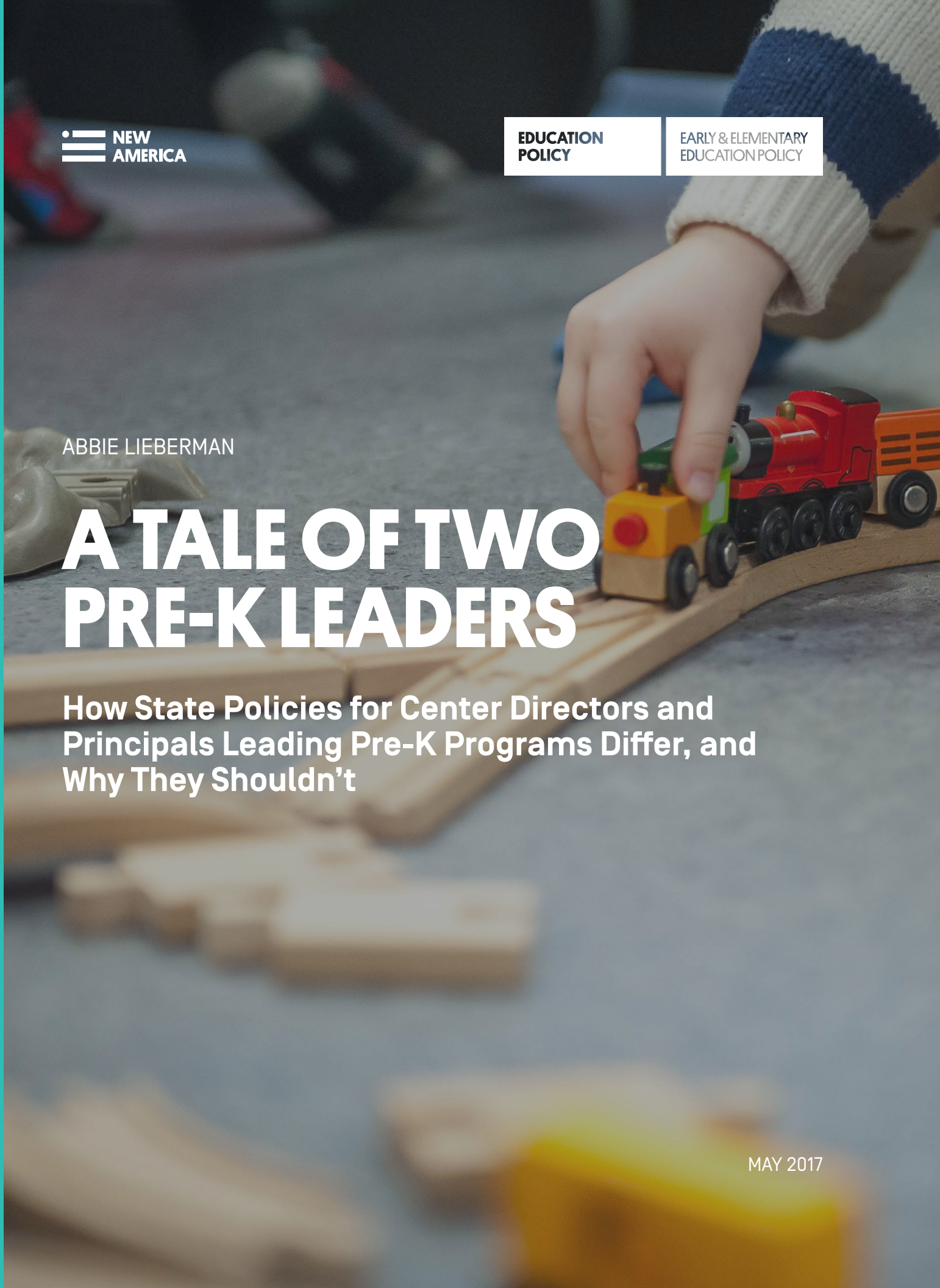

NEW AMERICA

EDUCATION POLICY | EARLY & ELEMENTARY EDUCATION POLICY

ABBIE LIEBERMAN

A TALE OF TWO PRE-K LEADERS

How State Policies for Center Directors and Principals Leading Pre-K Programs Differ, and Why They Shouldn't

MAY 2017

About the Author

Abbie Lieberman is a policy analyst on the Early & Elementary Education Policy team at New America, where she provides research and analysis on policies that impact children from birth through third grade. Prior to joining New America, she interned on the legislative affairs team at Education Trust and at the U.S. Department of Education working on the 2013 Race to the Top District competition. Lieberman graduated from University of California, Davis with a bachelor's degree in sociology and political science. She also holds a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University.

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INTRODUCTION

Weekdays start early for Amy Lobo, a child care center director outside of Baton Rouge, LA. At around 5 a.m., Lobo starts rearranging staff schedules for the day as she receives text messages from employees who call in sick or say they will be late to work. Her center, which serves over 200 children ranging in age from six weeks to 12 years, is open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Once she arrives at the center, her morning is spent checking in with staff, greeting families, and observing classrooms. A new pre-K curriculum was donated to her center last year and she is teaching her staff how to implement it.

Lobo has been working in child care as a teacher, assistant director, and director for more than 20 years. Yet, to qualify for this job in Louisiana, she was only required to have six semester hours in early childhood education or 90 clock hours of training with three years of experience working in a child care center. She happens to have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, however, because she used to teach pre-K in a state where it was a requirement. Between her higher education and extensive teaching experience, she feels that she "knew everything about children before becoming a center director but didn't know anything about management." Yet managing the business is how she spends a significant portion of her time. Much of her day is spent in her office dealing with scheduling, incident reports, and "lots and lots of paperwork." Lobo takes great pride in her work and wishes people understood that "early childhood is just such an important part of children's lives." She says, "sometimes I think people just think it's a daycare. But they're learning."

About 1,200 miles north, just outside of Minneapolis, MN, Joey Page starts his day in a similar way. He arrives at Richfield STEM Elementary, where he is principal, by 6:30 a.m. so that he has plenty of time to figure out any changes in staffing for the day, check in with teachers, and deal with last minute problems before his 780 students arrive. Throughout the day, Page tries to spend as much time in classrooms as possible, both doing formal teacher evaluations and just popping in to read stories with the students. He says, "outside of safety and security of the building, instructional leadership is my number one priority." With an assistant principal who helps to cultivate a positive school climate and an instructional coach who works to implement standards and curriculum, Page has the supports he needs to spend a good portion of his day connecting with students.

Page has been a principal for 13 years and has been at Richfield STEM Elementary for seven. He started as a third and fourth grade teacher, and gradually took on leadership roles at his former schools, such as working as the school's media director, thus gaining informal experience. Formally, he

earned his principal credential in Minnesota and then pursued a doctorate in educational school leadership. He says it is the "blending of formal preparation, the mentoring, [and] the opportunities from delegation" that prepared him well for his job.

Both Lobo and Page are responsible for overseeing pre-K classrooms. She has 41 pre-K students and he has 75. Each day they work to ensure that the young children in their charge are provided high-quality learning opportunities. But even for two children living in the same neighborhood, pre-K can look markedly different depending on where the classroom is. Some children attend pre-K in a child care center like Lobo's that they have been going to since they were infants, while others attend public pre-K in an elementary school building like Page's where they will be until they are 10 or 11. Both settings have the potential to provide three- and four-year-olds with the high-quality, strong foundation they need to succeed throughout their schooling. Well-prepared and highly competent staff make a big difference and this includes program leaders with the right expertise.

While workdays for Lobo and Page may look similar and their programs are serving some of the same kinds of students, the state policies and standards that establish requirements for their roles look very different.

In order to understand these differences, New America conducted a scan of state policies on leader preparation requirements, licensure, professional learning, and compensation to shed light on the current expectations for center directors and principals, identify areas for improvement in state policy, and highlight states that are leading on leaders. We found that requirements are not only inconsistent across states, but also that disparate requirements for center directors and principals lead to different challenges for each. Research shows that principals too often come into their jobs without a strong understanding of how young children learn, and center directors tend to have limited training in instructional leadership.[1] State policies are doing little to address this. Despite the similarities in their jobs, center directors are held to much lower standards and given less support than elementary school principals.

This report explains our methodology, discusses each of the indicators collected, reports findings, and provides recommendations for steps states can take to better support early childhood education leaders. In this report, we define pre-K as any early care and education program serving three- and four-year-olds, whether publicly or privately funded, whether located in public schools or community-based settings. Our findings are also available on New America's website through an interactive data visualization, which can be accessed at www.newamerica.org/in-depth/pre-k-leaders/.

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The Value of High-Quality Pre-K Programs

Across the United States, there has been increased focus on the importance of pre-K in recent years. Many state and local governments have been expanding access to public pre-K programs. Republican and Democratic leaders have promoted these programs' value. The Obama administration accelerated these efforts through competitive federal grant programs like Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge and Preschool Development Grants, which supported early learning infrastructure and expanded access to high-quality programs in select states. Polls by the First Five Years Fund show that three-quarters of Americans across the political spectrum support increased public investment in early childhood education.[2]

Part of this support stems from multiple studies of large and small programs around the country over the past quarter century, which suggest that high-quality early childhood education, pre-K included, can have remarkable benefits for children later in school. Pre-K attendance can lead children to perform better in kindergarten, reduce their chances of needing special education services or repeating a grade, and even increase the likelihood that they graduate from high school.[3] High-quality programs benefit all children, but are especially beneficial for children from low-income and minority families and for dual language learners, all of whom are likely to begin school behind their peers.[4] These long-term impacts have led economists to conclude that for some early childhood education programs, every dollar invested can have as much as a 13 dollar return to society, depending on program length, and most importantly, program quality.[5]

The plentiful research base confirms that expanding public pre-K is smart policy, and the broad public and government support is a sign that the time has come. But the impressive outcomes that early education promises are only possible when programs are high quality. Many factors impact program quality, but researchers agree that one of the most important indicators of quality is the nature of the interactions between adults and children in the classroom.[6] Forming positive relationships with teachers and caregivers fosters children's academic and social-emotional development; it is essential to their learning. It is school and program leaders that establish conditions making this kind of quality possible. Unfortunately, when it comes to discussions about improving pre-K quality, leaders are rarely given sufficient attention.

