

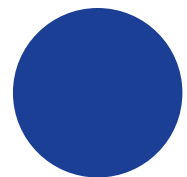
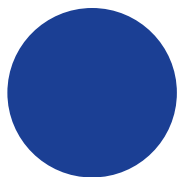
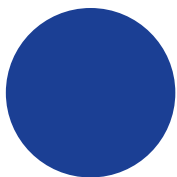
LINC Leadership to Integrate
the Learning Continuum

**Building a Seamless Learning Continuum:
The Role of Leadership in Bridging the Gaps
Between Early Childhood and K-12 Education Systems**

Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC)

A Project Sponsored by the McCormick Foundation

March 2009





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The Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) Advisory Group is pleased to release this report, *“Building a Seamless Learning Continuum: The Role of Leadership in Bridging the Gaps Between Early Childhood and K-12 Education Systems.”* This report is a culmination of research and discussion examining how education leaders can better bridge identified gaps in the coordination between early care and education and K-12 schools to create a seamless learning continuum. This work was supported by a grant from the McCormick Foundation, with additional funding from The Wallace Foundation.

The LINC Advisory Group included members of the Illinois General Assembly, representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Illinois Community College Board, and Illinois Board of Higher Education, the teachers unions, early care and education organizations and K-12 school administrator organizations.

In recent years, Illinois has been at the forefront of two national movements to improve Illinois' educational system: one in creating a statewide system of early learning, and the other in improving school leadership. The LINC Advisory Group report and recommendations build upon the critical progress made in these two areas. The LINC Project encouraged the Advisory Group and project staff to step out of their respective silos and think about learning and leadership more holistically, rather than in discrete segments. Group expertise and experience, along with new project research, informed the policy recommendations presented in this report.

From August through December 2008, Advisory Group members:

- Examined existing research on the impact of school leadership; the benefits of high quality early care and education programs; and the policies, practices, and benefits of a seamless learning continuum;
- Examined data collected from early childhood program directors, elementary school principals, and professional development providers in a gap analysis of current collaborations between educators in early care and education and K-12 education systems; and
- Developed recommendations to strengthen the connections between early care and education and K-12 education systems, including state policies to improve alignment between sectors, practices to improve the preparation and professional development of principals; and a data infrastructure to enhance communication and inform program improvement.

LINC Advisory Group members are confident that the research and the specific goals and recommendations described in this report will benefit educators, and more importantly students, by building a seamless continuum of learning and support for success in school and in life.

Advisory Group Members

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Michael Barlett Illinois Association of School Boards	Joanne Kelly Illinois Department of Human Services	Honorable Jodi Scott Henderson/Mercer/Warren Regional Office of Education
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Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) is a project sponsored by the McCormick Foundation to examine the role of education leaders in creating and maintaining a strong and supportive learning continuum for children from birth through formal schooling. The project is managed by staff at the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University.

An Advisory Group of early care and education practitioners, public school educators, researchers and policy advocates convened to study research about gaps in the learning continuum, barriers to collaboration and communication, and effective practices currently in use throughout Illinois. The group was asked to develop and implement policies and practices that address the missing links in creating a learning continuum that supports the whole child, from birth to beyond, and the role that early childhood and K-12 school leaders play in their efforts to collaborate with families, support agencies, and community and state stakeholders to provide high quality learning and developmental opportunities for children.

The project surveyed early childhood program directors and elementary principals, asking questions about their current practices related to the learning continuum for young children. Overall, when comparing the practices of both directors and principals, both appear to be engaging in practices related to improving the curriculum and teaching within their buildings and/or districts and using student data to assess children's progress. However, the practices that directors and principals report using the least are the alignment and collaboration practices that require these leaders to reach outside of their buildings.

Advisory Group recommendations are organized under three broad goals. Members identified specific recommendations for which they can build support and implementation strategies. Some recommendations will require legislation or other policy enactment, while some can be implemented through local leadership strategies.

Several issues were not fully resolved during the course of the LINC project, and offer opportunities for further collaborative work. These include funding, credentialing for early childhood program directors, and issues of teacher certification to support the learning continuum.

LINC Goal 1

Policies and mechanisms that strengthen the learning continuum through cross-sector communication

Recommendation 1.1

The State should develop a standing joint sub-committee of the P-20 task force and Early Learning Council to serve as a statewide “bridge” mechanism for policy and curriculum alignment, leadership, preparation, professional development, and communication across early care/education and K-12 education.

Recommendation 1.2

The Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Human Services should encourage cross-divisional coordination and alignment between staff in early childhood and other education/service units, including high level policy meetings.

Recommendation 1.3

The revised Illinois School Leader Standards should include knowledge and competencies related to understanding and supporting lifespan learning starting at birth.

Recommendation 1.4

Illinois Early Learning Standards and Illinois Learning Standards (K-12) should be clearly connected so that educators can see and understand learning expectations for students across the education continuum.

LINC Goal 2

Expanded leadership preparation and professional development programs that support the learning continuum.

Recommendation 2.1

The Illinois State Board of Education should broaden its principal endorsement to PreK-12.

Recommendation 2.2

The Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Board of Higher Education should expand criteria for principal preparation programs to include early learning content and practice.

Recommendation 2.3

State regulatory agencies should require preparation programs for early childhood directors and school administrators to include coursework regarding culturally and linguistically diverse children and families.

Recommendation 2.4

Oversight and funding agencies such (e.g., Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Human Services) should create incentives for providers to offer professional development for early childhood and K-12 leaders that includes learning theories and developmentally appropriate practices from birth through adulthood.

LINC Goal 3

A statewide data infrastructure that supports data collection and analysis of student development across the continuum from preschool (i.e., care and education programs prior to kindergarten) through higher education.

Recommendation 3.1

Build on the current work at the state level to interconnect teacher, student, and school data to inform state policy, leader and teacher preparation programs, professional development programs, and local programs and policies.

Recommendation 3.2

Data should be stored and accessible on a user-friendly on-line shared network, encouraging appropriate data use with a minimal expenditure of additional time.

Recommendation 3.3

The data infrastructure should make data analysis accessible and understandable for educational leaders and teachers so they can assess and make improvements to their curricula, instruction and services. State education agencies should make public reports on the data and/or an intermediary organization should be allowed access to the data to be able to analyze and publish data reports that are accessible to schools and early care and education providers.

We know that the foundation for student achievement is laid before children ever set foot in kindergarten. Research on brain development shows that from birth to five years of age, children's brains develop the building blocks for academic, social and emotional functioning for the rest of their lives (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

We also know that our American education system has developed in separate pieces at different times: the college system first (17th century), elementary and secondary schools next (19th century), and finally, early childhood (20th century). Only in the past few decades has work begun to integrate these pieces of the education system into a coherent whole: a **learning continuum**, or progression, that supports students from their earliest learning experiences, through their growing years and formal schooling, and into adulthood.

