

Preparing Principals to Support Early Childhood Teachers

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INFORMATION REQUEST

CEELO was asked to review current information on how states are preparing principals to supervise and support early childhood teachers in schools and districts. This document summarizes what is known about principal licensing requirements and professional development in early childhood pedagogy and best practice, and provides selected state examples of professional development models for principals. Find more details in the report [*What Do We Know About Principal Preparation, Licensure Requirements, and Professional Development for School Leaders?*](#)

Methodology

CEELO reviewed data on 21 states' principal licensure requirements, and included them in a coded database. CEELO also conducted structured interviews with experts on principal preparation and professional development in seven states, and spoke with staff at the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Institute for School Leadership.

What we know

- Principal leadershipⁱ is second only to teaching in terms of impact on child outcomes.
- Strong leadership has a positive impact on schools facing challenging circumstances, such as poverty, high teacher turnover, and limited resources.
- Specific features of schools (such as location, school and district size) also affect strong leadership.
- Most states' principal preparation systems could be improved to better equip elementary school principals to evaluate pre-K through third grade (P-3) teachers, support improvements in teaching and learning, and guide teachers in using curricula and assessments in the earliest grades. Recent state policy developments to expand state-funded pre-K education and reform teacher evaluation have increased the urgency for these policy changesⁱⁱ.
- Nearly all states have adopted some form of what's known as the [Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium \(ISLLC\) standards](#), which lay out a set of competencies school leaders need to succeed in improving instruction. Yet neither the standards, nor the states—except Illinois—have included early childhood content specifically in their licensure, accreditation, mentoring or evaluation processes.

What we learned

- Our research reveals an array of administrator licensure titles assigned to grade-level authority across states, some permitting principals or administrators the flexibility to oversee programs ranging from early childhood through high school.
- To date, only Illinois has included early childhood content specifically in their licensure and accreditation processesⁱⁱⁱ.
- Early childhood content is not a required element of principal preparation or professional development for principals in most states, according to our findings.
- Some states have developed policies and programs that acknowledge a need for integrating early childhood content (DE, IL, MD, NJ, PA, WA), but very few have progressed beyond initial stages of providing training or outlining policies.
- Although many states include pre-K in the scope of principal licensure (pre-K-12, for example) the extent to which that involves any childhood content or experience is varied, but generally extremely limited. We found the following:
 - In [Arizona](#), [Arkansas](#), and [DC](#), for example, pre-K teaching experience can be used to qualify for administrator licensure, but it is not a requirement.
 - [Delaware](#), [New Mexico](#), [New Jersey](#), [Oregon](#), and [South Dakota](#) outline no specific early childhood content or experience for licensing.
 - In [Nebraska](#), pre-K is included in principal licensure renewal—but state website sources do not indicate clearly whether it is required for initial licensure.
 - [Virginia](#) offers various routes to a pre-K -12 endorsement for an administration and supervision license, but no specific experience or content related to pre-K is specified in licensure regulations.
- A growing number of states are providing focused professional development on relevant early childhood content to school administrators. The work is, in part, being driven by the urgency to implement critical policy areas in the pre-K-12 arena. In many cases it involves cross-agency or cross-district teams, so that perspectives from the pre-K through third grade continuum can be shared. The examples in **Table 1** (below) provide robust models and resources that other states can draw upon in developing their own training and development policies and plans. In most cases, however, the impact of these models has not been evaluated in depth (or at all). This would be a useful step in future, to understand more clearly the impact of each element of training.

What we recommend

Administering pre-K through third grade as part of one continuum within the system represents a significant shift for state education agencies, teacher preparation programs, and elementary principals. The following are policy recommendations:

- **Tie principal professional development to state policy priorities for maximum effectiveness.** Reforming preparation and professional development of principals to include pre-K preparation and content is more likely to be sustained when aligned with, and tightly coupled to, state pre-K through third grade reform priorities. Current policy reform initiatives (e.g. Common Core, teacher evaluation) are most relevant to principals, and when resources are limited, districts and states want time and dollars to count towards multiple goals.
- **Customize the professional development model and approach to reflect state policy and local implementation.** State partnerships with professional associations within the state and community can help to build support for ongoing professional development, and help to

develop coherence and continuity throughout the preschool or birth through third grade continuum, emphasizing the influential role of the elementary school principal.