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, 29 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in state pre-K programs, 9 percent are enrolled in Head Start, 13 percent are enrolled in special education programs, and the other 59 percent are enrolled in privately-funded programs, locally-funded programs, or no program at all.[7] Publicly-funded programs may be located in an elementary school or a child care center. Because pre-K students participate in such a variety of programs, it is important to look beyond federal and state programs and discuss more broadly how the principal and director role is essential for providing high-quality teaching and learning experiences for preK-aged children in all settings.

IMPORTANCE OF LEADERS IN PRE-K

The quality of an early childhood education program is largely dependent on an often overlooked group of professionals: school or program leaders. After teachers, research shows that school leaders are the greatest in-school factor impacting student achievement.[8] A great deal of attention in K–12 education policy has been paid to improving educator quality over the last few decades, leading to various efforts at the federal, state, and local level. In 2015, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released the seminal report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, that brought much-needed attention to the importance of strengthening the early education workforce as well. The report builds on past research on how much children are able to learn from a very early age, and explains the complex nature of effectively educating children during the first eight years of life. But most of the policy changes that have come about based on the large body of research highlighting educator effectiveness have focused on teachers. Much less attention has been paid to leaders.

Directors in child care centers and principals in elementary schools both oversee pre-K classrooms. In addition to determining how well their programs run day-to-day, these leaders also influence the quality of learning experiences offered to children. While staffing intricacies may vary, both center directors and principals are usually expected to be both operational and instructional leaders. As operational or administrative leaders, they are responsible for ensuring finances are in order; allocating what are often limited resources; recruiting, retaining, and managing personnel; and communicating with families. As instructional leaders, they select curricula and assessments and work closely with teachers to ensure that they are best serving students. The *Transforming the Workforce* report lays out the knowledge and competencies leaders need to work with young children. (See page 6)

Principals and center directors establish conditions for quality of the rest of the staff. For leaders to know whether teachers are providing appropriate instruction to their students and to best support both teacher and child development, they must understand how young children learn.

Principals and center directors need preparation and professional development to build the knowledge and competencies outlined in *Transforming the Workforce*. They also need sufficient time, resources, and supports to effectively run their programs and provide high-quality learning environments for young children. Unfortunately, the existing requirements for training and certifying both principals and center directors in most states fall short in several ways, especially when it comes to imparting the latest research on best practices for child development and early learning.

Knowledge and Competencies for Leadership in Settings with Children Birth Through Age 8

Practices to Help Children Learn

- Understanding the implications of child development and early learning for interactions between care and education professionals and children, instructional and other practices, and learning environments.
- Ability to keep current with how advances in the research on child development and early learning and on instructional and other practices inform changes in professional practices and learning environments.

Assessment of Children

- Knowledge of assessment principles and methods to monitor children's progress and ability to adjust practice accordingly.
- Ability to select assessment tools for use by the professionals in their setting.

Fostering a Professional Workforce

- Knowledge and understanding of the competencies needed to work with children in the professional setting they lead.
- Ability to use knowledge of these competencies to make informed decisions about hiring and placement of practitioners.
- Ability to formulate and implement policies that create an environment that enhances and supports quality practice and children's development and early learning.
- Ability to formulate and implement supportive and rigorous ongoing professional learning opportunities and quality improvement programs that reflect current knowledge of child development and of effective, high-quality instructional and other practices.
- Ability to foster the health and well-being of their staff and to seek out and provide resources that can help staff manage stress.

Assessment of Educators

- Ability to assess the quality of instruction and interactions, to recognize high quality, and to identify and address poor quality through evaluation systems, observations, coaching, and other professional learning opportunities.
- Ability to use data from assessments of care and education professionals appropriately and effectively to make adjustments to improve outcomes for children and to inform professional learning and other decisions and policies.

Developing and Fostering Partnerships

- Ability to support collaboration among the different kinds of providers under their leadership.
- Ability to enable interprofessional opportunities for themselves and their staff to facilitate linkages among health, education, social services, and other disciplines not under their direct leadership.
- Ability to work with families and support their staff to work with families.

Organizational Development and Management

- Knowledge and ability in administrative and fiscal management, compliance with laws and regulations, and the development and maintenance of infrastructure and an appropriate work environment.

Source: LaRue Allen and Bridget B. Kelly, eds., *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (Washington, DC: National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, April 2015), 344-345.

METHODOLOGY

New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy team partnered with the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership to collect data on early education leaders. New America collected the elementary school principal data via survey from December 2016 to March 2017. We sent the survey to state departments of education and, in a handful of cases, also to state elementary school principal associations. We encouraged officials at the state departments of education to collaborate with colleagues in different offices and departments to collect the data. For states that did not respond to our survey or provided incomplete responses, we scanned their websites and contacted state department of education officials via e-mail and phone to find as much information as possible.

The McCormick Center gathered data on state center director policies through a comprehensive review of state child care licensure laws, child care director credential requirements, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). The scan included QRIS because this is the method most states are using to encourage program quality, unlike licensing standards, which tend to focus on minimal compliance. The McCormick Center followed up with states via survey and e-mail for certain indicators, as needed.

Scanning the 50 States

In 2015, New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy team conducted a similar scan to compare states' policies on early literacy and language development that support third grade reading proficiency. Data on principal and center director preparation were included among the 65 indicators selected that impact children's educational experiences. That report, *From Crawling to Walking: Ranking States on Birth–3rd Grade Policies That Support Strong Readers* is available at **https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/from-crawling-to-walking/**.

The McCormick Center's work culminated in the L.E.A.D. Early Childhood Clearinghouse, a public resource that makes available accurate and accessible information through an interactive website. National data about policy levers to improve the early childhood leadership workforce; state standards; and programs that educate, train, and support individuals who lead organizations serving children birth through age 8 are accessible through the Clearinghouse.

New America and the McCormick Center collected information about state early education leader policies in four areas:

1. Pre-service requirements
2. In-service requirements
3. Compensation and retention
4. Efforts to encourage diversity

Where possible we include the source of the data on the individual state pages, which can be accessed via the online data visualization tool.[9] Some data points are left blank either because the state reported that it does not collect the appropriate information or we were unable to find the data.*

In addition to our 50-state scan of state-level policies, we conducted interviews with multiple center directors and principals from around the country to learn more about their roles, including how they spend their days, what they view as the most important aspects of their jobs, what challenges they face, and how their formal preparation and professional development opportunities support or fail to support their work. These interviews help give voice to the policy data collected. Center Director Amy Lobo and Principal Joey Page were two of the leaders we interviewed.

Center Director Data We Were Unable to Collect

Because there are less standardized policies in place for child care centers, we limited the number of indicators in our scan to reflect the data available. Child care centers are subject to different regulations, some of which are voluntary (like QRIS in most states), and others that are required for a specific source of funding (such as the Head Start performance standards). Child care centers are so diverse that it is difficult to generalize what is actually happening within a state's child care system.

*We welcome additions or corrections to the data presented in this scan and are open to updating our report if the appropriate information is brought to our attention. Please contact us at earlyandelementaryed@newamerica.org for more information on this topic.

PART 1: PRE-SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Being a strong early childhood education leader does not necessarily come naturally; it takes specialized knowledge and skills that must be developed over time. Teaching prospective elementary school principals and center directors about early learning and providing them with practical experiences in pre-K settings through their preparation programs ensures that they are ready to oversee pre-K classrooms. Leader preparation programs are usually designed based on what states require for licensure. While leaders can always learn valuable lessons through on-the-job experience, there is a basic level of knowledge that they should attain before managing an early education program. State-level policies governing early education leaders should prepare them to enter elementary schools and child care centers ready to support young students and their teachers.

While leaders can always learn valuable lessons through on-the-job experience, there is a basic level of knowledge that they should attain before managing an early education program.

Pre-Service Requirements for Principals

Our scan looks at six different pre-service indicators for principals that can influence their likelihood of starting the job ready to support the youngsters in their schools.

What is the minimum education requirement to be an elementary school principal?

There is limited research regarding the appropriate amount of postsecondary coursework for principals, but all states agree that being an elementary school principal requires formal training beyond a bachelor's degree. It is not whether a principal's training culminates in a master's degree that necessarily matters, but whether he or she is able to gain the specialized knowledge and skills needed to lead an elementary school as both an administrative and instructional leader. More coursework might mean more opportunities to master the competencies laid out in *Transforming the Workforce*, but it is the relevance and quality of the learning opportunities in principal preparation that matter most.

New America's Finding: Five states and Washington, DC require principals to have at least a bachelor's degree to be eligible for licensure. Four states require coursework beyond a bachelor's

Figure 1 | What is the minimum education requirement to be an elementary school principal?

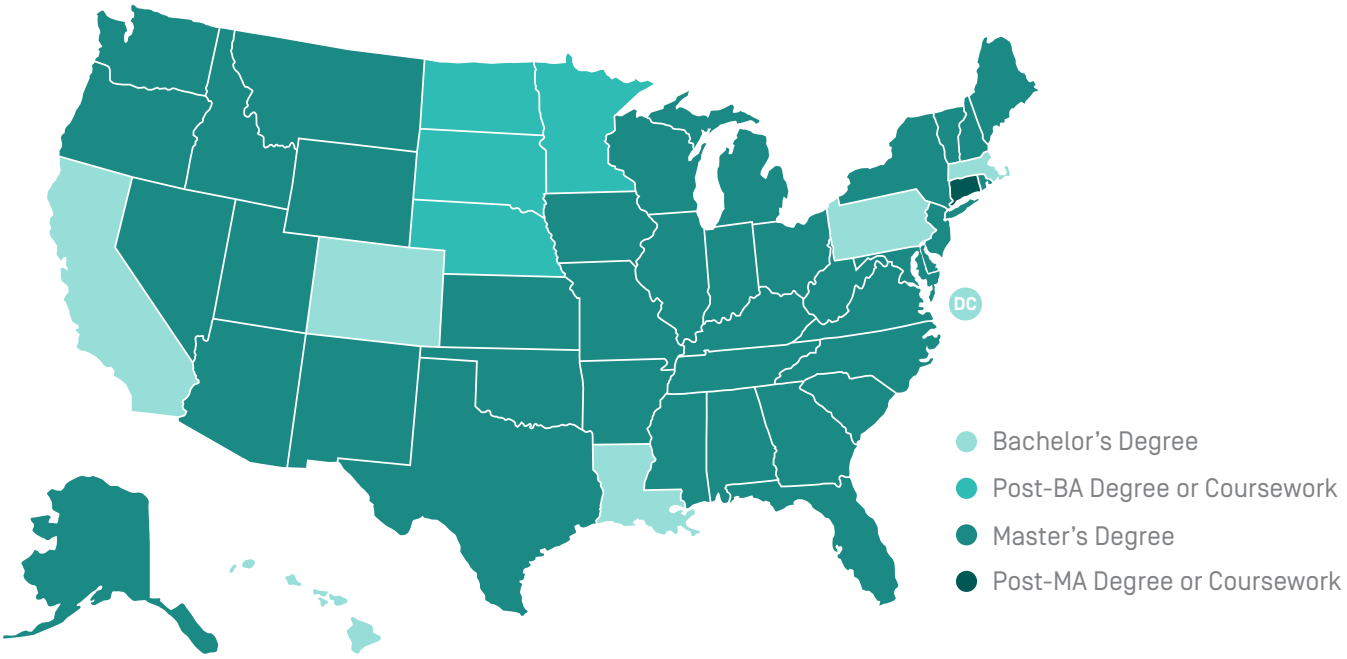


Figure 2 | What is the grade span of the state's license for elementary school principals?

