



# Building the Capacity of Undergraduate & Graduate Programs to Train Child Protection Personnel

PROJECT



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## Overview (Brief CAST History)

Since its inception in 2004, Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) has been the only known, standardized curriculum designed for postsecondary education deployment to better train the next generation of child-serving and child protection professionals. The curriculum was created through a collaboration with Winona State University (WSU) alongside the staff at the National Child Protection Training Center, the latter of which was created by the National District Attorney's Association. The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provided \$5.6 million over seven years to WSU with the express purpose of developing this national model for postsecondary child maltreatment curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Since its launch nearly two decades ago, with the assistance of OJJDP, the CAST movement has created a significant impact on higher education by empowering incoming child maltreatment prevention and intervention professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to put an end to child abuse and neglect. Several peer-reviewed, qualitative studies regarding CAST's impact on student competencies and attitudes towards combating child maltreatment have been conducted and have ultimately led to the recognition of the curriculum as an evidence-based program.<sup>2</sup> Under the guidance and facilitation of the model through Zero Abuse Project (Zero Abuse), CAST has grown almost forty-percent (37.3%) in a mere four years.

CAST now exists in ninety-two programs across 30 states.<sup>3</sup> CAST is traditionally composed of a three-course certificate path at most undergraduate schools. The following courses are utilized in that undergraduate certificate path:

- ***Perspectives on Child Maltreatment*** (*Perspectives* course): This course covers the history, comparative perspectives, legal framework, recognition of and responses to child maltreatment, skill development, and pertinent issues threatening the future of the child maltreatment/child advocacy field. The approach of the course comes from a variety of diverse, professional perspectives.
- ***Professional & System Responses to Child Maltreatment*** (*Professional Response* course): This course focuses on the responses of professionals to allegations of child maltreatment. The purpose of this course is to expand the student's knowledge and skills in identifying, investigating and prosecuting child maltreatment.
- ***Responding to the Survivor of Child Abuse*** (*Responding* course): The purpose of this course is to prepare students to recognize the effects of child maltreatment and apply intervention

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<sup>1</sup> Vieth, Victor I.; Goulet, Betsy; Knox, Michele; Parker, Jennifer; Johnson, Lisa B.; Tye, Karla Steckler; and Cross, Theodore P. (2019) "Child Advocacy Studies (CAST): A National Movement to Improve the Undergraduate and Graduate Training of Child Protection Professionals." *Mitchell Hamline Law Review*: Vol. 45: Iss. 4, Article 5, <https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/mhrl/vol45/iss4/5>

<sup>2</sup> California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse. 2023. Child Advocacy Studies (CAST). Retrieved from <https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/child-advocacy-studies>.

<sup>3</sup> Zero Abuse Project. 2023. Child Advocacy Studies: The Front Door to the Field. Retrieved from <https://www.zeroabuseproject.org/for-professionals/child-advocacy-studies>.

strategies for children and their families. Multidisciplinary approaches to prevention, advocacy and treatment of child maltreatment survivors are presented and discussed.

There are also three CAST courses that have been developed specifically for child-serving graduate school populations and are implemented by postsecondary institutions as appropriate:

- ***When Faith Hurts: Recognizing and Responding to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse*** (Faith course): This course empowers faith communities to recognize and respond to cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Included are discussions detailing the impact of child abuse on a victim's sense of spirituality and concrete suggestions for working with medical and mental health professionals to assist a child in coping with maltreatment. The course also discusses ideal child protection policies for a faith-based institution, including how to handle a situation in which a convicted sex offender seeks to join a faith community.
- ***Child Advocacy Clinical Studies*** (Medical course): This course is designed to better prepare medical professionals for detecting child maltreatment in a clinical setting and advocating for at-risk and maltreated youth. This course explores the medical consequences of abuse and neglect, while also observing interprofessional responses to child maltreatment by a variety of professional agencies.
- ***Child Abuse & the Law*** (Law course): This is a course designed for students interested in public service and civil/criminal litigation in child maltreatment cases. Learners will be presented with information and skills to better understand and navigate the criminal justice and civil child protection processes. Other concepts covered include the grounds for charging or petitioning, identification of witnesses and evidence pertinent to successful prosecution, and witness preparation for testimony in court.

Recent studies on the impact of CAST from both 2021 and 2022 demonstrate that the curriculum has impacted the learning of over 2,000 graduates from CAST programs annually and has empowered the education of almost 10,000 college learners.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to the current funding provided by OJJDP, Zero Abuse is even more strongly positioned than ever before to continue to champion the CAST model and bring more colleges and universities into the CAST Community while also enhancing the resources for current CAST programs to use when instructing new generations of child-serving experts.

## Purpose of the Report

In Fall 2021, Zero Abuse was awarded a grant from OJJDP via its FY 2021 Post-Secondary Education Opportunities for Child Protection Professionals grant program. Zero Abuse's *Building the Capacity of*

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<sup>4</sup> Zero Abuse Project. 2021. Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) Impact Report 2020-2021. Retrieved from <https://www.zeroabuseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CAST-Impact-Report-2020-2021.pdf>; Zero Abuse Project. 2022. Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) Impact Report 2021-2022. Retrieved from <https://www.zeroabuseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CAST-Impact-Report-2021-2022.pdf>.

*Undergraduate and Graduate Programs to Train Child Protection Personnel Project* includes the following project goal and related objectives:

- **Project Goal:** Assess disparity in child maltreatment competencies in current frontline agency training and postsecondary education
  
- **Project Objectives:**
  1. Conduct a survey for frontline, active multidisciplinary team professionals
  2. Conduct a survey for Children's Advocacy Centers and chapters
  3. Conduct a survey for graduate academic professionals
  4. Conduct an undergraduate and graduate course catalog analysis
  5. Analyze survey findings

This Report outlines the findings and major recommendations identified from the grant-funded survey data and review of current undergraduate and graduate course catalog offerings. The findings and recommendations will be used to expand and revise Zero Abuse's CAST Program Plan; guide the creation of six CAST Toolkits; and inform a CAST Faculty Implementation Guide. Enclosed herein are the results of the survey project and the preliminary findings from the course catalog review.

## Survey Findings

To identify critical issues in the prevention of and response to child maltreatment and to ensure that CAST content continues to focus on competencies in these areas, Zero Abuse and SUNY Buffalo State University (SUNY Buffalo), launched, developed and disseminated three surveys to the field.

The surveys were designed to assess gaps in educational programming for child-serving personnel to effectively respond to child abuse and what competencies should be included in the CAST Toolkits. The survey questions were drafted by Zero Abuse staff and formulated with a focus on question relevancy, accuracy, and composition. Zero Abuse then hosted three Think Tank meetings with key CAST stakeholders and frontline child-serving agencies to further revise and enhance survey questions.

The Think Tank meetings focused on refining the questions to elicit maximum responsivity and streamline key topic and theme identification to inform Zero Abuse's CAST Program Plan and CAST Toolkit content. The finalized surveys were integrated into the Qualtrics platform at SUNY Buffalo for broad dissemination to the three population groups. Zero Abuse publicized the surveys via its stakeholder mailing lists and social media, and through its national collaborative partnerships with agencies such as the National Children's Alliance (NCA), National Children's Advocacy Centers (NCAC), American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), National Association Prosecutor Coordinators (NAPC), Academy on Violence and

