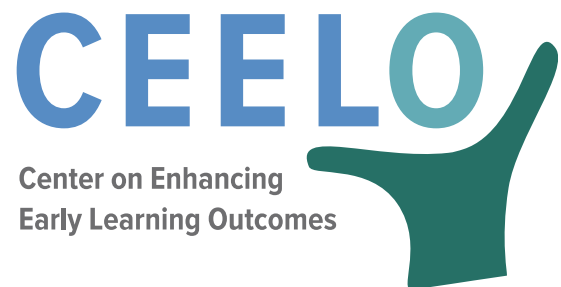


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CEELO Leadership Academy: A Retrospective Review After Three Years of Implementation

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Executive Summary

What We Studied

Launched in 2014, the State Early Learning Leadership Academy was designed to build the competencies of early childhood leaders working in state education agencies. The ultimate goal was to improve the capacity of state agencies so they are more likely to adopt policies and practices that enhance early learning outcomes. The design included several features unique among existing professional development opportunities offered to early childhood administrators in state education agencies. Specifically, participants experienced an intensive, year-long opportunity, applied leadership competencies to a job-embedded project, and received regular coaching to support their leadership development. The Leadership Academy supported adult learning styles, was tailored to leaders working in state government agencies, and provided fellows with additional leadership opportunities.

What We Found

Study participants reported that the Leadership Academy materials, exercises, structure, and information were of high quality and resulted in measurable changes in their skills and competencies as well as enhanced state agency capacity. The Leadership Academy led to personal leadership changes as well as policy changes. All Fellows reported the Academy had a significant impact on their professional growth and development. Many reported the Leadership Academy had informed the conceptualization, refinement, or implementation of specific early childhood policies. The Leadership Academy has led to personal, professional, and institutional improvements. The supervisors interviewed reported they believe the Leadership Academy led to enhanced agency capacity.

What We Recommend

Despite favorable perceptions of the Academy, study participants recommended changes that could improve future Academies. Based on data collected for this study, CEELO has considered and implemented changes to the Leadership Academy and is developing an explicit Theory of Change to both demonstrate results-based leadership and to succinctly communicate the links between Leadership Academy activities and intended short- and longer-term outcomes. The changes include: providing fellows advance information regarding the overall curriculum for the year and expected follow-up activities; incorporating Leadership Academy tools, strategies, and processes into technical assistance and CEELO's work of building state education agency capacity; and, exploring options to expand additional opportunities to offer a Leadership Academy specifically more seasoned, experienced leaders.

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Introduction

State education agencies (SEAs)—notably the mid-level early childhood administrators within these agencies—have significant leadership responsibilities, including oversight of early childhood programs. These administrators have responsibility over state pre-Kindergarten, early childhood special education services, child care, and numerous other projects funded through federal, state, and private dollars.¹ Yet, prior to the CEELO Leadership Academy, these administrators lacked professional development opportunities to support their leadership skills.

Improving learning outcomes for all young children requires skilled and knowledgeable leaders with the capacity to effectively promote early care and education programs and systems. To do so, administrators must be able to work within government to improve policy and promote policy implementation at scale in local communities. In many states, however, state offices of early learning do not have staff who are sufficiently trained to achieve their goals and implement policy effectively. To address this gap, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) designed a State Early Learning Leadership Academy to support the development of state level early education administrators' leadership skills and competencies.

To document the unique elements of the CEELO Leadership Academy and perceptions of the influence of the Academy a team from CEELO conducted a retrospective study in late 2017. This report presents a description of the Leadership Academy in the background section, briefly presents the methods used to collect and analyze data, and presents findings from the analysis.

This report presents the following:

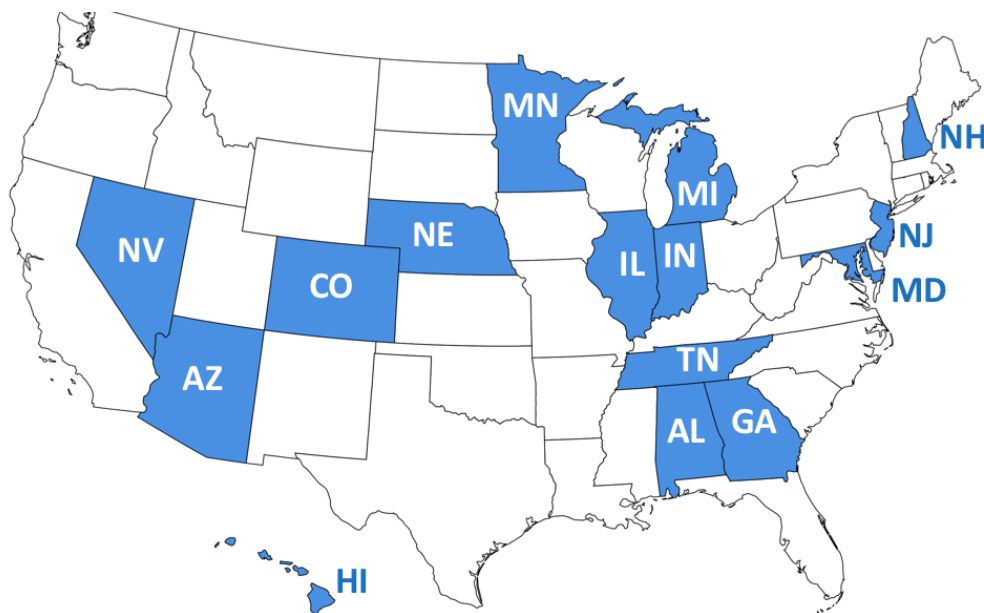
- Description of the Leadership Academy and a snapshot of the methods used to collect data for this study in the Background section
- Findings from the analysis of the Leadership Academy design and the Leadership Academy's impact on participants
- Lessons learned and implications for the design of professional development for state early education administrators
- Recommendations for future Leadership Academies

¹ For example, staff working in state education agencies or similar agencies oversee the following: a) State pre-Kindergarten programs in 43 states, Guam, and the District of Columbia; b) Pre-Kindergarten special education (IDEA Part B services) in all 50 states; c) Infant and toddler special education (IDEA Part C) in 15 states; d) The Head Start State Collaboration Offices in 27 states; and, e) The Child Care and Development Block Grant in 12 states; f) Numerous other projects funded through federal, state, and private dollars. Moreover, state education agency administrators work with other state and federal agencies on program improvement and professional development efforts across all publicly funded early childhood programs and funding streams.