Elementary School Principal License	AL ME MA MO MT NE ND OH OK SC SD WY
K-12 Principal License	AL CO DC HI IN KY MI MN MS MT NV NH UT WY
PreK-12 Principal License	AZ AR CA CT DE FL GA ID IL IA KS LA MD NE NJ NM NY NC OR PA RI SD TN TX VT VA WA WV WI
Varies Based on Program	AK

degree to obtain a principal license. Forty states require elementary school principals to have a master's degree or higher. (See Figure 1)

What is the grade span of the state's license for elementary school principals?

Some research suggests that teacher preparation programs covering a broad grade span are less likely to prepare teachers well to work with any specific age group.[10] The same logic can be applied to principal preparation programs, which are largely designed based on state principal licensing requirements. In theory, the difference between an elementary-specific license and a secondary school license or a broad PreK–12 license is the opportunity to focus on content pertinent to working with elementary school students and teachers.

Nebraska, for example, offers a PreK–8 principal certificate as well as PreK–12 and 8–12 certificates. PreK–8 certificate applicants who have a teaching endorsement at the same level for which they are seeking a principal certificate (such as a K–6 teaching license) need to complete 36 graduate semester hours in an approved educational administration program. Those seeking this certificate with a teaching license at a different teaching level would need to complete an additional nine semester hours focused on the elementary grades, as identified by their accredited teaching program.

Running an elementary school is different than running a middle school or high school; instruction should look very different for young children, who learn best through play and limited whole group instruction. Broad licenses may not give principals the opportunity to focus on the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the development of young learners, a group that spans from pre-K through third grade.

While both the K–12 and PreK–12 licenses are extremely broad, the PreK–12 license, by including the word segment "pre" somewhere in the label, does acknowledge the fact that elementary principals oversee pre-K classrooms. However, a 2014 review of principal licensure standards by the Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes found that, "although many states include pre-K in the scope of principal licensure (PreK–12, for example) the extent to which that involves any childhood content or experience is varied, but generally extremely limited."[11] Illinois is one exception. This state made meaningful reforms to its principal licensure law in 2010, when it added pre-K to the licensure span, going from a K–12 license to a PreK–12 license.[12] Among the reforms is a requirement for all principal preparation programs in Illinois to incorporate early learning into their curricula and provide candidates with internships across the PreK–12 continuum. Early childhood content is also now part of the state's licensure exam.[13]

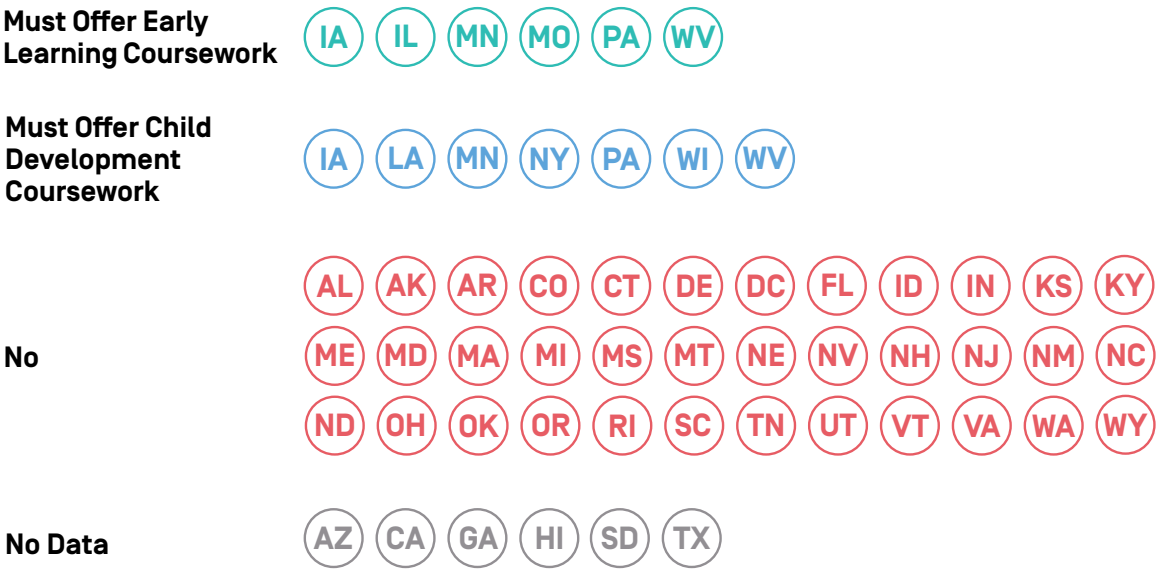
New America's Finding: Most states offer only a general K–12 principal license or PreK–12 principal license. Twelve states offer a specific elementary principal license. Five of these twelve states offer both an elementary-specific license and a broader K-12 or PreK-12 license for principals. (See Figure 2)

Does the state require principal preparation programs to offer specific coursework around early learning and/or child development?

While level of education and the span of licensure can both impact the opportunity for principals to receive early learning content, these policies are moot if early childhood education is not part of the curriculum. As noted above, one of the key reasons Illinois's licensure reform is meaningful is that it requires all preparation programs to incorporate early childhood education into their curricula. According to Erika Hunt of Illinois State University, who was integral to this reform effort, early childhood content is now woven throughout the curricula, as opposed to being covered in a separate class.[14] Programs in many states may offer specific coursework on these topics or incorporate them into other classes even if it is not specifically required by law as it is in Illinois.

New America's Finding: Only nine states reported that they explicitly require principals to

Figure 3 | Does the state require principal preparation programs to offer specific coursework around early learning and/or child development ?



have coursework in early learning and/or child development. Thirty-six states and Washington, DC reported that they do not. (See Figure 3)

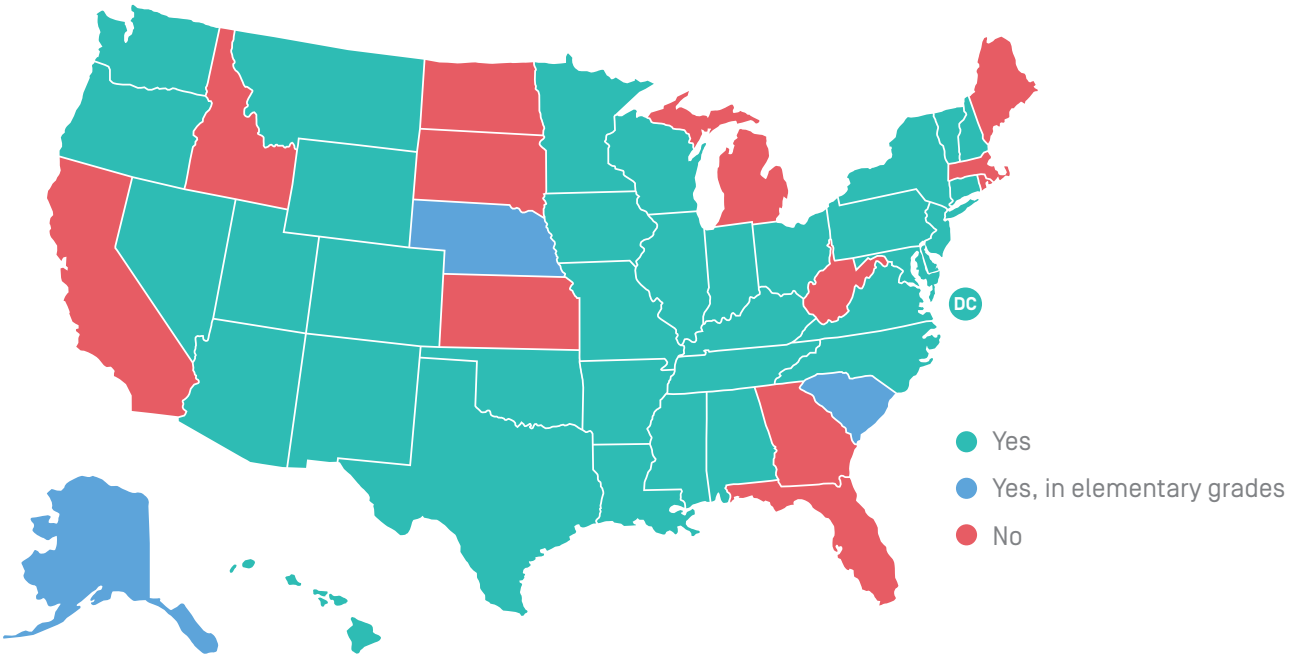
Does the state require elementary school principals to have prior teaching experience? If so, how many years and in what grades?

Since a critical part of being a principal is functioning as an instructional leader, it is helpful for principals to have had teaching experience of their own. This experience not only improves their ability and confidence to guide teachers, but also gives their opinions credibility with the teachers they are leading.