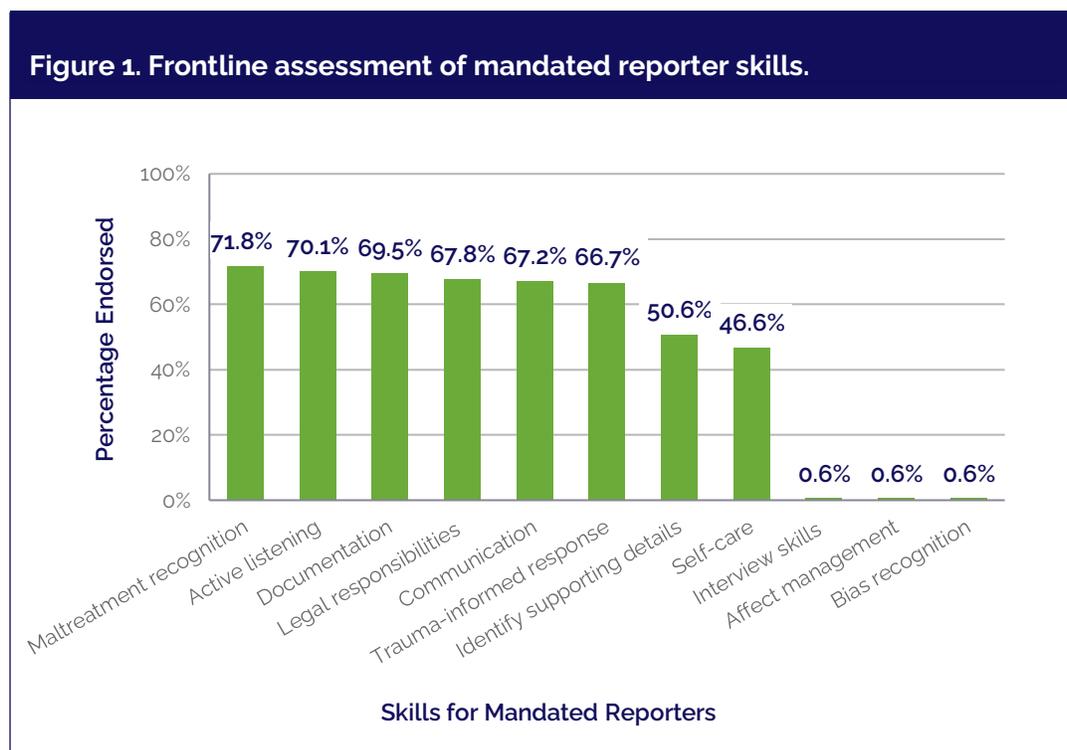
Abuse (AVA), and OJJDP VOCAA partners. [Dr. Pamela Schuetze](#) integrated the surveys into Qualtrics, collected and interpreted the data, and developed a final report.

The survey launch commenced in October 2022 and data was collected and aggregated by the Qualtrics platform through November 2022. An initial report illustrating key findings of each survey was finalized in December 2022.

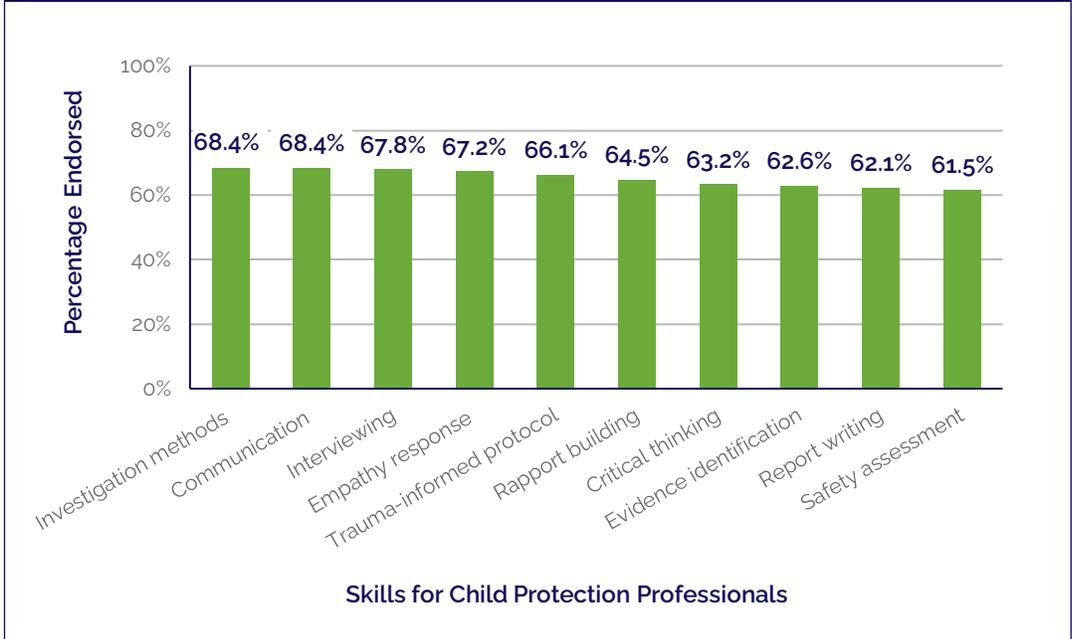
## Undergraduate Survey Assessment

A total of 175 child protection professionals, 185 CAC affiliates, and 83 postsecondary faculty submitted survey responses. The 443 responses provided Zero Abuse with a wealth of information regarding the skills and knowledge survey respondents feel are necessary for child-serving professionals to receive via CAST coursework.

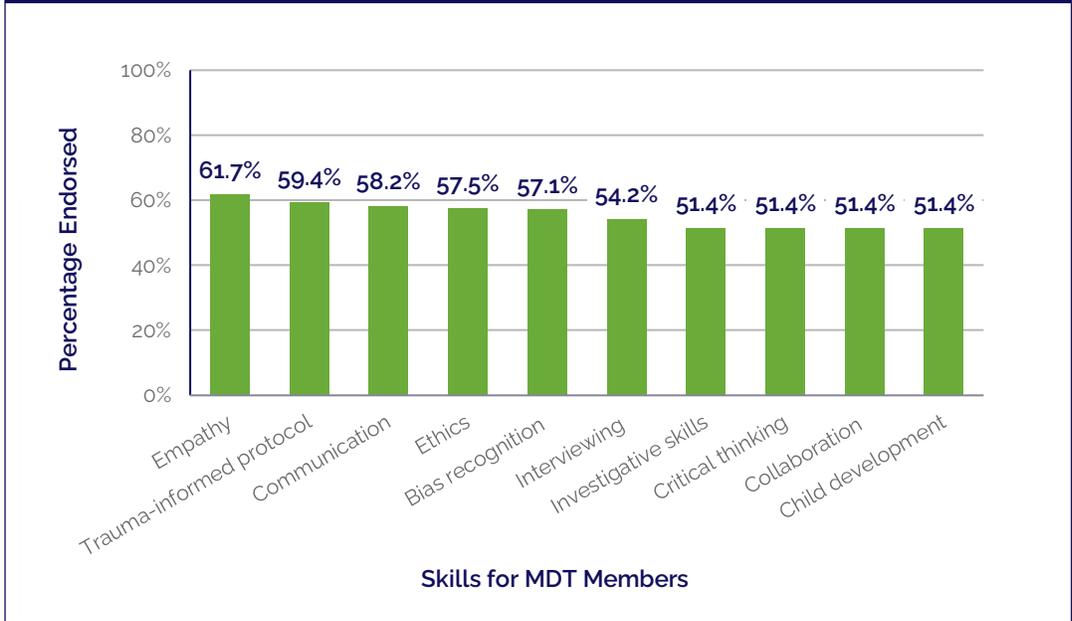
Figures 1-3 showcase the major results from the frontline professional survey (n = 175). As it pertains to mandated reporting, Figure 1 highlights the top skills necessary to make an effective mandated report and to empower those making mandated reports to assist a child at risk for abuse. Figure 2 illustrates the core skills necessary to be a successful child protection investigator by looking further into reports of abuse and neglect in the life of a child. Figure 3 demonstrates the knowledge and skills needed for the entire multidisciplinary team (MDT) regardless of role/responsibility when investigating allegations of maltreatment.



