Leadership Development for Center-Based Child Care and Early Education Program Directors: Research-to-Policy Resources

In 2012, there were 129,000 center-based child care and early education programs in the United States, employing more than one million teachers and caregivers, and in 2014 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated there were 64,000 preschool and child care center directors. Regulatory requirements for directors vary across programs such as Head Start, prekindergarten, and child care, as well as across states. In addition to these regulatory requirements, many states encourage directors to further develop their skills by offering director credentials and including administrator qualifications in their quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) standards.

Research supports the assertion that directors influence program quality. Given directors’ importance to programs, a number of organizations and bodies, including the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership and the Early Childhood Leadership Development Consortium, have developed leadership frameworks for directors. The seminal Institute of Medicine and National Research Council report Transforming the Workforce additionally identified core competencies for leadership (p. 7-16) and made recommendations related to the critical role of leadership for early childhood programs (p. 12-44). These frameworks and competencies cover a wide range of skills, but all identify both instructional and administrative abilities as crucial for effective leadership.

Of the nearly 3,000 early childhood undergraduate degree programs in the United States, only 2.9 percent focus on early childhood administration, management, or leadership. To address this gap and to support those already serving in leadership roles, institutions of higher education, state agencies, school districts, and other human services organizations have created early childhood-specific professional development programs to strengthen leadership development in the field.
This Research-to-Policy Resource List identifies research in the Research Connections collection published since 2000 on the outcomes of early childhood leadership development programs. The resources on the list are organized by program name and, where indicated, identify the program’s sponsor.

Aim4Excellence, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Director Support Program, Metropolitan Council on Early Learning

Director’s Credential, Mississippi Forum on Children and Families

Early Childhood Executive Leadership Program, National Institute for School Leadership

Early Education Emergent Leaders Program


Enhancing Leadership and Early Learning Services

Every Director Counts, First 5 Alameda County
Taking Charge of Change, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership


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