Elementary school principals should have elementary teaching experience. Ideally, this would include some experience in both the upper and lower elementary years. Principals often feel most comfortable giving teachers feedback in the grades that they are most familiar with. As one Orlando-based principal explained in a New America focus group, "since I taught fifth grade for so many years I don't feel as comfortable giving advice to the kindergarten teachers the way I might with a new fifth grade teacher."[15] Another principal who formerly taught first grade shared in an interview that, "having experience working with little ones is invaluable. If you want to be an administrator, you need to understand the grade span that you'll be working with." A principal who has only taught at the high school level, or even only fifth grade, may have difficulty giving appropriate feedback to a pre-K or kindergarten teacher.

New America's Finding: Thirty-eight states and Washington, DC require elementary principals to have teaching experience. Of the states that require teaching experience, only Alaska, Nebraska, and South Carolina require that it be in the elementary grades. Of the 12 states that do not specifically require teaching experience, the majority do require experience working in a school either in an administrative capacity or with students, as a counselor, for example. The vast majority of states require principals to have between two and four years of experience teaching or working in a school. (See Figure 4)

Figure 4 | Does the state require elementary school principals to have prior teaching experience?



Are aspiring elementary school principals required to have clinical experience in elementary schools during preparation?

A significant body of research suggests that strong principal preparation programs must couple coursework with meaningful clinical experiences, such as internships, assistant principalships, and mentorships.[16] According to the Wallace Foundation, university representatives "ranked clinical practice as the top (tied with competency frameworks) essential element for effective principal preparation" in a recent survey.[17] It is crucial that aspiring elementary school principals, especially those who never taught young children, get out of the college classroom and have field experiences in elementary schools. They need to see first-hand what high-quality instruction looks like in pre-K and the early grades.

As part of Illinois's principal preparation reform, the state now requires all principal candidates to get field experience in early childhood settings. The internships are competency-based and principals have to meet benchmarks specific to early learning, as set by the state.[18] Regardless of prior teaching experience, all aspiring elementary school principals can benefit from exposure to real-life leadership situations that enhance their ability to effectively run an elementary school.

New America's Finding: Most states do require clinical experiences, but they do not need to be specific to elementary schools. Only ten states reported that they require elementary school principals to have clinical experiences specifically in elementary schools: Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Virginia, Utah, and Wyoming.

Pre-Service Requirements for Center Directors

Our scan looked at state licensing standards, QRIS, and director credentials to understand the pre-service requirements for center directors.

What is the minimum level of education required to be a center director according to state licensing standards?

Transforming the Workforce recommends that all early childhood lead teachers and leaders, center directors included, earn at least a bachelor's degree with specialized training in the field.[19] The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Child Care Aware of America also view a bachelor's degree as best practice for center directors.[20] The federal Head Start program recently decided that all new directors will need to have "at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree and experience in supervision of staff, fiscal management, and administration."[21]

The qualification requirements for center directors are all over the map and are usually far less than what experts recommend. Most state licensing standards offer multiple paths for directors to meet the qualifications through a combination of the following: formal education, clock hours in early childhood education, clock hours in administration, years of work experience in child care, and credentials or certificates. (In this context, clock hours typically refer to in-service training and credit hours refer to higher education coursework.) The graphic on page 16 exemplifies the different—and often complicated—ways to become a center director in two states.

Low educational requirements make it difficult for aspiring center directors to gain the knowledge they need to be effective instructional and operational leaders. Center directors need to know the basics of running a business because they are often in charge of an independent program that is not part of a school district. It is equally important that they have a strong understanding of child development and early learning, since they are leading staff who often have minimal education and training in this area. These topics are not covered with a typical high school diploma.

New America's Findings: Because of the complicated nature of these policies, our scan captured the minimal education level that a center director must have. Seven states do not require center directors to have any formal higher education or training. Twelve states require at least some college coursework and seven states require an associate's degree. Currently only New Jersey, Vermont, and Washington, DC require center directors to have a bachelor's degree for licensure. These data reflect the education requirements for large child care centers,[22] as some states have varying requirements based on the size of the center. (See Figure 5)

According to licensing standards, do center directors need to have prior experience working in child care?

The qualifications for center directors laid out in state program licensing standards are usually based on a combination of education, clock hours, years of work experience, and credentials or certificates. The amount of education required and the amount of work experience required are usually inversely related. In Kentucky, for instance, someone with a bachelor's or associate's degree in early childhood education can become a center director with no work experience in child care, whereas someone with no formal education or training would need to have three years of relevant work experience.

New America's Finding: Twenty-seven states allow people to become center directors without any work experience in child care if they have enough formal education. Our scan included the range of work experience required to be a center director in each state to better illustrate the complicated nature of these requirements (for more information visit www.newamerica.org/in-depth/pre-k-leaders/). Again, these data reflect the work requirements for large child care centers, as some states have varying requirements based on the size of the center. (See Figure 6)

Does the state have a center director credential? If so, is it required for licensing?

States can also encourage center directors to enhance their knowledge and skills by offering or requiring director credentials. According to the

Figure 5 | What is the minimum level of education required to be a center director according to state licensing standards?

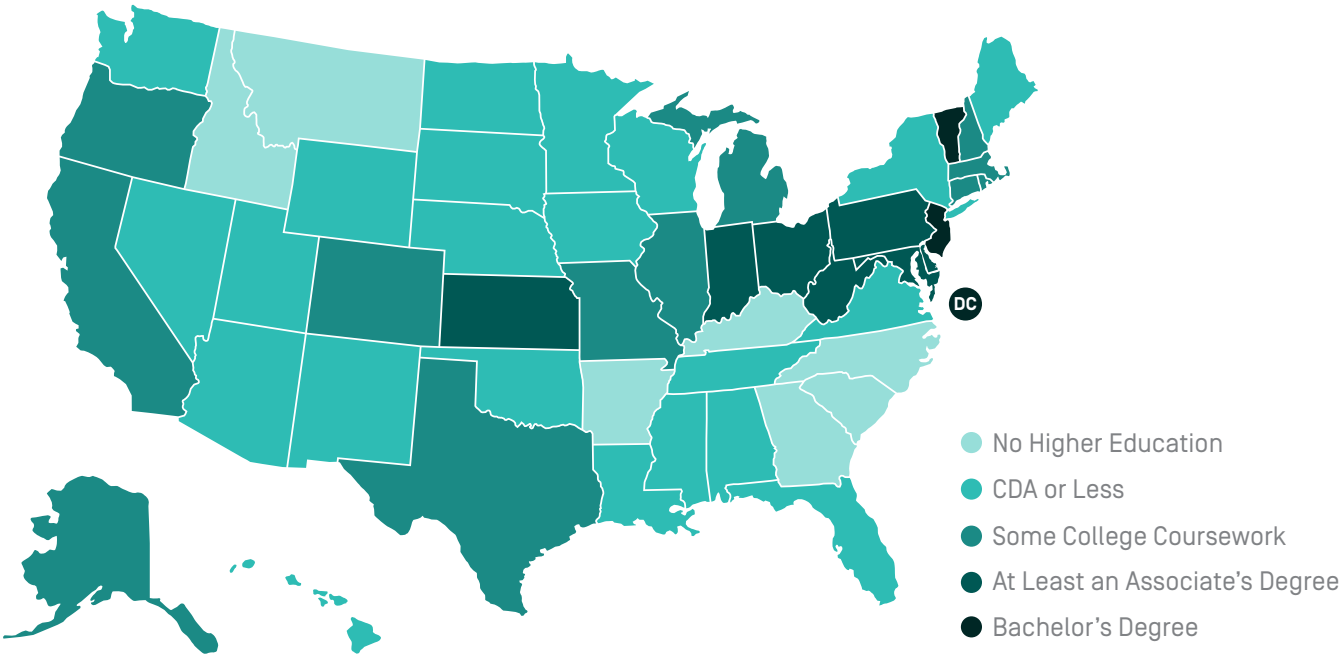


Figure 6 | According to licensing standards, do center directors need to have prior experience working in child care?