All three education sectors—birth to age 5 learning, pre-k through Grade 12 (P-12) schooling, and higher education—have the same general goal: to nurture students through the learning process, giving them knowledge and skills for success in school and in life. The sectors each approach this goal in ways that are appropriate to their students' developmental characteristics.

The idea of creating a continuum has troubled some who may envision our youngest children learning new skills through presentation of flash cards and then taking group-administered paper-and-pencil tests. Others may envision a play-based curriculum being forced onto older students with "naturalistic" observation as the only assessment tool. However, a continuum is neither of these extremes. Rather, it creates an educational environment where K-12 learning standards inform early learning standards and vice versa. It would mean that K-12 curricula build on learning in the early years and leaders of both schools and early childhood programs understand and incorporate social/emotional development into their pedagogical approaches. In short, a learning continuum has the goal of nurturing students throughout their learning process and giving them skills for success in school as well as life.

Given this common goal, creating a learning continuum that coordinates standards, curriculum, assessment and instruction across the education sectors will benefit students, families, educators and the workforce.

Smoothing transitions from K-12 to college became a prominent state and national policy focus during the 1990s. Work has progressed in the area of integrating learning standards, coordinating college admissions and placement requirements with high school graduation requirements, and creating pathways for students to earn college credit while still in high school.

Less progress has been made in creating seamless transitions and alignment from the early childhood sector to the K-12 sector. Research is scarce that focuses on the extent to which elementary schools coordinate students' early childhood experiences with educational approaches in K-3 (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005). Acknowledging this gap, the primary focus of this report is to make recommendations for linking birth to age five services with kindergarten to grade three education; however, this report also recognizes that this is part of a

larger continuum of development and learning that stretches into adulthood.

The Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) project focused on the roles of K-12 school leaders and early childhood program leaders in developing and nurturing a seamless early childhood to grade three learning continuum.

An advisory group of local and state early care and education (defined as all of the learning and development experiences that children experience pre-school) and K-12 representatives met from August to December 2008, providing expertise and guidance to study the current status of early childhood/K-12 integration in Illinois. Members of the advisory committee identified several challenges to creating the learning continuum:

- *Misperceptions of the nature and value of the work* performed within organizations and schools providing care and education along the learning continuum;
- *Complex systems of care and education*, in which communication processes are rudimentary (and sometimes non-existent) among the organizations and sectors, thereby creating silos, service duplication, and/or services not rendered to children and families in need;
- *Inconsistent cross-sector collaboration*, leading to misalignment of various essential elements of a strong learning continuum: standards, curricula, assessments, instruction, and preparation and professional development of leaders and teachers in early childhood education and K-12 systems;
- *Incompatible policies, practices and funding streams* that do not promote or sustain collaboration and seamless and integrated learning environments and experiences for children; and
- *Insufficient family and community* involvement to become essential partners in their children's development and education.

The LINC Project research component was designed to further examine these challenges and to seek examples of how they were being met by various practitioners. The Advisory Group considered these challenges and the LINC research in its deliberations regarding its recommendations.

The group was issued a specific charge to guide its work:

LINC Advisory Group Charge

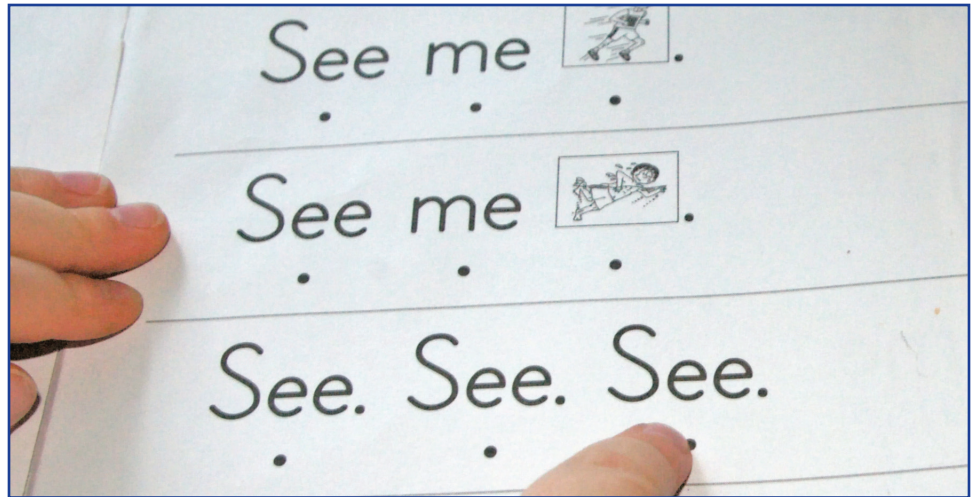
To develop and implement policies and practices that address the missing links in creating a learning continuum to support the whole child from birth to beyond and the role that early childhood and K-12 school leaders play in their efforts to collaborate with families, support agencies, and community and state stakeholders to provide high quality learning and developmental opportunities for children.

To develop and implement policies and practices that address the missing links in creating a learning continuum to support the whole child from birth to beyond and the role that early childhood and K-12 school leaders play in their efforts to collaborate with families, support agencies, and community and state stakeholders to provide high quality learning and developmental opportunities for children.

The LINC Advisory Group formulated its recommendations in the spirit of its charge: to promote a coordinated and collaborative learning continuum that supports children from birth. Educational leadership is a key factor in creating such a continuum.

The goals and recommendations, as presented, represent consensus among group members. They are based on a review of current research, research conducted within the scope of the LINC project, and many rounds of discussion among members and their constituent organizations.

For some policies, the Advisory Group could not reach full consensus within the time constraints of the project. These policy areas represent opportunities for further collaborative work in order to arrive at appropriate goals and recommendations. Other policy areas raised during the Advisory Group work fell outside the scope of the LINC project, but should be mentioned as integral to attaining a fully viable learning continuum. These unresolved issues are presented in Appendix A.



The LINC Advisory Group conducted its work based upon three guiding principles:

1. Leadership Matters.

Research shows that education leaders in both early childhood and K-12 schools have a significant effect on student learning, second only to the effects of teachers.

2. Early Learning Investment Pays Later Dividends.

Investments in early care and education result in important and measurable gains for students, including cognitive, social, and emotional growth as well as positive life outcomes.

