform future curricular decisions with regard to training highly qualified early educators. It sought to clarify the funding required to offer students a high quality four-year degree program with applied experiences.

Since 1998, Warren Wilson College's education program has had a long standing relationship with the Verner Center for Early Learning. Verner offers high quality care for young children and their families, establishing strong child-teacher relationships, utilizing asset-based care with a focus on resiliency. Warren Wilson College students have benefitted from the unique lab school relationship with Verner, gaining skills and knowledge interacting with children of all ages under the supervision and mentoring of seasoned professionals. Students work as an "apprentice" teacher, and the model has been identified as effective for producing high quality teachers. Verner's exemplary practices offer an ideal environment in which to offer training. Our longstanding relationship provided a unique opportunity to build on an existing community relationship and broaden the scope of offerings in the Swannanoa Valley.

Warren Wilson College served as the lead institution to work toward the following outcomes:

- Establish a pipeline for developing high quality professionals in the field of early childhood education, starting by offering six foundational early childhood courses taught by an ABTECH instructor at Owen High School.
- Increase the number of highly qualified early childhood professionals through providing a clear avenue for obtaining a 4-year degree.
- Increase the quality of the training of early childhood professionals through an apprenticeship model at a high quality early childhood education center, building on an already existing model at Verner east on Warren Wilson College's campus.
- Increase the availability of high quality early childhood education for children birth to age 5 in our community through addressing the extreme shortage of highly qualified teachers.

Starting in the spring of 2018, the PEECE partners began meeting to plan for the 2018-2019 academic year. The PEECE Advisory group initially included representation from each partner organization. Jennifer Bosworth from Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Gina Toomey and Tanya Tommy from Owen High School, Chris Tucker and Marcia Whitney from Verner Center for Early Learning, and Annie Jonas and Maura Davis from Warren Wilson College. The advisory committee worked quickly to identify the potential next steps in order to meet the aforementioned outcomes.

FY 2018-2019- Year One Summary

Owen High School and A-B Tech: Several high schools in the area offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses in early childhood education, and also have childcare centers located on their campus, e.g., Erwin, A.C. Reynolds, T. C. Roberson, and North Buncombe. Owen High School did not offer early childhood CTE coursework, nor did students have opportunity to explore the childcare profession by working in a center based program. The committee agreed that offering coursework and opportunities to experience working in a childcare facility would be critical in establishing a professional pipeline. Owen High School had an already existing relationship with A-B Tech and offered courses through the Career and College Promise Program. This program allows eligible high school students to enroll in community college classes tuition free.

Gina Toomey, the Assistant Principal at Owen was able to recruit eight students to register for early childhood education classes. The goal was for OHS students to register for a total of six classes: EDU 119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education, EDU 144: Child Development I, EDU 145: Child Development II, EDU 146: Child Guidance, EDU 151: Creative Activities, and EDU 251: Exploration Activities. Students who successfully completed EDU 119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education, would be eligible to seek employment in local area childcare centers as the state permits employment under the age of 18 with completion of EDU 119. Students who completed all six early childhood courses would be eligible for the Early Childhood Certificate. They could also apply the college course credit to further study at A-B Tech to complete an associate degree in early childhood. Following completion of an associate's degree, a student could potentially transfer to Warren Wilson to complete a bachelor's degree in psychology. This program was designed to be the start of the pipeline to encourage students to begin their training in early childhood at Owen and obtain mentor training in the classrooms at Verner. The goal in creating this partnership was to replicate the experiences offered to students at other area high schools who were able to access early childhood CTE courses, and work experience in the school's childcare classrooms.

