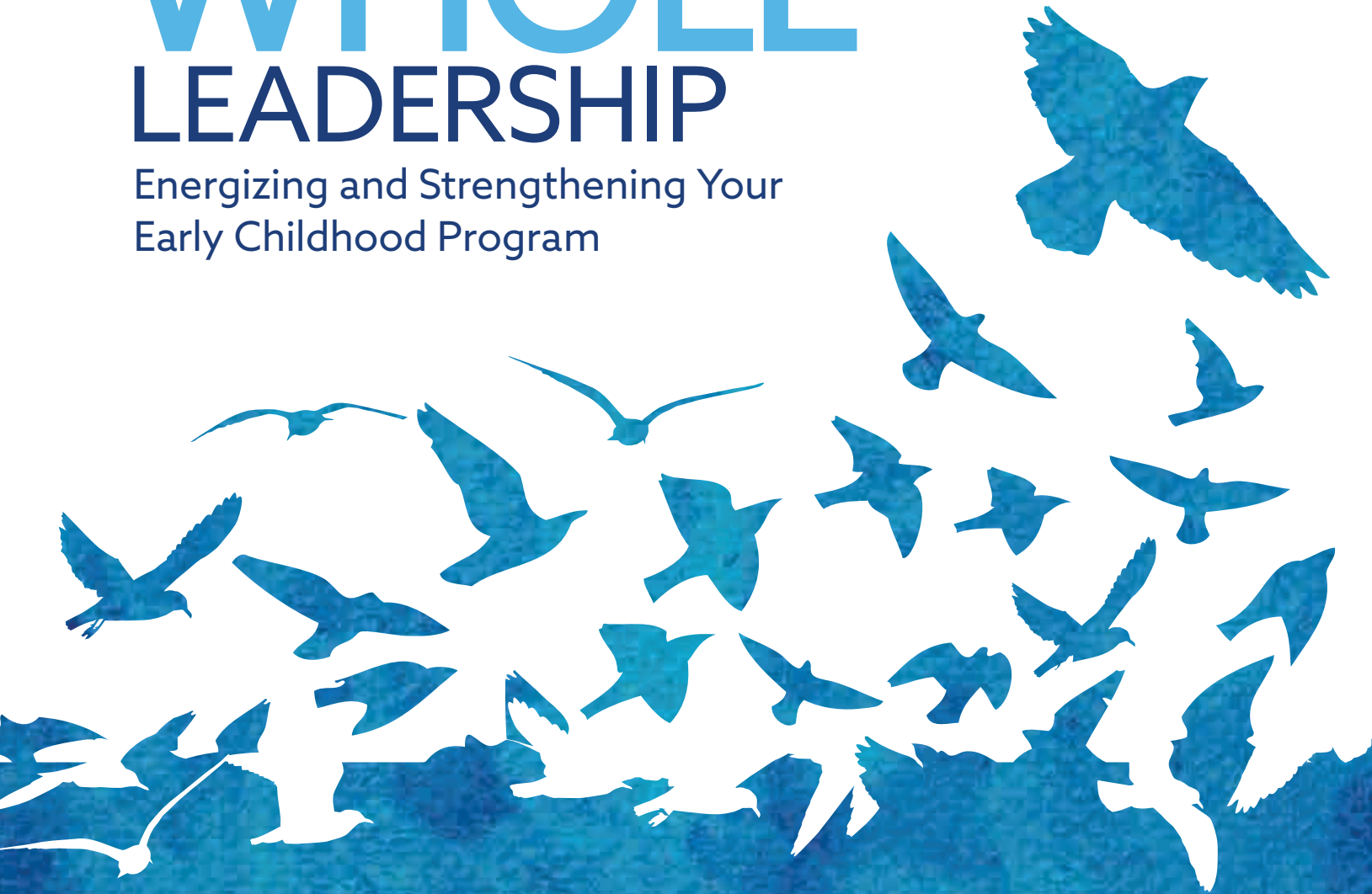


BUILDING ON WHOLE LEADERSHIP

Energizing and Strengthening Your
Early Childhood Program



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Introduction

If you are an early childhood program leader, this book is for you. In a single day, you manage operations, build relationships with families, oversee teaching, and plan professional development. You are an expert in child development, child guidance, licensing standards, and policy. With all of these pressing responsibilities, how can you foster a stronger sense of purpose and collaboration in your program? How do you balance priorities? How will you accomplish your goals while maintaining perspective and energy?

