

Summer 9-11-2013

The Changing Landscape of Early Childhood Education Leadership Development

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Recommended Citation

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, "The Changing Landscape of Early Childhood Education Leadership Development" (2013). *McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership Publications*. 10.
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Research Notes

The Changing Landscape of Early Childhood Education Leadership Development

It is now widely understood that children's experiences in high-quality early learning and development programs can positively impact their developmental outcomes. As expectations for early childhood education (ECE) increase, there is a corresponding need for effective leadership in classrooms, programs, and the organizations that form the field's infrastructure.

A recent study examined how the ECE field is addressing its need for leadership by focusing attention on the leadership development programs designed to meet the needs of the expanding field.¹ Programs participating in the study included all delivery approaches—workshops, seminars, degree programs, fellowships, institutes, and online instruction.

The second edition of the *Early Childhood Education Leadership Development Compendium: A View of the Current Landscape* sought to answer several questions:

- What programs are currently available to support ECE leadership development?
- Who are the target audiences for these programs?
- What can be learned about the field's definitions and approaches to leadership development from the descriptions provided by these programs?

The compendium provides comparison data, highlighting noteworthy differences in the findings between 2009—the year the first edition was published—and 2013, and identifies emerging trends in leadership development in early childhood education.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The sample included 55 self-reported leadership development programs. These programs were identified through a broad outreach to many early childhood listservs and e-mail distribution lists. Programs included in the first edition were contacted directly. Outreach was supplemented by Internet research to determine each program's current status. The final sample included 35 programs listed in the first edition of the compendium plus 20 newly listed leadership development programs.

Key representatives from the identified ECE leadership development programs completed an online survey providing both demographic information (program name, contact information, target audience,

and funding sources) and program information (purpose, leadership focus, definition of leadership, as well as lessons learned from implementing the program). Program representatives were also asked if their leadership development program connected school-based and community-based early childhood education leaders to advance PreK to 3rd grade alignment.

Prior to publication, each respondent was contacted and asked to review its entry to confirm the accuracy of information. If confirmation was not received, the entry was included in the compendium and noted with an asterisk.

FINDINGS

There have been multiple changes in the landscape of leadership development since the publication of the 2009 edition of the *Early Childhood Education Leadership Development Compendium*.

- The ECE field now has 55 self-reported leadership development programs as opposed to the 86 programs reported in 2009. These 55 programs are delivered by 50 different organizations or institutions of higher education. In 2009, there were seven entities that delivered 20 of the 86 programs. This contrast suggests that a more diversified delivery system is emerging.
- Leadership development programs were categorized by their focus on Program Administration (19 programs), Program Improvement (4 programs), or Leadership Skills (32 programs):
 - The number of programs focusing on Program Administration, including the development of director competencies, has declined from 32 to 19. Twelve of the 19 programs (63%) are associated with a state director credential.
 - The Program Improvement category, which declined from 13 to 4 since 2009, no longer shows evidence of any accreditation facilitation initiatives.
 - Since 2009, the composition of programs in the Leadership Skills category is both more diversified and more defined, leading to the identification of six sub-categories: Advocacy, General or Non-specific Leadership Skills, Policy, Systems Building, PreK-3rd Grade alignment, and Collective Impact.

- State and federal funding of leadership development has increased while philanthropic funding has decreased since the publication of the first edition of the compendium. Programs supported by a combination of fees/tuition, and philanthropic support declined from 29% to 11%. Table 1 presents funding sources for the leadership development programs.

Table 1. Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCE	N	% OF TOTAL
Fees/Tuition	15	27
Philanthropic	6	11
Fees + Philanthropic	6	11
State (Including County/Local)	10	17
Federal	6	11
State + Federal	2	4
Public (State and/or Federal) + Fees	2	4
Public (State and/or Federal) + Philanthropic	4	7
Tobacco Tax	2	4
Program Sponsor	1	2
Non-Specific	1	2
TOTAL	55	100

- Close to one-half of the 55 programs (42%) focused on a group loosely identified as “leaders,” “emerging leaders,” and “early childhood professionals.” Nonetheless, the target audience for leadership development programs appears more broadly distributed than in 2009 when more than one-half of the 86 self-reported programs were directed to the child care sector. Table 2 identifies the target audiences of the leadership development programs.

Table 2. Target Audiences

AUDIENCE	N	% OF TOTAL
Teachers	4	7
Child Care Directors, Assistant Directors, and Administrative Staff	12	22
Individuals in organizations and agencies in executive roles or as content specialist	5	9
Center Directors and Family Child Care Provider/Owner	4	7
Teacher and Center Director	4	7
Non-specified ECE personnel (leaders, emerging leaders, professionals)	23	42
PreK-3rd Grade Administrators (e.g., Birth to Five and K-3 Administrators)	3	6
TOTAL	55	100

Finally, programs were asked about the definition of leadership that guided their program’s curricula. Only 12 of the 55 programs responded to this request, suggesting that overall the ECE field continues to lack clarity on its purposes for leadership development. The definitions of leadership that were provided had three characteristics in common: action-oriented, intentionality, and mobilizing others in the service of a shared goal.

EMERGING TRENDS

State and federal funding appear to be the catalyst for growth in ECE leadership development. Five of the 14 states awarded grants in the first two rounds of the federal Race-to-the-Top/Early Learning Challenge included leadership development programs in their grant applications. California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and North Carolina have programs that are operational and listed in the compendium. Since publication of the *Early Childhood Education Leadership Development Compendium*, Delaware determined it will use a facilitated cohort model of Aim4Excellence™ Online National Director Credential, which is included in the compendium under Illinois programs.

In 1997, Kagan and Bowman noted, “Early care and education has become a complex field...If the nation is to ensure the quality of children’s early care and education experiences, new leadership development efforts must be considered. We can no longer ignore the necessity for the field to expand and develop its leadership capacity.”² Sixteen years later, the 2013 compendium provides evidence that a growing interest in leadership is finally emerging.

REFERENCES

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For further information about research conducted by the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, call 800.443.5522, ext. 5060. Funding for the McCormick Center’s *Research Notes* is provided by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and the Illinois Department of Human Services. Individuals may photocopy and disseminate freely.

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