Each of the 8 students who enrolled identified as female and White, not Hispanic or Latino. All eight of the students enrolled in the fall term, successfully completed EDU 119, EDU 144 and EDU 145. The overall average grade point average for the three courses was a 91 (A). During the first semester, there were challenges in the model related to the A-B Tech instructor hired to teach the courses. The instructor was hired by A-BTECH and considered their employee. Although the individual had taught early childhood education coursework at A-B Tech previously, they had not worked with high school students. The instructor's relationship with several students was challenged. In their attempt to contextualize the impact of environmental factors on a child's development, the instructor used one student as an example. Several students felt too much emphasis had been placed on this student, their family, and the challenges they

faced. Gina Toomey attempted to support the instructor and offer guidance on how to handle the situation and create a stronger relationship with the students. The guidance offered by Ms. Toomey was not welcomed by either the instructor or by A-B Tech.

Ms. Toomey had shared with the steering committee that the relationship the instructor creates with a high school student is the critical factor in creating positive learning environment. Initially all eight students registered for the second set of classes scheduled to be offered during the spring term of 2019: EDU 146: Child Guidance and EDU 151: Creative Activities. However, the relationship challenges between the adjunct instructor and the students resulted in six of the eight students withdrawing from the classes. As a result of the drop in class size, Jennifer Bosworth made the decision to cancel the classes, and her supervisor supported the decision. Two students who were interested in continuing coursework, were enrolled in online classes through A-B Tech. One student successfully completed the three courses on line. The second student ended up dropping the classes because the online learning posed significant challenges.

Verner Center for Early Learning: The students from Owen High School visited Verner throughout the course of the semester for a total of 5 visits lasting several hours. Each student embedded in a classroom where they were able to observe and interact with the children. Following their classroom time, the students and a mentor teacher reflected on what they had experienced during each visit. The time in the classrooms allowed students to see in real time, examples of the child development concepts they were learning in the academic portion of their classes. The advisory group continued to believe, and the OHS students concurred the hands on nature time in the classroom, followed by reflective supervision with the mentor from Verner was beneficial to their understanding of course content.

Warren Wilson College

In addition to beginning the pipeline at OHS, we began active recruiting for candidates who were interested in obtaining their bachelor's degree in psychology, with a concentration in early childhood education. Initially the goal was to recruit 5 students in to the PEECE Program with the thought that candidates would stop working and return to school full time. It became quickly evident that recruiting five early childhood educators to return to school full time would be a challenge, especially if they were the primary wage earner for themselves and their family. Even though substantial scholarship monies were available, it was not viable for most early childhood educators to end their employment and return to school full time.

Three potential student candidates were identified who were committed to completing their bachelor's degree while continuing to work full time. All three candidates identified as female and White, not Hispanic or Latino. They began classes in August of 2018. Since the students would continue full time employment, and attend school full time, the decision was made to create a 12 hour class schedule that created minimal disruption in the students' work schedule. Classes were "chunked" to two days per week, allowing them to come on campus two days per week for classes, but continue to care for children a full three days per week.

The curriculum at Warren Wilson included 40 credits in the psychology major, 12 credits in early childhood education courses, and additional general education requirements and electives. All three students successfully completed their first semester in December 2018 with career grade point averages of 3.33 for Student A, 3.33 for Student B, and a 2.10 for Student C. Each

successfully completed their second semester in the spring of 2019. Student A had a GPA of 3.43, Student B had a G.P. A of 3.27, and Student C had a G.P.A of 2.65. All three students enrolled for their third semester of classes which started in the fall of 2019.

In year one, our successes included that we were able to quickly get up and running. We created opportunity for eight students from Owen High to take classes through A-B Tech. The students were also placed in high quality infant and preschool classrooms to observe and experience working with young children. Three students receiving scholarships to attend Warren Wilson College successfully completed their first year of college, and enrolled for their second year.

