

EQUITY IN ACTION

CUNY Early Childhood Workforce Scholarship

“The ability to achieve higher education while working serves as a win for families and teachers, and helps to create a stable workforce.” 2019 NYS Women’s Justice Agenda

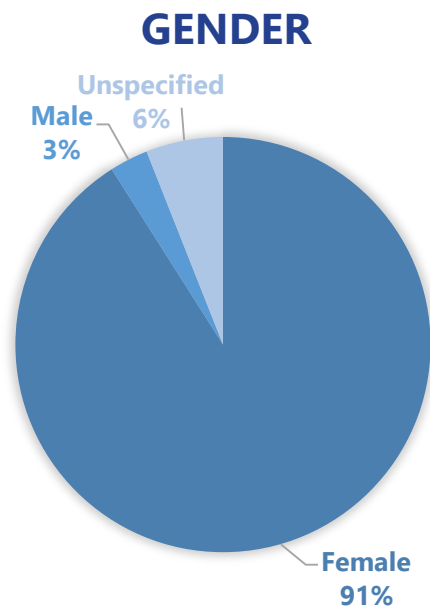
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Summer of 2019, Governor Cuomo’s office called upon CUNY to ask for partnership in launching the New York Early Childhood Workforce Scholarship – an initiative recommended by the NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council and endorsed by the NYS Women’s Justice Agenda. The University Dean of the Office of Early Childhood Initiatives (OECI) and Executive Director of the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (Institute) went before the CUNY Board of Trustees to request pilot funding for the first year of the scholarship with an assurance that a successful pilot would result in state funding in the following year. The Board of Trustees enthusiastically approved the request.

In the Fall of 2019, the OECI ran a pilot project for 14 individuals who worked 20 hours or more in a regulated early childhood/child care program in New York City with expressed desire to pursue higher education. The pilot was important and enabled the OECI to set up accounting procedures, registration codes, and recruitment, student support, and data tracking systems. All students completed the course successfully and 13 continued into the Spring 2020 term.

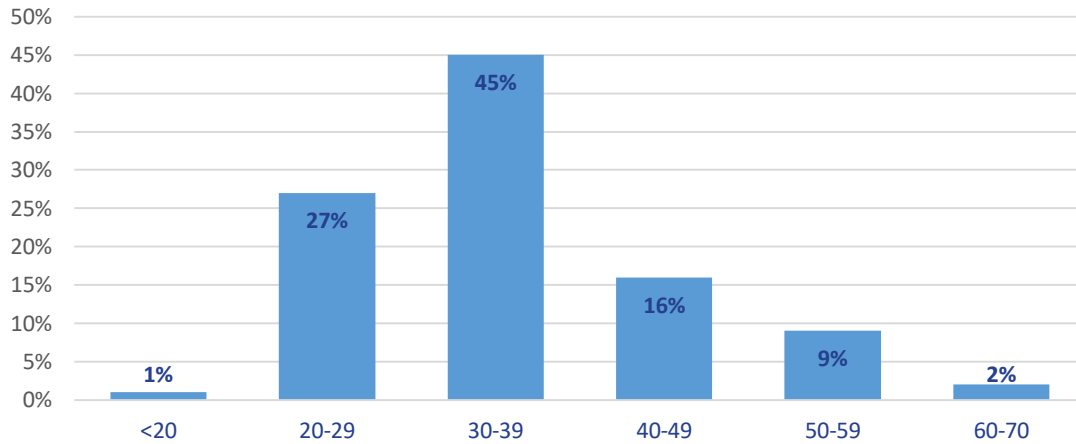
Immediately following the Fall pilot, the OECI launched a much more robust effort for the Spring, 2020 semester. 416 students indicated interest in the Early Childhood Workforce Scholarship. Advisors from the NY Early Childhood Professional Development Institute Career Center met with candidates to determine their eligibility for the program. One hundred (100) individuals, each working 20 hours or more each week, were selected to participate and as is the case in early childhood education, the great majority were female.