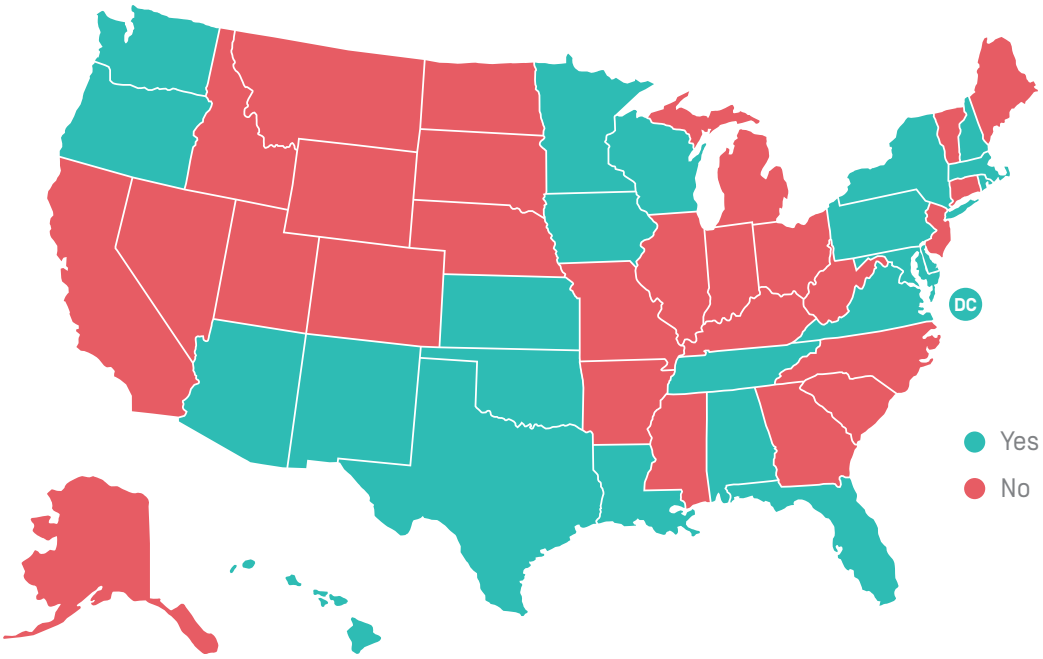
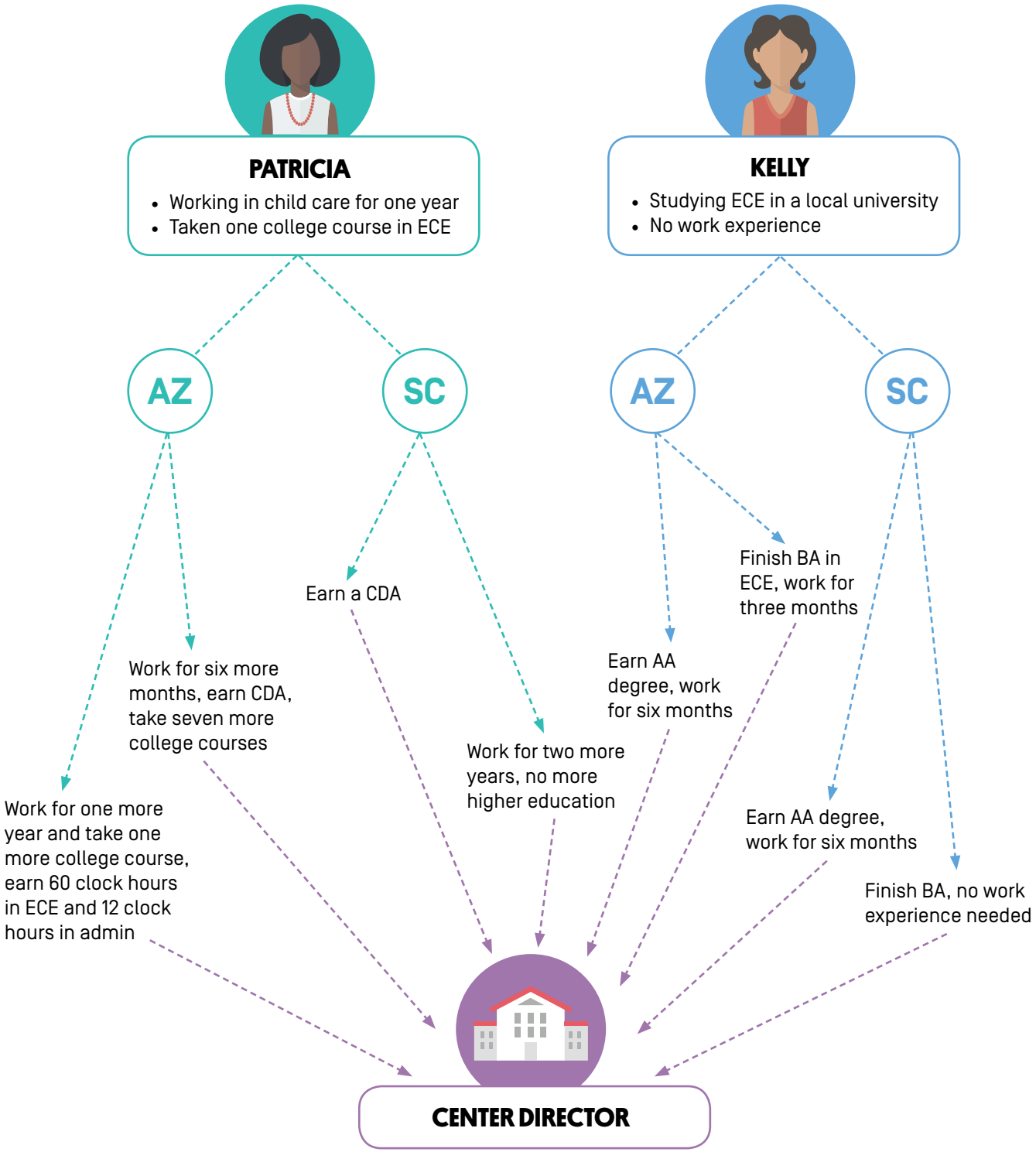


Figure 7 | The paths to becoming a center director

In many states, child care licensing standards offer multiple pathways to meet center director qualifications through a combination of formal education, clock hours, work experience, and credentials. Education requirements are often inversely related to the amount of work experience a candidate has. This graphic shows the complex paths two fictional women would navigate if they lived in Arizona or South Carolina.



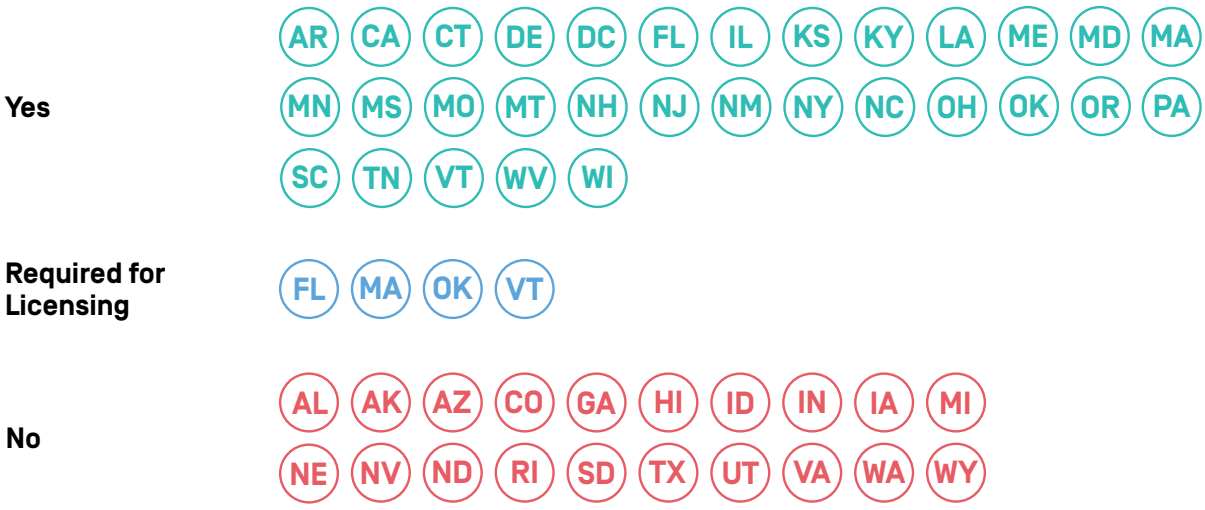
McCormick Center, "an administrator credential identifies what an effective director of an early childhood program needs to know and be able to do. Achieving an administrator credential is linked to more effective administrative practices in community-based early childhood programs."[23] While these credentials are often tied to program licensing requirements or go above and beyond licensing requirements, they vary significantly between states. The ability of these credentials to improve practice largely depends on specific requirements. More information on the specifics in each state credential can be found in the McCormick Center's L.E.A.D. Early Childhood Clearinghouse.

New America's Finding: Thirty states and Washington, DC offer director credentials for early childhood leaders. Only four of those states require that center directors obtain this credential for licensing. (See Figure 8)

Pre-Service Takeaways

Principals are held to significantly higher education and training standards than center directors. Most states require principals to have a master's degree, prior teaching experience, and clinical experience through their preparation programs. However, most state laws do not emphasize the unique knowledge and skills principals need to lead schools with younger children. State policies related to child care center directors are not as clear cut or consistent as those for principal preparation. Licensed child care centers must follow state licensing standards, which tend to focus more on basic health and safety standards than on teaching and learning. As a result, center directors in most states are only expected to have minimal education and training. However, the education and training requirements that are outlined in licensing standards usually focus on early childhood education, child development, and administration. Some child care centers are subject to other more rigorous regulations, such as Head Start standards, national accreditation standards, or state QRIS.

Figure 8 | Does the state have a center director credential? If so, is it required for licensing?



PART 2: IN-SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

While aspiring principals and center directors may best be reached through preparation programs, leaders already in the field also need opportunities to learn and improve their skills. Even the most seasoned early education leaders can benefit from high-quality, ongoing professional learning. Researchers have gained a deeper understanding of the science of child development and early learning in recent years and professional development can help ensure that leaders stay up to date on the best practices for working with young children.

In-Service Requirements for Principals

Does the state offer professional learning (such as training, mentoring, or coaching) around early childhood education or PreK–3rd alignment for elementary principals?

Too many elementary principals enter the job with a limited understanding of early childhood education. Professional learning focused on early education and the role leaders play in building a strong PreK–3rd grade continuum of learning can improve their capacity to support young students and their teachers. There are a handful of states leading the way on this work.

With the support of federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge funds and the Kellogg Foundation, the New Jersey Department of Education, in partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research and the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, started a professional learning series this year for teachers, principals, and district leaders to learn about high-quality teaching practices in kindergarten through third grade. According to Vincent Costanza at the department of education, this work is "driven by a clear theory of action that unless you are engaging central administrators, building administrators, and teachers, you are limiting potential impact."[24] The series is based on the state's newly released First through Third Grade Implementation Guidelines that detail best practices for educators and complete the best practice guidelines that now exist PreK-3rd in New Jersey.[25] New Jersey also created videos to show educators what appropriate instruction looks like in early grade classrooms. District teams meet three times throughout the year and participants keep in regular contact through an online community where professionals can share resources and educators can receive feedback on their work.

In Minnesota, the Department of Education has been partnering with the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association for multiple years to host a PreK–3 Principal Leadership Series on leading early learning communities. This work also started with Race to the Top–Early Learning

Challenge funds. Participation is optional, but there has been strong interest in the program, which has served 524 educators, 147 of them principals, from over 100 school districts in the last three cohorts. A fourth cohort is planned for fall. Teams are principal-led but must include collaboration with superintendents, teachers, and community partners to create meaningful action plans for strengthening alignment between early learning, kindergarten, and the primary grades.