We faced two challenges during our first year of operation. The first challenge was related to the instructor hired by A-B Tech to work at Owen High School. Gina Toomey, the Assistant Principal of Owen High School, indicated teaching high school students can be a challenge. The relationship between the student and the teacher is a critical component to student success. Ms. Toomey felt that the instructor could have benefitted from stronger teacher training on the most appropriate ways to interact with high school students. However, given that the adjunct instructor is an employee of A-B Tech, it was difficult for Ms. Toomey to provide direct supervision. During the semester the advisory group discussed concerns about hiring the adjunct to teach future classes. Although initially Jennifer Bosworth of A-B Tech seemed open to the idea of finding a better fit for an instructor, she shared with us in late May that A-B Tech was going to rehire the adjunct that taught the initial set of courses. Ronald Layne, Dean of Academic Success and Public Service at A-B Tech shared that given that all of the students who took the first round of classes at Owen High passed the courses, they would continue to use the adjunct. Despite the advisory groups misgivings about the instructor, Warren Wilson, Verner, and OHS actively recruited students during the spring term to enroll in the classes in the fall of 2019.

The second challenge was related to the course delivery structure at Warren Wilson College. We offer experiential based courses in a face to face format. Given that we serve predominantly “traditional” college students, classes run during the 8:30-4:30 schedule, with a few classes offered in the evenings. The timing of classes obviously posed a challenge for the three PEECE students, as they worked during the day. We were able to chunk the student’s days of attendance on campus to two days per week, which allowed them to have three full days at work. Still they faced challenges needing to reduce work hours or shift scheduled hours. It worked, but having a more flexible model of delivery model would have been ideal. During the first year and a half of the program, we did not offer hybrid or online courses due to limitations from our accrediting agency. We were able to modify early childhood class times, offering coursework in the early evening. During their second semester the three students worked in the mornings and attended classes in the afternoon and early evenings. This made for extremely long work and school days for the three students. Had the students needed to maintain this schedule over the long term, all of them felt it would have lead to burn out either in school, work, or in both settings.

FY 2019-2020-Year 2 Summary

Owen High School, Verner and A-B Tech

During our advisory meetings OHS faculty, Verner staff, and Warren Wilson faculty developed a plan to offer ongoing support to the students at Owen High School in the event there were

continued challenges in the relationship with the adjunct from A-B Tech. It was decided that increasing both the number of visits and time spent in the Verner classrooms would be of benefit. Students could augment their classroom learning by gaining more direct experiences working with the children, classroom teachers, and having guided mentoring with the Mentor Teacher, Melissa Wilson. The grant provided monies for OHS to hire a licensed bus driver and to cover the transportation costs to take students round trip from Owen High School to Verner.

During the fall term of 2019, fourteen students enrolled in EDU 119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education. Twelve students identified as female and two students identified as male. The majority of students self-identified as White, two identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Asian. Thirteen students later enrolled in and completed both EDU 144: Child Development I and EDU 145: Child Development II. The class average in EDU 119 was 88 or a B+. The class averages in EDU 144 and EDU 145 were also 88 or a B+.

In mid-November, Gina Toomey was contacted by Jennifer Bosworth of A-B Tech to inform her that the adjunct instructor had resigned with no notice. The resignation took place mid-way through the Child Development II class. Both EDU 119 and EDU 144 had been completed by the adjunct instructor. At the beginning of the semester Jennifer Bosworth, A-B Tech Department Chairperson, had restricted the time the class could be offered at Owen to the mornings. She had done this in the event of an illness or emergency where another A-B Tech instructor would need to step in to teach the class. Fortunately, because of her forethought, she was able to step into the role of instructor to complete teaching Child Development II. Jennifer established great relationships with the students and create a positive learning environment to complete the semester. At the end of the term during the December advisory meeting Jennifer Bosworth shared it was not tenable for her to hire an adjunct for the spring term. She also shared that A-B Tech was no longer interested in continuing in the PEECE project. A-B Tech left the PEECE Project in December of 2019, mid-way through the second year.

Given A-B Tech's departure in December, it was not possible to offer early childhood course work during the spring semester of 2020. In January of 2020, Warren Wilson faculty and Gina Toomey from OHS, began conversations with Buncombe County Schools to shift away from teaching early childhood classes through A-B Tech, to teaching through Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. Verner would continue to be used as a learning site. It was decided that a part time CTE instructor would be hired for the academic year 2020-2021 to begin teaching the prerequisite course Child Development.