Individuals indicating interest in the scholarship program were representative of a very diverse group. The candidates that were



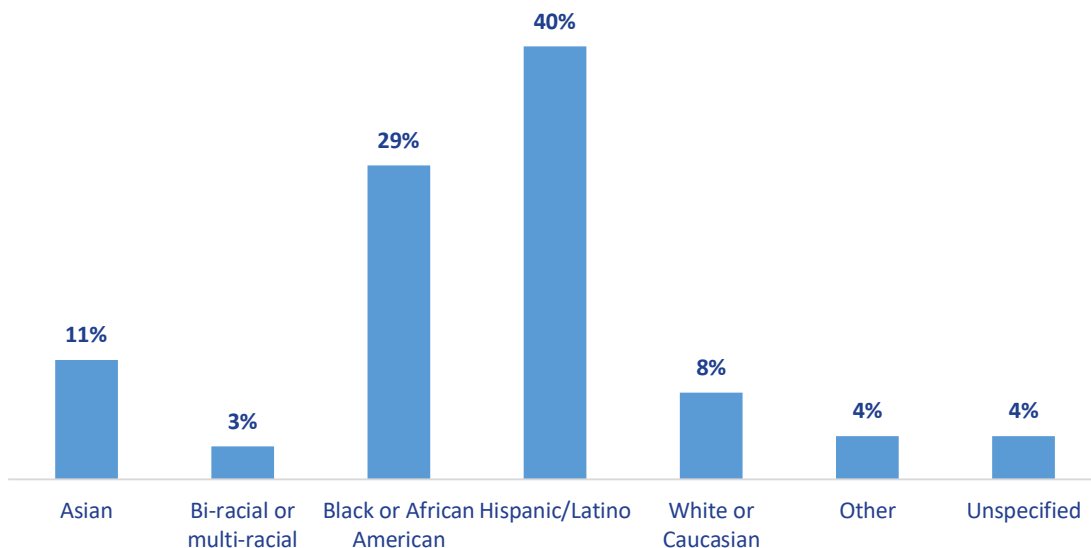
selected were extremely diverse in several ways. Notably, the age of participants varied significantly. While 27% were between the ages of 20 and 29 years, 72% were 30 years of age and older. And of the latter group, 27% were over 40. This dispels the myth that teachers who have been teaching for extended periods of time, in this case, 10 or more years, do not want to earn college degrees. And as the data indicates below, they not only want to earn degrees, they persist.

Age Breakdown



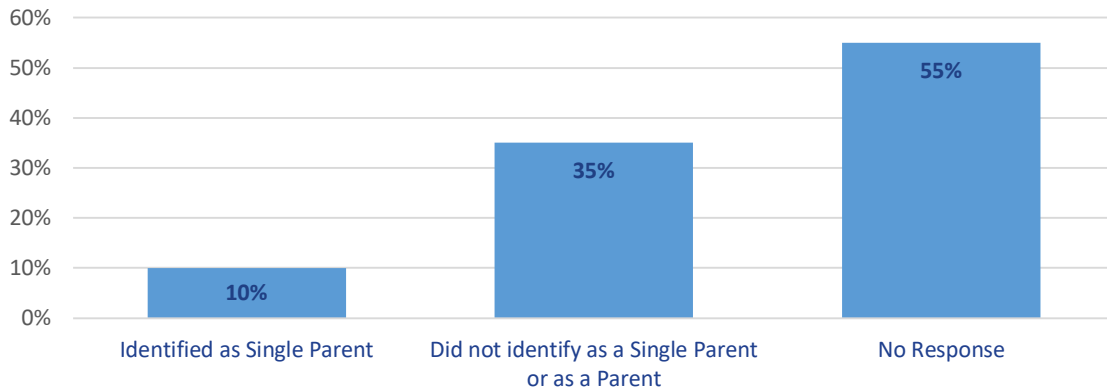
The OECI has a deep and historic commitment to social justice and racial equity and this project was no different. The goal was to recruit a cohort that represented the children served in our city’s early childhood programs. But recruitment is not enough. As will be demonstrated later in this summary, the insistence and support to success is equally as critical. At least 87% of the Spring 2020 cohort consisted of people of color.