Background

CEELO engaged in an intensive planning process to design a Leadership Academy intended to strengthen leadership competencies of state early education administrators. In 2013, CEELO commissioned, a national expert in early childhood leadership, to review the literature on promising practices from research and experts, conduct a survey of state early education administrators, and conduct interviews with selected stakeholders. The resulting report, [*Building Capacity Through an Early Education Leadership Academy*](#), described the needs of state leaders for leadership development and made recommendations for the design of CEELO's Leadership Academy. The report informed the design of the CEELO Leadership Academy, which was launched in 2014.

From 2014 to 2017, CEELO offered this intensive professional development opportunity in three cohorts, which included 21 leaders across 15 states. Collectively, these leaders oversaw policies and programs that serve an estimated 1 million children and families annually.²



CEELO designed the Leadership Academy to achieve specific, measurable outcomes. Objectives included the following:

² Of the 21 fellows, 14 completed a survey, and these respondents reported that they oversee programs and policies that serve approximately 750,000 children and families annually. Presuming the remaining 10 fellows oversee programs and policies that serve similar numbers of children, we estimate the influence to be at least one million annually.

- Enhance knowledge, skills, and competencies of participants as leaders to support state policies and initiatives that improve pre-Kindergarten through third-grade teaching and learning opportunities
- Increase partnerships with state leaders and organizations to build a more unified, equitable, and efficient birth-through-third grade state early childhood system
- Contribute to participants' professional growth and development so they are better positioned to inform the conceptualization, refinement, and implementation of early childhood policies

The CEELO co-director and director oversee the Leadership Academy and employ a process of continuous quality improvement to its management and content. Appendix A outlines the key activities that CEELO conducted from 2013 through 2017 to design and implement the Leadership Academy.

Methods

A senior technical assistance provider and a consultant to CEELO designed the study. The aims of the study were to: a) describe the unique aspects of the CEELO Leadership Academy; b) gather stakeholder perspectives on how the Leadership Academy informed participants' leadership competency; c) determine how participants have used the knowledge, skills, and experiences from the Leadership Academy to improve the capacity of their respective state offices; and d) gather recommendations to inform future Leadership Academies. See Appendix B for additional details about the methods.

What We Found

Leadership Academy Design

The Leadership Academy was Designed to Build Leadership Skills and Competencies

The CEELO project director, project co-director worked with a consultant to design the CEELO Leadership Academy. This implementation team designed the Leadership Academy to offer cohorts of state leaders opportunities to gather in multi-day meetings four to five times a year to learn from national experts and one another. The team designed the Leadership Academy to support the development of leadership skills and competencies in a number of domains recommended by experts. These domains include but are not limited to, [results-based leadership](#), [systems thinking](#), and [strategic communications](#). In addition, the team designed the Leadership Academy to give fellows opportunities to:

- Learn about leadership practices and tools, such as active listening and meeting facilitation
- Delve more deeply into the content of early childhood policies and programming
- Join in-depth discussions of seminal books and frameworks
- Practice and apply skills and new knowledge to job-embedded projects—designed to address specific issues in their state agencies and are tailored to their state context
- Receive regular coaching to assist with the completion of their job-embedded projects

The Leadership Academy Provides a Unique Professional Development Opportunity

Interviews with designers, faculty, and staff reveal several unique aspects of the Leadership Academy among professional development opportunities offered to state early education administrators. Specifically, CEELO designed the Leadership Academy to address the following components of leadership:

- **Pedagogical and program improvement leadership** addresses content knowledge related to early childhood development and programming and systems as well as strategies for improving programs. Examples of content that was covered include the following:
 - Participants' understanding of research-based best practices for fostering healthy child development and learning across the birth-through-third-grade continuum
 - Strategies for building the capacity of school administrators and early education program managers as instructional leaders
 - Systems for using standards-based assessments of programs, teaching, and children to support continuous program improvement
- **Organizational leadership** focuses on the importance of leading in the complex landscape of early education policy and begins with leadership within state education agencies. Examples of topics covered under this component include:
 - Linking a robust early education agenda to the state's overall education reform agenda
 - Managing staff, money, and relationships with intermediary support organizations
 - Working with other state and federal agencies to harmonize and simplify the burdens of multiple early education funding streams, accountability initiatives, and reporting systems
 - Sustaining a coherent agenda in the state policy environment shaped by legislators, governors, state boards of education, and advocacy organizations

- **Personal leadership** targets skills related to reflection, identification, and refinement of mental models through conversations with other participants to clearly articulate one's personal vision for a high-performing early learning system. This component also aims to enhance fellow's personal skills in areas such as communication, fiscal and project management, and maintaining a balanced approach to work, family, and health.

DESIGN OF THE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

- The Leadership Academy design supports adult learning styles.
- The Leadership Academy is tailored to leaders working in state governments.
- The Leadership Academy provides fellows with leadership opportunities as presenters at national meetings and webinars.
- Participants apply leadership competencies through a job-embedded project.
- Participants receive regular coaching to support their leadership development.
- Participants experience an intensive, year-long opportunity.

Designers, faculty, coaches, and participants were asked to state the most notable and unique aspects of the design of the Leadership Academy. They reported the following aspects as most notable.

