RESOURCE

LEADERSHIP STANDARDS AND COMPETENCIES

We fundamentally evolve the identity, role and responsibilities of early childhood administrators toward those of an instructional leader whose day-to-day practice shapes teaching and learning and ensures staff have the sustained supports essential to achieving excellence, quality and innovation of teaching and learning.

We use the term "instructional leader" broadly to encompass the different instructional leader roles that may be represented in an early childhood system. Instructional leaders include building leaders (e.g., principals and center directors) as well as other leaders with responsibilities for supervising pre-k teachers, guiding their practice and/or facilitating job-embedded professional learning (e.g., teacher leaders, master teachers, head teachers, assistant principals, assistant directors, curriculum coordinators, pre-k coordinators, education coordinators, instructional coaches and early childhood special education facilitators). Systems leaders (e.g., district leaders, grantee leaders and state leaders) also have responsibilities regarding instructional leadership. These standards are meant to apply to all such instructional leaders, though how they are demonstrated in practice may vary with their different levels of responsibilities.

Standard 1. Visionary Leadership

An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of all young children by facilitating the development, articulation and stewardship of a vision of ambitious, developmentally appropriate early education that is realized by the entire school/center community. A strong educational leader:

a. **Articulates** a vision based on knowledge and understanding of:
    1. Early childhood development and learning
    2. Ambitious and developmentally appropriate early childhood teaching and learning
    3. Family engagement in children's learning and development
    4. Kindergarten readiness as a flexibly and broadly defined concept that includes all areas of children's development and learning, with emphasis on social-emotional development
    5. Cultural competency and equitable practices
    6. Continuous practice improvement as an organizational process

b. **Develops** vision in collaboration with staff and families and builds collective understanding of the vision among all in the school/center

c. **Ensures** that the school/center vision drives decision-making, policies and constructive responses to accountability requirements

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d. **Cultivates** relational trust, community and social capital across the entire school/center and with families and the community to foster collective responsibility and collegial support for achieving the vision

e. **Cultivates** leadership among teachers, parents and community

Standard 2. Improving Teaching and Learning

An educational leader provides consistent and coherent instructional guidance and builds a strong professional learning community that collaborates to continuously improve teaching, family engagement and learning for all young children. A strong educational leader:

a. **Applies** knowledge and understanding of implementation science, school improvement research and effective job-embedded professional learning to articulate and steward continuous instructional improvement

b. **Uses** multiple contexts for job-embedded professional learning that build staff knowledge, skills and dispositions, including observation and performance feedback, peer learning and collaboration, coaching and mentoring, reflective supervision and appraisal of performance

c. **Assesses** instructional practices and the impacts on children's learning regularly to assist teachers with identifying, clarifying and addressing barriers to children's learning and development

d. **Engages** staff in collaborative and routine cycles of improvement to analyze multiple sources of data, identify root causes, set goals, plan and test small incremental changes and improvements to practices and policies

e. **Collects** and analyzes data pertinent to equitable outcomes and ensures continuous improvement cycles including attention to equity

f. **Demonstrates** effective facilitation skills during job-embedded professional learning and cycles of improvement and uses protocols to build trust among staff, to promote active and equitable participation, to ensure focused and productive dialogue and to foster inquiry, the construction of knowledge and problem solving.

Standard 3. Ambitious Instruction

An educational leader develops, articulates and ensures an ambitious and developmentally appropriate instructional program and supportive interactions among staff, children and families to promote the success and well-being of all children. A strong educational leader:

a. **Works** with the entire school/center community to develop and continuously refine a research-based framework for teaching, learning and family engagement

b. **Ensures** that all adults endorse and use early learning and development standards, curriculum and assessment information about children's progress to intentionally plan for children's learning

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c. **Ensures** teachers reflect on and plan intentionally for their role in providing children with emotionally supportive, organized and instructionally meaningful interactions

d. **Supports** staff to apply principles of universal design for learning to meet the needs of diverse learners

e. **Supports** staff to individualize and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each child

f. **Supports** staff to collaborate in designing, implementing, evaluating and refining curriculum and instruction to support the learning of all children

g. **Supports** staff to make decisions about curriculum and instruction based on practice standards and data, learning standards and data, the expertise of peers, a respect for diversity and the recommendations of research and learned societies

Standard 4. Family Engagement

An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of all young children by engaging families as knowledgeable partners in children's learning and development, responding to diverse family interests, strengths and needs. A strong educational leader:

a. **Applies** knowledge and understanding of effective frameworks and strategies to engage families

b. **Builds** and sustains positive relationships with families with respect for diversity

c. **Structures** opportunities for families to regularly contribute their knowledge and perspectives to enhance teaching and learning for their children

d. **Guides** staff to work cohesively across home and school/center to support children's participation, health, learning, development and kindergarten readiness

e. **Cultivates** strong ties with elementary schools/staff and actively supports families, children and teachers to make successful kindergarten transitions

Standard 5. Supportive Learning Environment

An educational leader ensures a positive, supportive learning climate wherein all staff hold high expectations for children's learning and development and build supportive relationships with each other, with children and with their families to support children's successful approaches to learning and capacity to persist with ambitious curriculum and instruction. A strong educational leader:

a. **Establishes** policies and attends to their implementation daily to ensure all adults in the school/center community create consistently supportive culture, relationships and learning environments

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b. **Models** positive, supportive, linguistically and culturally competent interactions and relationships with children, families and staff

c. **Supports** all adults with creating a positive emotional climate allowing children to consistently feel safe, liked, able to build relationships and actively explore

d. **Guides** staff to develop personalized relationships and social-emotional supports for children to enable them to meet high expectations

e. **Assists** staff in using positive behavioral guidance strategies and proactive social, emotional and behavioral supports

f. **Ensures** that each child is treated in a fair, respectful and unbiased manner and with an understanding of his or her culture and context

g. **Supports** teachers to create physical environments that are comforting and organized and that promote learning through play

Standard 6. Effective Management

An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of all young children by effectively and efficiently managing school/center operations and resources while maximizing time for instructional leadership to ensure a safe, supportive and effective educational environment. A strong educational leader:

a. **Ensures** instructional leadership team has adequate time, expertise and support to provide instructional guidance to early childhood teachers and to facilitate their ongoing professional learning and practice improvement

b. **Connects** varied accountability demands to the school/center vision and policies and articulates with staff the corresponding professional responsibilities

c. **Uses** effective communication skills and practices inclusive problem solving and decision-making

d. **Demonstrates** savvy with school calendars, schedules, staffing and resources to ensure routine protected time for teacher collaboration and professional learning

Standard 7. Ethical Leadership

An educational leader promotes the success of all young children by acting with integrity and fairness and in an ethical manner, confronting inequality and bias, ensuring equity and valuing diversity. A strong educational leader:

a. **Applies** knowledge and understanding of professional codes of ethics

b. **Addresses** matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in practice discussions to inspire others to higher levels of performance

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c. **Models** self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency and ethical behavior

d. **Treats** people fairly, equitably and with dignity and respect

e. **Demonstrates** appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity of staff, children and families in the school/center community

f. **Considers** the impact of one's administrative practices and responses to accountability demands on others

These standards are informed by The Essential 0-5 Survey organizational supports for improvement, a research-based framework and Start Early's research and development work to adapt and apply this framework in early learning settings.[1] They are aligned with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders and the Oregon Educational Leadership/Administrator Standards.

[1] Pacchiano, D., Klein, R., and Hawley, M.S. (2016). "Reimagining Instructional Leadership and Organizational Conditions for Improvement: Applied Research Transforming Early Education." Ounce of Prevention Fund.

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