Race/Ethnicity



The Women’s Justice Agenda and the OEI were both interested in whether this project could succeed in its support of student–parents who identified as single. A significant number, 55%, of individuals did not identify with this category which leaves room for further exploration and support for students in the future. We wondered whether the category of single student-parent was too restrictive, fluid or ambivalent to working women raising children – acknowledging that so many women now engage in active co-parenting, shared custody, and other arrangements that were once non-traditional.

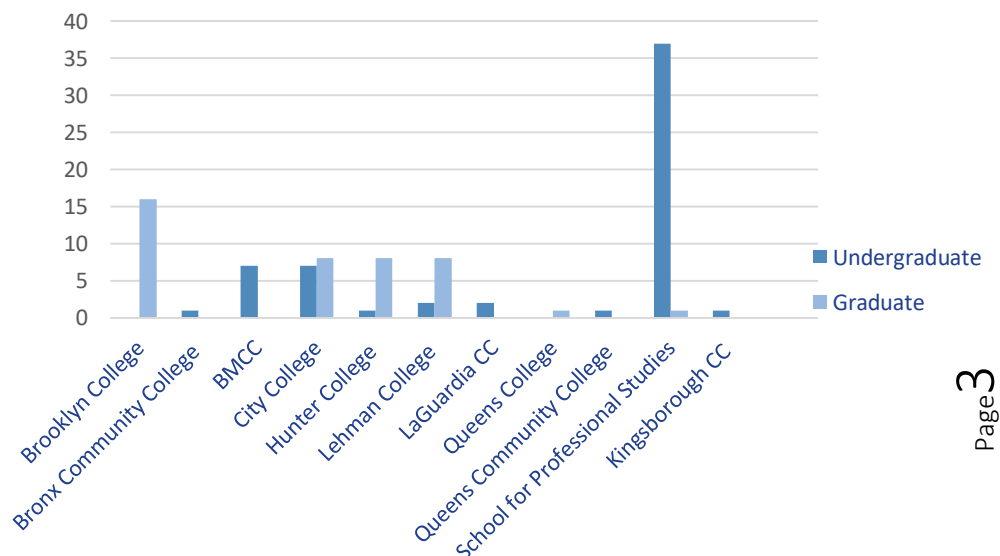
Identified as Single Parent



It was important to place students in the colleges they were most comfortable with. In many cases, individuals had begun studying at a particular college and an effort was made to enable them to continue where they left off. In other cases, our career advisors worked with the student to find the best fit. Since the CUNY College of Professional Studies has both the only under-graduate credit-bearing Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential and the only graduate credit-bearing Children’s Program Administrator Credential we saw a large number of students attend that school. The CDA is an ideal first step to begin building a career in early childhood education,