The Whole Leadership Framework offers an opportunity for you to refresh your sense of purpose, energize your practice, and focus on the most important ingredients of leadership success. In this book, you will find useful tools and resources to help you balance your priorities and effectively lead your program. The framework will help you develop a cohesive, sustainable, and vibrant organization.

Where Did the Whole Leadership Framework Originate?

Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council 2015) introduced a mandate to strengthen the capacity of early childhood program leaders. Leaders needed common language, clearly defined priorities, and cohesive direction to support professional development and set goals for program success. To clarify direction for the field and to give support for the internal growth and effectiveness of programs a unified framework was needed.

The Whole Leadership Framework, developed through the work of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, addresses this gap and introduces an integrated and holistic way to revitalize the work of early childhood leaders.

The framework emerged from engagement among early childhood leaders around the United States and within the McCormick Center. Incorporating feedback from early childhood leaders across sectors, the framework was refined to focus on the most important ingredients of leadership success: leadership essentials, pedagogical leadership, and administrative leadership. The model introduces balance across domains, creates integrated connections among the domains, and illustrates the priorities of all types of early care and education program models serving children from birth through third grade.

What Is the Whole Leadership Framework?

The interdependent relationships among leadership essentials, pedagogical leadership, and administrative leadership ensure the health and success of programs. As the framework demonstrates, the program leader functions as a facilitator for the overall vision, direction, and daily management of an early childhood program. This leader has the authority to delegate some leadership functions to others in an organization and to coordinate tasks to ensure that goals are met. The Whole Leadership Framework creates a model to do this effectively.

- **Leadership essentials** includes the basic competencies and individual qualities that are foundational to the effectiveness of all facets of leadership. Essentials include competencies in self-awareness, communication, and relationship building, characteristics that shape the dynamics and interpersonal systems of your program. Leadership essentials affect all aspects of pedagogical and administrative leadership.
- **Pedagogical leadership** supports teaching and learning. While discussions about teaching usually focus on what teachers do in classrooms, pedagogical leadership provides a more complete foundation that includes competency in early childhood development and teaching knowledge. Pedagogy includes the program philosophy, the physical environment and materials, routines, activities, and interactions that influence teaching quality. This dimension also addresses the program leader's role in selecting curriculum, overseeing teacher qualifications, ensuring ongoing feedback and support for teaching staff, facilitating professional development opportunities, and building communities of practice to ensure continuous quality improvement. In addition, pedagogical leadership includes promotion of family engagement and work with families.
- **Administrative leadership** keeps a program stable and facilitates growth through maximizing the team's capacity to develop and sustain a vital early childhood organization. It incorporates operational and strategic leadership functions, including creating program policies, developing systems for efficient operation, ensuring organizational supports for effective teaching, managing budgets and funding, and overseeing building and personnel needs. Administrative leadership includes both leadership and management functions in the organization. As a program leader, you set the strategic direction for the program and also assume various leadership roles beyond your own organization. Through advocacy and connecting with your communities and its resources, you expand the scope of your influence and effectiveness.

Leadership is the most important stabilizer, shaping how your program functions. It is essential to the organizational health and efficacy of program effectiveness for staff, families, and children. Instead of approaching each part of your work separately, the Whole Leadership Framework offers the opportunity to use an integrated and holistic approach that will strengthen all aspects of your work. Importantly, the framework will increase your influence as a professional and provide the tools and resources you need to increase your productivity within and outside your organization.