- **Principal professional development content must build bridges between the cultures and practices of birth to age five programs and Kindergarten through grade three.** Understanding specific histories, content, and leadership skills must be bidirectional (e.g. birth to age five needs to understand K-3 and K-3 needs to understand birth to age five). Yet content and requirements must be differentiated by age and grade to ensure principals have appropriate, specialized knowledge and skills to support teachers in providing appropriate experiences for children.
- **Principal preparation should include a broad and wide range of experiences.** These might include classes on child development; models of early education; early childhood curriculum, instruction and assessment; developmentally appropriate practices; and family and community engagement , for example.
- **Provide incentives to include early childhood content in school administrator licensure and professional development.** Higher education professors who teach principal preparation courses often are not included in state training initiatives or even the conversations surrounding principal preparation. It is important for states to work with the professors at colleges and universities who prepare principals. Ensure that principals are able to obtain either college credit or continuing education units to support their recertification.
- **Frame principal preparation and professional development as talent recruitment and retention strategies.** Principal turnover is high. A focus on training, retention, and evaluation, to provide ongoing feedback and support, would be likely to enhance recruiting and reduce turnover. There are many opportunities to introduce early childhood content and child development training to principals who are likely to be supervising teachers of early childhood classrooms within, or linked to, elementary public schools.
- **Build in evaluation and data collection to track outcomes of principal professional development models.** It is not clear that any states or training programs have implemented ongoing evaluations of their training efforts: examining implementation fidelity and short- and long-term outcomes will be helpful in refining the content and processes of these programs, and understanding how they can be most helpful to principals, districts, and states. There is also little evidence of the role of using data to understand the impact of principal preparation or training programs incorporating early childhood content on child outcomes or classroom quality, perhaps because there are so few of them, and most are early in their development stages.

ⁱ Louis, K.S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K.L., Anderson, S.E. et al. (2010 July). *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

ⁱⁱ Szekely, A. (2013 May). *Leading for early success: Building school principals' capacity to lead high-quality early education*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Davis, S.H. (2010). *Analysis of site-level administrator and superintendent certification requirement in the USA (2010)*. Pomona, CA: California State Polytechnic University.

Table 1 Selected State Examples: Early Childhood Focused Principal Professional Development Models

Several states have developed sustained professional development models for principals to increase knowledge and awareness of early childhood pedagogy and best practice. Key features of effective professional development models include sustained opportunities for dialogue with peers, observation of best practice, and mentoring or coaching in the application to school leadership functions.

State	Program	Participants	Activities	Support
CT	<p>Connecticut’s Office of Early Childhood has brokered an arrangement with the University of Connecticut to replicate the University of Washington’s pre-K-3rd grade Executive Leadership Certificate model for leaders in Connecticut next year.</p> <p>Connecticut’s “3 to 3 Institute” is a collaborative effort between the state’s new Office of Early Childhood and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), the state principals’ association, which has taken an active interest in supporting professional development for career principals and other school leaders in jointly sponsored “Getting Pre-K to Grade Three Right” symposia.</p>	<p>Teams included principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, early childhood administrators/directors, kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, and literacy coaches, to bridge 0-5 and K-3 systems thinking, focusing on shrinking the achievement gap.</p>	<p>A full-day symposium featured national experts addressing early language and literacy, mathematics, and executive function within a continuous pre-K-3rd grade framework, before breaking into teams. Each team worked with a facilitator throughout the year to develop and implement an actionable team plan. Facilitators were often former principals who had received executive coach training through CAS.</p>	<p>The symposium with follow-up facilitation was made possible through philanthropic support. A grant from the National Governors Association will help them continue for a second cohort. A second leadership team symposium was held in January 2014. Kristie Kauerz presented the Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches.</p> <p>3 to 3 Institute includes representatives from the Office of Early Childhood, EASTCONN, CT Association of Schools, local school districts, and the Memorial Fund.</p>
DE	<p>To support professional development for school leaders, the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), at the University of Delaware’s (UD) College of Education and Human</p>	<p>ALP meets one afternoon/evening a month. Although many participants who engage in this professional development program will assume responsibility as</p>	<p>Each session features a different element of school leadership: leadership style; leadership behaviors; administrative services (nutrition, transportation, facilities, budget & finance); management and instructional</p>	<p>Sponsored by the Delaware Department of Education’s State Action for Education Leadership Project and funded by the Wallace Foundation.</p>