3. Early Learning and K-12 Can Learn from Each Other.

Many effective educational methods and approaches used within each sector have important applications within the other. Sharing this knowledge will benefit students, parents and educators.

Principle One: Leadership Matters

Important research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) identified the significant contribution that school leaders make to increasing student achievement, second only to the contributions of teachers. The same research found that in difficult times and circumstances, leadership matters even more. This is not only the case in K-12 education. Research shows that the level of training and support for early childhood program directors impacts the quality of services provided (Bloom & Bella, 2005).

Other studies have identified the effects of specific leadership skills on improved student achievement. Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003) examined the effects of school leadership practices on student achievement and identified research-based school leadership responsibilities and practices significantly associated with improved student achievement.

While teachers work directly with students most of the time, leaders in both early childhood and K-12 education are well-positioned to create the conditions for a smooth learning continuum that fully supports children as they progress. However, based on the LINC research and discussions, it is clear that many early childhood program directors and K-12 school leaders currently lack awareness and practice in bridging the divide between early childhood and the K-12 system.

The problem often begins with the training that principals and early childhood program directors receive in their preparation programs and continues with a shortage of targeted professional development for practicing school leaders and childhood program directors. For example, very few principal preparation and professional development programs provide training about early childhood learning standards, early childhood brain research and learning theories, or funding and school laws/policies related to early childhood education. Such knowledge would prepare K-12 principals both to partner with early childhood professionals and to provide instructional leadership for pre-K and early elementary programs within their own schools.

The Urban Leadership Program at the University of Illinois-Chicago is an example of a program addressing the need for early childhood learning for principals. Since January 2008, the principal preparation program offers a component to increase principals' abilities to initiate and support high quality early childhood programs in their schools, embedding early childhood learning experiences into the course content, internships and assessments of knowledge and practice.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2005) has developed six standards that effective principals must demonstrate to connect elementary schools and early childhood programs to develop high quality early childhood and elementary programs in their communities. However, while these standards have been created, no research currently exists to show how these standards are being used, how widely distributed they are, or whether these standards have improved student learning.

The problem is also evident in a relative lack of formal and informal training for many early childhood leaders. When training occurs, it rarely addresses the connections between early childhood and K-12. While principals must complete a master's level certification program, early childhood program directors are required to have

less formal education; many have a bachelor's degree while others have an associate's degree.

As noted in the most recent *Who's Caring for the Kids?* Report (2008), the quality of care provided is affected by the level of formal education and specialized training of early childhood program directors. A study by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University (Summer 2008) found that directors who are more highly educated tend to provide more professional growth opportunities to their teachers. More highly qualified directors have also been shown to increase staff retention as well as set higher expectations for program quality – both of which translate to better learning experiences for children (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). The research on early childhood program directors confirms that directors are an important part in improving the quality of early childhood teachers, facilities, and care for young children.

Principle Two: Early Learning Investment Pays Later Dividends

Multiple studies have shown that enrolling low-income children in early childhood programs improves outcomes in elementary school, with benefits that include higher achievement test scores, reduced need for special education services, and lower grade retention rates (Horton, 2007; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Robertson, Mersky, Topitzes, & Niles, 2007; The Committee for Economic Development, 2006; Wat 2007). Studies following preschool attendees through adolescence find higher rates of high school completion and higher educational attainment compared to other low-income children not enrolled in preschool programs (Horton, 2007; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Robertson, Mersky, Topitzes, & Niles, 2007).

For example, the Chicago Longitudinal Study followed the life course of 1,539 low-income minority children born in 1979 or 1980 and who attended early childhood programs in 25 sites in 1985-1986. The study found that the preschool group had significantly higher rates of high school completion and 4-year college attendance as well as more total years of education completed. By age 24, the preschool group was more likely to have a stable employment history and had significantly lower incarceration rates. (Reynolds et al., 2007).

The Administration for Children and Families conducted a 2006 study of Early Head Start programs serving children from birth to age three. Results showed that Early Head Start children performed better on measures of cognition, language and social-emotional functioning and were less likely to be in an “at-risk” category, potentially reducing the need for special education services. Early Head Start parents were more likely to be in education or job training programs and to be more supportive of their children’s development. The researchers also found significant positive effects on English vocabulary acquisition for Spanish-speaking children.

The economic benefits of early childhood programs are well-documented through many longitudinal studies. One study followed preschool students through age 27, and compared economic outcomes with a similar group of students who did not attend Pre-K school. The researchers found that the pre-k school group had four times as many individuals earning \$2,000 or more each month; three times as many owning their own homes; and one fourth as many using welfare benefits as adults (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). A recent Minnesota report found that the estimated cost burden to the Minnesota K-12 system due to children entering kindergarten unprepared was \$113 million annually (Chase, Coffee-Borden, Anton, Moore, & Valorose, 2008). Finally, a recent report described the economic gains of a voluntary universal pre-kindergarten program in Illinois. By 2050, this cohort of students would contribute an additional \$18 billion in earnings resulting in \$9 billion in increased profits and benefits for Illinois businesses, and a \$7 billion decrease in governmental spending and a \$6 billion reduction in crime-related costs (Lynch, 2007).

Principle Three: Early Learning and K-12 Can Learn From Each Other

An effective learning continuum ensures continuity in children’s experiences as they move from one setting to another.

A strong continuum includes several important features:

- ◆ Vertical alignment: curriculum and instruction progress in an orderly and logical manner across developmental levels and grades;
- ◆ Horizontal alignment: instructors coordinated learning experiences within grades and subjects;
- ◆ Shared goals of student readiness and proficiency as learning progresses; and
- ◆ Communication and coordination among caregivers, educators, and families to support student learning.

Research shows that this type of aligned early childhood and K-12 approach can improve student achievement, reduce the need for costly special education services, and produce a more educated, skilled and competitive workforce (Graves, 2006). It not only can lift student achievement dramatically, but also multiply the benefits of investments in preschool. To do this requires continuity in services between early childhood and K-12 education.

Continuity requires sequential access to coordinated programs and predictable experiences that support learning and development. To create this sequential experience, Kristie Kaurez of Columbia Teachers College suggested in a presentation to the LINC advisory committee that early childhood and K-12 systems need to integrate both push-down and push-up efforts. Push-down refers to policies and practices in the K-12 system that the early childhood community may learn and adapt for use within its classrooms. Similarly, push-up includes policies and practices from the early childhood community that the K-12 system may adapt for its own student clientele.

Examples of push-down practices noted by the LINC advisory committee include a stronger dedication to systems of accountability that focus on the child and universal approaches that benefit all children. Examples of push-up practices include a greater focus on the whole child strong communication with and respect for children's families in the learning process, communicating with and meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families, and expanding accountability measures to include program quality.

