



State Early Education Leadership Academy: Report on Year 1, 2014-2015

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To promote improved learning outcomes for young children, state early education administrators need skills, knowledge, and dispositions to effectively implement state policy for young children. State early education administrators vary in their leadership and management competencies, yet scant attention has been given to preparing and developing their leadership skills. The CEELO Leadership Academy (LA) was designed to address this gap.

Background

The [CEELO Leadership Academy](#) (LA) was designed to strengthen leadership and management competencies of individuals with responsibility for early childhood education programs in state departments of education (SEAs) or state early learning agencies (ELAs). The design of the Academy is based on [Building Capacity Through an Early Education Leadership Academy](#), a policy brief by Dr. Stacie Goffin, commissioned by CEELO. The paper incorporates information gathered from a targeted literature review, a broad survey of leadership needs among state early learning specialists, and targeted interviews with specialists at varied levels of early education leadership within their agencies and organizations.

The LA introduced concepts of leadership development tailored to state early education administrators with the intent to:

- Build SEA leadership and management capacity to advance state agency visions for early childhood education
- Improve effectiveness of publicly funded programs for children from birth through age five
- Advance SEA policies and initiatives that improve Kindergarten-through-third-grade teaching and learning opportunities
- Partner with state leaders and organizations to build a more unified, equitable, and efficient state birth-through-third-grade early childhood system.

The first year of the CEELO Leadership Academy curriculum addressed three components of leadership: Personal Leadership, Organizational Leadership, and Program Improvement. Each meeting was designed to expand the Fellows' abilities to:



- Build individual capacity to advance their state agency visions for ECE
- Build individual leadership and management competencies to:
 - advocate for improved policy,
 - implement policy reforms and program improvement initiatives in school districts and early childhood program organizations, and
 - articulate persuasive visions of high quality early learning teaching and learning environments.¹

In 2014-2015, CEELO piloted the LA with six state early education administrators (called Fellows). This report describes the content, outcomes, and lessons learned from executing the LA and implications for the LA with a second cohort of Fellows in 2015-2016.

The Leadership Academy Fellows

Thirteen applications to the LA were reviewed and scored by a national expert and the CEELO co-project directors. All applications were ranked based on a composite total score. Two references for each of the semi-final applicants were interviewed by phone. Final selection and notification of acceptance into the LA was made on September 1, 2014. Six applicants were accepted to participate in the LA in 2014-2015.

Following the first on-site session, one LA Fellow left the cohort because of a new position within her agency with new responsibilities that she felt precluded her from participating. The remaining [five Leadership Academy Fellows](#) were from five states (AL, MI, MN, NJ, and TN). Four of the five Fellows were housed in Departments of Education and the fifth sat in the Department of Children's Affairs. Some Fellows were relatively new to their positions at the start of the LA, with less than 3 years tenure, while others had been in their positions for more than 10 years.

Over the course of the year, three of the five Fellows experienced changes in job position/responsibility. One Fellow left the department of education to pursue an opportunity with a national organization. Another received a promotion with a new title and more responsibilities. A third Fellow was assigned additional responsibility due to the award of a federal grant.

The Leadership Academy Design

In-Person Meetings

In the pilot year of the LA, a consultant with expertise in leadership led the design of the Leadership Academy, worked collaboratively with CEELO project directors to identify faculty for each session and coordinated curriculum design with faculty and project directors. The LA cohort met in person four times during the year-long academy.² The first two meetings and the final meeting convened in

¹ For an overview of the Leadership Academy see [here](#).

² See Agenda and Materials from the four meetings [here](#)



Washington DC for two days of active learning in conjunction with guest faculty. The third meeting was held prior to the [CEELO 2015 Annual RoundTable](#) and was a one-day meeting.