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	<p>Development, has developed several programs. The Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP) assists participants in acquiring essential skills and knowledge for managing and leading schools, with a focus on school improvement and student achievement.</p> <p>In partnership with UD’s Institute for Public Administration, DASL designed the Executive Leadership Academy.</p>	<p>principals in elementary schools with pre-K responsibilities, the program does not formally address pre-K-3rd grade.</p>	<p>leadership; communication; legal issues; governance, policy and procedures, and protocol; resume writing and interviews; and leadership assessment. Participants identify “problems of practice” to research and address, and work with self-identified school or district mentors to provide support, through the duration of the program. DASL staff members also provide ongoing support to participants and their mentors.</p> <p>Six sessions addressing strategic planning, instructional leadership, legal issues, school finances, collective bargaining, school construction, board of education governance, and understanding leadership styles. Participants also identify, research, and complete a “Problem of Practice” action plan as part of the program. As with other DASL programs, pre-K-3rd grade issues are not specifically incorporated into the content; they are incidental issues based on participant interests and needs.</p>	<p>Created by the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL).</p>
<p>MD</p>	<p>The Maryland Department of Education (DOE) used some of their Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge award to develop an Early Childhood Leadership Academy.</p>	<p>Principals from each school system in the state were invited to form collaborative teams, including two additional members from their school; and three representatives from Head Start, child care, family members or family child care.</p>	<p>In the morning of the one-day event, teams focused on executive functioning and Maryland EXCELS, the state’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Teams spent the afternoon engaged in facilitated short- and long-term action planning. The academy did not address pre-K-3rd grade as a comprehensive issue; it attempted to expand relationships and understanding of a broader context and continuum, for</p>	<p>The Maryland Department of Education (DOE) used some of their Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge award to develop the Academy.</p> <p>Maryland DOE also makes a concerted effort to include pre-K-3rd grade topics in conferences held by other organizations, including the</p>

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			greater incorporation of pre-K-3rd grade into school improvement plans.	<p>Maryland Association of Elementary Principals; Maryland Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD); and Common Ground, a consortium of higher education institutions.</p> <p>Maryland is completing work on its kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) and a pre-K-3rd grade pedagogy guide that can be used by principals.</p>
MA	<p>By 2006, The Community Advocates for Young Learners (CAYL) Institute recognized the need to focus more on principals and created the CAYL Principals Fellowship Program.</p>	<p>The intensive year-long learning experience was offered initially only to principals in the Boston Public Schools system, then opened to principals throughout the state when the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC) replaced expiring private funding. Later, the Institute was reconfigured to attract community teams involving principals with administrators from Head Start and child care.</p> <p>By the time CAYL Institute's National Conference for Elementary School Principals was held in July 2010, principals from Ohio, Massachusetts, Texas, Delaware, Virginia, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, and Maryland attended, underscoring the need and</p>	<p>The goals of the CAYL Principal Fellowship Program are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a peer learning network; championing policy changes at the local, district and state levels; • Establish a high-quality pre-K learning environments within school systems; and • Promote family involvement and cultural competence as a key to successful early education in the schools. 	<p>The CAYL Institute is supported by funding and voluntary services from citizen donations.</p>

State	Program	Participants	Activities	Support
		interest in supporting early education expertise for principals.		
NJ	<p>In 2009, the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE), New Jersey Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NJASCD), and Advocates for Children in New Jersey (ACNJ), with support from the Foundation for Child Development (FCD), offered professional development opportunities to district teams, by developing the PreK-3rd Grade Leadership Training Series for administrators with preschool responsibilities, recognizing the critical role school administrators play in bridging early childhood and primary education.</p> <p>After the FCD grant ended, the focus shifted to include district teams. The New Jersey Early Childhood Academy (ECA) is designed as a continuous improvement approach for the state’s school districts. The Division of Early Childhood Education at the New Jersey Department of Education is partnering with The National Institute for Early Education</p>	<p>While not designed expressly for elementary principals, the series included them as a primary audience, with the understanding that many principals were contending with new issues such as early learning standards, developmentally appropriate curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. More than 200 elementary principals participated, developing a foundation to better address more recent issues of early learning standards alignment with the Common Core, student assessment, and teacher and principal evaluation.</p> <p>Select districts in the state were invited to send a team including at least a principal, teacher, and central office administrator.</p>	<p>The “PreK-3rd Grade Leadership Training Series,” a 4-day series of sessions over a 5-month period, centered around nine components of the PreK-3rd Grade system framework developed by Kauerz and colleagues. Components included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to programs • Teacher/teaching quality • Program quality • Leader quality • Standards addressing all developmental domains • Child-based assessments • Transitions • Infrastructure, and • Family and community engagement <p>ECA incorporated a year-long, three-session academy, focusing on coherence of preschool expansion and quality, teacher evaluation, and Common Core State Standards implementation in early childhood. Formal presentations by local experts were followed with small-group discussion, the teams develop district-focused “evidence documents” or action plans. Additional homework and online programs supplement learning between sessions.</p>	<p>The initial program was supported by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD). During years two and three of the FCD funding, an “advanced” course was also offered, for those who completed the original professional development but wanted additional training.</p> <p>Eight districts contributed funds to send a team of three (up to six members could participate per district, for an additional cost per person). Including this past year, about 400 school administrators have participated in the program. A third-round grantee of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, New Jersey plans to continue the academy as a two-year program for</p>