According to Kaurez, a learning continuum should be a "together effort" that includes everyone, without the burden falling on one particular sector. For example, in Sweden, integrating pre-k schools with primary schools made the schools more learner-centered and brought about a paradigm shift in education in which child care and development go hand in hand with education (Soo-Hyang Choi, 2002). Sharing efforts and knowledge in these ways helps early childhood and K-12 to jointly provide coordinated child-centered education and whole-child development.

LINC Research and Gap Analysis

Studying a Critical Problem

Early childhood and K-12 education leaders lack awareness, training and practice in providing instructional leadership that bridges the divide between early childhood and K-12 and creates a seamless learning continuum.

Recognizing this problem, the McCormick Foundation granted funding to researchers in the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University to study the current state of learning continuum alignment in Illinois. The goal of the research

was to inform policy recommendations based on the data collected and to identify for the larger education community those policies and practices that both support and pose barriers to creating a seamless learning continuum.

The study considered four primary research questions:

1. What is the current nature of the linkages and partnerships between early childhood programs and K-12 school systems in Illinois?
2. What are the most current issues and challenges that are barriers to creating a seamless early learning continuum in Illinois?
3. How are early childhood program directors and elementary school principals facilitating the alignment of a learning continuum?
4. What actions do practitioners recommend that would facilitate their efforts to develop and sustain a learning continuum?

Creating a Research Base

To set the stage for informed Advisory Group discussions and the project's research agenda, project staff created an on-line research compendium, a compilation of the most relevant and current research and literature about the alignment of the learning continuum, grouped into three categories: early childhood, learning continuum alignment, and leadership.


Links to full articles as well as summaries of each article were provided. The research provided common information on the state of knowledge regarding the creation of an early learning continuum and the role of leadership in the process.

The on-line research compendium resource is available to the public and can be viewed at <http://www.leadershiplinc.ilstu.edu/researchcompendium/>

Research Methods

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to address the research questions. These included:

- A survey of early childhood program directors,
- A survey of elementary school principals, and
- A survey of early childhood and K-12 professional development providers.



Project staff designed and administered surveys to an Illinois sample of early childhood program directors, elementary school principals (with and without early childhood classes in their schools), and professional development providers. Surveys were sent to 1,790 childcare center directors (in for-profit, not-for-profit and school-based centers) and 2,628 elementary school principals. Targeted sample sizes were 327 and 328 responses for program directors and principals respectively. Staff analyzed the survey data using a statistical program to identify response frequencies and patterns. Information from the surveys was examined to look for similarities and differences of responses among the various survey groups.

Findings and Discussion

The survey process garnered 205 responses from early childhood program directors and 403 responses from principals. This section provides the results of the surveys and discusses their implications for the learning continuum. Appendices B and C contain the demographics of the program directors and principals who responded to this survey.

Policies and Practices of Early Childhood Program Directors

Based on the survey findings, it appears that program directors work most frequently with teachers within their own programs to improve teaching and learning within their programs. For example, program directors expect their teachers to regularly assess their children's developmental progress and use the results to inform curriculum, teaching, and program development. Furthermore, program directors alert their teachers of professional development opportunities to learn more about aligning early care and education programs with the K-12 education system.

When it comes to working with educators outside their own early childhood programs, directors rarely engage with the elementary teachers and administrators in their local school districts. For example, early childhood program directors and teachers do not regularly include elementary teachers and administrators in curriculum planning meetings. Nor do program directors and teachers frequently work with elementary teachers and administrators to align the two systems' programs and curricula, observe classrooms, or participate in joint professional development. Finally, early childhood program directors indicated that they did developmental screening of each child upon enrollment as well as monitor children's development while in their centers. However, federal student data privacy restrictions do not allow them access to their students' data once they matriculate to elementary school, which prohibits them to use these data to evaluate and improve their programs.

The survey findings for program directors are displayed in Table 1.

Policies and Practices of Elementary Principals

Based on the surveys of elementary school principals, K-12 teachers and administrators are working diligently to align their curricula, monitor and assess the quality of their schools