Meeting 1: Washington DC, December 3-4, 2014

The objectives of this meeting were to:

- Deepen knowledge of their personal leadership and management competencies (strengths and areas for growth)
- Increase self-awareness of leadership goals, style, and challenges
- Increase awareness of how organizational and political circumstances impact the exercise of leadership
- Refine the purpose, goals, execution, and results of the Fellows' Job Embedded Projects

This meeting included a presentation by Dr. Beth Rous, University of Kentucky, entitled [Leadership Frames: What Does It Mean To Exercise Leaders?](#) The Fellows also heard a presentation from Dr. Ellen Kagen, Georgetown University, entitled [Who am I in the Work of Leadership?](#) During the meeting, the Fellows were also provided set times to meet with their coaches and talk with colleagues to further digest the information presented and apply it to their own positions and contexts. This meeting also provided time for the Fellows to reflect on the content in relation to their Job Embedded Project (JEP; see description below). This enabled the Fellows to consider refining their project in light of the content presented and feedback from coaches.

Meeting 2: Washington DC, February 3-4, 2015

During the February LA meeting the Fellows were introduced to Results Based Leadership (RBL) and the impact of their agency's organizational and political context on the exercise of leadership.

As a result of this meeting, the Fellows were to:

- Be exposed to two key frameworks of Results Based Leadership
- Understand the four core skills of Results Based Accountability and be able to apply them to their Job Embedded Project
- Create building blocks for their personal leadership development based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
- Deepen their understanding of adaptive work by analyzing allies, adversaries, stakeholders, and potential casualties of their Job Embedded Projects
- Increase awareness of what the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) sees as critical priorities of chief state school officers and the place of ECE within this context
- Gain insight and guidance on increasing effectiveness as middle-management leaders
- Deepen awareness of how organizational and political circumstances impact the exercise of leadership
- Develop further self-awareness of their leadership goals and challenges
- Further refine the purpose, goals, execution, and results of the Job Embedded Projects [JEP]



Guest faculty were Jennifer Gross, Guest Faculty Senior Associate, Leadership Development, Annie E. Casey Foundation and Angela Hendrix Terry, Guest Faculty, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and Independent Consultant. The Fellows had ample time to discuss their JEPs and meet with their coaches to apply the information being learned to their current work. In addition, the Fellows met with [Chris Minnich, Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers](#), and heard from two experts, Dean Nafziger, Director of the [Building State Capacity and Productivity Center](#) at Edvance Research and Rolf Grafwallner, Assistant State Superintendent [Division of Early Childhood Development](#), MD State Department of Education, who shared professional experiences around change leadership.

Meeting 3: New Orleans, Louisiana, June, 2015

The goals of meeting three were for the Fellows to:

1. Identify ways systems thinking habits and tools can positively influence their leadership development and impact program development
2. Identify ways systems thinking habits and tools apply to the Job Embedded Projects and their role as a state-level leader
3. Apply the systems thinking tools and strategies to their agency leadership work
4. Review the Job Embedded Project plan of action using systems thinking as a guide

Systems thinking information was [presented](#) by Tracy Benson, a leader of the Waters Foundation Systems Thinking in Schools Project, who serves as President of the Systems Thinking Group. The Fellows actively engaged in learning around understanding complex systems, systems thinking habits, and systems structures, and had the chance to continue this learning during Tracy Benson's presentations during the subsequent CELO Roundtable.

Meeting 4: Washington, DC, August 11-13, 2015

During the fourth, and last, Leadership Academy meeting for the first Cohort, the Fellows learned about stakeholder engagement, and diversity and cultural competency awareness, both of which are central to effective communications. The group learned from each other as they shared presentations on their JEPs and reflections on the CELO LA.

As a result of this meeting, the Fellows were to:

- Learn about the personal and organizational challenges and the leadership development opportunities associated with effecting policy change through their and their colleagues' Job Embedded Projects
- Identify, classify, and prioritize stakeholders in their states
- Expand their awareness of diversity and cultural competency issues
- Gain tools and tips for engaging stakeholders
- Consolidate their thinking about the coaching experience and leadership development
- Inform development of future CELO Leadership Academies
- Identify ways to stay involved with the CELO Leadership Academy and support future Fellows



- Share their fondest memories of the Leadership Academy, colleagues, and staff

The final meeting of the first cohort of the LA began with each Fellow giving a short presentation on her JEP, the outcomes, and leadership skills learned through the process. There were also presentations and in-depth discussions on Stakeholder Engagement and developing diversity and cultural competency awareness. Discussions and reflections on the overall LA experience were interwoven throughout this final meeting and included working closely with the coaches and offering feedback to the LA planning committee.