**Figure 2. Frontline assessment of child protection investigator skills.**



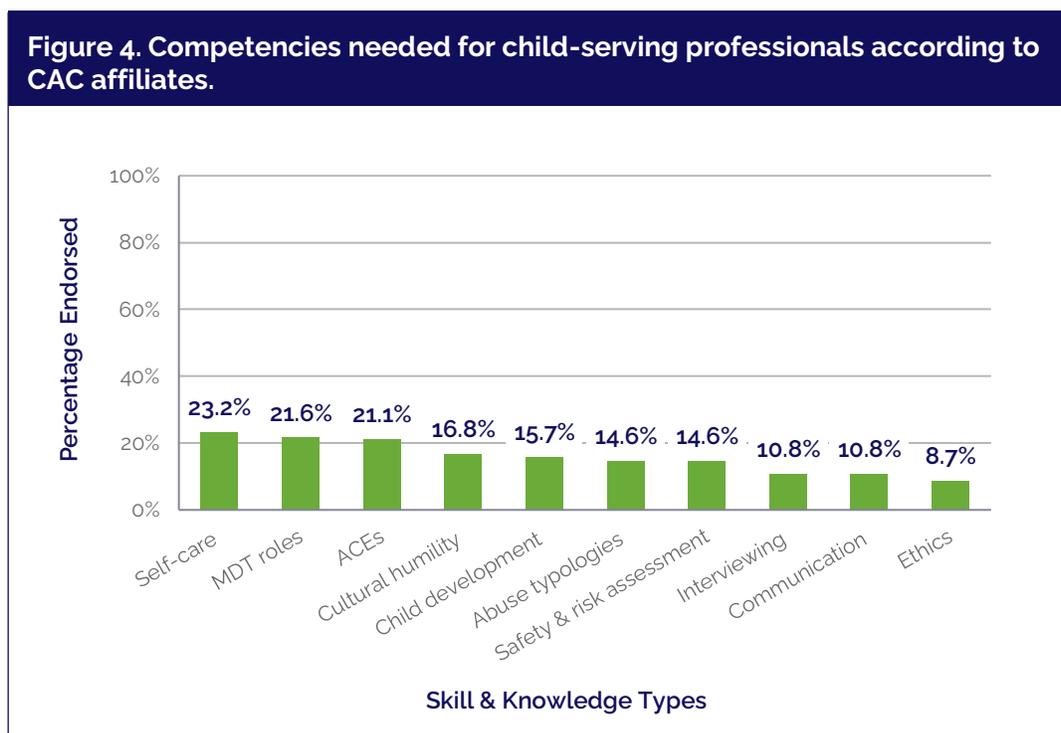
**Figure 3. Frontline assessment of knowledge and skills required for all multidisciplinary team (MDT) members.**



Based on the information shared in Figure 1-3, there is a high level of introductory concepts and skills surrounding abuse detection, child development, communication, and trauma-informed or empathy-driven practices that can be condensed into content for the *Perspectives* and *Professional Response* courses. The major themes pulled from this data indicate that more course content is needed on trauma-informed communication and care for survivors of abuse, improving recognition of abuse, understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and its impact on the life of the child, self-care for the professional, and best practices for MDT collaboration. **The topics presented here can be easily integrated into three undergraduate CAST Toolkits as either new components or enhancements to current content areas addressed in these courses.**

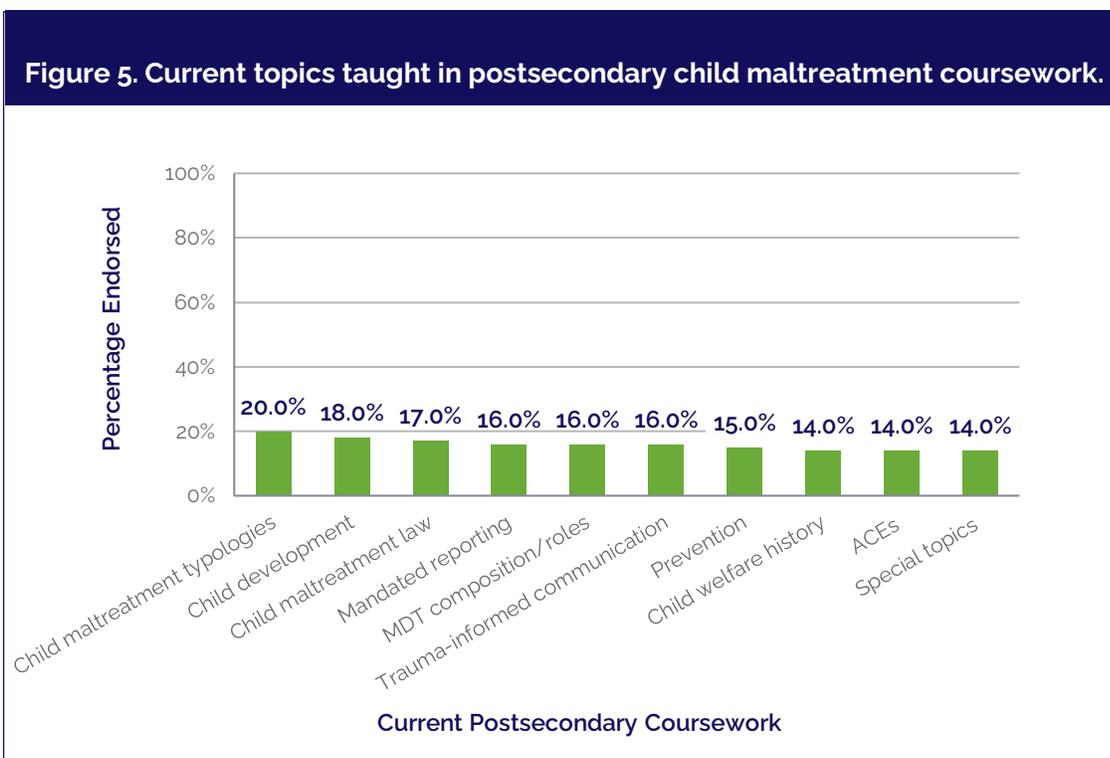
Competency results from CAC respondents (n = 185) are collected in Figures 4 below.

As determined by the results from CAC affiliates, the major needs for skill development and knowledge growth appear to be focused on mitigating burnout (self-care), understanding maltreatment impact on the life of a child (ACEs, child development) and recognizing abuse while working with the MDT and in a culturally competent manner with cultural humility being a focus (Figure 7). **Many of the traditional course topics offered up by this stakeholder population align well with the CAST Perspectives and Professional Response courses.**

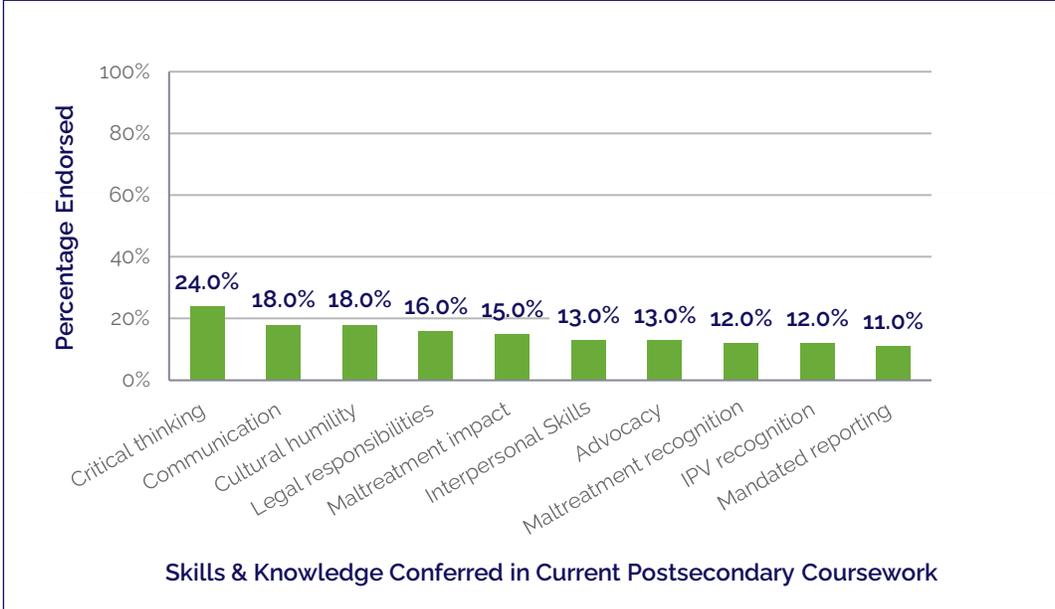


The final cohort surveyed were postsecondary faculty and administrators from across the nation. The major findings from this stakeholder population (n = 83) are enclosed in Figures 5-7. Note that the survey participants were faculty and administrators not associated with CAST courses, but are teaching some form of child maltreatment content in their programming. Major content currently