Whole Leadership Framework

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS (BIRTH TO THIRD GRADE)







Source: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. 2019. Whole Leadership Framework. Wheeling, IL: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. Used with permission.

The Whole Leadership Framework provides common language for communication with staff, coaches, and policy professionals as you address, support, and advance the needs of young children, families, and staff. As you face a long "to-do" list and prioritize a range of significant obligations, you will be able to make critical decisions about how to balance your time, energy, and priorities for the most productive results. The visual and conceptual roadmap will help you integrate each function of your work more effectively into the context of your whole organization and its goals.

How This Book Is Organized

The content and features of this book show you how to use the Whole Leadership Framework to identify the strengths, capabilities, and needs of your organization. You will find practical strategies to create action steps to make the most of growth opportunities. In addition to new ideas for daily practice, you will benefit from real-life scenarios and reflections from other professionals that provide insight about how to achieve greater effectiveness, cohesion, and impact.

This book invites program leaders to use the framework to identify the strengths and capabilities of their organization and to take practical steps to engage in meaningful professional growth. The features will inspire and encourage you to take positive steps in your leadership journey.

- **Real-Life Scenarios:** Each section uses vignettes showing benefits, lessons learned, and the ways the book's content affects and supports leaders.
- **Legacies of Leadership:** This feature, indicated by , provides tips, success stories, and inspirational quotes from leaders that show how the principles and practices of whole leadership can make a difference in your organization. These examples represent the combined wisdom of program administrators and are not attributed to any one particular speaker.
- **What Works Best:** Indicated by , these brief research-to-practice information boxes highlight the latest evidence-based knowledge about what works to anchor your leadership practice.
- **Take-Away Strategies:** These practical application steps, indicated by , provide an on-the-spot opportunity to integrate content into your daily work.
- **Digging Deeper:** These brief resource sections, indicated by , provide additional information for readers to pursue a topic in depth.
- **Chapter Study Guides:** At the end of each chapter, guiding questions and activities frame active reflective evaluation and planning. The study guide can be used individually for self-study or to facilitate a group study within a community of practice for program leaders. Study guides may be copied.

As you read each chapter, you will discover practical information and strategies to help you overcome barriers to effective planning and practice. You will become part of a national initiative that strengthens and prioritizes the influence of early childhood leaders in guiding continuous quality-improvement efforts. The Whole Leadership Framework will help you maximize your impact as a change agent in the lives of children, families, organizations, and communities.

Understanding Your Influence as a Leader

Unpacking the Challenges and Opportunities of Leadership

Program director Allyeah wants to encourage effective planning. She has asked teachers for ideas about strengthening relationships with families. She hopes to encourage individual effort and at the same time support cohesive program goals. Inviting teachers to brainstorm has been a productive way to build confidence and incorporate staff ideas to promote family collaboration.

Teachers Samina and Jasmine brainstorm strategies to connect with families. Samina says, "I want to use puppet play to teach social skills." Jasmine adds, "Maybe we can ask parents to teach manners at home." Allyeah encourages them. "I'll include a weekly manners tip in the newsletter. Each of these strategies will help us reach our goals."

A leader's responsibilities can be overwhelming. On a day-to-day basis, program leaders need to clarify goals, motivate staff, foster organizational norms and expectations, and ensure teachers have needed resources for success. But these priorities often take a back seat to the daily management of the program—maintaining adequate funding, meeting multiple reporting requirements, and participating in quality-improvement efforts. Responding to the needs of children and families (or substituting in the classroom) may require time that conflicts with planning and preparation for staff growth and development.

Time management is a pressing challenge. Scheduling required meetings, creating effective daily routines, and managing communication about changes to families' schedules all require attention and time. Policies that appear to be clear in a handbook may be missed, misunderstood, or questioned. Making phone calls and following up on email communication can require more time than expected.