Verner Mentor Teacher.

Verner's Mentor teacher was instrumental in supporting the Owen High School students during their classroom visits. It is often assumed that effective teachers just happen, they do not. Verner was able to offer the students at OHS opportunities to take theory and put it into guided practice in the classrooms. The classroom essentially becomes a lab where students learn how to put into practice what they have been exposed to in readings or class assignments. Melissa Wilson was able to guide classroom observations and facilitate individual observations and course activities the OHS students were required to complete for EDU 119, EDU 144 and EDU 145. She was also able to facilitate reflection on the classroom observations after each visit as a

method to strengthen learning. Melissa was not able to offer the OHS students additional mentoring after A-B Tech left the partnership. She was however able to offer more in depth mentoring to the Warren Wilson students enrolled in the PEECE project, Warren Wilson students working at Verner, as well as mentoring to the staff at Verner Center. We had planned for Melissa to begin working with the teachers at Donald S. Collins Early Learning Center in Black Mountain to support them in their work. However, this did not happen because Verner and the Collins Center shut down because of COVID-19.

Warren Wilson College

Our second year of the grant progressed smoothly in the early half of the year. The second half of the year was impacted by the coronavirus epidemic. In August, the three PEECE students continued to complete degree requirements at Warren Wilson College. They enrolled in 13 credits during the fall term, which were completed face to face. Their semester GPA's for Student A was 3.42, Student B was 3.08, and Student C was 3.20. During the spring term, students enrolled in 12 credit hours that were completed in person till mid-March. At that time Warren Wilson made the decision to shut down the campus due to the coronavirus, and sent all students home to complete the remainder of the semester online. Their semester GPA's were a 3.90 for Student A, a 3.57 for Student B, and a 3.43 for Student C.

Students reported that the classes they took during the spring semester, African American History and Culturally Competent Educator had a profound impact on their outlook working with children and families. All students enrolled in the Culturally Competent Educator were also required to attend Building Bridges in Asheville. The mission of Building Bridges is to dismantle racism by fostering relationships that respect diversity, seek understanding and encourage action. The combination of classes was challenging as all three students had to address their white privilege and how this privilege impacted their relationships with the children and families whom they serve. One student shared, "my eyes are opened more to racial issues -I have to look at the perspective that not all children have someone that looks like them. Made it more personal for me."

During the summer all three PEECE students were able to enroll in 7 credits of completely online coursework to complete general education requirements. The summer term GPA's were a 3.44 for Student A, a 3.04 for Student B, and a 2.57 for Student C. In total, students completed 32 credit hours of coursework during the year while continuing to work on a full or part time basis. At the end of spring 2020, it was determined that each of the PEECE students would only need to attend on a part time basis in the fall of 2020 in order to complete graduation requirements. Each of the students had to put their Psychology Capstone research on hold during COVID-19 and were given a grade of incomplete, allowing them to complete the work at a later date without penalty to their grade point averages.

FY 2020-2021-Year 3

Owen High School

Owen High School began offering Child Development classes through the Early Childhood Career and Technical Education track in August of 2020. With support from Owen faculty and the Early Childhood CTE educators in Buncombe County Schools, the new instructor was able to jump right in. In the Buncombe County Schools Return to Learn plan, students and parents

were given the option to attend as a completely remote online learning student, or attend two days per week face to face with the remaining three days remote. A total of 23 students enrolled in two sections of Child Development which ran from August through December. The class average for both sections was 84.2, or a B. During the second half of the year, January through June, two additional sections of Child Development were taught with an additional 25 students enrolled. From January to late March, students in these sections either attended remotely, or they continued with the two day per week face to face instruction. It was not until late March that students who chose in person attendance returned to 5 day face to face instruction. Final grades for the second half of the year were recently submitted, and the class average for the first section with ten enrolled students was 86.2 or a B+. The class average for the second section with fifteen students enrolled was 91.85 or an A-.