Fellows' Feedback on the Meetings

Fellows completed evaluations following each in-person meeting. Generally, the Fellows rated the quality, relevance, and usefulness of each of the meetings high; and identified ways they would apply what they learned to their job responsibilities and Job Embedded Project. For example:

- *I plan to make a conscious effort to think more closely about the approaches I take in leading my work. That may include asking myself "why" I'm making particular decisions, in an effort to get to the root of the strengths and weaknesses of my leadership style... At this point, I've already shared some of my broader lessons learned with my direct boss so that she is aware of the concepts we discuss and how I hope to use them in my future work.*
- *Just this week, the Director of the Office of Head Start visited from DC to help us problem-solve and think strategically. I had the opportunity to use the systems thinking tools to help us all prepare for the visit.*

Coaching Support

Upon acceptance into the LA, each Fellow had the opportunity to interview two prospective coaches and provide a rank order preference to the LA project directors regarding the coach they would like to work with in the LA. Each Fellow was then assigned a highly experienced coach to guide them through their year-long experience as a Fellow.³ The coaches selected to work with the Fellows possessed several key characteristics that qualified them to support the leadership development of the Fellows. Each has extensive leadership experiences in an SEA in an early childhood education capacity and had experience that provided the Fellows a well-rounded look at early childhood education.

Results from the overall evaluation of the LA from the Fellows indicate that the one-on-one coaching component of the LA was highly valued. This individualized support was provided through several LA design features. According to the feedback received from the Fellows, they were supportive, and yet sufficiently challenging to extend the Fellows' learning and application of new leadership skills. Key lessons and commentary on the role of the coaches include:

- Each coach attended all in-person LA meetings. During these meetings coaches participated in the learning outside of the circle of the Fellows. This underscored that the presentation and

³ For more information see 2014-2015 Coaches [here](#).



discussion sessions were targeting the Fellows; coaches were observers of the learning and conversations.

- The LA meetings session was carefully crafted to include planned coaching time between the coaches (one-on-one and small group) and the Fellows. This provided the opportunity for the coach to guide the Fellows' understanding and application of the new information.
- The coaches met regularly via phone (approximately once a month) with each of their Fellows. These calls were generally 90 minutes in length but varied based on the Fellow's need. During these calls the coach posed questions targeting how the LA Fellow was applying the information being learned; how the Fellow was coming along on the JEP and how what was being learned and/or the JEP fit into the bigger picture of her work; and how her leadership skills were evolving. Discussion topics included building relationships, collaboration, time management, RBA, supporting staff, and leadership versus management.

Job Embedded Project

Each Leadership Academy Fellow completed a Job Embedded Project (JEP) to advance her growth as a leader and provide a context for applying concepts and strategies from LA meetings and coaching. See **Appendix A** for the 2015-2016 revised CEELO Leadership Academy Job Embedded Project Plan. Fellows were asked to respond to the questions regarding their initial ideas for the JEP as part of their application to the LA.

1. Identify a goal or responsibility within your current role that offers you an opportunity to apply the new leadership and management skills you will learn during the Leadership Academy.
2. What results do you hope to achieve? What data informs your project? How will you know if your results have been achieved?
3. What organizational and/or systemic challenges do you anticipate facing in implementing your project?
4. How will the proposed project help you to expand and/or improve your leadership skills? Try to be as specific as possible in your response.

Each Fellow completed a Job Embedded Project description of 150 words (e.g., an elevator speech) to quickly describe their JEP. They also completed in December 2015 an initial draft of their JEP plan that outlined the goals, results, assumptions and potential challenges, and leadership development opportunities. Through the course of the LA, some Fellows recognized that their JEPs were too ambitious or not directly connected to their day-to-day work, and therefore difficult to find the time to execute. By the conclusion of the LA, all five of the Fellows had refined their initially proposed JEP with the guidance of their coaches. At the fourth and final meeting, each LA Fellow presented a review of her project to the LA through a Powerpoint presentation organized around the questions designed to identify key outcomes and personal growth in leadership and policy/program implementation.⁴ Fellows