Daily challenges may feel overwhelming when teachers are unexpectedly absent and temporary substitutes need to be secured. At times you are needed in a classroom to maintain ratio or to manage staffing breaks and schedules. Time on the phone with a temporary staffing agency, hiring an extra teacher, and managing the budget for capacity coverage can interfere with other priorities. The need to find and hire strong staff, along with ongoing changes in external licensing, state standards, and assessment requirements, can be daunting.



What Works Best: Exploring Primary Challenges

Primary challenges for program leaders include making leadership visible and valued, assuring positive outcomes for children, and managing change (Coleman et al. 2016). Leaders need to mandate formal organizational structures and ensure clear roles for staff, yet at the same time foster relationships and a collaborative learning environment (Colmer et al. 2014). The functions of leadership and management need to be integrated in a cohesive way so staff can accomplish what is necessary in a timely and efficient way, yet the program leader needs to mobilize others to take on those challenges as their own (Hay 2012).

Conflicts between daily realities and the needs of individual staff can interfere with program cohesion and goals (Nuttall et al. 2018). In addition to internal demands, external requirements such as standards, accountability, and external systems may conflict with internal priorities such as intentional teaching, strength-based mindsets, cultural responsiveness, collaboration, and organizational identity (Carter 2016). The Whole Leadership Framework can unify organizational vision and help balance internal and external resources critical to meet the needs of children and families (Abel et al. 2017).



Take-Away Strategies: Making Time for Overall Goals

In planning for the complex needs of an early childhood program, your ability to manage time, priorities, and planning is essential. You may need to get organized but can't seem to get out from under pressing needs long enough to feel proactive. You may need to evaluate what is working well and identify what needs to change. As you examine the priorities and the goals of your program, make sure your basic organizational approaches are in place:

- **Keep your vision clear.** Define the specific goals you want to achieve. Do your goals inform your decisions, motivate your efforts, and drive your plans?
- **Get organized.** Set aside an hour or more each week for calendar updates and planning.
- **Keep a time log.** Track how much time you spend on specific areas of work. Use this information to allocate time for tasks and plan realistic timeframes for projects.
- **Arrange your information.** Create a working system for storage of records, frequently needed information, and file management so that you conserve time for important priorities.
- **Write a plan for future success.** Take time to evaluate what is not working well. Don't do the same thing tomorrow yet expect different results. When frustrations arise, be your own best coach.
- **Evaluate what happened.** Write action steps to keep yourself on track the next time you encounter the same challenge.

Anchoring Your Work in the Whole Leadership Approach

Claretta finally has a minute to return to her office after lunch just as the phone rings. It is Libby, the chairperson of the community early literacy workgroup. "Claretta, you are just the person I am looking for. Would you be able to serve on the budget committee? We meet once a month on Thursday night at the library."

Claretta pauses. "I really want to, but I need to think about whether I can fit it in. May I call you back and let you know?"

Libby replies, "Okay. But you know we need you."

Like many directors, Claretta works at maximum capacity. She feels as if she is in over her head and needs to weigh her energy and resources. She is determined to keep her life in balance and is struggling to manage her schedule. With many demands, she knows she has to postpone saying yes until she has time to evaluate the rest of her schedule and priorities. In the morning, she calls Libby to suggest another director who might be a good match.

Often a day brings a barrage of unexpected events, people, and circumstances. You may begin the day with a well-planned to-do list but find that, at five o'clock, you haven't begun to tackle what you thought were your priorities. At times it can feel like trying to put together a thousand-piece puzzle without a picture on the box cover to guide your choices. You work on a small section, begin to feel discouraged, and randomly shift to a new color or pattern. You make gradual progress, but don't have a sense about how the sections will fit together.