In total, four sections of Child Development were taught from August 2020 through June of 2021. The majority of enrolled students identified as female (45 students), and three as male. This is not surprising as the field of early childhood education tends to be dominated by individuals who identify as female. Owen High School reports that 12% of the student population identifies as Hispanic, 4% as Black, 78% as White, and 5% as two or more races. In regards to the students who registered for Child Development classes, thirty-seven students (78.7%) identified as White, five students identified as Black (10.6 %), three students identified as Hispanic (6.4%), one student identified as Pacific Islander (2.1%) and one student did not report (2.1%). The class enrollment was demographically similar to the OHS demographics, however were the grant to have continued, the advisory committee would have worked on ways to encourage greater diversity in enrollment. Recruiting early childhood educators who are racially and ethnically diverse is critical to creating a more welcoming early childhood environment.

Gina Toomey, the Owen High School Assistant Principal who worked on the grant since the beginning shared the following about the overall experience for Owen High School:

Upon reflection of our work over the past three years, I would like to thank our partners along this journey. Without collaboration and support of each other, we would have been limited in our ability to begin our focus on a community need. This opportunity has provided our school a chance to reach out to students about career ideas. As many would believe that we have ample time to prepare our students to begin to think about what they want to do with their lives outside of their high school years, we are truly short on that time and planning. The PEECE project has allowed us to explore interest in early childhood development and integrate our students into our community which has been an amazing endeavor for them. I hope to find our way back to this opportunity in the future, having participated in this experience has helped us re-visit our Career and Technical Education courses to align with community needs. We will now be offering Childhood Development next year as we have had over 50 students request the course! Unfortunately, OHS is not in the position to offer the next level course which allows students to participate in a practicum at a local early childhood center. Our goal is to find an avenue to implement the second level of the Early Childhood Human Services pathway at the high school level. I would simply share that this opportunity has left us encouraged and inspired to continue this work.

It is important to note that when the PEECE Project first started, one of the main goals was to create interest in the field of early childhood education. The belief was that by offering coursework in early childhood education to high school students in the Owen Valley, we could potentially increase interest in the field of early childhood. In the fall of 2018, eight Owen High students enrolled in the A-B TECH classes. The classes did not run in the spring, but in the fall of 2019, fourteen students enrolled. In the third year of the grant, we transitioned to offering classes through Career and Technical Education. Over the course of this year, 48 students completed Child Development.

When Warren Wilson decided not to pursue grant funding for FY 2021-2022, we discussed with Gina Toomey whether Owen High wanted to pursue funding for the CTE Instructor position on their own. After consulting with Taylor Baldwin, the Director of Career and Technical Education for Buncombe County Schools, it was decided they would not pursue the grant funding for the position. Although the grant is not continuing, the significant increase in the enrollment from 8 to 48 provided clear evidence that there was significant interest in child development and early childhood education. As Gina Toomey shared in her comments above, 50 students are registered for class in the fall of 2021. They have tentatively identified a new part time instructor as the current instructor is moving to Florida. Over the course of three years the grant allowed 70 students to learn more about child development and the field of early childhood, and we are hopeful that students see early childhood education as a potential career pathway.

Verner Center for Early Learning:

Verner adopted very strict COVID-19 restrictions in order to operate during the pandemic. The only people allowed into the building were classroom teachers, children, and essential staff, e.g., kitchen staff, center manager. All support staff worked remotely from home. Parents were not allowed into the building and dropped their child at the outside classroom door. Children and teachers remained in their classroom pods even outdoors on the playground to reduce the risk of transmission. As a result of their strict policy Verner was not able to have any outside visitors to the classrooms from March 2020 through March 2021. Starting in March of 2021, visitors were only able to enter the building if they had been fully vaccinated. Sadly, because most high school students have not yet been fully vaccinated, they were not able to embed in the classrooms or meet with the Mentor Teacher at Verner for the past year. Verner did not receive any grant funds during the last year of the grant operation.