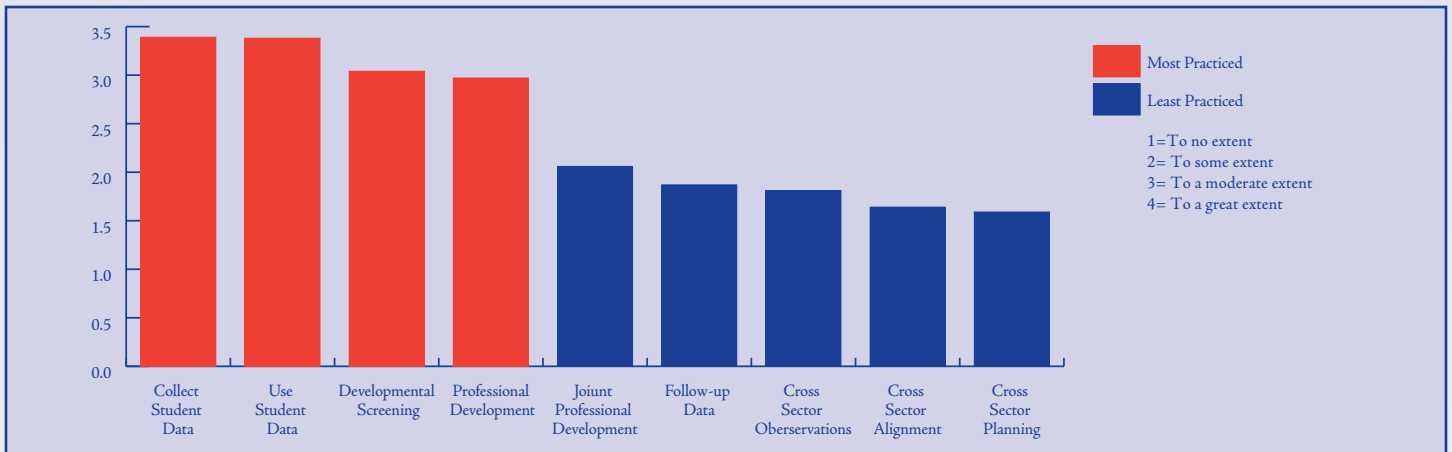


Table 1: Policies and Practices of Early Childhood Program Directors

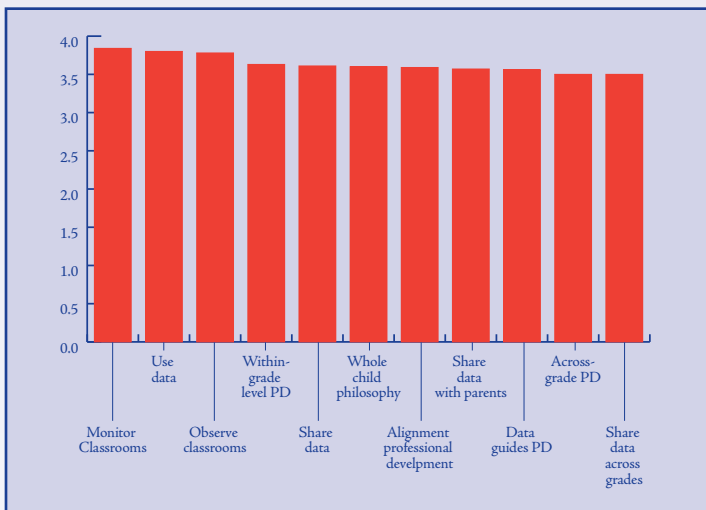


Table 2. Most Common Policies and Practices of Elementary Principals

and classrooms, assess students’ learning and use that information to guide curricular development and professional development. However, similar to the responses for program directors, these practices are most commonly employed within each principal’s building.

Like program directors, principals reported that they rarely work with early childhood program directors and teachers outside of their buildings. A large percent of principals reported that their schools do not routinely invite early care and education providers (e.g., early childhood teachers and family-based providers) into their classrooms to observe and learn about kindergarten expectations for students, nor do the schools include pre-k teachers in common planning sessions with elementary teachers. While it is

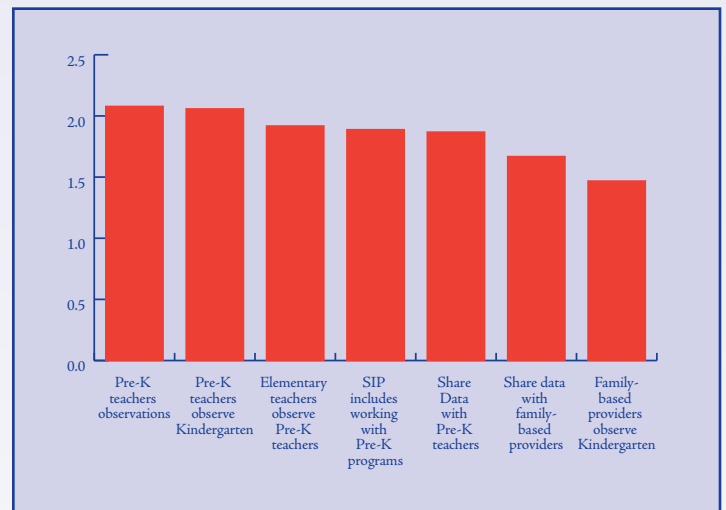



Table 3. Least Common Policies and Practices of Elementary Principals

common that principals encourage elementary teachers to observe each other’s classrooms, very few principals encouraged pre-k teachers to observe elementary classrooms. Similarly, few principals reported that they encouraged elementary teachers to observe pre-k teachers’ classrooms.

The survey findings for elementary principals are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.

LINC staff compared the practices of principals who have a pre-k program within their buildings to those who do not have a pre-k program. The analysis showed that principals with pre-k programs in their buildings were more likely to engage in the following practices associated with developing a learning continuum:

- 
- Expect teachers to adopt curricular practices and teaching strategies from early learning theories and early care and education providers,
 - Align curriculum in their elementary classrooms with the Illinois Early Learning Standards for 3 and 4 year-old students,
 - Include pre-k teachers in common planning time with elementary teachers,
 - Encourage pre-k teachers to observe elementary classrooms,
 - Encourage elementary teachers to observe pre-k teachers to learn about the students' learning experiences in pre-k classrooms,
 - Offer professional development to teachers on early childhood learning theories and the adoption of these theories in their classrooms, and
 - Expect teachers to share aggregated student data with pre-k teachers to guide discussions about strengthening elementary classroom practices.

Barriers to the Learning Continuum

Data from both the program director and principal surveys identified the most common barriers to aligning learning experiences between early childhood and K-12 programs.

Program directors cited the following barriers:

- Lack of access to follow-up data on center graduate's progress in K-12 system;
- Not enough time to build partnerships; and
- Lack of interest by K-12 district on receiving early childhood assessment data when the child matriculates.

Principals provided their own list of barriers:

- Not enough time to build partnerships;
- Incompatibility of schedules between the two systems; and
- Privacy laws that strictly regulate the sharing of student information among people and systems (e.g., the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act or FERPA).

Suggestions for Overcoming Barriers

Preparation: Principal respondents had several recommendations about how to integrate more learning about early care and education into Type 75 administrator preparation programs. Their suggestions included:

- Integrate concepts related to building the learning continuum and early care and education in preparation program courses;
- Convey that cross-sector collaboration is a priority, include team-building, working with partners, and community relations in course work;

- Engage aspirant principals in learning about developmentally appropriate practices, integration of early learning standards into policies and practices, curriculum and instruction to meet young children’s learning needs, and administrator’s role in developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Response To Intervention (RTI) for preschool-age children;
- Provide a course for each level of schooling (early childhood, elementary, and secondary education);
- Hire a faculty member/course instructor with early childhood experience;
- Include working with early care and education providers as experiences within internships in the general administration Type 75 preparation program and practical experiences in professional development programs [also recommended by director respondents];
- Provide opportunities for observing early care and education providers [also recommended by director respondents]; and
- Provide an option for a specialized program in which candidates can receive specialized designations for PreK-elementary, middle school, or high school within the general administrative certificate (Type 75).

Early childhood program director respondents offered some additional recommendations, including:

- Offer post-graduate courses that include early childhood leaders in joint training sessions;
- Place more emphasis on partnering and relationship-building in Type 75 programs;
- Recognize philosophy differences between early childhood and elementary education; and
- Teach students about the whole span of a child’s learning and development beginning in infancy.

Professional Development: Early childhood program directors indicated their recommendations to professional development providers as to the types of training that would help prepare them to better work with K-12 schools. The most common response related to the concept of “push-up/push-down,” in which educators from the early childhood sector and K-12 sector can learn and adapt philosophies, policies, and practices from each other (e.g., learning theories, expectations, transitions, developmentally appropriate practices, curriculum alignment, relationship between the Illinois Early Learning and Illinois Learning Standards). Several directors suggested professional development courses about

strategies to build partnerships and collaborating across sectors and seven respondents called for more cross-sector team opportunities to collaborate, in which representatives of the early childhood and K-12 communities come together for county, district, or regional seminars and workshops.