- **Participants experience an intensive, year-long opportunity.** The Leadership Academy provides fellows with a chance to work with national leaders, peers, and coaches, which in turn leads to creating stronger networks among early education leaders across the country. In contrast to other professional development experiences, fellows reported that they had the chance to work on personal, organizational, and program improvement competencies and skills, rather than learning one narrow skill set that is specific to one program or funding stream.
- **The Leadership Academy design supported adult learning styles.** Fellows learn by reading, completing job-embedded projects, receiving coaching, engaging in journaling and reflection, learning from peers and national experts, and engaging in team-building through fun, structured activities. This design approach was based on research about effective learning for adults that leads to improved competency.
- **The Leadership Academy was tailored to leaders working in state governments.** CEELO designed the curriculum to take into account the unique challenges and opportunities of emerging leaders working within political and bureaucratic contexts. The curriculum included the following topics:

- What results-based leadership is and how it and other accountability approaches are used across state agencies
- How to engage others by understanding their dispositions through taking and reviewing personal assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality inventory
- What communication strategies are most effective
- How to manage projects during times of change
- How to leverage personal styles to be most effective through journaling and reflection

By focusing on systems thinking, fellows reported learning to reframe challenges into opportunities and to effectively manage both within and across their state agencies.

- **Participants applied leadership competencies to a job-embedded project.** Before beginning the Leadership Academy, each applicant proposes a project and obtains state agency approval for that project. Fellows choose design projects that will effect specific changes within their state agencies. Through conversations with experts and one another, reflection on the project during in-person interactive sessions, reflective journaling, and coaching, fellows consider how to apply lessons learned from the job-embedded project to their leadership role within their state agencies.
- **Participants received regular coaching to support their leadership development.** Former state specialists, with decades of experience navigating early education leadership challenges and managing publicly funded programs, provided Leadership Academy fellows with regular feedback and encouragement. These coaches become “thought partners” as they engaged with fellows to practice skills they learned during in person meeting. The reflective coaching was designed to support Fellows growth, development, and competencies as leaders.
- **The Leadership Academy provided fellows with leadership opportunities as presenters at national meetings and webinars.** To enhance personal and organizational leadership, the Leadership Academy provided opportunities for fellows to present before national audiences at meetings and through webinars.

Leadership Academy Faculty and Coaches Have Expertise with State Early Education Agencies

The cumulative experiences, capacities, and expertise of the Leadership Academy’s faculty and coaches enabled them to provide fellows with an in-depth understanding of leadership within the context of state education agencies. Specifically, faculty, coaches and Leadership Academy designers and facilitators:

- Demonstrated the ability to apply credible experience working with early education leaders, programs and state education agencies. In this capacity, coaches applied their knowledge of what is important to accomplish and their experience accomplishing and documenting results.

- Supported fellows through reflective listening, coaching, and mentoring. In this way, coaches aimed to enhance fellows' understanding of the political, educational, and social context in which they operated.
- Encouraged fellows to apply newly acquired knowledge regarding data acquisition, analysis, presentation, and reporting. Coaches aimed to support fellow's ability to understand successes and challenges, to document progress, and to gather data to demonstrate whether or not desired outcomes were achieved.

Outcomes of the Leadership Academy

Fellows, their agency supervisors, and others engaged in the Leadership Academy described the Leadership Academy as a high-quality professional learning experience. Study participants reported measurable changes in their skills and competencies and supervisors reported improved state agency capacity.

Leadership Academy Led to Improved State Agency Capacity

The supervisors of Leadership Academy fellows were interviewed to obtain their perspectives on the impact of the Leadership Academy on the individual or agency. They provided favorable evaluations, noting the following specific impacts.

One supervisor reported specific changes in policy and practice attributed to the Leadership Academy: *[One of the Fellows I supervise] flourished through the experience. She craves learning opportunities, and it was right up her ally. For her project, she developed a P–3 leadership institute, and we are now looking to expand it statewide. We are looking to support P–3 implementation throughout the state. . . This [the Leadership Academy] has really been valuable. I know that she learned from that experience, and it gave her a level of confidence...to be more assertive and be a thought partner throughout the division.*

Another supervisor reported the Leadership Academy made a big difference in highlighting early learning in his state, saying: *When [the Fellow I supervise] began the Leadership Academy, she was not in a leadership position. Since then, she has been promoted and now supervises an entire unit. Before she attended I was aware that she really knew her stuff, but she was quiet. Now. . . if she is speaking about early learning, she is able to run circles around anyone.*

“[The Leadership Academy enhanced] her ability to work with others, get outside of the minutia and know when to break outside of that to get stuff done and not be constrained by state government.”

This supervisor further reported that some practices the fellow learned, such as results-based planning, have been adopted by leaders in the state agency. He reported that he believes the Leadership Academy has been quite valuable for the state. Because of the skills and capacities gained through the Leadership Academy, the fellow is now positioned to make early learning a priority. He noted: *It was a very low cost and huge, huge benefit.*

Supervisors interviewed stated they would recommend the Leadership Academy to other state leaders because of its benefits to both participants and the state agency. For example, one supervisor noted,

“If you are really grooming someone on your staff to be in a leadership experience, this is just what is needed.”