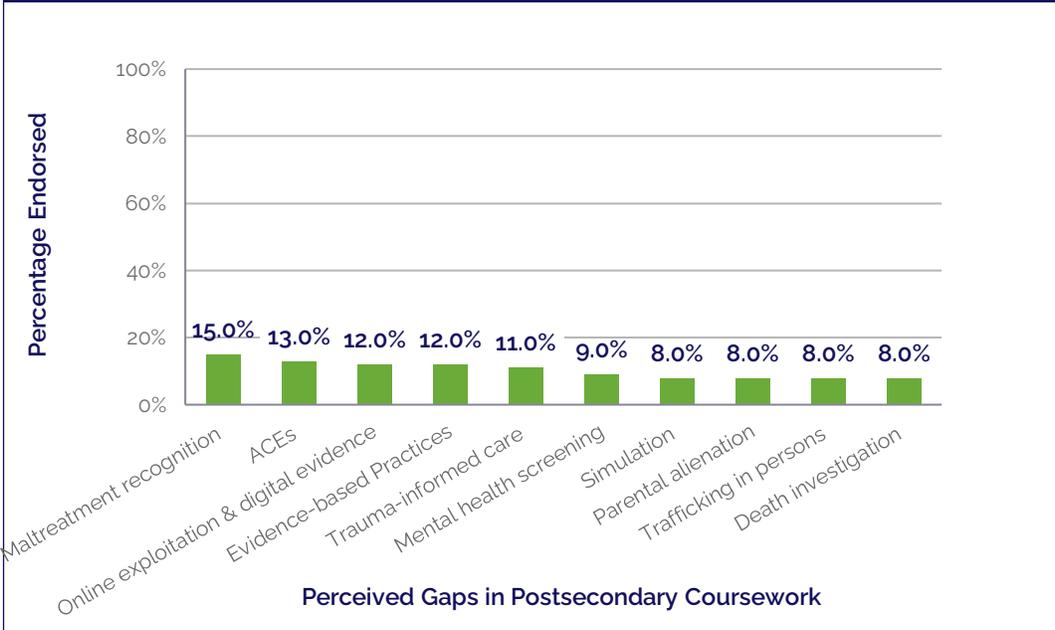
being taught in non-CAST child maltreatment courses predominantly aligns only with the CAST introductory *Perspectives* course, indicative of the limited education currently offered to next-generation child protection professionals in postsecondary institutions (Figure 5). Skills and knowledge currently taught to prospective child protection professionals are observed in Figure 6. Figure 7 highlights areas where faculty and administrators believe gaps in knowledge and skill mastery exist in child maltreatment education at higher institutions. Looking at the major topics endorsed, there is an even balance of topics that align across all three undergraduate CAST courses in which the CAST Toolkits are being crafted for dissemination. **In short, survey responses suggest that current course content nationwide provides an emphasis on professional responses to abuse and general abuse recognition, but not much skill development tailored to responding to survivors of child maltreatment.**



**Figure 6. Competencies imbued through national child maltreatment coursework.**



**Figure 7. Content areas in higher education where perceived gaps exist for child protection professional student learning.**

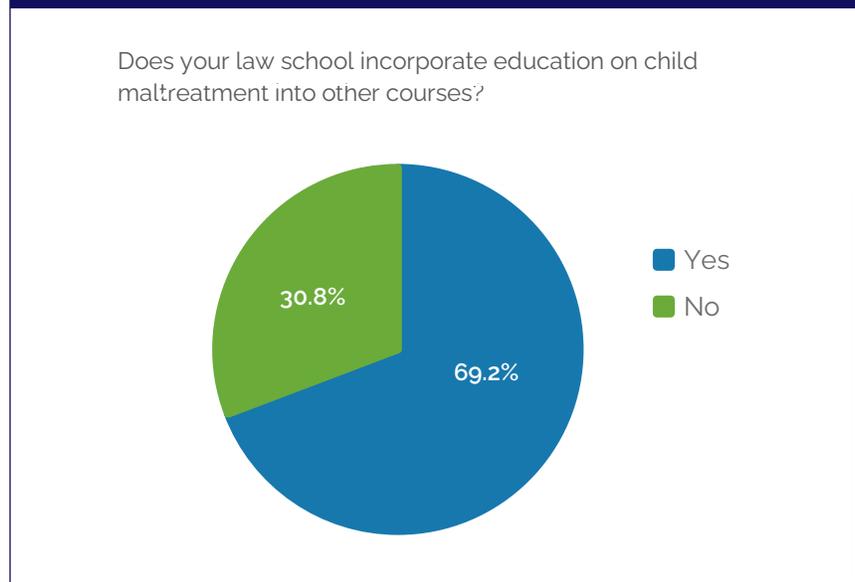


## Graduate Survey Assessment

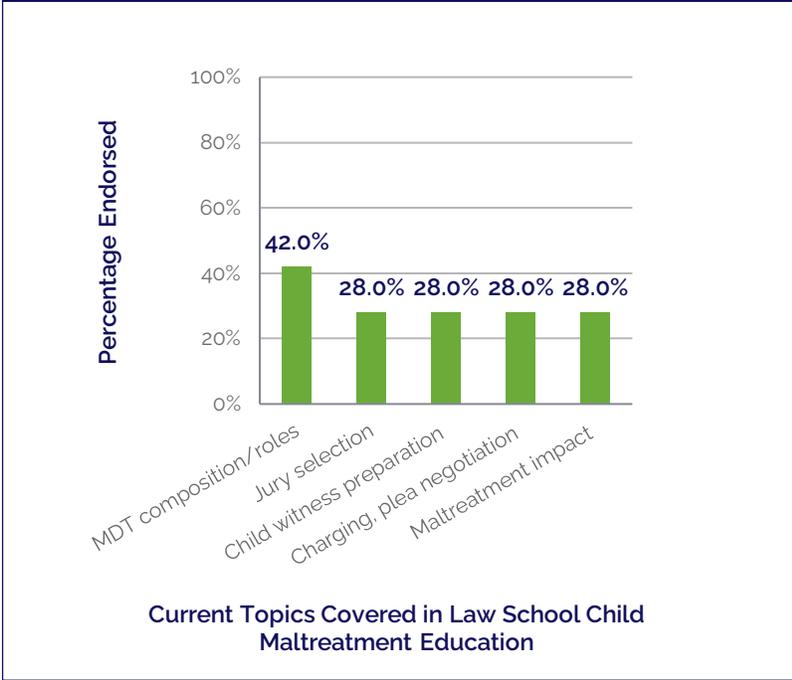
A formal assessment of graduate law schools, seminaries, and medical schools was also conducted in parallel with the undergraduate evaluation, given the development and deployment of CAST courses in these areas of study. A series of questions specific to these programs of study was added as an expanded section to the surveys. A total of thirty-six respondents identified as teaching graduate coursework, with nine (n = 9) seminary, thirteen (n = 13) medical, and fourteen (n = 14) law school faculty, provided additional insight into the educational practices and prevalent topics covered in current child maltreatment instruction.

Only half of law school respondents (data not shown) indicated that they teach a standalone child maltreatment course. Figure 8 highlights the prevalence of *any* child maltreatment content embedded into law school coursework. Figure 9 reveals the topics taught when a standalone course is offered to law students. Based on survey results, current courses offered by law schools rarely (approximately 50% of respondents; data not shown) offer standalone courses. They do, however, offer limited, traditional learning content, with only 45.5% using some form of experiential or simulation-based learning (data not shown). **Programs that do offer standalone coursework target learner populations that will work on the frontlines of child maltreatment prosecution and defense, which is promising, but the data clearly shows that more must be done to engage law programs in the U.S. with respect to CAST Law course incorporation.**

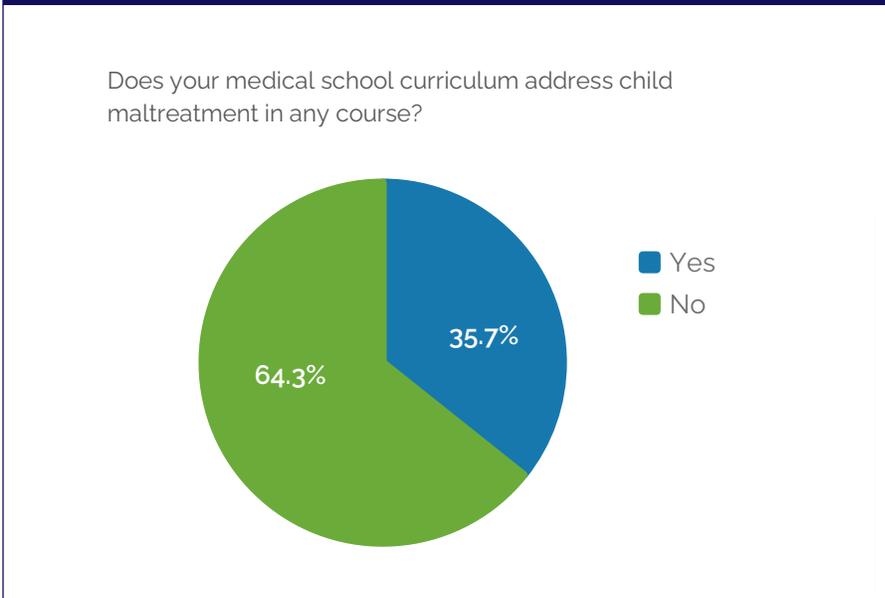
**Figure 8. Pervasiveness of child maltreatment content woven into current non-standalone law school coursework.**