Warren Wilson College

The final year of the grant was a culminating success with all three PEECE Scholarship recipients graduating on May 9th, 2021. Student A graduated with an overall grade point average of 3.52, which translates to an A-. Student B graduated with an overall grade point average of 3.24, which translates to a B+. Student C graduated with an overall grade point average of 2.94, which translates to a B-. Prior to graduation, the Registrar and the Director of Student Success at Warren Wilson conduct degree audits for all graduating seniors. When the Registrar completed this audit, it was discovered that two of the PEECE students had completed all degree requirements, however were found to be one and two credits short on the credit hours to fulfill

graduation requirements. These students were able to walk at graduation and have recently completed independent studies to fulfill all graduation requirements.

The three students completed their Capstone Research Project during the spring of 2021. Student A researched the role of a mentor teacher in supporting staff development, overall job satisfaction, and in the long term, teacher retention. Student B completed research on the where, when, and how women typically receive information about postpartum depression. They have developed a resource guide for their childcare facility to share with new mothers who have recently enrolled their first child in childcare, or have another child already in care. Student C conducted research on how to support childcare staff in teaching young children on a naturalized playground. They investigated how a teacher's childhood experiences in nature impact their willingness to explore nature with children. Each student presented their capstone research in late April. A videotaped recording of their presentations is also available.

The benefits reported by the three PEECE participants could be grouped into two main categories: An opportunity for both professional and personal growth. All three participants were the first in their families to receive a bachelor's degree. Each reported they would not have been able to complete their degree had they not been provided scholarship monies from the Buncombe County Early Childhood Education and Development Fund. Participant responses are included below in bullet format.

In reference to professional growth

- Better understanding of child development
- Improved my communication skills with teachers and families
- Allowed me to stay in the role of the director, and I've become a better leader
- Job opportunities for me are broader
- Going on for my Birth to Kindergarten Licensure at Western Carolina University in the spring of 2022

In reference to personal growth, the following statements were shared

- Gained self-confidence
- Increased my pay
- Built inner strength
- I have more pride in myself
- Gained friends
- Cohort helped so much, having my fellow student motivated me, supported me, encouraged me
- Set a higher standard with my family at work and school
 - I would have been ok if they didn't go to college. Now, I realize if I can do it with a full time job, opening a center, they can do it. Now it is an expectation!
 - I set an example for my children- don't have to stop just because your 40's, you can go back to school.
 - I presented my final presentation to my daughter to practice, and I could tell she was proud of me.

- I was at such a low point when I started, even figuring out passwords was a challenge
- I loved being on the campus I am not an online student
- I'm as old as these students mothers, but I felt welcomed and supported. This campus is very special

We ask childcare providers to give so much of themselves during the day as they care for children. Attending school full time, working full time and caring for family stretched these women. The PEECE students shared challenges they faced in creating a balanced life.

- Hard to do while working full time, with a family
- Juggling a lot
- Tiring mentally and emotionally draining at times
- Time management was challenging
- Balance work-school-family
- Had to let go of perfectionism
- Needing to have a supportive administration at childcare
- Had to reduce work hours
- It would have been great to have more online offerings.
- Having classes at night was great, but made for LONG days.

Each of the graduates remain employed in the field of early childhood education. Two are teaching full time, in classrooms for four year-olds. Student A already has plans to pursue their post baccalaureate B-K Licensure through Western Carolina University starting in the spring of 2022. They have chosen Western's program because it is offered completely online. The third student is now the official director of an early learning center in Buncombe County. For several years, they had been in the role of acting director, however the center's board of directors required the center manager hold a bachelor's degree in order to become the "official" director.