Elementary school principals responded with several suggestions for professional development providers that would help principals develop the knowledge and capacity to collaborate with early care and education providers. Several principals suggested that professional development providers should continue the workshop that currently exists for principals on understanding the pre-k program. In addition, the principals suggested that workshops (preferably Illinois Administrator Academy courses) should provide learning opportunities on the following topics:

- Opportunities to partner with early childhood programs or educators to align curricula, assure matches between curriculum and assessment, and assure rigor in early childhood and early elementary classrooms;
- Developmentally appropriate practices; assessing young children’s learning and development;
- Early childhood learning theories and best practices; and,
- How to integrate early childhood philosophy in the world of elementary schools that has to meet the accountability demands of NCLB and state tests.

Finally, principals said they need more information about mental health resources for students and families, and best practices to engage parents as partners in the early childhood to elementary education transition.

Collaboration: The cross-sector collaborations described by principal respondents most often involved administrators and staff in elementary grades working with staff in their own district’s early childhood programs (e.g., Head Start and Preschool for All programs). Only a few principals reported working with early care and education providers outside the district in the greater community.

Another small group of principals reported being involved in community coalitions that involved multiple community groups such as representatives from business, mental health and social service agencies, health providers, and educators. The most common goals or activities in these collaborations involved working together to improve children’s transitions from early childhood programs to kin-

dergarten through screening, visits to the kindergarten classrooms and open houses, aligning curriculum, and informing early childhood providers of school readiness requirements.

Among early childhood director respondents, the majority indicated that they were not involved in any collaborative activities with their local school districts. Those that did engage in such activities described them as falling into three categories:

- Participating in formal community/county-wide coalitions with community stakeholders from the education and business communities, social service agencies, and others to increase resources for early care and education providers and improve transitions for children from pre-school settings to kindergarten.
- Serving on school district school improvement teams and decision-making committees to align the curriculum, share test results, and inform the early childhood community about the district's kindergarten readiness expectations and logistics.
- Working with individual schools and/or teachers (either formally or informally) to appropriately place students, particularly special needs students; aligning standards and curriculum; and learning about best practices and teaching strategies. The most common goal for these collaborations was to improve the transitions for specific children from preschool to kindergarten.

About half of the principals said that they participated in some type of collaboration with early childhood providers. Of those who responded, the overwhelming majority (84%) said that these collaborations involved administrators, faculty, and staff in their own districts. These data appear consistent with the data presented earlier, in that elementary school principals reported engaging in alignment and collaboration activities, but these activities most often involved staff members in their own buildings.

Gap Analysis Conclusions

Overall, when one compares the practices of both program directors and principals, both appeared to be engaging in practices related to improving the curriculum and teaching within their buildings and/or districts and using student data to assess children's progress. However, the practices that program directors and principals reported using the least are the alignment and collaboration practices that require these leaders to reach outside of their buildings. While these conclusions are based on the responses of principals and program directors who responded to this survey, we anticipate that the results would be about the same in schools and early childhood programs across Illinois because the results are similar to those found in the research.

After a thorough review of the published research, the LINC data analysis, and the discussion progress over several months, the LINC Advisory Group devised its goals and recommendations. The group first reviewed its work to assure that the goals and recommendations addressed the original group charge.

LINC Advisory Group Charge: To develop and implement policies and practices that address the missing links in creating a learning continuum to support the whole child from birth to beyond and the role that early childhood and K-12 school leaders play in their efforts to collaborate with families, support agencies, and community and state stakeholders to provide high quality learning and developmental opportunities for children.

In reviewing the charge, it became clear that the final recommendations must focus on the special role of leaders in strengthening the learning continuum. This enabled the group to identify important issues that were outside the scope of the project. These are highlighted in the discussion section of this report. As the members maintained their focus on the role of education leaders and policymakers, they created a list of alignment issues and narrowed the goal list to three key goals. The advisory group was able to develop specific action recommendations for each goal. The results are summarized in Figure 1.

LINC Goal 1: Policies and mechanisms that strengthen the learning continuum through cross-sector communication and collaboration among service agencies, early childhood representatives, and K-12 education.

Recommendation 1.1

The State should develop a standing joint sub-committee of the P-20 task force and Early Learning Council to serve as a statewide “bridge” mechanism for policy and curriculum alignment, leader-

ship, preparation, professional development, and communication across early care/education and K-12 education.

Recommendation 1.2

The Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Human Services should encourage cross-divisional coordination and alignment between staff in early childhood education/services and other units, including high level policy meetings.

Recommendation 1.3

The revised Illinois School Leader Standards should include knowledge and competencies related to understanding and supporting lifespan learning starting at birth.

Recommendation 1.4

The Illinois Early Learning Standards and Illinois Learning Standards (K-12) should be clearly connected so that educators can see and understand learning expectations for students across the education continuum.

LINC Goal 2: Expanded leadership preparation and professional development programs that support the learning continuum.

Recommendation 2.1

The Illinois State Board of Education should broaden its principal endorsement from K-12 to PreK-12.

Recommendation 2.2

The Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Board of Higher Education should expand criteria for principal preparation programs to include:

- Developmentally appropriate practices and curricula from birth,
- Information about the Illinois Early Learning Standards in relation to the Illinois Learning Standards,
- Team-building and collaboration with early learning organizations
- Internship/practicum experiences at all educational levels (early learning, elementary, secondary), and
- Early care and learning representatives as preparation program partners.

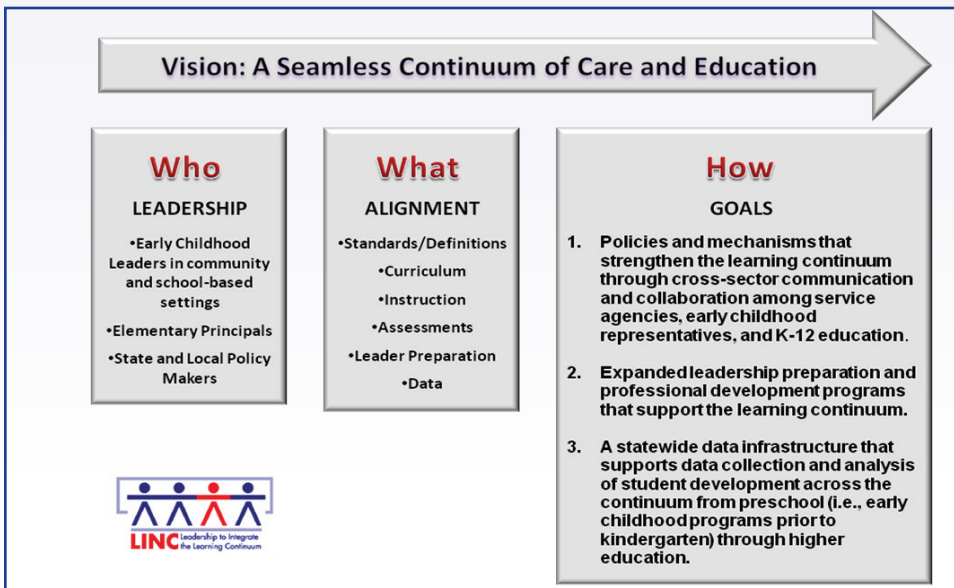


Figure 1: Strengthening the Learning Continuum: Who, What and How



LINC Goal 3: A statewide data infrastructure that supports data collection and analysis of student development across the continuum from early childhood (the learning and development experiences that children have pre-school) through higher education.¹