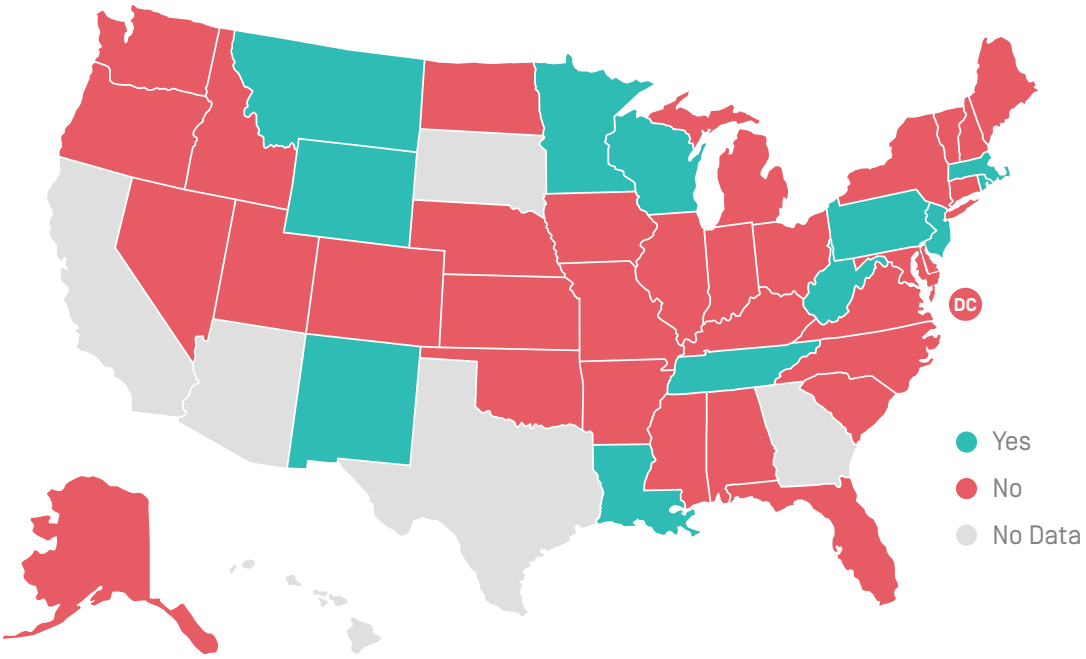
New America's Finding: Twelve states responded to our survey stating that they offered this type of professional learning opportunity for principals. Thirty-two states and Washington, DC reported that they do not offer this. New America does not have data on the remaining six states. (See Figure 9)

Does the state offer joint professional learning for elementary school principals with early education program administrators (i.e., Head Start and child care center directors)?

Children need to have smooth transitions from one year of schooling to the next in order to sustain the gains made each year. The transition from pre-K to kindergarten can be a particularly challenging time, especially if it is a child's first time in an elementary school.[26] One way to encourage smooth transitions is to strengthen the alignment of child care centers and elementary schools. Collaboration, coordination of standards and curriculum, and information sharing are key to meaningful alignment. When principals and center directors participate in joint professional learning they can establish relationships with each other and ensure that they have a similar knowledge base. Some states and districts are offering joint professional learning for principals and the center directors whose programs feed into their schools in order to facilitate these smooth transitions.

Louisiana is one state working to align its early learning system to improve program quality across all settings. All providers serving young children, whether in a private child care center or

Figure 9 | Does the state offer professional learning (such as training, mentoring, or coaching) around early childhood education or PreK–3rd alignment for elementary principals?



public school, must participate in the state QRIS if they wish to continue receiving public funds. In Louisiana this means elementary school principals serving pre-K students and child care or Head Start center directors need to be trained in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool, which measures the quality of teacher-child interactions as a key indicator of program quality. According to Jenna Conway, assistant superintendent of early childhood at the Louisiana Department of Education, the state realized that facilitating strong local relationships to create conditions for collaboration is key to reform. Over a three-year pilot phase, communities applied for competitive funding to create local early childhood community networks. Through these networks, leaders collaborate on how to provide better professional development and participate in training on CLASS as well as state-approved early childhood curricula and assessment. The state also hosts an annual summit in New Orleans where principals and center directors are both invited to receive similar and cohesive professional learning opportunities. Conway says that since the reform efforts started she has seen, "a real shift from a compliance mindset about PD, where leaders wanted to check a box, to leaders wanting more specific and embedded opportunities that are known to be effective and to help their teachers get to great."[27]

More states may support communication and collaboration efforts between child care centers and elementary schools in the near future because the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires local education agencies to facilitate agreements between public elementary schools and their local Head Start programs to improve coordination and create smoother transitions for children.

New America's Finding: According to our survey responses, only seven states offer joint professional development for principals and center directors: Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

Does the state require principals to be formally evaluated?

Principal evaluation is key to holding leaders accountable for their performance, and it is also helpful in identifying areas where they can improve their practice. Most principal evaluation systems are only a few years old and there is little research on best practices. There is significant variation in design and implementation by state.[28]

New America's Finding: All states require principals to be formally evaluated. Most states give districts the discretion to determine who conducts the evaluation, but evaluations are usually left to the superintendent.

In-Service Requirements for Center Directors

Does the state's QRIS tie center director qualifications to different tier levels?

As of 2016, 39 states and Washington, DC had created QRIS to monitor and improve the quality of their early childhood education programs.[29] Programs earn a rating based on their ability to meet a host of quality indicators, and higher ratings are often tied to opportunities for more funding. Tying center director qualifications and professional learning to tiers in QRIS is one way states can encourage center directors to seek higher levels of education and training. Mississippi's QRIS is a good example of how center director requirements differ at each tier of the rating system. (See Table 1)

As we did with principals, our scan aimed to understand the type of professional development opportunities available to center directors. Due to a lack of available data, it was not possible to determine the details of state professional development requirements for center directors in most states. This information is rarely included in licensing standards or outlined in director

Table 1 | Mississippi QRIS Tiers

	Mississippi Quality Stars
Tier 1	Program holds a current Mississippi Child Care License.
Tier 2	Director received 20 hours of annual staff development training. Director's self-assessment completed and on file. A self-improvement plan is on file that indicates actions to address deficient areas.
Tier 3	Director completed "Child Care as a Business" course. Director holds a current DECCD director's credential or a credential approved by MDHS/DECCD, or an associate's or higher degree in child development, early childhood education, or a related field. Director trained in Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines.
Tier 4	Director holds an associate's degree in child development technology or early childhood education or higher degree; or a bachelor's degree in child development, early childhood education, early childhood special education, elementary education, or a related field with 18 credit hours of early childhood courses.
Tier 5	Director holds a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education, early childhood special education, child development, elementary education, or related field with 18 credit hours of early childhood courses.

Source: Data collected by McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership from BUILD Initiative's QRIS Compendium

credential requirements. However, a few states do outline specific professional learning requirements in the QRIS tiers. New Mexico is such a state. (See Table 2)

New America's Finding: Thirty-three states currently encourage higher educational qualifications through QRIS by tying education and training to different tiers. However, for center-based early childhood education programs, participation in QRIS is voluntary in most states. Only Illinois, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma require participation for center-based programs.[30] Participation rates in other states vary significantly. (See Figure 10)

Does the state require center directors to be formally evaluated?

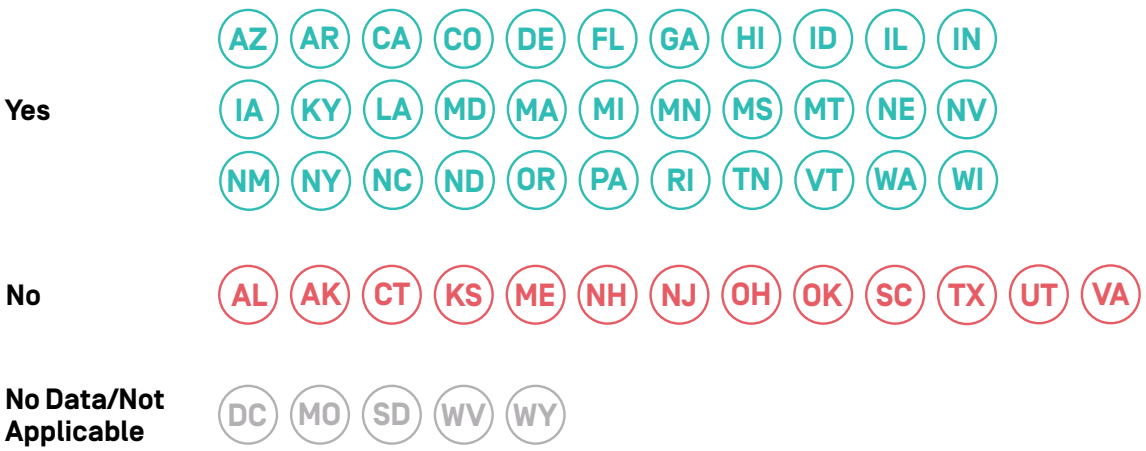
The push to implement meaningful teacher and principal evaluation under the Obama administration stayed in the K–12 education policy space and did not extend into the years before elementary school. As with principals, center director evaluation could both hold administrators accountable for their performance and improve their performance by identifying areas for improvement. While no state has requirements around director evaluation, licensing standards do usually require that programs be regularly monitored for compliance, but this is not specific to directors.

Table 2 | New Mexico QRIS Tiers

	New Mexico FOCUS
Tier 1	Meets licensing regulations.
Tier 2	Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must be prepared to complete all the steps toward obtaining, or have already obtained, the New Mexico Child Development Certificate (or higher early childhood degree with corresponding certificate or license). Explore higher education entrance, registration, and enrollment requirements, including when the ACCUPLACER exam is required, in order to complete courses for the New Mexico Child Development Certificate. Program leadership must establish, and update annually, a Professional Development Plan for themselves as well as for each educator. Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Orientation to Intentional Teaching, an 8-hour series-based training; Powerful Interactions (4 hrs.); and New Mexico Leadership Academy 1 Part 1 (8 hrs.)
Tier 3	Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Child Growth, Development & Learning (3 credits) Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Introduction to Intentional Teaching, an 8-hour series-based training; The Full Participation of Each Child (6 hrs.); and New Mexico Leadership Academy 1 Part 2 (8 hrs.)
Tier 4	Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Assessment of Children and Evaluation of Programs (3 credits) Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Intermediate Intentional Teaching, a 10-hour series-based training; Quality Child Care Programs for All (6 hrs.); and New Mexico Leadership Academy 2 (10 hrs.)
Tier 5	Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Family and Community Collaboration (3 credits) and Health, Safety, & Nutrition (2 credits) or Guiding Young Children (3 credits) Site Director, or staff person designated as the site's Education Coordinator, must have successfully completed: Advanced Intentional Teaching, a 10-hour series-based training that includes: New Mexico Leadership Academy 3 (10 hrs.)

Source: Data collected by McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership from BUILD Intiative's QRIS Compendium

Figure 10 | Does the state's QRIS tie center director qualifications to different tier levels?



There is no superintendent-equivalent at the child care level to evaluate center director performance. Local child care resource and referral agencies may be best suited to do this work in some areas.

New America's Finding: From a review of state licensing standards, it appears that no state requires formal evaluation of center directors.