In summary, we believe the pilot project was a success, albeit on a smaller scale than hoped. One primary goal was to start a professional pipeline where individuals could identify a clear pathway from high school to college to employment in the field of early childhood education. The first part of that goal was to create an increased awareness for the field of early childhood education. Over the course of three years, 70 students from Owen High School were able to access coursework in early childhood education, an opportunity that had not previously been available. Twenty-two students successfully completed coursework through A-B Tech (EDU 119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education, EDU 144 and 145: Child Development I and II.) The remaining forty-eight students completed the Child Development course through Career and Technical Education. The growth we saw from initial enrollment of 8 students in the first year to 48 students in the last year, clearly indicates we increased awareness in the field.

Although awareness about the field grew, we do not believe we successfully established a clear pipeline for students. The goal of the partnership with A-B Tech, was to have them teach early childhood courses at Owen, creating the beginning of the education pipeline. Had students been able to complete all six courses initially identified, they would have been eligible for the Early Childhood Certificate, and received college course credit towards an associate's degree. Following completion of the associate's degree the goal was to have students transfer to Warren

Wilson to complete their bachelor's degree. Although we did not officially track students who graduated, Ms. Toomey knew of one Owen student who took early childhood coursework through A-B TECH, and began attending A-B Tech last fall. We did not however have any students who completed coursework at Owen, enroll at A-B Tech, and transfer to Warren Wilson to complete their degree. Realistically however it would not have been possible to see the impact of establishing the pipeline until year four at the earliest.

Benefits to the A-B Tech partnership included students obtaining college level course work and credits toward an associate's degree. In addition, it was more cost effective to hire an adjunct instructor for the courses than to pay salary for a CTE instructor. However, there were also challenges given the lack of consistency with the adjunct selected to teach. When we moved to using the Career and Technical Education pathway, we saw significant growth in enrollment. The enrollment increase likely be attributed to two factors. First, the instructor was consistent, engaged and enthusiastic. Their presence in the classroom created a positive energy, and as Ms. Toomey indicated, high school students respond to this and tell their friends. Second, the timing of the class offering was more flexible under CTE. Two sections were offered at different times during the day, whereas the A-B Tech class could only be offered in the early morning.

The second major goal of the pilot was to increase the number of highly qualified early childhood educators. When the pilot was first written, the goal was to recruit and graduate ten participants with a bachelor's degree in psychology. The belief was candidates would resign from full time employment, attend school full time, and complete their bachelor's degree in four semesters, or two years. The college has determined students must complete a minimum of sixteen credits per semester in order to complete their degree in a timely manner. After we began recruiting, it became very clear that the idea of resigning employment was neither tenable, nor realistic for most candidates. Many childcare professionals indicated they were the primary wage earner for themselves or their family. Leaving employment, would have created incredible financial hardship. Another factor for several recruits was health insurance. For individuals who had health insurance benefits, leaving full time employment would have meant a loss of health insurance benefits. Our initial goal of ten was revised to five, as it became obvious if individuals wanted to maintain full time employment, it would be challenging to work full time and take 16 credits per semester. It would also mean that students who enrolled would take longer than two years to complete their degree.

Over the course of the first and second year, six students were recruited. Five students reached the point of deposit and registration. One candidate determined she needed to complete her degree at the school where she started, as transferring to Warren Wilson would have added over a year to degree completion. The second candidate shared that she needed greater flexibility in course delivery methods. Although Warren Wilson was then able to offer online coursework, the classes met synchronously in the afternoons. Although the candidate was highly motivated, they realized that it was not be possible for them to commit to taking online coursework that required them to attend online on specific days and times. The candidate was an assistant center manager, and typically had to cover staffing during lunches and breaks during the afternoons due to short staffing. They needed the flexibility to complete courses and class work asynchronously at their own pace.