Another stated, *“State employees don’t get many opportunities for learning at this level.”*

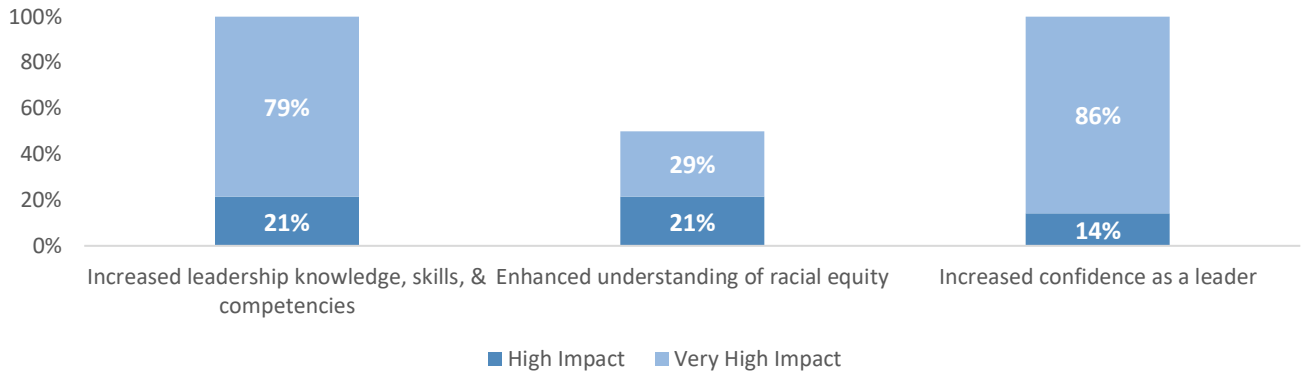
Fellows Reported the Leadership Academy Led to Increased Leadership Knowledge and Skills

Fellows reported the Leadership Academy improved their personal leadership skills and reported a positive influence on their states. For example, several study participants reported using tools and exercises from the Leadership Academy in trainings they conducted in state. Some reported using results-based agenda planning for both agency and external meetings. Participants also perceived that the Leadership Academy led to:

- Increased knowledge, skills, competencies, understanding, and confidence of participants. Specifically, several fellows reported that they were able to support state policies and initiatives that improve early learning opportunities.
- Enhanced professional networks and gave them more confidence speaking about early learning issues. Multiple study participants reported that they now feel more confident working in partnership with state leaders and organizations to build a more unified, equitable, and efficient early childhood system.
- Informed the conceptualization, refinement, and implementation of early education policies.

As noted in Figure 1, all (100%) of the survey respondents reported the Leadership Academy enhanced their leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies and increased their confidence as leaders. About half of responding fellows reported their participation in the Leadership Academy had a strong impact on their understanding of racial equity. The Leadership Academy did not explicitly address racial equity during the first two years and it is therefore not surprising that lower percentages of study respondents reported that the Leadership Academy enhanced their understanding of equity.

Figure 1: Changes in Fellows’ Knowledge, Skills, Competencies, Understanding, and Confidence



Percent of respondents (N = 14)

Leadership Academy Led to Increased Self Awareness and Confidence

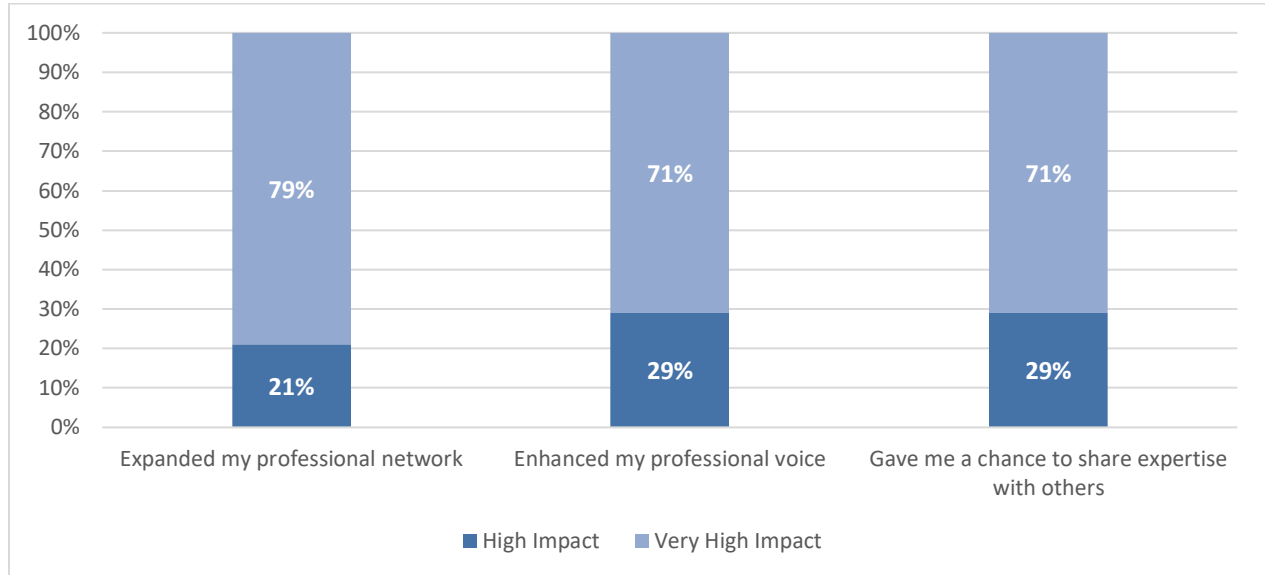
Elaborating on their survey responses, during interviews fellows reported that CEELO coaches and resources improved their competence to lead, self-awareness, empathy, and personal confidence. Some fellows identified specific content of Leadership Academy meetings, while others cited specific formats they especially valued. Following are sample quotes from interviews and surveys:

[I] Truly enjoyed Systems Thinking, Leadership on the Line readings, coaching, and networking. [This fellow noted that she now applies knowledge of results-based leadership, systems thinking, and lessons from Leadership on the Line to her regular work and even to her personal life. She noted that whether she is working on a project with her husband or engaged in church activities, she considers results-based leadership and the systems frameworks and lessons learned and applies these to her life.]

The most important outcome from the Leadership Academy is my increased confidence to use skills related to result based leadership and “Habits of a Systems Thinker.” Follow up consultation with Tracy Benson to apply the Habits of a Systems Thinker directly to my work was especially impactful.