In the same way, having a visual picture of whole leadership can help you sort your priorities, decide where to focus your attention, and better understand how the pieces in one part of the puzzle affect other parts. With a picture of the whole, you will more quickly recognize when a piece is missing and when you need to pay attention to subtle patterns. With a visual guide, you will more quickly understand how leadership areas fit together, notice when you have overlooked an obvious need, and adjust to keep your organization on track toward clear goals.

Use the Whole Leadership Framework as a visual roadmap to help you plan in proactive and intentional ways for challenges and be able to step out with greater confidence to lead positive change. Rather than considering leadership and management, professional learning, and working with families as separate silos, integrate your work to strengthen your ability to evaluate and plan. You can use the Whole Leadership Framework to make connections from the work itself to the outcomes you want to achieve.

As you think about organizational planning and goal setting, leadership essentials will help you evaluate and strengthen your own skills as you build the capacity of your staff. While strengthening your program's philosophy and teaching approaches, pedagogical leadership will help you make the most of your environment, approaches to teaching, classroom interactions, and family engagement. As you manage the operational and strategic functions of your program, administrative leadership will help you create efficiencies, and expand your effectiveness and influence.

Exploring the dimensions of the Whole Leadership Framework in detail will help you to better understand how to evaluate the various requirements and challenges of your work. What previously seemed like an unrelated issue will soon seem connected to a more cohesive whole. You will be able to allocate your time, energy, and planning to manage and innovate your work. The framework will help you communicate priorities and goals to engage staff, families, and others who participate in and support your program.



What Works Best: Strengthening the Influence of the Program Administrator

What aspects of your program require time, effort, and planning? As you consider your priorities as a program leader, you may find that you are responsible for the following:

- You establish and maintain program norms and ensure a positive organizational climate and an integrated, collaborative culture (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muhammad 2013). As a vital role model, you inspire others to understand and commit to common goals. You hire and train staff and plan to help them thrive and grow within your organizational philosophy and mission.
- You facilitate quality-improvement efforts (Lieberman 2017). You foster reflective practice and plan professional-development training to create positive change (Ang 2012). You facilitate conversations with staff to define program strengths and identify areas that need improvement. With successive cycles of evaluation, you implement new approaches, reflect with staff about progress made, and integrate additional action steps.
- You ensure staff use developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive practice (Bloom 2014; Minkos et al. 2017). You facilitate staff reflection about the ways culture is integrated with learning and encourage teaching and communication that is congruent with linguistic, family, and community contexts.
- You cultivate commitment among staff to nurture family and community partnerships (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). You set aside time to facilitate learning with staff about the role of families and identify strategies to foster family engagement.
- You manage business and organizational aspects of program administration and recognize their impact on the quality of the learning environment (Dennis and O'Connor 2013; Talan et al. 2014). You fine-tune administrative functions to ensure viable systems to carry out the program mission.
- You act as liaison between the program, community, and early childhood system to ensure all elements of the program operate as a whole to promote optimal results for children and families (ECSWG 2014; Tout et al. 2015). These linkages garner needed connections for early intervention, provide information to families about needed services, foster successful transitions to school, and strengthen professional supports for the program and those it serves.

Leading with a Whole-Child, Whole-Person Mindset

The program director, Jacquie, holds family meetings three times each year. The events are held at the end of the program day, and child care is provided. As families arrive, they find handouts and resources on a variety of topics, such as local educational opportunities, nutrition guidelines, health brochures, parenting and positive-guidance tips, and flyers highlighting local art and music events for children. This month, the presenters are discussing sleep challenges. The session is packed.

The event begins with a greeting by Jacquie, followed by a presentation by a community child-development specialist and a pediatrician. Pediatrician Dr. Hayworth addresses the attentive group: "It's hard raising a child. You have to balance your child's needs with your own. In many cases, your child's needs keep you from meeting your own—like when your child wakes up in the night or is sick. Let's talk about what you can do to make bedtime, naptime, and sleep routines work for you."

After the brief presentation, the presenters respond to specific questions about personal experiences.