Three students successfully completed their bachelor's degree. These three candidates were highly motivated and committed to completing the program, however three factors also contributed to their success. First, the scholarships the students received made it all possible. Warren Wilson committed to covering half of the PEECE student's tuition during the grant period. In addition, these students were also eligible for federal PELL grants which further reduced the costs. These students could not access funds through T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program because the primary courses were in psychology, not specifically early childhood education. Without the generous scholarships monies from the Buncombe County Early Childhood Education and Development funds, it would not have been possible for these individuals to attend Warren Wilson or any other college. Warren Wilson is a private college, with a limited endowment to provide merit aid to reduce tuition. Although we do have scholarship monies available, the requirements are full time attendance and the student must live on campus. Non-traditional students are unlikely candidates for scholarships with residency limitations. At present, it costs more to obtain a degree through Warren Wilson in comparison to a state funded school such as the University of North Carolina-Asheville, Appalachian State or Western Carolina. The costs to run the PEECE program would likely have been less if it were offered through a state institution. Regardless, if we as a community are committed to supporting early childhood educators in furthering their education, providing some type of financial support to early childhood will continue to be imperative.

Second, the PEECE students were employed at centers that were committed to them obtaining their advanced degree. In one case the board of directors for the center had required the degree as terms of employment. At both facilities where these students were employed there were typically extra staff available to cover their absence from work when they attended classes. Clearly this takes administrative commitment from a center, as well as personal commitment from a student. The support these students received from their places of employment was a critical factor in their success. The three PEECE students felt torn being away from "their children" during the day in order to attend school. Larger centers, with larger staff, who employ consistent substitutes and floaters have the flexibility to allow employees to take time away from work to complete coursework. The county and the Partnership for Children have recognized the need to have additional well trained support staff available to step in as substitute teachers. Having this additional staffing will continue to be critical in supporting child care providers when they return to school to complete a degree, whether face to face or online.

Third, the faculty of the psychology and education departments were fully vested in supporting these students in being successful and completing their degree. The faculty felt that "non-traditional" students added considerable depth to the classes. Traditional college students often understand the theory or facts, however they can be challenged when asked to apply the knowledge to day to day situations. The PEECE students brought to class discussions not only what they learned from the text, but integrated learning with their life and work experiences. Two faculty member's children attended Verner Center, where two of the PEECE students were employed. The faculty understood the importance of having highly qualified professionals teach their children. They valued the time and effort the PEECE students put in to their work.

As a faculty we were hopeful about continuing the grant, and potentially adding a Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) licensure program. We had begun work with Brevard College to create an articulation agreement between the two schools, enabling students from Warren Wilson to enroll at Brevard after graduation to complete a post baccalaureate B-K licensure. It was decided that Warren Wilson would not complete a formal articulation agreement with Brevard during the last year of the grant. Dr. Megan Keiser, from Brevard College, suggested that we complete an analysis of the education classes at Warren Wilson to see how we could better integrate edTPA requirements into our courses. edTPA is a system used by Educator Preparation Programs (EPP's) to identify, support and measure the knowledge and skills and teachers need to be successful in their work. The goal of completing this analysis is to know where to incorporate edTPA requirements, as including these will increase the likelihood that education course credits taken at Warren Wilson could be more easily transferred to a licensure program, such as U.N.C. A, or a post baccalaureate licensure program at Brevard or Western Carolina. As indicated in previous reports we have had changes in administration at Warren Wilson College. We are undergoing a restructuring and streamlining of academic programs. Though both faculty and administration were supportive of the grant, it was determined that continuing the program during this time of change was not feasible. We are however hopeful that in the future when the restructuring is complete, we may be able to revisit the possibility of expanded education offerings.

One of the final goals of the grant was to strengthen community relationships, and we believe we were successful in this goal. Warren Wilson continues to maintain strong relationships with Brevard College, Donald S. Collins Early Learning Center, Owen High School, and the Verner Center for Early Learning. The remaining partners in the Partnership for Excellence in Early Childhood Education Program, Owen High School, Verner Center for Early Learning and Warren Wilson College are tremendously thankful to Buncombe County, the County Commissioners, and the Early Childhood and Development committee members who afforded us the opportunity to explore this pilot program to provide educational opportunities to individuals interested in the field of early childhood education.