**Figure 9. Current topics taught in graduate law school standalone child maltreatment coursework.**



**Figure 10. Pervasiveness of child maltreatment content woven into current non-standalone medical school coursework.**

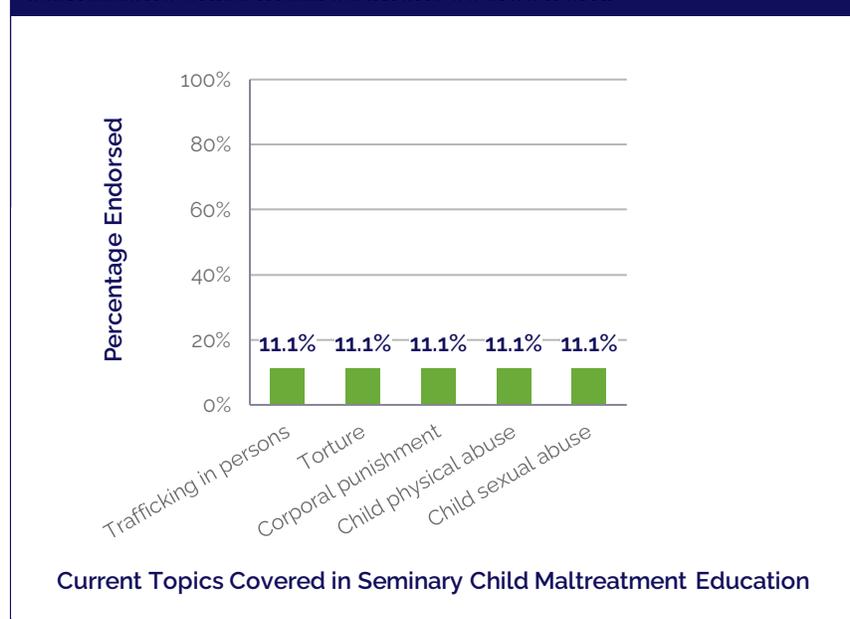


Of the medical school respondents, an overwhelming majority (70.6%; data not shown) do not provide standalone course offerings for their learners on child maltreatment concepts and skill development. Only 50% of programs with a standalone course indicated that it is a required course for completion of the program of study (data not shown). As noted in Figure 10, almost two-thirds of surveyed medical school affiliates confirmed that child abuse content is not integrated in their current coursework. Even more concerning, 92% (data not shown) of those respondents indicated that simulation-based learning was not utilized and a mere two topics are being taught in their graduate coursework: maltreatment impact and psychopathology of child maltreatment (data now shown).

**These findings indicate that there is considerable opportunity for integration of the CAST Medical course in postsecondary medical school curriculum.**

With respect to seminary coursework, 55.6% of respondents indicated that no standalone child maltreatment course existed in their programming (data not shown). Of those with standalone coursework, only 50% stated that the course was a requirement for graduation. Further, these respondents did state that *some* form of child maltreatment content existed in their currently existing coursework with non-standalone classes. The content offered in standalone seminary child abuse coursework are introductory in nature, as noted in Figure 11, aligning with child maltreatment typology content typically offered in the CAST undergraduate *Perspectives* course. Further, only a fraction of seminary respondents (44.4%; data not shown) engage in simulation-based learning, with seminaries nearly split on its incorporation into their pedagogy. **More seminaries could, as such, be empowered by a greater expansion of topics and concepts offered through the CAST Faith course and experiential or simulation-based learning offered through the coursework.**

**Figure 11. Current topics taught in graduate seminary school standalone child maltreatment coursework.**



## Course Catalog Review Findings

A course catalog review of the nation's four-year universities was conducted by [Dr. Travis Conradt](#) and eleven graduate students at the Florida Institute of Technology (FL Tech) in parallel with the survey project. The purpose of the course catalog review is to evaluate the major topics and content currently being taught in postsecondary education as it pertains to child maltreatment. With the results of this effort, Zero Abuse will have access to national data on the prevalence of child maltreatment education in postsecondary institutions.

FL Tech graduate students scoured the nation's postsecondary institutions' websites for program and course listings that would reveal the presence or absence of child protection-based coursework. Findings were provided for 2,116 four-year degree-granting institutions. Table 1 displays the researched four-year public institutions, broken down by geographic region. Table 2 breaks down the prevalence of child maltreatment coursework at the listed institution. Courses were identified as "child protection-based" if they matched the following operational definition: *Based on the course title and description, a relevant course should provide relevant or related content knowledge and/or training concerning child protection (child welfare, child maltreatment) for the course subject's field or multidisciplinary team (MDT) professional role.* 'Yes' schools did have coursework that would align well with CAST programming and content could be easily modified for the institution to be recognized as a CAST school. 'Maybe' institutions are those where coursework would require further review to determine if the coursework meets CAST course requirements or needs further content revisions. A 'No' response indicated that the reviewers found no child maltreatment course content present in any of the degree programs analyzed. Through this research, we found that U.S. postsecondary schools largely lack any form of coursework on the subject of child abuse and neglect, with over 60% (1,305) of the four-year programs in higher education having no course title or course descriptions sufficient to be categorized as a child protection course. Of those programs offering coursework, many only offer 1-2 courses (Figure 12), falling below the 3- course threshold recognized as a baseline for CAST certificate program adoption. Diving further, Figure 13 outlines the most prominent Programs of Study in which CAST traditionally takes root and where MDT child protection professionals graduate from and thus transition into the field. Of those programs where CAST traditionally resides, one can determine that areas of study—undergraduate and graduate Social Work and graduate Law programs—provide a mean over 1 (e.g., teach 1 or more courses) focused on child protection.

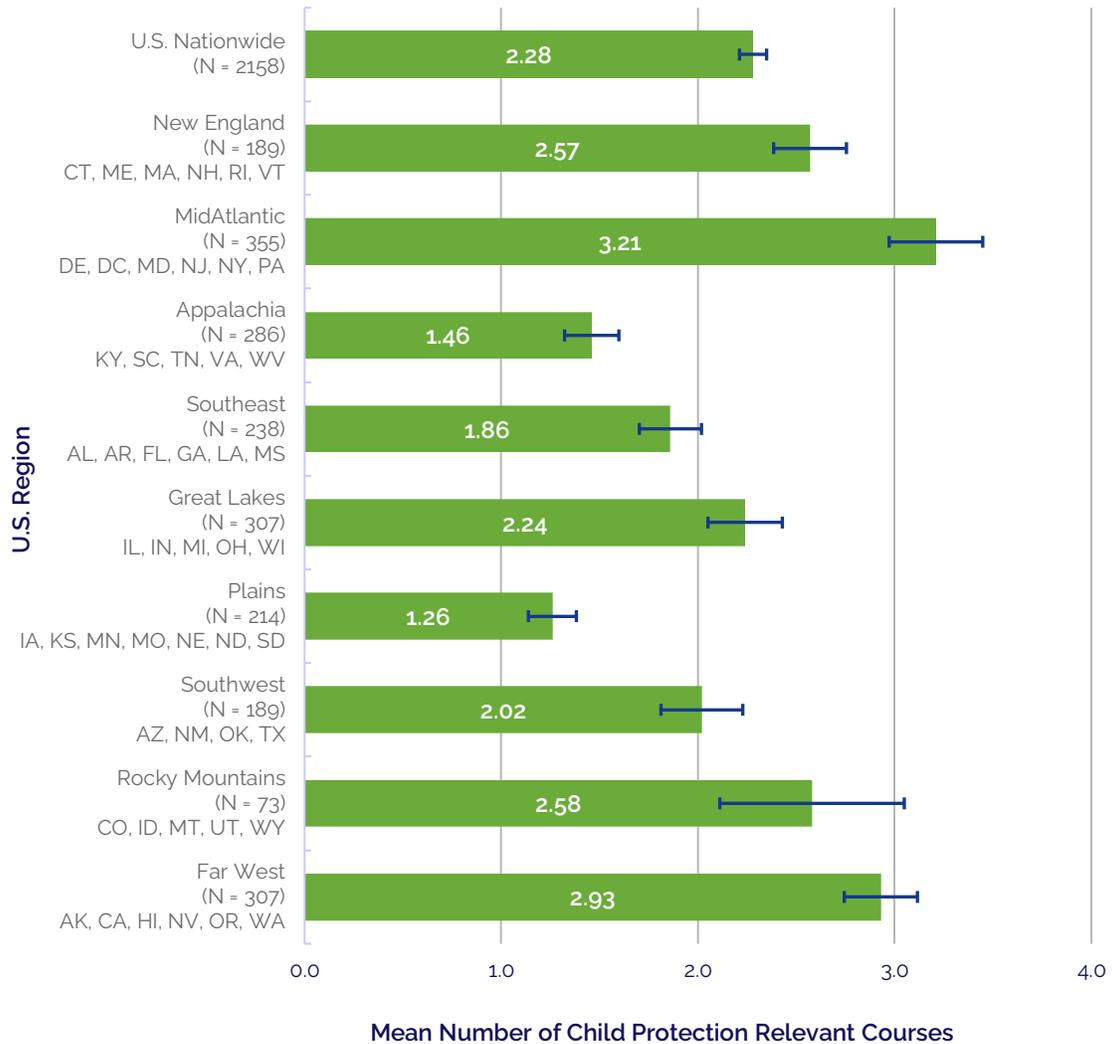
**Table 1. Degree Granting Institution Types among U.S. Four-year Postsecondary Institutions, by Region.**