Jacquie and her team have embraced the principles of child-centered practice. They know that children are affected by personal, family, community, social, and policy factors that foster resilience and healthy development. They weigh daily decisions in the program by keeping in mind the best interests of the children and families they serve. They partner with community organizations that share their values and connect families to resources that can strengthen the quality of life for children. This is the foundational philosophy of the organization.



Digging Deeper: Trauma-Informed Care

In addition to knowledge of high-quality teaching and responsive nurturing, staff should be aware of the effects of stress on children and families. Children who have experienced early stress or trauma benefit especially from safe, predictable routines. Attentive and secure relationships strengthen emotion regulation and instill trust and security. Staff can learn about trauma-informed teaching and use strategies that help children monitor and mediate stress. As the program director, you can facilitate wellness initiatives. Make materials available that connect families to community mental-health resources. For more information about trauma-informed teaching and care, see chapter 6. In addition, explore the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families resources and links: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/schools>

The components of the whole-child, whole-school, whole-community model ensure all foundations for success are fully integrated in school-based settings (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2018). In the same way, the Whole Leadership Framework integrates all elements of leadership that support the effectiveness of a program. The goal is to provide the highest quality

setting and strengthen families as full partners in children's education and development. Whole leadership focuses on all aspects of program vitality, including staff motivation; cultural foundations; and the social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning. By including administrative, pedagogical, and essentials of leadership, all priorities are supported.



What Works Best: Understanding the Influence of Your Program

Understanding the greater influence of your program can inspire persistence in working toward goals. From birth to age five, a high-quality program provides social, language, and cognitive stimulation that have lasting positive influences on academic and social outcomes (Fuller, Gasko, and Anguiano 2012). Warm and responsive relationships, play-based learning, positive guidance, and appropriately challenging experiences are essential to prepare children for school (Masterson 2018). Early language exposure that is rich in both quantity and quality and takes place through talking, interacting, and reading also has a positive long-term impact (Camilli et al. 2010; Weldon 2014). Children's language skills from age one to two years predict their preliteracy skills at age five (Kuhl 2011). Their vocabulary level at the age of three predicts reading at third grade and future academic success (Zauche et al. 2016). Ensure that your program staff know the importance and influence of their work.

Aiming for Excellence and a Journey of Growth

Tabitha returns from a leadership conference feeling inspired. She posts a sign on her office door: "We teach children skills for life." In a staff discussion about using language prompts during play, Joshua remarks, "We have a long way to go to reach our goals." Tabitha responds, "How do we know we're making progress?" The usually responsive group is silent. Finally, Melissa answers, "I see progress when a child uses descriptive words during play." Sue adds, "I see progress when a parent thanks me for what a child is learning." Tabitha says, "We are working toward long-term goals and also celebrating the short-term accomplishments that we see. Let's take time each week to talk about the progress we're making."

When you play a board game, the goal is to move all of your pieces into a designated area, be the last one standing, or achieve the most points before—or with—everyone else. You experience an exhilarating sense of victory, thrill at making the right move, or pride in choosing an effective strategy.

Your professional life may not have such clear markers of success. How do you measure the daily significance of building relationships with teachers? How will you recognize the effects of excellent teaching when learning happens in incremental steps? How do you know that the resources you share make a difference to your staff? Given the unseen outcomes and gradual development of change over time, it is important to recognize and celebrate progress.

