



McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Leadership Matters

To ensure school readiness and help prepare children for successful participation in work and civic life, our nation has committed to providing a comprehensive and coordinated system of early learning and development. As more community-based programs provide publicly funded preschool, the need for well-qualified early childhood administrators has greatly increased. To create fiscally sound early childhood programs with learning environments that nurture and challenge young children and with work environments that develop, support, and retain skilled teachers, program directors capable of strong leadership are essential.

What We Know

Directors' ability to attract and retain effective teachers in their programs, establish norm of ongoing quality improvement, and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education, experience, and specialized training in both early childhood education and program administration.

- *Directors' level of formal education is a strong predictor of overall program quality.*¹
- *There is a positive relationship between the quality of administrative practices and the quality of the children's learning environment in center-based programs.*²
- *Directors with higher levels of education and specialized training in program administration are more likely to support the professional development of their teaching staff, secure and maintain program funding, and achieve center accreditation.*³

Most early childhood administrators were promoted to their current position because others saw their leadership ability and encouraged them to pursue the role. Few have had specialized training in program leadership and management prior to assuming their administrative duties.

- *Approximately 90% of directors have been classroom teachers, but only one-fifth report that they actively pursued an administrative position*⁴
- *Only 27% of directors state they were well-prepared for their administrative role. Over one-half of directors describe the transition into their new role as overwhelming.*⁵
- *One-third of directors working in a mixed service delivery system (funding from Head Start, child care, and publicly funded preschool) identified the fiscal arena as the area in which they could most improve.*⁶

The scope of responsibilities for center directors is similar to elementary school principals. Both administrators oversee curriculum and child assessment, supervision and evaluation of teachers, human resources allocation, family engagement, community outreach, and fiscal matters relating to their programs. Yet director qualifications contrast sharply with the qualifications for principals.

- *Most states require that school principals hold a master's degree and an administrative certificate while only five states (CA, CO, FL, NH, TX) require even one college course related to administration or business before assuming the position of director of a licensed child care center. Only four states (DE, IN, NJ, PA) require a director to have a degree at any level.*⁷

- *The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identifies as a best practice for program accreditation that an administrator have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree with 24 s.h. of specialized education in early childhood and 9 s.h. of specialized education in administration.*⁸
- *Director qualifications are decreasing. In 2001, 72% of center directors reported having a bachelor's degree or higher; in 2008, only 66% reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.*⁹
- *Two kinds of leadership development programs exist—one for principals and one for child care center directors—but neither addresses the needs of leaders in the new mixed service delivery early childhood system.*¹⁰

Professional development makes a difference. Directors who receive leadership and management training specific to early childhood are able to perform their responsibilities more effectively. Administrative practices are improved when mentoring or coaching supplements the training.

- *Directors with greater levels of administrative training report significant gains in their level of competence. Staff at their programs perceive the work climate to be more positive and productive.*¹¹
- *A formal curriculum to increase directors' administrative knowledge and skills, coupled with a strong mentoring component emphasizing peer support, results in demonstrable organizational change.*¹²
- *Business training is most effective when it is used in concert with ongoing technical support, is hands on, and meets administrative needs specific to early childhood.*¹³
- *Directors with more training report significant differences in both their self-perceptions as an advocate and in their actions advocating for the early childhood workforce. They are also more likely to serve in a leadership role in an early childhood professional organization.*¹⁴

An administrator credential identifies what an effective director of an early childhood program needs to know and be able to do. Achieving an administrator credential is linked to more effective administrative practices in community-based early childhood programs.

- *There are 24 states that define and recognize the administrative competency of center directors by issuing a director or administrator credential. In almost all of these states the credential is voluntary.*¹⁵
- *NAEYC recognizes 28 administrator credentials in its alternative pathway for meeting director qualifications for center accreditation.*¹⁶
- *Directors holding a credential score significantly higher on measures of administrative quality and are more likely to have centers that are accredited by NAEYC.*¹⁷
- *The credential level of the director is a predictor of classroom quality.*¹⁸

A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is an effective strategy for increasing the qualifications of directors and improving the quality of leadership and management practices in early childhood programs.

- *Nine states (AR, DE, KY, MS, NH, NC, OK, PA, WI) require directors to hold an administrator credential to achieve one or more star levels in their QRIS.*¹⁹
- *Seven states (AR, ID, IL, OH, MA, MD, MT) have embedded the Program Administration Scale (PAS) within the quality standards of their QRIS.*²⁰
- *Four states (NY, PA, TN, WI) identify the Program Administration Scale (PAS) as a resource to support quality improvement within their QRIS.*

What We Need to Do

State-funded prekindergarten initiatives typically require lead teachers in preschool classrooms to hold a baccalaureate degree and often teacher certification. Head Start has mandated that 50% of its teachers have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood or child development by 2013. In order to build comprehensive early learning and development systems, states must address the need for cross-sector early childhood leadership development.

- *Support the use of the CCDF quality set-aside funds, Head Start training and technical assistance dollars, and Race-to-the-Top Early Learning Challenge grants for early childhood leadership training.*
- *Encourage institutions of higher education to expand early childhood administration courses and degree programs.*
- *Create incentives for early childhood administrators to enhance their professional qualifications and attain a state or national administrator credential.*
- *Provide leadership training to meet the needs of early childhood leaders working in mixed delivery systems.*
- *Ensure that organizational measures of program administration are included in system reform efforts such as quality rating and improvement systems.*

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1. Ackerman, 2010; Bloom, 1990, 1996; Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Phillips, et al., 2001; Rohacek, Adams, & Kisker, 2010; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000; Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008; Washington, 2008; Whitebook, et al., 2008, 2001.
 2. Dennis, 2010; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; MCECL, 2010; National Center for Children and Families, 2008.
 3. Ackerman, 2008; Bloom, 1996; Bredekamp & Willer, 1996; Fowler, Bloom, Talan, Beneke, & Kelton, 2008; Iutovich, Fiene, Johnson, Koppel, & Langan, 1997; MCECL, 2008; Rous, Grove, Cox, Townley, & Crumpton, 2008.
 4. Rafanello & Bloom, 1997.
 5. MCECL, 2003.
 6. Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011.
 7. National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families. OCCQualityCenter@icf.com
 8. National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org).
 9. Fowler, Bloom, Talan, Beneke, & Kelton, 2008; Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005.
 10. Goffin & Means, 2009; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011.
 11. Bloom, 2010; Bella & Bloom, 2003; Bloom & Bella, 2005; Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Mietlicki, 2010.
 12. Doherty, 2011.
 13. Stoney & Blank, 2011.
 14. MCECL, 2012, Winter.
 15. MCECL, 2012.
 16. National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org).
 17. Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Fowler, Bloom, Talan, Beneke, & Kelton, 2008.
 18. Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008.
 19. MCECL, 2012.
 20. Talan & Bloom, 2011.

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