

Key Findings From the 2021 BEST Workforce Survey

The Birth through Eight Strategy for Tulsa (BEST) focuses on the entire birth-to-8 continuum—preconception services, prenatal care, and services for early elementary school-age children and their families—aiming to transform these systems by helping them effectively collaborate with each other to create an integrated set of supports for young children and their families. American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is conducting a multiyear study of BEST, including annual workforce surveys of frontline staff and managers who work for BEST partners to understand their experiences delivering services to young children and families.¹ This brief summarizes the 2021 survey results compared with the 2020 survey findings.

1. Between 2020 and 2021, the BEST workforce reported improvements in awareness of community service providers, use of referrals, and cross-agency communication.



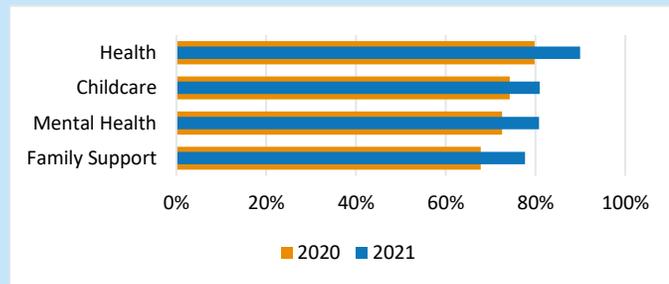
Staff knowledge of other service providers in Tulsa increased from 2020 to 2021. Staff who are more knowledgeable about other service providers that may benefit their clients are better positioned to link families to the supports they need.



Staff are making more referrals and using “warm handoffs” with clients more often.

Compared with 2020, the percentage of staff who reported making referrals increased between 3 percentage points and 10 percentage points across all service sectors. Staff are more likely to provide warm handoffs to other service providers, to ensure successful referrals.

Percentage of Staff Making Referrals, by Service Sector and Year



More than half of the BEST partner staff communicate about shared clients, an increase from 2020. In addition to more cross-agency communication, the proportion of staff reporting satisfaction with communication with staff in other organizations increased by 9 percentage points compared with 2020 (from 38% in 2020 to 47% in 2021).

2. Barriers to service access and racial equity persist.



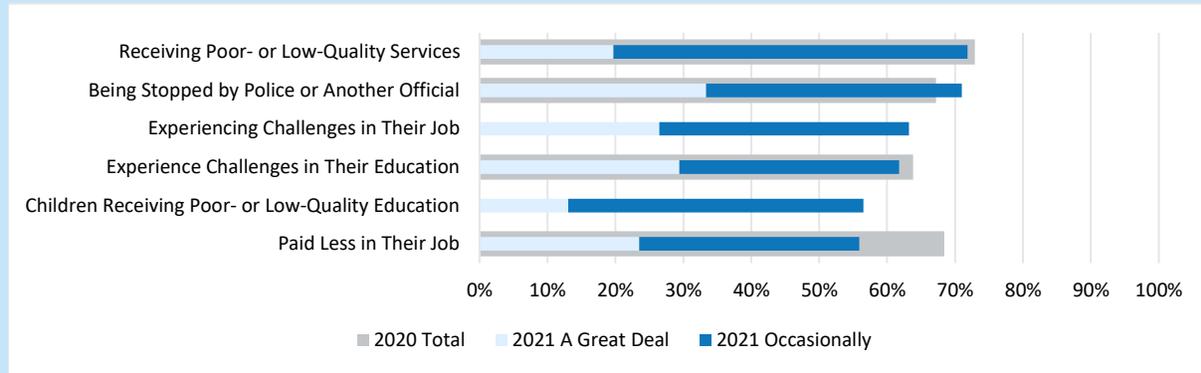
Staff reported that the most difficult services for clients to access are housing assistance, legal services, and mental health services for adults, which is similar to 2020. In addition, the most common challenges to service access for clients include a lack of transportation, a lack of childcare, long wait times for services, client concerns about their immigration status, and clients’ lack of knowledge about available services—the same barriers identified by staff in 2020.

¹ In 2021, the survey was sent to 348 BEST frontline staff and managers within 26 BEST partner organizations. In 2020, the survey was sent to 297 BEST frontline staff and managers within 21 BEST partner organizations. The 2021 survey response rate was 72% ($n = 250$). Of those who completed the survey in 2021, 133 also completed the survey in 2020.



Slightly more than half of the respondents (54%) reported talking with adult clients about challenges or advantages they may face because of their race or ethnicity. Staff reported that when adult clients spoke of challenges, the most common challenge was receiving poor- or low-quality services, followed by experiencing challenges in their job and being stopped by the police or another official. These responses changed little compared with the 2020 survey.

Percentage of Staff Reporting Their Clients' Experience Various Challenges Because of Their Race/Ethnicity Occasionally or a Great Deal of the Time, by Year



3. Levels of family engagement remained stable from 2020 to 2021, but there is room for improvement in some service sectors.



Engaging families in decision making and leadership roles continues to be a challenge for some BEST partners. Rates of family engagement remained constant from 2020 to 2021. Most staff (64%) reported that the opinions of families are heard regardless of their race, culture, or language spoken. Yet, fewer staff indicated that opportunities exist for family members to serve in leadership roles (25%) or that families are included in decision-making meetings about improving services (24%). Staff reported more opportunities for family engagement in the early learning and care sector compared with health-related services and the family support sector.

Conclusion

The workforce survey occurs annually during the BEST Study to document changes across time in the early childhood workforce in Tulsa. Information about the BEST Study, including the [study reports](#) published to date, are available on the [study website](#). If you have questions about the BEST Study, contact Dr. Eboni Howard, project investigator/project director, at ehoward@air.org.



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