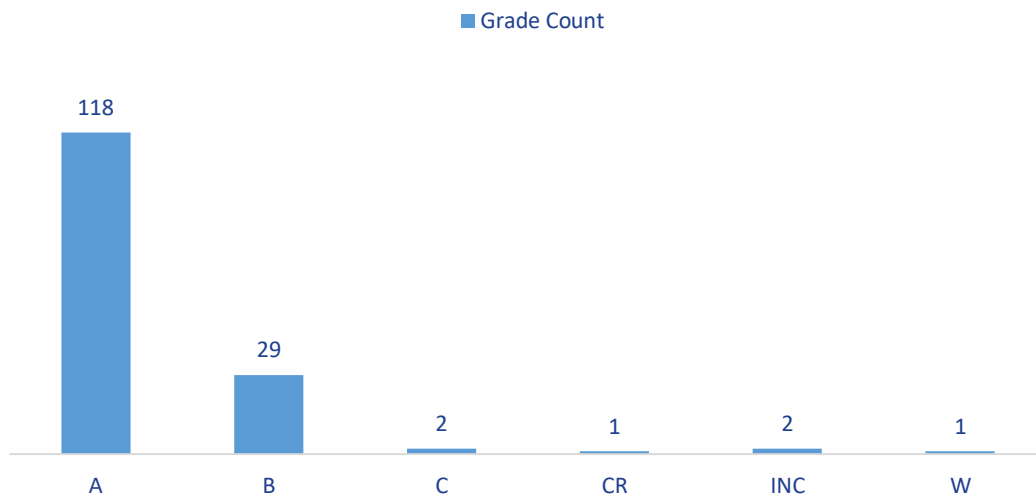
especially since at CUNY it is credit-bearing and there are at least 4 ways to articulate to community colleges within the CUNY system once one has earned the credential. This becomes important when one considers the critical nature of the Institute’s work creating pathways and career mobility for early childhood educators.

CUNY College Breakdown



Students participating in the Scholarship project were wildly successful! Students earned an A or a B in 96% of the courses taken. This must be placed in context. Several of these individuals had been out of school for quite some time and many had not experienced an online course before, BUT this semester we are focusing on happened right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. An already at-risk population of students (studying while working) faced a dramatic challenge when all courses at CUNY were converted to an on-line/distance learning format within one week. Our goal of retaining enrollment and supporting success intensified. Career advisors went into high gear to make sure students made the transition to this new form of learning. The results speak for themselves. One student exercised her right to take the course on a pass/fail basis and 2 students needed a bit more time to complete final assignments. Only 1 student withdrew. 99% of the students completed the coursework. Students chose whether they took one or two courses in the semester. 47 students took one course. 53 students took 2 courses. As a reminder, many students maintained employment for a minimum of 20 hours each week. While several students lost their employment as a result of the pandemic, many others kept their employment and worked with the children in their classrooms remotely, while they made the transition to online learning at the college level.

Performance and Perseverance



Participation in the project meant that each student worked with a career advisor affiliated with the Institute Career Center. Students were promised a minimum of two face-to-face meetings with their advisor where they co-constructed a study plan to ensure that progress towards their goals were on track. Performance, concerns with assignments or course completion, and other barriers to success were discussed. As soon as the pandemic became a reality in the City each participant was contacted with offers of guidance on how to use BlackBoard, Zoom, time management, how to access reduced cost of Wi-Fi, and to share information about the CUNY laptop program and emergency grants. Career advisors also conducted wellness checks with the students to make sure they felt supported and cared for.

Costs

The cost of the tuition for 153 courses was approximately \$130,000 for the Spring, 2020 semester. Costs associated with recruitment, course guidance, and career advisement were covered with a generous grant from the Dodge Family Foundation.

Recommendations for Future Implementation

Early childhood educators want to earn the credentials that will enable them to meet the needs of the young children they teach. For too long, our early childhood systems have compromised the quality of programs by lowering the expectations for its workforce, especially in programs that serve children of color and poverty. The workforce, also largely women of poverty and color has encountered artificial barriers preventing them from pursuing higher education and career mobility. While the field addresses compensation, another serious gap that continuously compromises the social condition of the early childhood education workforce, we need to provide access to higher education to enable the workforce to benefit from compensation changes when they occur.

As the state of New York strives to recover from the economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic we will search for funding to maintain the momentum of the Spring semester's students. We will also search for funding to introduce the scholarship to early childhood educators throughout the rest of the state who can pursue their certificates, credentials, degrees, and certifications both at CUNY and SUNY schools. With the current expansion of the Institute's Career Centers in 4 other regions across the state, there is capacity to broaden the impact to those throughout the state of New York.

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