	Schools Entered N	4-year (N%)	4yr/primarily 2yr (N%)	2-year (N%)	< 2-year N (% Total)
<b>US Nationwide</b>	<b>2158</b>	<b>1820 (84.3%)</b>	<b>296 (13.7%)</b>	<b>40 (1.9%)</b>	<b>2 (0.1%)</b>
Far West	307	231 (75.2%)	74 (24.1%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)
Rocky Mountains	73	52 (71.2%)	21 (28.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Southwest	189	156 (82.5%)	33 (17.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Plains	214	196 (91.6%)	18 (8.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Great Lakes	307	267 (87.0%)	40 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Southeast	238	186 (78.2%)	52 (21.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Appalachia	286	252 (88.1%)	28 (9.8%)	6 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Mid-Atlantic	355	331 (93.2%)	21 (5.9%)	2 (0.6%)	1 (0.3%)
New England	189	149 (78.8%)	9 (4.8%)	31 (16.4%)	0 (0.0%)

**Table 2. Prevalence of Child Protection Coursework in U.S. Four-year Postsecondary Institutions.**

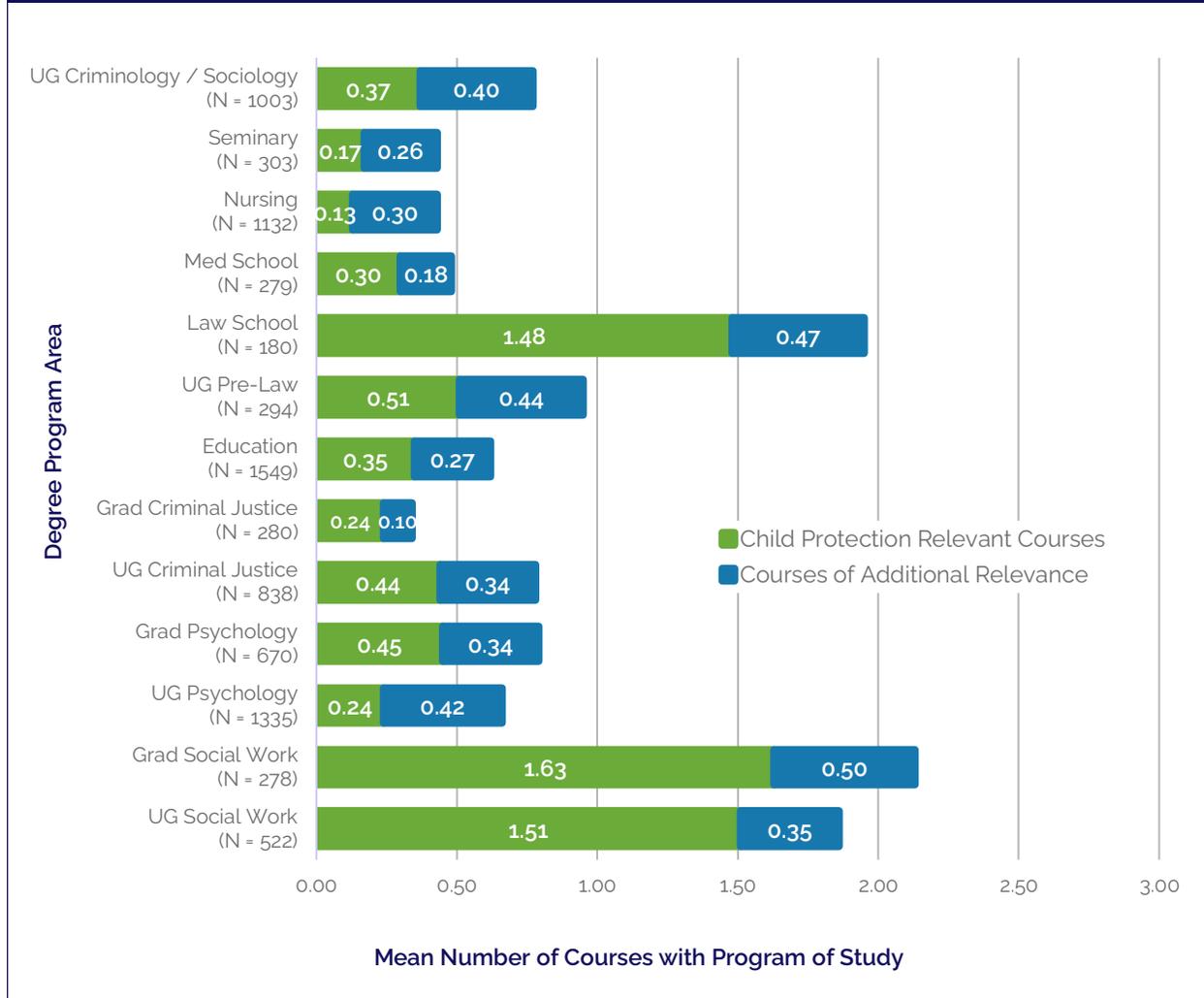
	Schools Entered N	YES (N%)	MAYBE (N%)	NO (N%)
<b>US Nationwide</b>	<b>2158</b>	<b>331 (15.3%)</b>	<b>387 (17.9%)</b>	<b>1305 (60.5%)</b>
Far West	307	79 (25.7%)	78 (25.4%)	140 (45.6%)
Rocky Mountains	73	19 (26.0%)	11 (15.1%)	40 (54.8%)
Southwest	189	25 (13.2%)	48 (25.4%)	69 (36.5%)
Plains	214	9 (4.2%)	20 (9.3%)	182 (85.0%)
Great Lakes	307	50 (16.3%)	82 (26.7%)	166 (54.1%)
Southeast	238	26 (10.9%)	23 (9.7%)	169 (71.0%)
Appalachia	286	23 (8.0%)	25 (8.2%)	237 (82.9%)
Mid-Atlantic	355	82 (23.1%)	73 (20.6%)	165 (46.5%)
New England	189	18 (9.5%)	27 (14.3%)	137 (72.5%)

