



McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Leadership Matters

To ensure school readiness and help prepare young 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 receive early education funding, the need for well-qualified early childhood administrators has greatly increased. To create early childhood programs 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 and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education, experience, and specialized training in early childhood 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

The scope of responsibilities for center directors is similar to elementary school principals. Both administrators oversee curriculum implementation, supervision and evaluation of teachers, child assessment, human resource allocation, parent engagement, community relations, 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 four states (CA, CO, FL, 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.*⁶
- *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.*⁷
- *Administrator qualifications are decreasing. In 2001, 72% of directors reported having a bachelor's degree or higher; in 2008, only 66% of directors reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.*⁸

Training makes a difference. Directors who receive specialized leadership and management training are able to perform their responsibilities more effectively.

- *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.*⁹

Director credentials are 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.*¹⁰
- *NAEYC recognizes 28 administrator credentials in its alternative pathway for meeting director qualifications for center accreditation.*¹¹
- *Directors holding a credential score significantly higher on measures of administrative quality and are more likely to have centers that are accredited by NAEYC.*¹²
- *The credential level of the director is a predictor of classroom quality*¹³

State quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are an effective strategy for improving the quality of leadership and management practices in early childhood programs.

- *Eight states (AR, ID, IL, OH, MA, MT, TN, WI) have embedded the Program Administration Scale (PAS) in their quality rating and improvement systems.*¹⁴

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 early childhood leadership development. To assure that community-based early learning programs are able to develop, improve, and sustain sound administrative practices, policymakers need to:

- *Support the use of the CCDF quality set-aside funds and Head Start training and technical assistance dollars for director 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 director credential.*
- *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. 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. 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. National Child Care Information Center (<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/cclicensingreq/ccdr-directors.html>).
 7. National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org).
 8. Fowler, Bloom, Talan, Beneke, & Kelton, 2008; Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005.
 9. Bloom, 2010; Bella & Bloom, 2003; Bloom & Bella, 2005; Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Miettlicki, 2010.
 10. National Child Care Information Center (<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/pd-credentials.html>).
 11. National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org).
 12. Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Fowler, Bloom, Talan, Beneke, & Kelton, 2008.
 13. Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008.
 14. Talan & Bloom, 2011.

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