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	<p>Research (NIEER)'s Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) at Rutgers University, to continue to build communities of practice among New Jersey school district leaders. The ECA is focusing more specifically on issues related to teacher evaluation and implementing Common Core State Standards.</p>			<p>districts, with the second year emphasizing the use of data in a continuous improvement process. First year teams will serve as mentors for subsequent cohorts enrolling the following year.</p>
<p>NC</p>	<p>Leadership from several offices in DPI—Division of Educator Recruitment and Development, Office of Professional Development, and Office of Early Learning/Teacher Licensure Unit—recognized a continuing need for principals to increase their understanding of early childhood education. Teaming with the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation at UNCC, the DPI developed the Resource Manual for Administrators and Principals Supervising and Evaluating Teachers of Young Children in 2010 to support NCTEP. Although elementary principals in North Carolina are not required to have had experience or demonstrate competence in early childhood per se, the resource guide serves as a valuable tool. It is also an indispensable resource for the</p>	<p>Training had been provided to every school system in the state by DPI and UNCC to enhance use of the manual.</p>	<p>Phase one involves a full-day training during the work-week to introduce the Manual and indicators of quality practices. The second phase involves participants taking what was learned back to their districts and programs, and applying it through program and educator observations. After a period of a month or so, the final phase of the program assembles participants to share their findings, address questions and concerns, and provide additional resources.</p>	<p>When administration of the More at Four Program shifted from DPI to the Division of Child Development and Early Education in the Department of Health and Human Services, training also shifted to the new agency. Although the program is open to principals, most participants are from Head Start and Child Care, possibly due to this shift in agency. Also, North Carolina has dedicated funds from its Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge award to develop a Directors' Leadership Academy, but the target audience is directors of pre-K and child care programs, rather than elementary principals.</p>

State	Program	Participants	Activities	Support
	<p>Beginning Teacher Support Program, which is a required multi-year program that includes mentorship, professional development plan support, and formative and summative evaluation aligned with the teacher licensure progression.</p>			
PA	<p>With a unique administrative structure linking the Departments of Education and Public Welfare through a dually appointed Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) worked closely with the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) to establish the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Executive Leadership Institute (PA ECELI).</p>	<p>Currently in its fifth year, PA ECELI is a five-day program designed for elementary principals and early education directors to come together in support of a continuous, aligned, birth–grade 3 system. Delivered regionally, the program has generated new interest among principals, since they are facing new accountability reforms, such as kindergarten entry assessment, third-grade reading requirements, and teacher evaluation. Principals acquire Act 45 (PA Inspired Leadership Initiative) credit for their successful participation.</p>	<p>Participants gather for three consecutive days (generally in summer), followed by a two-day session with a minimum of one month in between (a 2-2-1 schedule is also possible). Day one addresses child development through a “whole child” lens, using a case study based on a rural Pennsylvania town and program design based on the six components of the Standards Aligned System (SAS) to support student achievement. Curriculum for the second day covers the alignment of pre-K and kindergarten standards and assessments, in addition to developing a participant-designed action research project called the Action Learning Project (ALP). Topics covered on the third day include multigenerational engagement; family, school and community involvement; and continuity and transition planning. When they reconvene, day four of PA ECELI provides the opportunity for peer sharing and reflection on participants’ ALP efforts, using the eight-step Kotter Change Process adapted for early childhood. The program concludes by</p>	<p>OCDEL and DOE provide funding for the program; there is no cost to participants, other than travel.</p>