**Figure 12. Average Number of Child Protection Courses Offered by Regional Postsecondary Institutions.**



*Note. Error bars represent standard errors.*

**Figure 13. Prevalence of Child Protection Coursework in Predominant CAST Programs of Study.**

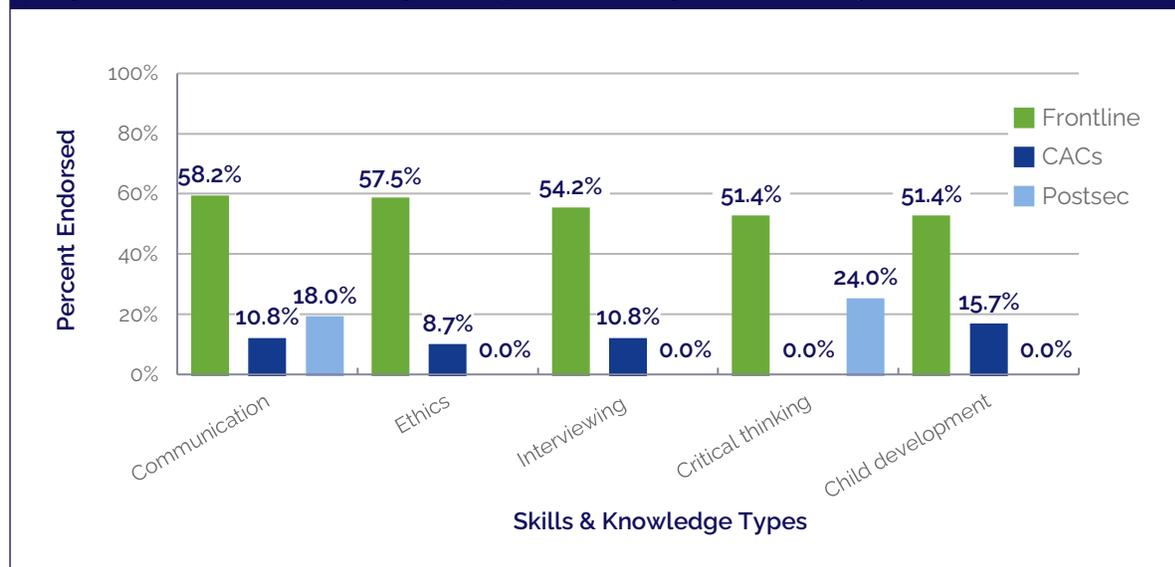


These findings indicate that child maltreatment education is in limited availability for the most prominent child-serving professional fields of study in undergraduate education. The need for standardized CAST implementation via ready-to-deliver content is further apparent when only 40.9% (data not shown) of survey respondents in higher education from this study indicate that they teach any courses on the subject of child maltreatment at all, and a mere 17.7% (data not shown) of faculty indicate that their programs collaborate with MDT agencies. **The data from FL Tech demonstrates that Zero Abuse - as the national facilitator of CAST programming - is in a unique position to expand child maltreatment coursework through the OJJDP grant-funded CAST Toolkits and ultimately via a Zero Abuse-led National Child Advocacy Studies Center for Excellence to serve educational institutions and learners across the U.S.**

## Overall Survey Findings

Based on the aggregated data from the survey project, there was a disconnect between the frontline agencies' and CACs' perceptions of the skills and knowledge gaps in child protection professionals and the skills currently being fostered by postsecondary courses covering child maltreatment. As noted in Figure 13 below, frontline professionals and CAC affiliates seemed to be in harmony regarding the top five knowledge or skill areas that every child-serving professional should possess. Only two areas were detected where postsecondary education was meeting the demands of frontline competency development: communications and critical thinking. This is consistent with research indicating that postsecondary training is generally lacking in the realm of child protection preparation.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 14. Survey respondent overlap between competency demands (frontline, CAC responses) and current competency education (postsecondary).**



There were also discrepancies between the CACs' and frontline agencies' responses to both the percentages endorsed and in the top competencies deemed necessary. CACs tended to endorse more skills in a larger, even distribution, while frontline agency submissions tended to be disproportionately focused on investigative aspects (e.g., evidence collection, report writing, interviewing, communications) and were less focused on skills that imbue compassion and emphasize prevention (e.g., trauma-informed response, ACEs science, intergenerational trauma). **The findings indicate that there is a wide variety of competencies to consider at the academic level when attempting to satisfy the full spectrum of skills and knowledge necessary to work in the**

<sup>5</sup> Woodtli, M.A. & Breslin, E.T. 2002. Violence-Related Content in the Nursing Curriculum: A Follow-Up National Survey. *Journal of Nursing Education*. 340; Hatlevig, J. 2006. Research conducted at Winona State University. See also Vieth, V. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts. 2012. Retrieved March 4, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/12-5-23ViethTestimony.pdf>; Walker, D.F., Partridge, K.J. & Stephens, R.L. 2014. Religion and men's violence against women. Springer.

**field of child protection and within the bounds of an investigative MDT. CAST historically has covered and will continue to train on these broad professional areas to ensure that CAST graduates are well-rounded professionals and suffer from skewed or limited competency development that provides the learner with only partial preparation for the realities of investigating child abuse.**

Diving deeper into the importance of these skills, further contrasts between CAC and frontline expectations for professional competencies are evident. Table 3 outlines the survey responses from both populations regarding knowledge and skill level preparedness upon graduation and subsequent hire. Note that the many competency areas had equal endorsement, so general competency categories were listed. For example, 'occupational competencies' refers to the fact that frontline professionals recognized that fundamental skills and knowledge areas such as self-care, bias recognition, cultural humility and MDT roles and responsibilities were equally not fostered during the new hire academic journey. 'Recognition and response skills' refers to a category that broadly covers maltreatment recognition, advocacy, and survivor response—critical skills necessary to detect and effectively intervene when a child's life is in harm's way.

<b>Table 3. Top five most and least prepared skill areas upon graduation based on frontline professional and CAC survey perceptions.</b>			
<b>Top 5 High Ranking (most prepared) Skills: Frontline Respondents (rank of 5)</b>		<b>Top 5 High Ranking (most prepared) Skills: CAC Respondents (rank of 5)</b>	
<b>Skill/Knowledge Types</b>	<b>Percent Endorsed</b>	<b>Skill/Knowledge Types</b>	<b>Percent Endorsed</b>
Interviewing	59.4%	Self-care	66.4%
Critical thinking	55.1%	Critical thinking	60.2%
Safety & risk assessment	54.6%	Survivor response	59.8%
Survivor response	53.8%	Bias recognition	58.9%
Trauma-informed response	49.5%	Safety & risk assessment	57.5%
<b>Bottom 5 Low Ranking (least prepared) Skills: CAC Respondents (rank of 1)</b>		<b>Bottom 5 Low Ranking (least prepared) Skills: CAC Respondents (rank of 1)</b>	
<b>Skill/Knowledge Types</b>	<b>Percent Endorsed</b>	<b>Skill/Knowledge Types</b>	<b>Percent Endorsed</b>
National Laws	3.8%	Offender response	3.6%
State Laws	2.8%	National laws	2.7%
Trauma-informed response	2.8%	Occupational competencies	1.9%
Occupational competencies	1.9%	Recognition & response skills	0.9%
Recognition & response skills	0.9%	Critical thinking & Collaboration	0.0%

The most prominent concern here is the fact that baseline child abuse and neglect recognition appears as a 'least prepared' area of professional preparation. This is an issue consistent with current research which has found that those with the closest contact to children and who are in the greatest

vantage point to intervene are often the least prepared for recognizing maltreatment unless it is egregious and readily apparent.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of response-based skills and knowledge, too, is concerning. The dearth of training on trauma-informed response has been studied in first responder populations for many years. For example, a 2005 study of law enforcement officers found that police can misunderstand or fail to recognize the diverse expressions of trauma that may manifest in an abuse survivor, and that their misperceptions are the result of a lack of training on the topic.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, better training on expectations of communication and survivor responses may result in better victim rapport and improve perspectives re: victim credibility.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, additional research shows the need for other MDT professions, such as educators, to have more training on trauma-informed interactions with victims of abuse.<sup>9</sup> While Zero Abuse does offer trauma-informed practice training for frontline professionals,<sup>10</sup> it's apparent from Table 4 that more must be done to improve the postsecondary learning offered to these child protection professionals prior to graduation.

