

Leading Change: The Vision and Impact of the Whole Leadership Framework

BY MARIE L. MASTERSON AND TERI N. TALAN

Leadership development in early education and care is one of the [most pressing priorities](#) in the field today. The newly released report, [Top Down-Bottom Up: Building a State Child Care Center Workforce \(2024\)](#), emphasizes the critical role of program leaders. “Program leadership should be included in all aspects of stabilizing the workforce” (15). While much attention and funding from local, state, and national policymakers has focused on building the qualifications of the workforce and supporting the skills of teachers, [early childhood leadership](#) holds the potential to stabilize and strengthen the workforce from within early childhood organizations. In turn, strong early childhood organizations have a positive impact on the strength and stability of communities and systems.

The field must reposition leadership in early childhood programs as essential to [advancing equity](#), justice, inclusion, and belonging, with leaders facilitating the practical and meaningful work of creating caring learning communities for staff and families, as well as children. Program administrators must step into the important role of the pedagogical leader as a matter of equity to ensure access to the highest quality teacher-child interactions, developmentally appropriate learning environments, and rich curriculum experiences that promote child development and learning. In these ways, strong program leaders are gatekeepers of quality, providing for the health and stability of programs, maximizing staffing resources and well-being, and collaborating within communities of practice to sustain effectiveness and impact.

Since 2017, the Whole Leadership Framework has provided a conceptual model for national competencies for early childhood program leaders. The framework is aligned with the *Program Administration Scale: Measuring Whole Leadership in Early Childhood Centers, Third Edition* (2022) by Talan, Bella, and Bloom, utilized by more than a dozen state Quality Improvement Systems and Aim4Excellence, which provides training for the national early childhood administrator’s credential, and utilized by 26 state professional development systems and the Department of Defense. The book, [Building on Whole Leadership: Energizing and Strengthening Your Early Childhood Programs](#) (2019) by Masterson, Abel, Talan, and Bella, is used nationally in higher education leadership coursework, as well as in other leadership training.

For states embracing administrator credentialing and the use of competencies, the Whole Leadership Framework provides an organizing structure. For example, the Illinois Director Credential has ten administrative content areas organized by the three domains of the Whole Leadership Framework. Other states have used the framework as a model when developing core knowledge competencies for program administrators.

With the seismic changes in the profession since 2017, the framework has been revised to reflect critical transformations. The revision processes and significant changes to the framework are presented in [Updates to the Whole Leadership Framework: Responding to Voices in the Field](#), published in Exchange Press by Masterson, Talan, and Bella in the May 2024 edition of Exchange.

Listening to the voices from the field is a core element of the current transformations in the early childhood education and care field. A new mantra – *Nothing about us without us!*—has been championed by an empowered workforce. In response, we recognize the many contributors and their significant contributions to the revised Whole Leadership Framework. These contributions include:

- Feedback from over 200 program leaders participating in the [Building Leaders initiative](#) who were asked whether the Whole Leadership Framework represents the competencies needed to effectively lead early childhood programs situated in centers, schools, and family childcare homes;
- Feedback from 65 program leaders of color participating in [Leading with Equity: Building Leaders, Part II](#), who were asked about the impact of race, culture, and language on their professional journeys;
- Updated competencies to identify and address structural barriers and remove [deeply embedded inequities](#) that impact children and families;
- Revisions to professional standards and competencies, specifically the NAEYC Position Statements on Advancing Equity (2019) and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (2020), and the revised book, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children Ages Birth through Age Eight, Fourth Edition* (2022);
- Content expert review and feedback from the field regarding the development of the Program Administration Scale: Measuring Whole Leadership in Early Childhood Centers, Third Edition; and
- Peer review of conference presentations and [published blogs](#) focused on the framework and whole leadership in practice.

The feedback, critical values, and revisions have been incorporated into the competency area of Administrative Leadership, which includes four areas of operational, strategic, advocacy, and community leadership. Through these competencies, leaders guide the vision and goals of organizations, provide administrative and fiscal management, facilitate oversight of the infrastructure of daily operations, lead competency-building for staff, develop and foster partnerships with families and the community, instill professionalism, and guide ongoing quality improvement as a priority for growth.

Similarly, the competencies of Pedagogical Leadership address how leaders support educators to implement inclusive and developmentally appropriate curriculum, build on family strengths, promote equitable engagement, and foster vital advocacy on behalf of children and families.

Finally, updates to Leadership Essentials anchor the work of the organization, as leaders create a culture of caring and equity through competencies in leadership for quality improvement, intrapersonal and interpersonal leadership, and culturally responsive leadership. Importantly, positive relationships with supervisors and overall organizational well-being are essential to staff stability. Teachers who report [high levels of connectedness](#) with other staff, better supervisor support, and more control over their work

report lower stress, provide higher quality care, and are [less likely to leave their jobs](#). The competencies of Leadership Essentials offer tools for valuing and building on the talents and strengths of program staff and families and provide critical elements for organizational health, stability, and growth.

We invite you to download the [Whole Leadership Framework](#) and incorporate the competencies in your work. We also invite you to read the Exchange article, [Updates to The Whole Leadership Framework: Responding to Voices in the Field](#), and provide additional feedback and reflections about the use of the framework in your state's early childhood system, early childhood program, or professional growth.

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