⁴ See 2014-2015 Leadership Academy Agenda and Materials for each Fellow's presentation [here](#).



made significant progress in implementing their JEP and applying new leadership skills and knowledge to achieve these goals. The following Job Embedded Projects were completed by the Fellows:

- Implementing a Mindful Leadership Professional Learning experience with 10 local leaders and 10 professional development facilitators
- Working with five school districts to develop and pilot a statewide plan for increasing inclusive preschool classrooms for young children with identified special needs
- Developing a cross-agency data sharing agreement to support the state early childhood longitudinal data system
- Implementing a new results-based accountability format for reporting on use of cross-agency state funds for children and family services
- Supporting the transition to new professional responsibilities

Impact of the LA and Considerations for Future Leadership Academy Cohorts

Two primary sources of data were reviewed to identify the impact of the LA on the first cohort of Fellows, including monthly coaching logs completed by the two coaches and online evaluations of the four meetings completed by the Fellows. We found the following evidence of impact on the Fellows:

Increased self-knowledge of individual leadership and management strengths and areas for growth

- *“[My Coach] kept asking me questions like “What kind of leadership skills are you using?” My answer: I sent it to them in an email...what else do they need? It finally hit me – ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP, not just management, is required.”* From a JEP presentation.
- *“Recognizes that her initial approach to leadership has changed as a result of LA experiences and relationships; more collaborative and perhaps can operate best in a less bureaucratic system.”* Coaching log quote.
- *“Despite all the issues, feels more in control of reaching out to others; approach problems by looking at the bigger picture; feel more comfortable taking a bigger view of the situation; not just personally focused. Might have just waited in the past and felt not empowered to do anything about the problem. More comfortable talking to people directly with concerns. Thinking about why problems exist and trying to do something about them. Do have to deal with consequences!”* Coaching log quote.
- Fellows have found themselves outgrowing their current spaces, perhaps because of their experiences in the LA. One example: *“[The Fellow] has looked pretty carefully at her own leadership potential and is frustrated that she cannot utilize her skills. The Leadership Academy may have exacerbated her discomfort, but it is causing her to look realistically at who she is and how she might realize her ambitions—if the situation were fair or open, she wouldn’t be so frustrated!”* Coaching log quote. Another example is the movement of the Fellows, one moving



on from SEA work to a position with more national outreach and another moving into a new position with increased status and influence.

- The coach reflects on the coaching log about a Fellow, *“Distinguished between former approach of ‘taking over’ to being more collaborative.”*
- A Fellow set goals for herself at one point with the coach that included, *“To learn how to delegate and trust others to get the job done.”*

Increased knowledge of other programs, resources, and perspectives. Built a network and effective partnerships within the Leadership Academy, within their agency, and with other agencies in their EC system.

- *“Glad to have developed access to resources outside of [my state].”* Coaching log quote.
- *“Never enough time in state government to pick your head up to see what’s around.”* Coaching log quote.
- *“Having a cohort to work with/learn with and from” is of tremendous value.* Coaching log quote.
- One Fellow used the JEP to work on building relationships with other stakeholders in EC in her state. She worked toward partnerships and mentored her subordinates to work collaboratively with all agencies. The JEP pushed her to get many agencies on the same page using *“Mental models, anticipating the concerns of others; Shared Ownership, showing other agencies how [the project] benefits everyone; and Systems thinking, connections within and between systems and that small actions/changes that can leverage desired effect.”* JEP slide.
- *“Developed stronger relationship with IDEA 619 preschool coordinator and consultants [and] encouraged the dialogue between general education preschool staff and special education preschool staff at the school level to think about how their programs could work together.”* One Fellow’s description of the JEP on a slide.

Direct application of content learned in the Leadership Academy

- *“She expects to use much of what she’s learned about herself, organizations, and organizational culture/climate to understand how she can make effective and correct decisions in the future and make an effective transition to her new role/responsibilities.”* Coaching log quote.
- The Myers Briggs exercise helped many of the Fellows understand themselves better, as well as those they work with directly and indirectly. Although not a direct application per se, this information was useful to these leaders as they navigated the systems and the intricacies that come along with complex systems and personnel.
- A few Fellows implemented Results Based Accountability (RBA) in their own state work. One Fellow noted, *“RBA: The Answer to All Ills? RBA gave a great framework for re-thinking the process and desired outcomes for [the state preschool program].”* JEP presentation slide. This



Fellow implemented RBA quickly and fully. Others are implementing in smaller ways or keeping RBA as a goal in mind to work toward.