All Fellows reported the Leadership Academy had a “high” or “very high” impact on their professional voice and network, and it gave them a chance to share their leadership and expertise with others. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Changes in Fellows’ Professional Voice, Networks, and Experiences



Percent of respondents (N = 14)

Leadership Academy Led to Expanded Professional Networks

Fellows shared how the Leadership Academy affected their professional networks and reported that they feel they are better able to communicate about key early childhood issues:

The small, intimate group allowed for strong relationships to develop among participants, coaches, and faculty. As a result,

“We have built a network for both professional and personal connection and development.”

As fellows, we continue to connect with each other. We just had a conference call together and shared what’s happening with our personal as well as professional lives. We will be scheduling another call in February and promised to connect in-person soon. . . I just want to extend, again, my deepest thank you for the Academy and its funders, for giving me this amazing experience.

The networking piece was huge. It’s not a traditional networking process, which often feels disingenuous and advantageous. The Cohort model [creates] meaningful relationships with people similar to you but also working through different things. I know I can contact any of those fellows and coaches, and it feels like they would drop everything and help. That is most important—the cohort model.

“I have met amazing leaders through CEELO and am deeply appreciative of the depth of conversations and engagements afforded to me through their outstanding program.”

I will continue to advocate for equitable educational communities for ALL children, which is dependent upon all educational professionals to understand early learning! In addition to school educators, no administrator will be certified again through my center without understanding developmental learning progressions.

I have been reading about confidence . . .

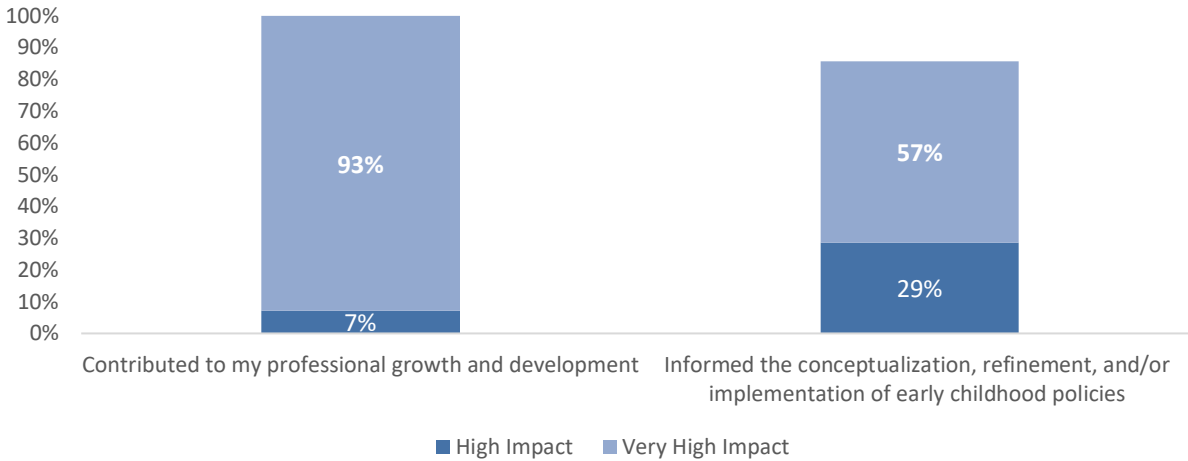
“I do think that my confidence was grown, but I think participating in the Leadership Academy enhanced my ability to be courageous.”

It helped me to start conversations by saying, “I wonder” or “What if? . . .” It gave me tools to know where I was going. With being courageous, and with the skill I gained and the tools, I ended up feeling more confident. The increased confidence resulted from my increased courage, skills, and opportunities. I now know that I am properly equipped and when I am taking a risk, I know it is an educated risk and because of the tools I now have, I feel I have a safety net.

Leadership Academy Led to Improved Ability to Craft or Implement Policy

All respondents reported the Leadership Academy had a “high” or “very high” impact on their professional growth and development as shown in Figure 3. Also, a large percentage (86%) reported that participation in the Leadership Academy has informed the conceptualization, refinement, or implementation of specific early education policies. Those who indicated that it has not yet informed early education policies reported that they have not yet had the opportunity to apply the knowledge or skills gained in the Leadership Academy to specific policies, but they have applied what they learned to practice.

Figure 3: Reported Changes on Leadership and Policy



Percent of respondents (N = 14)

Fellows provided specific comments regarding their perceptions of the impact of the Leadership Academy. Sample comments are:

Following the Leadership Academy, I was appointed the Director of the Office of Early Learning. Currently. . . I am the Senior Director of the department. This position is an “assistant cabinet member” position appointed by the Governor. The department employs around 125 employees.

Although there are no structure-type of changes in my current position, I believe my view on systems thinking has been improved tremendously and the confidence to speak in front of colleagues. Since June 2017, I have facilitated three systems thinking sessions: 2 at [our state] Association for the Education of Young Children and 1 at Region 9 Head Start Association Family Engagement and Cultural Effectiveness Conference. I have been asked to facilitate a similar session for our Early Learning Board and at [our city] AEYC Conference in March. . . I feel that I have brought the habits of systems thinking to [our state].

I have become more involved with NAECS-SDE [the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education] as the Vice President. In addition,

“I find myself attending and presenting at the national level much more than before the Academy.”