## Upcoming Grant-Funded Activities

### CAST Toolkits Development and Dissemination

Using the skills, knowledge areas, and topics derived from the survey results presented above and the review of the competencies where current training is lacking, Zero Abuse categorized these elements into the most logically fitting undergraduate and graduate CAST courses. By pairing the topics with the most relevant courses (e.g., introductory concepts in the *Perspectives* course), a framework of condensed themes was developed. These themes informed Zero Abuse regarding the best content to include in the CAST Toolkits. Table 5 highlights the major content areas, arranged by

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<sup>6</sup> Feng, Jui-Ying & Levine, Murray. (2005). Factors associated with nurses' intention to report child abuse: A national survey of Taiwanese nurses. *Child abuse & neglect*. 29. 783-95. 10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.11.006; Butts, Allison N., "Mandated Reporting and Child Maltreatment: Training and Experiences of Minnesota Teachers" (2014). Social Work Master's Clinical Research Papers. 296. [https://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw\\_mstrp/296](https://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_mstrp/296); Parrilla L. 2012. "Firefighters among those accused for not reporting child abuse." *Fire Rescue 1*. <https://www.firerescue1.com/fire-department-management/articles/firefighters-among-those-accused-for-not-reporting-child-abuse-UdTHOKVmOFesSml2/>; Lynne EG, Gifford EJ, Evans KE, Rosch JB. Barriers to reporting child maltreatment: do emergency medical services professionals fully understand their role as mandatory reporters? *NC Med J*. 2015 Jan-Feb;76(1):13-8. PMID: 25621471; Walsh, WA, Jones, LM. 2015. Factors that Influence Child Abuse Reporting: A Survey of Child-Serving Professionals. Crimes Against Children Research Center. <https://www.unh.edu/ccrc/sites/default/files/media/2022-03/factors-that-influence-child-abuse-reporting-a-survey-of-child-serving-professionals.pdf>; Ricks L, Tuttle M, Land C, Chibbaro J. 2019. Trends and Influential Factors in Child Abuse Reporting: Implications for Early Career School Counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*: 17(16). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1217455>; Berthold O, Clemens V, Levi BH, Jarczok M, Fegert JM, Jud A. Survey on Reporting of Child Abuse by Pediatricians: Intrapersonal Inconsistencies Influence Reporting Behavior More than Legislation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022; 19(23):15568. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192315568>; RAINN. 2021. Equipping First Responders To Help Save Children. <https://www.rainn.org/news/equipping-first-responders-help-save-children>.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, R. (2005). What really happened? A validation study of rape survivors' help-seeking experiences with the legal and medical systems. *Violence and Victims*, 20, 55-68.

<sup>8</sup> Franklin CA, Garza AD, Goodson A, Bouffard L. 2019. Trauma Informed Training & Police Perceptions of Victim Behaviors. Sam Houston State University: Crime Victims Institute. [http://dev.cjcenter.org/\\_files/cvi/82-brief-2019-04.pdf](http://dev.cjcenter.org/_files/cvi/82-brief-2019-04.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> L'Estrange L and Howard J (2022) Trauma-informed initial teacher education training: A necessary step in a system-wide response to addressing childhood trauma. *Front. Educ.* 7:929582. doi: 10.3389/educ.2022.929582.

<sup>10</sup> Zero Abuse Project. 2023. Trauma Informed Prosecutor Project. <https://www.zeroabuseproject.org/professionals/trauma-informed-prosecutor-project/>.

CAST undergraduate course listing, that will be developed into CAST Toolkit content. Table 6 illustrates the major content themes that will be developed for the three graduate CAST Toolkits. CAST Toolkit content will include the following components for successful instruction:

- Slide deck for topical instruction.
- Required and supplemental readings to build fundamental and advanced knowledge for a subject area.
- Experiential learning materials (e.g., case study, vignette, simulation packet) to foster active, problem-based learning and allow students to engage knowledge and skills using real-world examples.
- Assignments and rubrics to help evaluate student mastery of topical concepts and competencies.

By producing these Toolkits using the framework derived from the survey results, Zero Abuse aims to optimize student learning experiences so they can better recognize, prevent, and respond to child maltreatment. The 'ready-to-deliver' aspect of these Toolkits will allow flexible deployment across the landscape of higher education, where budgets for course deployment and instructor availability to craft such content are limited.<sup>11</sup>

<b>Table 5. Undergraduate CAST Course Toolkit Framework</b>		
<b>Perspectives on Child Maltreatment</b>	<b>Professional &amp; System Responses to Child Maltreatment</b>	<b>Responding to the Survivor of Child Abuse</b>
At-risk recognition and prevention	Trauma-informed communication	Trauma-informed/Compassionate care & response
Child development	Safety and risk assessment (mental health screening)	Survivor responses
Child maltreatment typologies	Testifying in court	Non-offending caregiver support
Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACES) Science	Cultural humility, racial disparities in system	Culture: impact, understanding of child maltreatment & recovery
Impact and Understanding of Child Maltreatment	Evidence-based practices, policies	ACEs mitigation
Socio-ecological correlates of maltreatment	Self-care, vicarious trauma/secondary traumatic stress	Treatment & resources
Mandated Reporting	Interdisciplinary (MDT) collaboration, roles, team makeup	Co-occurring factors
Child Welfare History	Investigative response to abuse or neglect (w/death investigation)	Outcomes of child maltreatment

<sup>11</sup> Lumina Foundation. 2020. Higher Ed Budgets for the Post-COVID Era. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/resource/higher-ed-budgets-for-the-post-covid-era/>; Flaherty C. 2022. "Calling It Quits." *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/07/05/professors-are-leaving-academe-during-great-resignation>.

**Table 6. Graduate CAST Course Toolkit Framework**

Child Advocacy Clinical Studies	Child Abuse & the Law	Recognizing and Responding to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse
Adverse effects of abuse on child development	Dynamics of Victimization	Child maltreatment typologies
Psychopathology of child maltreatment	Value of Working as part of an MDT team	Culture: impact, understanding of child maltreatment & recovery
Intergenerational/family cycle of violence	Charging, plea negotiation and disposition	Pastoral care & MDT Collaboration
Long-term consequences of maltreatment	Preparing children for court	Identifying and countering troubling texts & scripture
Role of medical professional in abuse prevention, intervention	Jury selection	Theological & confessional resources to prioritize abuse response
Trauma-informed patient care	Evidence considerations	Investigative response to abuse or neglect (w/death investigation)
Abuse, neglect identification in medical setting	Preparing for court	Congregational policies & best practices for prevention, intervention
Cultural humility and intersection with medical response to abuse	Permanency outcomes	Self-care, vicarious trauma/secondary traumatic stress

## CAST Faculty Implementation Guide Development and Dissemination

In addition to postsecondary CAST Toolkit development, Zero Abuse will create a Faculty Implementation Guide. The Guide will focus on two key facets of CAST growth: faculty implementation (for new CAST institutions) and enhancement/expansion strategies (for current CAST institutions). The implementation section of this guide will focus on two critical areas for successful launch of CAST:

- I. Technical planning: New faculty will be empowered with insight and best practices from successful CAST programs to help them optimize their strategic plan for deploying new CAST programming at their college or university with the grant Toolkit deliverables.
- II. Best practices for instruction: Helpful tips or insight into best practices for teaching CAST coursework.

The enhancement section will outline unique strategies to expand upon their CAST deployment, including but not limited to:

- Best practices re: simulation integration;
- Expanding from a CAST certificate to a CAST Minor or a CAST Major;

- Continuing education and frontline training considerations.

## CAST Seminar

The CAST Toolkits and Faculty Implementation Guide will be launched during Zero Abuse's first-ever CAST Seminar, which will be held virtually on November 8-9, 2023. The Seminar has been announced and attendees can register [here](#). The Seminar agenda includes presentations on the findings from the survey and catalog review projects; launch and overview of the CAST Toolkits and Faculty Implementation Guide; and topical presentations from leaders in the field on current trends in child protection.

## Conclusion

There is a large disconnect between the academic needs of frontline professionals to successfully execute their duties to keep children safe and the preparation currently provided in higher education. CAST, as facilitated nationally by Zero Abuse, continues to develop and offer the much needed, standardized path for consistent education. The CAST Program has proven, through rigorous peer-reviewed studies, that it can both address the missing areas of competency development in higher education and increase the skills and knowledge necessary for frontline professionals to fulfill their duties to protect children at-risk for or suffering from abuse.

For more information about this Report or questions about implementing CAST, please contact CAST Director Dr. Tyler Council at [tyler@zeroabuseproject.org](mailto:tyler@zeroabuseproject.org).



**Zero Abuse Project works to eliminate child sexual abuse in all of its forms.** A 501(c)(3) organization, we are committed to transforming institutions to more effectively prevent, recognize, and respond to child sexual abuse. Our efforts focus on cross-disciplinary education and training, advocacy for systemic legal change, guidance for survivor support, and leadership on emerging technologies. We also recognize and address the intersection of child maltreatment and child sexual abuse.