- The Fellows found the time with their coach to be valuable. And, as noted in the coaching log, *“Used more as an “after-the-storm” support following a difficult roll-out of expansion grants. Got caught up in heavy work demands and said “I guess I could have used a call like this more than I thought.”*

Considerations for Future Leadership Academy Cohorts

Below are several key lessons that were applied to the LA for year 2 implementation:

- *“Interactions with peers and relationships is necessary ingredient; wouldn’t hesitate to expand the group a little but intimacy can’t be jeopardized.”* Coach feedback from coaching log.
- The JEP is about the process not necessarily the product. Seemed to work best when it was focused, doable, and applicable to the everyday work of the Fellows.
- Coach reflection on the log, *“Supervision and coaching has emerged as a new component of her work, something she sees as important pieces of leadership.”*
- Think that LA may want to include a component on working with others in different capacities (supervisor, manager, coach, direct report, etc.) and how to have difficult conversations when necessary.
- Don’t schedule 3 coaching calls on same day! It takes more time to be a coach than actually coaching the person face-to-face.
- Gradually encourage Fellow to take leadership for structuring the coaching call.
- Not sure if journaling has taken hold with Fellows as a habit for reflection.
- On a coaching log, *“Wishes there were more opportunities to be in communication with other Fellows throughout the time period, perhaps a monthly call among themselves BUT it won’t likely happen if they have to organize it themselves because they are so busy.”* And *“Would like to see this be a 2-year program (her state would probably support some costs once a year).”*

The first cohort of the Leadership Academy was a successful pilot. The Fellows expressed satisfaction with their experiences in the Leadership Academy, noting the opportunities to interact with peers, coaches, and noted leaders was invaluable to their growth as early education administrators. As we embark on Cohort 2 (2015=2016) of the Leadership Academy, we note the following:

What Worked Well and Will Continue with Some Adjustments

- **Curriculum:** Results Based Leadership and Systems Thinking in Education faculty and content were highly valued by the Fellows and will be included in the curriculum for Cohort 2. For Cohort 2, we moved RBL content to the first session in order to ensure the Fellows had the benefit of this content in crafting the results of their Job Embedded Project; and Systems Thinking in Education will be presented at the two-day February 2016 meeting. The LA directors are still



considering the curriculum for the final two sessions and will engage the Cohort 2 Fellows in determining precise speakers or content.⁵

- **Coaching:** The process of matching coaches and Fellows encourages Fellows to take leadership in choosing the coach they believed would best support their growth; and in Cohort 2 we also asked the coaches to provide some feedback on the Fellow they felt they could best establish an effective coaching relationship with. In addition to monthly one-on-one coaching, time for individual one-on-one coaching and small-group coaching of the coach and 2 or 3 Fellows will be included in the face-to-face meetings. Coaches will continue to complete the monthly coaching log.
- **Job Embedded Project Plan:** Cohort 2 will be required to develop a JEP, however we will provide greater support on identifying a project that is directly related to current responsibilities and offers opportunity to grow and build leadership skills. We'll begin earlier in the curriculum to help Fellows clarify their project and determine the results. Coaches will continue to provide support in defining and implementing the JEP in coaching calls. We will also build time into each meeting for Fellows to discuss their JEP and increase peer learning and sharing around the JEP in the face-to-face meeting time.

Based on feedback from Cohort 1, we will provide a greater number of interim opportunities for Fellows to reflect and collaborate – including webinars with organizers, but also virtual gatherings among the Fellows only; and build more time for in-depth review and discussion of readings and journaling between sessions. We are planning to extend the 2-day in-person meetings with an additional half day, so that we may engage in greater dialogue with the Fellows to learn from them the day-to-day challenges and opportunities they face in implementing early education policy and to engage them in discussion and informing CEELO's strategic priorities.