Moreover, the analysis of interview data and reviews of job-embedded projects reveals that lessons learned from the Leadership Academy informed state policies and programs. Examples of the ways that fellows applied skills acquired during the Academy include the following:

- Several fellows reported that they are now working to align policies across the SEA with departments overseeing other early education programs. One reported the Academy informed her integrated early childhood data work, and another reported that she now regularly engages with colleagues overseeing other early education programs.
- Some reported that they have incorporated language in funding solicitations that reflects a broader systems-thinking framework and a focus on results.
- Drawing on lessons from the Leadership Academy, a participant from one state worked with state stakeholders to create a new statewide early childhood credential.
- One fellow designed a P–3 academy and is in the process of refining it to implement statewide next year. The fellow’s supervisor reported, “*We are still working to grow that particular project and expand it statewide. . . This [Academy and job-embedded project] has really been valuable.*”

In sum, reports from both fellows and their supervisors illustrate that participation in the Leadership Academy encouraged growth in personal leadership and enhanced capacities of state education agencies to advance early learning priorities.

Lessons Learned: Implications to Inform Professional Development for State Leaders

Collectively, the data gathered for this retrospective study yielded several lessons to inform future professional development activities targeting early education specialists, especially initiatives designed to support leadership development. The project director and co-director offered their perspectives on their roles designing and implementing the Leadership Academy. One notable benefit of designing, participating in, and delivering the Leadership Academy has been the inclusion of many of the concepts and skills taught in the Leadership Academy in other aspects of CEELo’s work. In the words of the co-director, “*I have incorporated many of the concepts into virtually everything I do.*”

Several themes emerged from the analysis of interview and survey data, as well as the analysis of documents ranging from logs and agendas to materials produced for job-embedded projects.

LESSONS LEARNED TO INFORM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STATE LEADERS

- Model continuous quality improvement
 - Support peer-to-peer networking
 - Engage participants with national experts
 - Model reflective practice and systems thinking
 - Focus attention on gender and racial equity issues
 - Build confidence through regular interactions with individuals in similar roles
 - Provide opportunities to connect with experts engaged in other aspects of early education
 - Support the use of a results-based leadership framework in their work
-
- **Model continuous quality improvement.** Study participants reported that the Leadership Academy’s modeling of continuous quality improvement was beneficial. Several noted that it not only enhanced the overall quality of the professional development experience, but also demonstrated the effective use of formative data. Several interviewees recommended that CEELO highlight how the unique aspect of employing a continuous quality improvement framework, using data, and being open to recommendations and feedback have led to a stronger Leadership Academy design over time. For example, used formative data to amplify the focus on racial equity and highlighted this as an important use of formative data. During the first two Academy cohorts, issues of equity were addressed only indirectly, but in 2017 the topic racial equity was added to the Leadership Academy curriculum. Several study participants reported that this was a good example of using formative data for continuous quality improvement.
 - **Support peer-to-peer networking.** Several interviewees continue to network with their cohorts through dinners at national meetings and even through a special Facebook group. We recommend making follow-up networking an explicit focus of future Leadership Academies. Providing fellows with details about how previous cohorts have connected and advice about how to continue to network could further solidify a practice that emerged for some but not all cohorts.
 - **Engage participants with national experts.** Fellows reported the opportunity to engage with national experts provided both content knowledge and confidence as leaders. Although many described this engagement as beneficial, a number reported that they did not want to burden leaders after the conclusion of their cohort activities.

They reported that they understood the faculty received stipends for their work during the Leadership Academy and were not certain of the boundaries of their availability for ongoing consultation. We recommend that future cohorts of fellows receive clear advice regarding the boundaries and expectations regarding outreach to national experts after the Leadership Academies.

- **Model reflective practice and systems thinking.** Participants reported that seeing systems thinking modeled was beneficial. Specifically, several reported that since participating in the Leadership Academy and seeing how reflective practice was used, they now incorporate this into their work and personal lives. We recommend that future Leadership Academies continue to model reflective practice and systems thinking.
- **Focus attention on racial and gender equity issues.** Attention to the cultural perspective of early childhood educators, women as leaders, racial equity, and how to use more limited power to gain leadership was an important aspect of the Leadership Academy. Several fellows reported they gained confidence and saw that they could lead. Many said that they feel those working in early childhood are valued less than those working with older children, but the Leadership Academy experience gave them the confidence to address this issue. We recommend that future Leadership Academies continue to focus on issues of racial equity and explicitly address issues of gender equity.
- **Build confidence through regular interactions with individuals in similar roles.** Fellows reported they built confidence through regular interactions with administrators working in state education agencies who faced similar policy and resource constraints and yet were charged with similar responsibilities. Several participants reported that through regular conversations with their peers they learned about promising approaches and challenges that they shared with others in the administration of early care and education programs and policies. We recommend that future Academies continue to cultivate relationships among fellows as a way to enhance peer networks and build knowledge and capacity.
- **Provide opportunities to connect with experts engaged in other aspects of early education.** Several fellows said they benefited from cohorts that included individuals working solely on special education issues as well as some responsible for state-wide pre-K. We recommend that future Leadership Academies focus attention on the roles and responsibilities of the fellows in cohort with an emphasis on sharing information about how responsibilities differ by role.
- **Supports the use of a results-based leadership framework in their work.** Currently the CEELo Leadership Academy does not have an articulated Theory of Change. Creating a Theory of Change could be useful to model results-based leadership and to communicate the logical links between Leadership Academy activities and desired short and longer-term outcomes. Similarly, gathering baseline data through systematic surveys of fellows and then administering such surveys over time would enable the

Leadership Academy designers in describing the changes participants experience after participating in the Academy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout the four years of the State Early Learning Leadership Academy, the implementation team used data and recommendations to modify the Academy. For example, the team used data collected during the design phase, point-of-time surveys and end-of-year evaluations to modify the design of the Academy. Key changes that were made since the first year include the following:

- Refinements to the curriculum to streamline and target the focus on systems thinking, results-based leadership, and communication as the curricular areas.
- An explicit focus on racial equity by discussing implicit biases throughout the fellowship year
- An understanding that the development of the job-embedded project would allow for an iterative process of making adjustments that reflect the application of the content learned during in person meetings.