In-Service Takeaways

States can do more to support meaningful professional learning for both principals and center directors. While states and districts have some requirements and resources in place to support professional learning for principals, few states are specifically directing that support toward helping principals become stronger leaders for pre-K classrooms.

States often have less infrastructure in place for center director professional learning. Based on the disjointed nature of child care center oversight, it is not surprising that New America and the McCormick Center were unable to find details about ongoing training requirements for directors or determine meaningful details about the type of professional learning opportunities available within a state. Our scan did not determine whether state-provided professional learning focuses on child development, instructional leadership, or administrative skills. QRIS appears to be a primary way that states are encouraging directors to pursue further education and training.

Failing to offer joint professional learning for principals and center directors is a missed opportunity to strengthen alignment between programs. Unfortunately, even when states do offer professional learning opportunities around early childhood education for leaders, it is often voluntary and limited to small groups due to funding constraints. Because leader professional development is often determined at the local or program level, there are limited state-level data on in-service requirements.

PART 3: COMPENSATION AND RETENTION

In order to develop high-quality early education leaders, policymakers first need to attract them to the field and then give them the supports they need to remain. This means providing leaders with adequate compensation, comfortable working conditions, and the resources to do their jobs well. Leader compensation should reflect their levels of training and education, as well as the complex nature of their jobs. Retaining effective principals and center directors is essential to program quality and ensures continuity for program staff, families, and, most importantly, children. State policies around compensation and work supports can influence whether leaders stay in the field.

Principal Compensation and Retention

What is the average salary for an elementary school principal in the state, as of fall 2015?

Principals deserve compensation that appropriately reflects their significant responsibilities, high level of education, and substantial work experience. Salaries should be comparable to those of leaders in other fields with similar qualifications.

New America's Finding: The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average salary for elementary and secondary school educational administrators was $90,410 as of May 2015.[31] This ranged from $67,890 in West Virginia to $124,560 in New Jersey. Unfortunately, these data are not disaggregated by elementary, middle, or high school. Elementary school principals are often paid less than those leading schools with older students.[32] (See Figure 11)

What is usually included in a principal's benefits package?

Fringe benefits are an important part of overall compensation and can contribute to a principal's quality of life. Research has shown that benefits, especially health care and paid leave, are top contributors to job satisfaction.[33]

New America's Finding: While many states were unable to provide data on overall principal compensation because they do not collect it, 28 states and Washington, DC reported that principals' benefits packages usually include health insurance, pension or retirement contributions, and paid sick leave. (See Figure 12)

Figure 11 | What is the average salary for a school principal in the state, as of fall 2015?

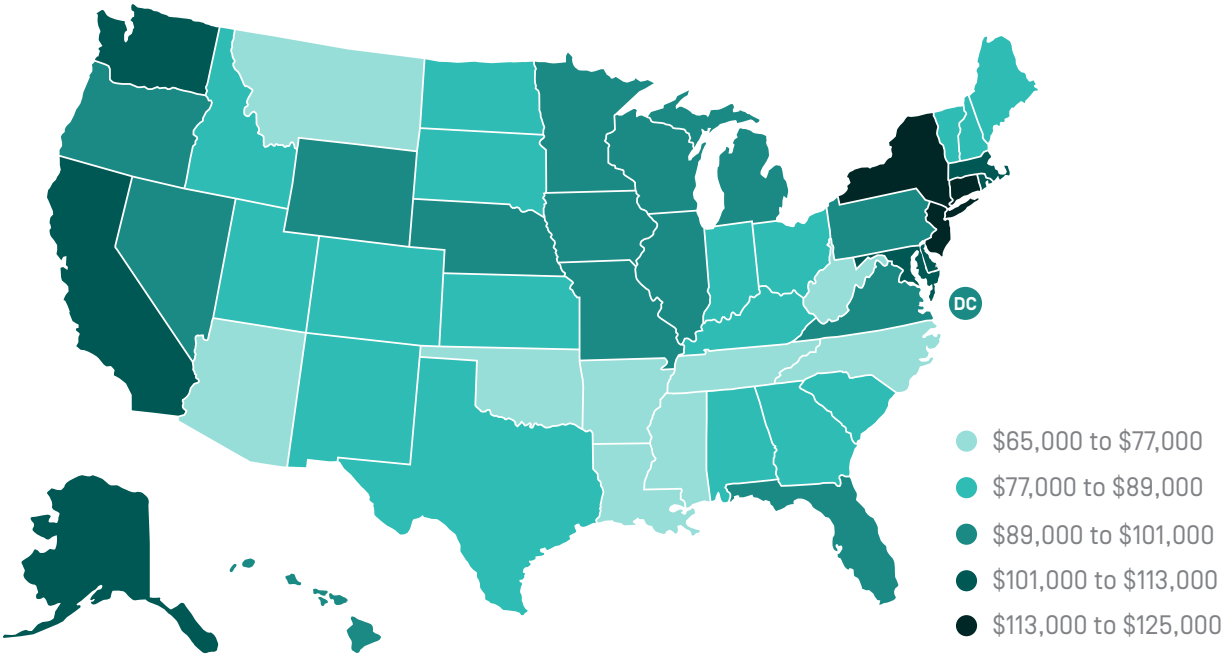


Figure 12 | What is usually included in a principal's benefits package?

Health Insurance, Pension/Retirement, and Paid Sick Leave	AK AR CA CO CT DE DC FL ID IN IA KS LA ME MI MT NV NH NJ NM NY ND OR PA SC UT VA WV WI
Health Insurance and Pension/ Retirement Only	AL KY
Data Not Available	GA IL MN MO NE OH OK RI SD TN TX VT WY
No Survey Response	AZ HI MD MA MS NC WA

Does the state track principal turnover?

According to a 2014 report by the School Leaders Network, "50 percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role. Those that remain frequently do not stay at high-poverty schools, trading difficult-to-lead schools for less demanding leadership roles that serve more affluent populations."[34] Principals play a key role in reforming struggling schools, and constant turnover is disruptive for reform efforts that can take many years to implement. One principal we interviewed said that "it takes three to five years for principals to settle in. You don't build capacity in a building when you are busy building the capacity of the principal."[35] The School Leaders Network also estimates that it takes approximately five years to fully implement reforms that can improve school performance.[36]

New America's Finding: Seventeen states reported that they track principal turnover: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming. Twenty-four states and Washington, DC said that they did not track principal turnover: Alabama, California, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. New America does not have data on the nine remaining states.

Center Director Compensation and Retention

What is the average salary for a pre-K center director?

Center director salaries remain low across most states and lower than principal salaries in all states. States and districts do not set standards for center director compensation as they do with principals. Research has shown that employees in child care centers are less likely to have employee benefits, such as health care, retirement contributions, and paid sick days, than those employed by public school districts.[37] We know that center teachers often do not have these benefits and so we assume that directors do not either.

New America's Finding: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for a child care center director in 2015 was $52,760.[38] This ranged from $39,190 in Tennessee to $68,180 in Washington, DC. We were unable to determine what types of benefits are usually included in center directors' compensation due to a lack of available data. (See Figure 13)

Compensation and Retention Takeaways

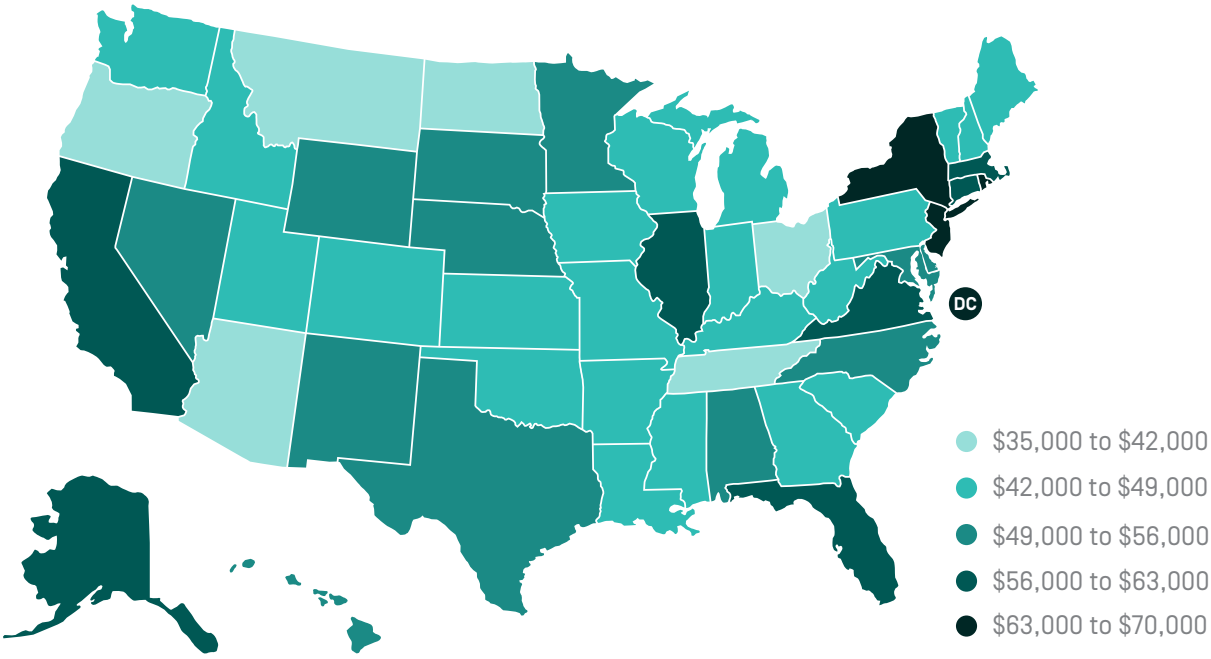
Despite their similar responsibilities, center directors overseeing pre-K classrooms are compensated at a rate much lower than elementary school principals. This can include access to benefits like health insurance, paid sick leave, and retirement contributions, which all contribute to employee well-being. This type of disparity is true throughout early childhood education when comparing the child care workforce to the K–12 workforce. [39] According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, only 14 states with public pre-K programs require salary parity between pre-K teachers and those teaching kindergarten through third grade.[40] Pre-K teachers and leaders working in child care centers deserve compensation commensurate with the complexity and importance of their work. Especially if states are requiring center directors to have higher levels of education

> **Pre-K teachers and leaders working in child care centers deserve compensation commensurate with the complexity and importance of their work.**

and training, there needs to be additional public investment to help pay for better compensation to help these leaders afford more schooling and to retain them once their qualifications increase.