Recommendation 3.1

Build on the current work at the state level (e.g., Illinois State Board of Education Student Information System and Teacher Service Record and the Illinois Early Learning Council) to interconnect teacher, student, and school data to inform state policy, leader and teacher preparation programs, professional development programs, and local programs and policies.

Recommendation 2.3

State regulatory agencies should expand the criteria for preparation programs to require preparation programs for early childhood program directors and school administrators to include coursework regarding culturally and linguistically diverse children and families.

Recommendation 2.4

Oversight and funding agencies such (e.g., Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services) should create incentives for providers to offer professional development for early childhood program directors and K-12 leaders that includes learning theories and developmentally appropriate practices from birth through adulthood.

Note: See Appendix A for additional comments regarding important aspects of educator preparation and credentialing to support the learning continuum.

Recommendation 3.2

Data should be stored and accessible on a user-friendly on-line shared network that is in compliance with federal and state laws and guidelines (e.g., FERPA) to protect the privacy of students and families.

Recommendation 3.3

The data infrastructure should make data analysis accessible and understandable for educational leaders and teachers so they can assess and make improvements to their curricula, instruction and services. State education agencies should make public reports on the data and/or an intermediary organization should be allowed access to the data to be able to analyze and publish data reports that are accessible to schools and early care and education providers.

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Opportunities for Further Collaborative Work

Illinois Director Credential (IDC)

Highly qualified directors have been shown to increase staff retention as well as set higher expectations for program quality – both of which translate to better learning experiences for children (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). Who’s Caring for the Kids (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2008) found that directors with a bachelor’s degree or higher are more likely to have early childhood centers that are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and are more likely to support professional development of their teaching staff. The report also states that center directors who successfully acquired state Preschool for All funds have higher levels of education and administrative experience than other directors.

In 1999, in an effort to assist childcare directors with obtaining the competencies necessary for effective leadership and management, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) developed the Illinois Director’s Credential (IDC). The goals of the Credential are (1) establishing professional standards in management and leadership for center-based early childhood and school age administrators; (2) recognizing the specialized knowledge and skills required to be an effective manager of a center-based program; (3) improving the quality of programs that serve young children and their families; and (4) improving social, emotional, cognitive and physical developmental outcomes for children. The credential is offered at three levels: the Associates, Bachelors and Graduate Degrees. Currently, an estimated 360-400 directors have been awarded the Illinois Director’s Credential. Approximately two-thirds of the credentials have been awarded at the bachelors degree level or beyond. One-fourth of center directors receiving Preschool for All funds hold an Illinois Director Credential.

The competencies and benchmarks developed for the Illinois Director Credential were adopted by NAEYC as standards for well-qualified program administrators in their accreditations process. NAEYC’s accreditation criteria for administrator qualifications include a bachelor’s degree with:

- At least 9 credit-bearing hours of specialized college-level course work in administration, leadership, and/or management; and,
- At least 24 credit-bearing hours of specialized college-level course

work that addresses child development and learning from birth through kindergarten in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, or early childhood special education.

NAEYC also accepts alternative pathways to achieve educational qualifications of a program administrator that provides documentation of having achieved a combination of formal education, experience, and relevant training considered to meet the qualifications identified by NAEYC. Nineteen states (including Illinois) have NAEYC-approved state director credentials.

The LINC Advisory Group did not feel comfortable that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) require the phase-in of at least the Level I Directors Credential for all early childhood directors. Before such a recommendation should be made, LINC committee members felt that more discussion was needed at advisory boards and other venues in the state.

School districts have begun to recognize the value of the credential. Chicago Public Schools has just begun incentivizing the IDC in its community partners program (this is Preschool for All in community-based organizations). Programs that have a credentialed director receive a 2.5% add-on for IDC Level I, a 5% add-on for IDC Level II, and a 7.5% add-on for IDC Level III.

Requiring the Director’s Credential for all early childhood directors may be termed an “aspirational goal.” This concept should be referred to the Illinois Early Learning Council for additional research and discussion.

Professional Development

The LINC Advisory Group originally developed an entire goal related to providing cross-sector professional development opportunities. While the group reached consensus that this was an important goal, it needed more time and discussion to flesh out relevant and workable recommendations.

The group raised several issues:

- Whether to require practicum experiences for participants; in particular, requiring aspiring principals to engage in experiences in an early childhood program and/or in collaboration with an early childhood program to improve programs and practices and facilitate a continuum of learning;

- ◆ The interrelationship among professional development offerings sponsored or approved by the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Regional Offices of Education, and professional organizations; and
- ◆ The logistics of providing team-based trainings across sectors.

Policy Considerations Beyond the LINC Project Scope

Diverse workforce

Urban, suburban, and rural areas of Illinois are undergoing rapid demographic changes with an influx of ethnically diverse immigrant families. The teacher workforce should be expanded to reflect a more ethnically and linguistically diverse population. These teachers will be better equipped to communicate with diverse families and meet the learning needs of diverse students. In addition, to better prepare teachers to teach and work with culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, teacher preparation programs should incorporate cultural and linguistic coursework into their curriculum.

Assessment

The concept of school readiness and “Ready Schools” was raised in discussions at several meetings. One of the challenging issues within this discussion is that of assessing students’ learned skills and knowledge at the early childhood level. Many barriers exist to adopting a single “universal” assessment of learning, including quality of assessment tools, developmental appropriateness, and the wide range of student variations. While a unified student data system is a key goal for developing a learning continuum (see LINC Goal 3), the Advisory Group believes that the specific assessment question is a policy issue meriting further study and review by the Early Learning Council and the Illinois State Board of Education. However, many members of the LINC committee cautioned that data collected through assessments at the early childhood level should be aggregated and used to guide instruction in early childhood and elementary school programs, and assess trends over time; not to determine children’s readiness for school entry.