⁵ See [here](#) for Leadership Resources shared with LA Fellows.



Appendix A

CEELO Leadership Academy Job Embedded Project Plan October 2015

Your Job Embedded Project provides an opportunity to strengthen and apply leadership and management skills to a critical issue or goal that is important to you and your agency. Each Leadership Academy meeting will include time for you to share progress and reflections on your project and receive feedback from your coach, other Fellows, and CEELO leadership. Each Fellow will also present the results of their project at our final Leadership Academy meeting next August. We also hope you will find opportunities to present your project outcomes and lessons to other audiences in your state or nationally.

Considerations:

You each proposed and briefly described a Job Embedded Project goal in your application, however you have an opportunity to change or revise your Job Embedded Project; to develop and define a project that is part of your current job responsibilities AND provides you with an opportunity to build, strengthen, and stretch your leadership skills. The first meeting in November on Results Based Leadership will offer you an opportunity to further define the results and outcomes of your Job Embedded Project.

By August 12-13, 2016, each Fellow will have completed a Job Embedded Project case study comprising 3 elements: 1) the Project Description, 2) the Project Plan, and, 3) the PPT/Video presentation. Each is explained below. Using this format will bring consistency to how your projects are described and allow project-related interactions to be more effective.

Due December 1, 2015

Project Description (150 words)

This project summary or abstract should convey a concise, clear, description of the project. Think of this as your “elevator speech” -- providing a pithy and powerful explanation of your project and its expected outcomes. It should draw the reader into wanting to know more. These descriptions will be shared with your peers and coaches and will go on the Leadership Academy website, providing a window to the projects to the wider community.

Project Plan

The Project Plan is intended to provide a succinct narrative to guide your work on the Job Embedded Project. It is likely to be an evolving document that is updated regularly as you gain feedback from the project’s implementation and the work with peers, coaches, and faculty during LA meetings.



We are requesting that you revisit your initial project description in your application to accomplish the following:

- Refine and expand your project plan to address the questions outlined below.
- Limit your project plan to 2-4 pages.
- Discuss your revised plan in your first call with your coach.

Job Embedded Project Plan Outline

Project Title:

Summary Description: (150 words)

Purpose:

Why are you doing this work?

Objectives:

1. What specific results do you intend to achieve and how will your results be measured?
2. What are the performance indicators and evidence of success that could reasonably be achieved in the nine months of the LA?

Assumptions and Potential Challenges

1. Identify the role of other state agencies and/or organizations that will be critical to achieving your identified results.
2. Identify the 3-5 individual leaders who are critical to the success of your project and describe how you plan to engage them to achieve your desired results.
3. Describe organization, fiscal, or systemic challenges you anticipate having to face and possible solutions.

Leadership Skills and Competencies

What are your key priorities for strengthening your capacity as an early childhood leader and manager through this project?

April 2016 Project Check-in

Based on your December 2015 Job Embedded Project plan, talk with your coach about the progress of your project. Use these questions as a guide:

1. Given the objectives you set for project, what have you accomplished to date on your project?



2. What evidence have you collected to demonstrate your impact to date based on the performance indicators you identified?
3. What goals do you have for yourself and the project from now until August?
4. What support do you need from CEELO/your coach to be successful with your project?
5. Do you believe that this project enhanced your leadership skills? If so, how? If not, why not?

August 2016: Final Job Embedded Project Presentation

During the August 2016 LA meeting, each Fellow will be expected to present the results of their Job Embedded Project to the full group. Further details and suggestions on format will be discussed at a later date. We are hoping the presentation for the LA will also be used by each Fellow to communicate their LA goals and results to other audiences in their state or nationally.

Please prepare an “artifact” (could be PPT, no more than 5 slides that address the following through words, pictures, data graphs, prezi, or video the following. The following can encompass your experience in the Leadership Academy through the specific lens of your Job Embedded Project. Please address changes in your project as appropriate.

1. What did you do and why?
2. What did you accomplish?
3. How do you know?
4. What leadership skills did you develop? Or do you need to develop?
5. What’s next for you or the Job Embedded Project?