Adequate compensation is a key factor in retaining a high-quality workforce. Leader turnover is disruptive to all staff and can diminish the quality of care and education. Research has found that turnover is high among both principals and center directors. According to *Transforming the Workforce*, turnover in child care settings is four times higher than in elementary school settings.[41] However, we were unable to find state-level data specifically on director turnover. Tracking turnover is an important step states can take to understand the stability of their workforce. However, it is what states do with these data that is most important. When policymakers are cognizant of which programs or districts experience high turnover and why, they can target supports to promote workforce stability.

Figure 13 | What is the average salary for a pre-K or child care center director in the state, as of fall 2015?



PART 4: LEADER DIVERSITY

All students, but especially those from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, benefit from having diverse teachers and leaders. Minority teachers tend to have higher expectations for minority students, and students benefit from having role models that reflect their racial and ethnic backgrounds.[42] In fact, a just-released study by Johns Hopkins University found that having just one black teacher in elementary school decreases black boys' likelihood of dropping out of high school by almost 40 percent.[43]

Principal Diversity

Despite the growing ethnic diversity of students in American public schools, 80 percent of principals are white, according to U.S. Department of Education data.[44] Another study from University of Texas at Austin and Columbia University found that there may be systemic, gendered, and racial biases in principal pathways that lead to an overrepresentation of white male principals.[45] While states need to address the diversity of the teaching workforce too, which is also more homogenous than the students it serves, there are steps they can take to encourage ethnically diverse teachers to pursue leadership opportunities.

New America's Finding: No states reported meaningful efforts to increase principal diversity in our survey.

Center Director Diversity

While the child care workforce is more ethnically diverse than the K–12 teaching workforce, "people of color are disproportionately concentrated in lower-status and lower-paying jobs in certain settings and have limited representation in administrator and director roles as well as teacher educator and other leadership and decision-making roles in the field," according to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.[46] One of the primary concerns with increasing the education and training requirements for center directors is that it will further reduce the existing diversity in the workforce. Requiring expensive bachelor's degrees without opportunities for scholarships or substantially higher compensation could discourage early childhood educators making little money from pursuing leadership roles.

> **All students, but especially those from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, benefit from having diverse teachers and leaders.**

Some states have policies in place to make higher education and training more accessible for the early childhood workforce. Many states offer T.E.A.C.H.

Early Childhood scholarships that help teachers and leaders earn college credits, degrees, and credentials. The scholarships often cover most of the cost of tuition and fees and recipients often benefit from a wage increase. Center directors are eligible for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.[47] One state, Louisiana, is taking a different approach. Child care center directors are encouraged to participate in the administrator's ladder of the Louisiana Pathways Child Care Career Development System to increase their education in early childhood and administration. Participating directors who work in publicly-funded centers are eligible to receive fully refundable School Readiness Tax Credits ranging from $1,600 through $3,300 annually. Higher levels on the career ladder lead to larger tax credits. However, starting in 2018, these tax credits will instead be tied to the quality of adult-child interactions and instructions in classrooms. While these efforts are not targeted towards increasing diversity among center directors, they may encourage people to pursue leadership positions who might not have done so otherwise.[48]

New America's Finding: No states reported initiatives with the primary purpose of increasing ethnic diversity among center directors.

Leadership Diversity Takeaways

Lack of diversity is a problem among principals and center directors. Students benefit when they can relate to their teachers and leaders and when their teachers and leaders can relate to them. States can take steps to encourage culturally and ethnically diverse teachers to pursue leadership roles and provide supports, such as mentoring, in order to retain diverse leaders. This is an area where states would be wise to focus more attention.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Even though the job of overseeing pre-K classrooms does not necessarily change based on state lines, the policies related to early education leaders do. Amy Lobo and Joey Page both begin their days sorting out staff schedules before the sun rises and end their days having spent time connecting with families, filling out paperwork, and leading teachers. But their qualifications, training, workforce supports, and compensation are quite different. The state policy systems surrounding center directors and principals create different challenges for each, although great leaders like Lobo and Page are able to succeed in spite of them. From our state data collection, leader interviews, and review of the research, we have identified some of the primary challenges that can inhibit early education leaders from reaching their full potential.

Most existing principal preparation programs focus heavily on the business side of the job and instructional strategies relevant for older students. Most states do not require preparation programs to

cover early childhood education and development through coursework or clinical experience and do not require aspiring elementary school principals to have teaching experience in the early grades. As a result, there is a lot about early education that principals are left to learn on the job. Unfortunately, professional learning on early childhood education is also rare, so even after years leading an elementary school, principals may continue to lack the skills and knowledge they need to promote high-quality teaching during these crucial early years of school. Considering that a majority of elementary school principals oversee pre-K classrooms for three- and four-year-olds,[49] this shortcoming needs to be addressed.

State policies related to center directors are more haphazard. Center directors may be responsible for following licensing regulations, QRIS requirements, director credential requirements, some combination of those, or none of them at all. Efforts to improve quality are also not necessarily supported at the state level. For instance, program directors may earn a bachelor's degree because it is required through the federal Head Start program or because it is recommended for accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. State licensing standards are the most standardized measure, but still vary from state to state, and tend to have minimal requirements for center director education and training that do not reflect the complexity of the job. In the same vein, center director salaries tend to mirror the job's low education requirements as opposed to the knowledge and competencies required to do the job well. While we did not collect data on the details of curricula, in *Transforming the Workforce*, experts found that the competency statements for early childhood education leaders that exist "have to do with how well a leader can develop and manage a well-functioning organization." The focus for center directors is less on instructional leadership and more on operational leadership.[50] Operations are important since center directors are often running their own businesses and cannot turn to a school district for support, but it cannot be to the exclusion of education on instructional leadership, since the early years are so important for every child.

Amy Lobo and Joey Page begin their days sorting out staff schedules before sunrise and end their days having spent time connecting with families, filling out paperwork, and leading teachers. But their qualifications, training, workforce supports, and compensation are quite different.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES

While there is much work that can be done at the local level, the Wallace Foundation has called attention to the power states have to improve leader preparation requirements because they are responsible for program approval and can reform licensure.[51] States would benefit from acknowledging the similarities between the roles of elementary school principals and center directors overseeing pre-K classrooms. To the extent possible, states should think about these roles together and better align policies for all leaders of programs serving early learners. Ideally, principals and center directors would have opportunities for joint professional learning, giving these early childhood leaders the opportunity to build relationships, coordinate efforts, and ensure smoother transitions between programs for children and families.

The recommendations below could help ensure that both center directors and elementary school principals start their jobs with the administrative know-how to run a business and the competencies needed to be strong instructional leaders for early childhood educators. They would also ensure that leaders like Lobo and Page stay current on the latest research in child development and work to continually improve their practice. Lastly, they could promote job stability so that talented leaders choose to stay in the field. Here are our eight recommendations for states:

Elementary School Principals

1. **Embed early childhood education throughout principal preparation courses.** Through licensing standards, states can require preparation programs to incorporate child development and early learning into coursework, ideally incorporated into all courses instead of treated as a stand-alone topic. This would ensure that all principals enter their jobs with the basic ability to identify and promote appropriate instruction, classroom management strategies, and learning environments in pre-K, kindergarten, and the early grades.

2. **Require teaching experience or clinical experience specifically in elementary schools.** While coursework on early learning is important, principals often feel that their most valuable experience was gained on the job. Much of a principal's work needs to be experienced firsthand. Licensing standards should ensure that all elementary school principals either have experience teaching at the elementary level or participate in

meaningful clinical experience (such as in an assistant principalship) at this level before leading an elementary school.

3. **Offer ongoing professional learning opportunities on early education.** Professional learning is the best way to improve practice of principals already in the field. States should prioritize professional learning about early childhood education and empower principals to be leaders in PreK–3rd grade alignment.

4. **Track principal turnover and salaries and use the data to determine how districts can better support leaders.** Being an elementary school principal is an important but challenging job. Turnover is disruptive and can impede meaningful reform efforts. States should track principal turnover to understand why principals leave and encourage districts to use the data strategically to improve retention. States should also collect data on principal salaries and bring compensation more in line with principals at the secondary level if discrepancies exist.

Pre-K Center Directors

5. **Increase center director qualifications to reflect the research on child development and early learning.** State licensing standards tend to focus more on safety than teaching and learning, resulting in minimal or low qualifications for center directors. QRISs often encourage higher education and training, but participation in these systems is voluntary in the vast majority of states. States should require center directors to have a bachelor's degree with specialized training in early childhood education, as recommended in *Transforming the Workforce*. States would need to take steps to ensure that institutes of higher education have the capacity to meet this new demand.

6. **Increase infrastructure for child care to improve center director well-being and retention.** Despite the complexity of the job, center director compensation is low relative to elementary principals. In addition to low salaries, directors do not necessarily have access to affordable health care, paid sick days, or retirement benefits.[52] In child care there is not usually an outside entity like a district providing these benefits, so employee compensation depends on a center's budget and how a director allocates funds. More public funding could ensure that center directors receive compensation commensurate with the complexities of their job. Better compensation and more state and district support could reduce turnover in the field, which is disruptive to teachers, children, and families.

7. **Increase center directors' opportunities for professional learning.** Due to low qualification requirements, center directors can enter the job with limited knowledge about business administration, child development, or instructional leadership. States should offer accessible professional learning in these areas for center directors to address areas of weakness and stay up to date on the latest research. Because of the lack of state and local infrastructure for child care centers in some areas, professional learning that strengthens relationships between programs may be beneficial. States should consider tying participation in professional learning to QRIS ratings.

8. **Streamline state regulations and eliminate redundancies.** Center directors spend significant time navigating the disparate requirements for center licensing, accreditation, QRIS, state pre-K programs, and Head Start. As one director we interviewed from West Virginia said, "the most frustrating [part of my job], probably, is multiple agencies that inspect the very same thing and conflicting regulations." Reporting can be repetitive, and sometimes even contradictory. Navigating this disjointed system takes away from time a center director could be spending on instructional guidance. *Transforming the Workforce* recommends that experts come to a consensus on a set of core competencies for center directors and that states align their standards and qualification requirements accordingly.

Notes

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