Additional recommendations emerged from this retrospective study. Specifically, we recommend that future Leadership Academies be designed with the following considerations in mind:

- **Create a Theory of Change to demonstrate results-based leadership.** Although the Leadership Academy modeled results-based leadership, several fellows reported that a Theory of Change that demonstrates the logical links between Leadership Academy activities, outputs, and outcomes could be useful for communicating to state agency leaders and informing the design of an evaluation.
- **Develop an evaluation that includes baseline data collection, follow-up, and final data collection and analysis.** Although survey data were used to inform changes in the design of the Leadership Academy, a more robust proactive evaluation, including baseline data and data over time, would be useful in documenting changes and outcomes.
- **Provide participants with information regarding the overall curriculum for the year and follow-up activities.** While participants appreciated having general information about the design of the Academy, they reported that specific information on the dates, times, locations, curriculum, and follow-up activities expected of fellows would be useful. In particular, participants requested more details regarding the expectations for engaging with their cohort and whether to contact national experts.
- **Incorporate Leadership Academy tools, strategies, and processes in technical assistance and the work of building SEA capacity.** In recent months, CEELo has developed a Leadership Toolkit that will be available to technical assistance providers and state education agency staff. Nonetheless, those involved in this study reported the

importance of articulating a clear strategy to use the information compiled through the Leadership Academy.

- **Explore offering a Leadership Academy specifically for senior leaders.** Participants of this study reported that the Leadership Academy led to substantial benefits. Several also noted that the knowledge, skills, and competencies could be beneficial to senior leadership within SEAs. However, these participants also strongly recommended that the Leadership Academy continue to focus on mid-level leadership.
- **Investigate allowing teams of participants to attend the Leadership Academy.** Several fellows reported they had benefited from learning about the experience of fellows who had participated previously and wished they could attend as a team. Although allowing teams (as opposed to individuals) to participate in the Leadership Academy would present unique challenges in terms of confidentiality and potential issues raised during the in-person meetings, it is important to reflect on this consideration as some believe a team design could offer additional value.

Findings of this study will be used to inform new cohorts of CEELO's Leadership Academy beginning with Cohort 4 which was launched in March 2018. We hope these findings also spark additional opportunities for state early education leaders to build leadership skills to effectively implement policies and achieve goals for the children in their states and beyond.

Appendix A. Key Activities

Table 1: Key Activities in the Development and Implementation of the Leadership Academy

| Time Period | Key Activities |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 2013–2014 Leadership Academy Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensive planning and development process to ensure the Leadership Academy directly builds leadership capacities of individual fellows, with the end result of building the capacity of state agencies to enhance early learning outcomes ▪ Tailored design to state early education administrators to advance early childhood education, improve effectiveness of birth through five programs, advance policies to improve kindergarten through third grade, partner with state leaders to build a unified and equitable birth-through-third-grade early childhood system ▪ Leadership Academy design based on <i>Building Capacity through an Early Education Leadership Academy</i>, a policy brief by Dr. Stacie Goffin |
| 2014–2015 Leadership Cohort Academy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External facilitator coordinated faculty, coaches, and fellows and documented process of administering the academy ▪ Six fellows were selected representing Alabama, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Tennessee ▪ Curriculum began with results-based leadership and included one-day meeting on systems thinking |
| 2015–2016 Leadership Cohort Academy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refined application process to streamline the approach ▪ Seven fellows were selected representing Nevada, Illinois, Minnesota, Arizona, Michigan, Maryland, and Alabama ▪ Based on feedback from fellows, curriculum shifted to begin with a two-day systems thinking workshop |

| Time Period | Key Activities |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 2016–2017 Leadership Cohort Academy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Refined application process to reflect lessons learned during the more time-intensive review of the applicants from previous cohorts▪ Seven fellows were selected representing Indiana, Illinois, Hawaii, Nebraska, Georgia, Alabama, and Colorado▪ Curriculum expanded to include lessons on communication and implicit bias, race, equity, and inclusion▪ CELO leaders instituted a process of convening faculty to create smooth transitions across each component of the Leadership Academy |

Appendix B. Retrospective Review Methods

One senior CEELO technical assistance provider led the design of the review with the assistance of a former Leadership Academy fellow who is currently a CEELO consultant. Table 2 below describes the methods employed for the study.

Table 2: Data Collection Activities

| Evaluation Activity | Target Audience | Purpose | Number |
|---------------------|--|--|--------|
| Survey | Leadership Academy Fellows | Obtain evaluation data regarding the quality and reported outcomes of the Leadership Academy | 14 |
| Interviews | State specialists who participated as Leadership Academy fellows, coaches, and faculty, as well as supervisors of fellows | Obtain perspectives regarding the nature of the Leadership Academy, as well as its quality, relevance, usefulness, and outcomes | 16 |
| Document Reviews | Reviews of the curriculum, notes that documented the in-person meetings, logs, documentation regarding the job-embedded projects, and evidence of outcomes that fellows attributed to the Leadership Academy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the nature of the Leadership Academy ▪ Analyze data to create summaries that describe the nature, intensity, and impact of the technical assistance ▪ Analyze the quality of the data to improve the consistency and usefulness of data | N/A |

Appendix C. Summary of the CEELO Leadership Academy Retrospective Study

By Tracy Jost

Improving learning outcomes for all young children requires skilled and knowledgeable leaders who are disposed to effectively promote early care and education program and system goals. Yet, state early education administrators—those responsible for overseeing pre-Kindergarten policies and programs—vary in their leadership competencies. To address this gap, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) designed a Leadership Academy to support the development of early education administrators' leadership skills and competencies.