It is human nature to enjoy the successes of others and to cheer on the progress of teammates. A spirit of positive energy and expectation is often contagious. The following strategies will jump-start your journey:

- **Be an encourager.** Everyone appreciates a cheering section: “I am in your corner.” “I’m thinking of you today as you try a new strategy. Let me know how it goes.” “I noticed you stayed late to meet with the families. That will make a difference.”
- **When you experience setbacks, get right back into the game.** Use challenges as opportunities to reorient your thinking patterns: “This happened today, but I’m going to approach this differently tomorrow.”
- **Keep the focus on opportunities.** “You encountered a challenge, but you’re making progress.” “You weren’t sure what to do this time, but now you have strategies to use next time.”
- **Create short- and long-term goals.** While children’s social development takes time, encourage teachers to use one new positive guidance strategy each week. Children’s literacy skills develop over time, but in the short term, you can ask teachers to set a goal of reading two new books each week. Building relationships with families takes time. Encourage teachers to share a positive contribution children have made during daily pick-up time, so that families hear five affirmations about their children’s developing competencies each week. Worthy goals begin with small steps.
- **Encourage the health and wellness of your team.** Support your team’s efforts toward health and wellness, including organized schedules, consistent exercise, adequate sleep habits, and work-life balance. Be a positive role model for growth.

Influencing Leadership through Vision and Practice

Phyllis stops by Iris’s office on her way home. “We’re moving to Georgia after the holidays. I want you to know how much Kody and Kennedy have loved being in your program. These are memories we’ll cherish for years to come. We found a great program for them to attend that is sponsored by my husband’s new job.”

Iris responds, “Thank you, Phyllis. Families like you make my job so rewarding. Your two beautiful children have had a great start in life. I know their teachers and friends will miss them.”

The work you do is your legacy. To children who come through your doors, you imprint the power of language. You give love and security that becomes a blueprint for future relationships. You instill a sense of purpose to serve others and contribute productively. You inspire a love of learning. To families you serve, you reinforce and foster competence. You empower engagement and build on their investment in the lives of children. To your staff, you model professionalism. You demonstrate healthy leadership and model how to invest in the skills of others.

Your work has a profound impact on children, families, staff, as you provide a stable and economically sound anchor to your community. Your thriving business strengthens your community. Your involvement in professional organizations extends your influence outward into the greater world. Those who lead also have the benefit of growing in leadership skills and influence.

As a program administrator, it is likely that your work is your passion. As you explore each area of the Whole Leadership Framework, you will gain a new perspective on the importance of your work. You will see how your daily work is energized by your mission, your leadership, and your commitment. You will begin to link daily investment in the work of your program to long-term outcomes for staff, children, and families.

Legacy of Leadership: Living Your Best Life

"After my children started school, I realized how important the first five years are to their development. I achieved my state director's credential and took on the role of program director. While talking to my mom, I apologized that I didn't stay in nursing. But I realized that my choice was exactly what I wanted to be doing. This is my best life—the profession I am called to serve. I have begun to read books, attend conferences, and embrace growth. This is the best journey ever."

Take-Away Strategies: Developing a Purpose Statement

To chart the course toward your vision, you must define the vision. It helps to think about the motivating purpose behind your work and to consider the personal and interpersonal context of your interactions with others. The following questions will help you develop a statement that can inspire and guide your daily work.

1. What inspired you to serve children and families? What drew you to this profession?
2. Leadership includes both an outward and inward focus. Why is it difficult to keep an outward and inward focus during a typical day? What purpose or personal mission statement will help you keep a balance?
3. Create a purpose or personal mission statement that will refocus your vision and empower your work on a daily basis.

DISCOVER AN INSPIRATIONAL APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

In a complex and changing landscape of scarce funding, high turnover rates, and differing views about priorities, the early childhood profession needs an anchor. The Whole Leadership Framework, developed by the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, helps early childhood professionals inspire their staffs' collaboration, creativity, and ethical commitment.

Using the Whole Leadership Framework's three domains—leadership essentials, pedagogical leadership, and administrative leadership—learn how to:

- Develop foundational leadership attributes and competencies
- Use both day-to-day management and long-range leadership skills
- Encourage family engagement
- Advocate for children and families in your community

Building on Whole Leadership will help you inspire your staff to see the value of their work and invest their best efforts—all while maintaining your own energy and motivation. This book will guide you as you become an influential change agent in the lives of children, families, organizations, and communities.

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University is a thought and research leader in early childhood.



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