Teacher Certification

While the LINC project focused on the role of education leaders in creating and supporting a viable learning continuum, several issues regarding teacher certification are relevant and merit further examination. The State Board of Education and the State Teacher Certification Board should explore these issues further.

Type 04 Certification. Not all teachers in early childhood and early elementary classrooms have earned Illinois Early Childhood Type 04 certification (birth to Grade 3). The Illinois State Board of Education does not currently require this certification; for example, many teachers in K-3 have earned the K-9 teaching certification. The learning continuum would be strengthened if the Early Childhood certificate were required for teaching in Pre-K through Grade 3 classrooms.

Special Education Certification. The current special education certification is valid only for grades K-12. To teach in an Early Childhood Special Education Program (3-8 years) a person needs either the Learning Behavior Specialist 1 (LBS1) certificate with preschool approval or the Type 04 certificate and special education approval. The LBS1 certificate does not cover preschool. Obtaining the required approvals for preschool and special education require taking several courses. To strengthen the learning continuum, this certificate (and its related preparation programs) should be expanded to cover birth to age 5.

Appendix B: Demographics of Center Director Survey Respondents

Number of Responses

- ◆ 205 completed surveys (targeted representative sample size of 327)
- ◆ Sent to 1,790 centers

Type of Center

- ◆ 24% (48) Private nonprofit-independent
- ◆ 20% (40) For-profit proprietary or partnership
- ◆ 20% (40) Public nonprofit-sponsored by federal, state, or local government
- ◆ 14% (28) Public school
- ◆ 13% (25) Private nonprofit-affiliated with a social service agency or hospital
- ◆ 9% (17) For profit-corporation or chain
- ◆ 3% (5) College or university affiliated

Location of Center (if affiliated with a public school)

- ◆ 81% (29) Located in a public school
- ◆ 14% (5) In another school building (not an elementary school)
- ◆ 8% (3) In a district stand-alone building

Sources of funding

- ◆ 70% (109) IDHS or Chicago CYS child care subsidies (CCAP) program
- ◆ 57% (88) Preschool for All, state-funded pre-kindergarten, or other ISBE early childhood block grants
- ◆ 34% (52) Head Start or Early Head Start
- ◆ Other listed include: Parent tuition or district funds

Geographic Location of Center

- ◆ 32% (64) Small town/Rural (pop. less than 25,000)
- ◆ 28% (56) Chicago
- ◆ 25% (51) Collar county (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will)
- ◆ 17% (35) Large town (pop. over 25,000)

Age Levels of Children Served

- ◆ 98% (193) Preschoolers
- ◆ 56% (110) Toddlers
- ◆ 50% (99) School-agers
- ◆ 42% (83) Infants

NAEYC Accreditation

- ◆ 76% (148) No
- ◆ 24% (47) Yes

Licensure Status

- ◆ 83% (162) Licensed
- ◆ 17% (34) Licensed-exempt

Number of Children Licensed to Serve

- ◆ Average 120 children
- ◆ Median 82 children
- ◆ Range 8-935

Race/Ethnicity of Children Served (response average—totals do not equal 100%)

- ◆ 64% Caucasian
- ◆ 30% African-American
- ◆ 26% Hispanic
- ◆ 7% Asian/Pacific Islander
- ◆ 5% Multi-Racial
- ◆ 1% Native-American
- ◆ 9% Other

Number of Teachers Employed (includes teachers, assistant teachers and teacher aides)

- ◆ Average 13 teachers
- ◆ Median 9 teachers
- ◆ Range: 1-100

Appendix C: Demographics of Elementary Principal Survey Respondents

Number of Responses

- 403 completed surveys (targeted sample size of 328)
- Sent to approximately 2,600 elementary schools

Geographic Location of School

- 56% (218) Small Town/Rural (pop. less than 25,000)
- 29% (114) Collar County (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, & Will)
- 13% (51) Large Town (pop. over 25,000)
- 3% (10) Chicago (note: Chicago Public School principals were not actively recruited for this survey to avoid conflicts with Chicago Public School's research/data collection efforts)

Age Levels of Children Served

- Predominately Pre-K through 8th
- A few principals led Pre-K through 12th schools

District Pre-K Programs

- 91% (367) of principals' districts have a Pre-K program

Location of Pre-K Programs

- 41% (163) In principal's school
- 28% (111) In another elementary school
- 16% (65) In a district-owned stand-alone building
- 8% (30) In another school (not elementary)
- 49% (198) of Pre-K programs in the principals' building are located near the early (K-3) elementary classrooms

Number of Children Enrolled

- Average 423 children

Race/Ethnicity and Income of Children Served

- 25% average percentage of minorities served in principals' schools
- 37% average percentage of students qualify for free- or reduced-lunch in principals' schools

Average Number of Years as Principal

- 8 years

Principals' Teaching Credentials

- 83% (251) Type 03
- 23% (71) Special Education
- 15% (46) Type 04
- Others listed include: Type 75, Type 09, Type 73, Type 06, Type 10, NBCT, Reading Specialist, ELL, Superintendent Certificate

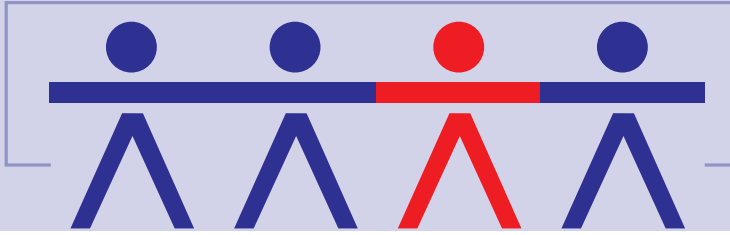
Grade Levels Taught Prior to Becoming a Principal

- 11% (38) Pre-K
- 51% (178) K-3
- 73% (257) 4th – 9th
- 27% (94) High School

Teaching Credentials of Teachers in Principals' Schools

- 81% average percentage of teachers who hold the Type 03 in principals' schools
- 17% average percentage of teachers who hold the Type 04 in principals' schools

Note: Type 03 is a K-8 teaching certificate, and Type 04 is a Pre-K-3 teaching certificate



LINC Leadership to Integrate
the Learning Continuum

M McCormick Foundation

About the McCormick Foundation

The McCormick Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to strengthening our free, democratic society by investing in children, communities and country. Through its five grantmaking programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, and three world-class museums, the Foundation helps build a more active and engaged citizenry. It was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest charities, with more than \$1 billion in assets. For more information, please visit www.McCormickFoundation.org.