WHAT CEELO DID

CEELO engaged in an intensive planning process to design a Leadership Academy tailored to specifically strengthen leadership competencies of individuals responsible for state early childhood education systems, programs, and policies. CEELO is a national technical assistance center funded in 2012 by the U.S. Department of Education. Drawing on research, promising practices from thought leaders, interviews with stakeholders, and data compiled from a needs assessment, CEELO tailored the Academy to emerging leaders responsible for early education programming who had a track record of accomplishments. To date, CEELO has offered the intensive Leadership Academy to 21 leaders across 15 states.

The most notable unique features are as follows:

- Participants experience an **intensive, year-long opportunity** to work with national leaders, peers, and coaches that leads to stronger networks among early childhood leaders across the country.
- Fellows participate in readings, complete job-embedded projects, receive coaching, engage in journaling and reflections, learn from peers and national experts, engage in team-building through structured and fun activities.
- The Academy curriculum is tailored to **early learning specialists working in state government** to account for the unique challenges and opportunities of emerging leaders working within political and bureaucratic contexts. The curriculum offers Fellows opportunities to learn about Results Based Leadership and Accountability approaches used across state agencies, how to engage others by understanding their dispositions through taking and reviewing personal assessments such as the Myers-Briggs, what strategic communication strategies are most effective, and how to manage projects during times of change and learn about their own personal styles that are most effective through journaling and reflection.

- The Academy offers Fellows the opportunity to **apply lessons through a job-embedded project** that each applicant articulated prior to participation. These projects are chosen by Fellows and designed to effect specific changes within their state agencies. With experts and one another, reflection on the project during in person interactive sessions, reflective journaling, and coaching, Fellows were encouraged to consider how to apply lessons learned from the job-embedded project to their leadership role within their state agencies.
- **Coaches**, former state specialists with decades of experience navigating early childhood leadership challenges and managing publicly funded programs, **provide each Fellow with regular support and feedback**. The coaches offer each Fellow a “thought partner” by engaging in reflective coaching that is designed to support ongoing growth and development. Through regular support, coaches help Fellows practice skills learned during in-person meetings to support development of leadership competency

WHAT CEELO EXPECTED

CEELO designed the Leadership Academy with the aim of achieving specific, measurable outcomes. The objectives are to support participants so they are better positioned to:

- Improve the effectiveness of publicly-funded programs for children from birth through age five
- Improve the implementation of state policies and initiatives that improve pre-Kindergarten through third grade teaching and learning opportunities
- Increase partnerships with state leaders and organizations to build a more unified, equitable, and efficient birth through third grade state early childhood system

WHAT THE RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW DOCUMENTED

A senior technical assistance provider and consultant to CEELO designed a review with the aim of describing the unique aspects of the CEELO Leadership Academy, gathering stakeholder perspectives on how the Academy informed participants’ leadership capacity, and in turn, how the participants (called Fellows) have used the knowledge, skills and experiences from the Leadership Academy to improve the capacity of their respective state offices of early learning to better target their work to improve early learning outcomes.

Fellows reported that the Leadership Academy led to improvements in their personal leadership as well as outcomes for their states. Specifically, the Fellows reported that participation. . .

- Increased knowledge, skills, and competencies as a leader
- Enhanced understanding of racial equity
- Expanded their professional network

- Enhanced their professional voices
- Provided a chance to share expertise with others
- Increased their confidence as leaders
- Contributed to their professional growth and development
- Informed the conceptualization, refinement, and/or implementation of early childhood policies

Participants in the retrospective study reported that the Leadership Academy improved outcomes for the participating fellows and led to some improvements in state education agency capacities. Specifically, all (100%) of the survey respondents reported that the Leadership Academy had a strong impact on their leadership knowledge, skills and competencies and increased their confidence as a leader. Less than half reported that their participation in the Academy had a strong impact on their understanding of racial equity. This is not surprising as the issue of racial equity was introduced to the third cohort of Fellows but not the previous cohorts. Additionally, the study participants reported that the Leadership Academy's design toward continuous quality improvement led to enhancements of future Leadership Academies through recommendations and feedback. This process allowed for adjustments to benefit subsequent cohorts and enhancements to the curricula such as adding-in a more intensive content focus on equity.

Lessons Learned

Despite highly favorable perceptions of the Leadership Academy, several study participants recommended changes that could improve future Leadership Academies. Based on analysis data collected for this study, we recommend CEELO consider the following changes to future Leadership Academies:

- Create an explicit Theory of Change to both demonstrate results-based leadership and to succinctly communicate the links between Leadership Academy activities and intended short- and longer-term outcomes
- Develop an evaluation that includes baseline data collection, follow-up, and final data collection and analysis
- Provide participants with information regarding the overall curriculum for the year and expected follow-up activities
- Incorporate Leadership Academy tools, strategies, and processes into technical assistance and CEELO's work of building state education agency capacity
- Explore options to expand additional opportunities to offer a Leadership Academy specifically for senior leaders

- Investigate the possibility of allowing teams of participants to attend the Leadership Academy

Additional findings from coaches and faculty were also captured. Please review the ***Leadership Academy Retrospective*** for more detail.

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES

As managers of this flagship project, CEELO directors have always applied a process of continuous quality improvement to the Academy, and changes are made that reflect this ongoing process. CEELO's Leadership Academy Cohort 4 launched in April 2018 and will continue through March of 2019. CEELO hopes that these future leaders will become strong advocates and managers to create effective policies impacting children aged birth-grade 3.

Reports from both fellows and their supervisors illustrate that participation in the Leadership Academy encouraged growth in personal leadership and enhanced capacities of state education agencies to advance early learning priorities.

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) strengthens the capacity of State Education Agencies (SEAs) to lead sustained improvements in early learning opportunities and outcomes. CEELO works in partnership with SEAs, state and local early childhood leaders, and other federal and national technical assistance (TA) providers to promote innovation and accountability. For other *CEELO Policy Reports, Policy Briefs, and FastFacts*, go to <http://ceelo.org/ceelo-products>.

The Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) is a partnership of the following organizations:



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