State	Program	Participants	Activities	Support
			examining issues of leadership and sustainability	
WA	In Washington, the University of Washington’s College of Education offers a Certificate in Pre-K-3rd Grade Executive Leadership (P3EL) program in response to increased interest on the local level, spurred in large part by sustained investment in local school districts and communities by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This Washington-based leadership program broadens the age focus to include the birth-through-third-grade continuum, but narrows the audience by focusing explicitly on site-based administrators (elementary principals and 0-5 directors). The ultimate goal is to provide a common professional education experience for administrators in the 0-5 and K-12 systems.	P3EL annually enrolls a 50-person cohort equally representing elementary school principals and administrators of Head Start, child care, and state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) pre-K programs to bridge traditionally separate birth–5 and K-12 sectors. Selective enrollment is determined following a competitive application process, which requires approval from the applicant’s supervisor. In addition to its co-directors, P3EL has an esteemed advisory board of state and national PK-3rd grade leaders.	The Leadership Institute brings a timely focus to supporting pre-K-3 rd grade administrators in their efforts to implement current policy reforms that span the pre-K-3 rd grade continuum in Washington including Early Achievers quality rating and improvement system (QRIS); Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) kindergarten entry assessment; aligning the Early Learning and Development Guidelines with the Common Core State Standards; and teacher/principal evaluation. To address these issues and their alignment with developmentally appropriate practice, P3EL coursework is built upon three pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical Leadership (curriculum, learning environments, intentional teaching, using child assessment data); • Equity-driven Leadership (diverse learners, child development and learning, family and community engagement); and Pre-K-3 rd grade Policy, Advocacy, and Strategic Leadership (P–3 organizational change, state and federal policies).	Offered by the University of Washington’s College of Education.
Harvard PreK-3rd Grade Institute	The Harvard University Graduate School of Education (HGSE) provides a model for pre-K-3rd grade leadership. Designed for team attendance, the Institutes focuses on providing a rich	Attendees include superintendents, central office administrators, elementary school principals, leaders from school- and community-based birth-to-age-5 programs,	National experts present on relevant topics covering the pre-K-3 rd grade continuum and engage directly with participants in team planning sessions. The Institutes’ intentional focus on “How to do pre-K-3 rd grade” led to the	

State	Program	Participants	Activities	Support
	grounding in leading-edge research and practice related to preK-3rd grade approaches, as well as practical tools and time for teams to design implementation plans that are used when the teams return “home.” These four-day Institutes, held most recently in 2012, convene teams of educators and administrators from across the country at the state, district, school, and community level, who are actively collaborating to implement a comprehensive pre-K-3rd grade approach.	classroom teachers, philanthropic leaders, state agency leaders, and others. The cross-district and cross-state sharing is a cornerstone of the Institute’s design. The Institutes are led by a team of HGSE faculty including Drs. Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Richard Weissbourd, Stephanie Jones, and Nonie Lesaux.	development of the <i>Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches</i> , co-authored by Kristie Kauerz (Harvard Graduate School of Education and University of Washington) and Julia Coffman (Center for Evaluation Innovation). The Harvard PreK-3rd Grade Institutes are not designed to formally align with state elementary principal licensure requirements, nor offered as a credit-bearing course. Participants receive a certificate of completion and letter confirming the hours of participation.	
The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)	NISL retains ownership of its model NISL Early Childhood Executive Leadership Institute (ECELI) which can be tailored to any state’s effort to support what elementary principals need to know to be effective leaders and change agents for seamless system pre-K-3rd grade reform.		Content focuses on child development, early learning strategies, the cross sector landscape of pre-K-3rd grade, family engagement, and strategic planning skills. The \$35,000 fee covers full institute costs for up to 25 participants; two trained facilitators (one with early childhood expertise, the other with K-12 leadership experience); online and in-person coaching; and materials. Institutes are typically scheduled for three consecutive days, followed by several months to permit action research in participants’ districts, before concluding with two consecutive days of supplemental professional development and peer learning.	NISL has provided the ECELI for several cohorts in Mississippi and other states have expressed interest.

ABOUT CEELO:

One of 22 Comprehensive Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) will strengthen the capacity of State Education Agencies (SEAs) to lead sustained improvements in early learning opportunities and outcomes. CEELO will work in partnership with SEAs, state and local early childhood leaders, and other federal and national technical assistance (TA) providers to promote innovation and accountability.

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