

# Administrator Effectiveness

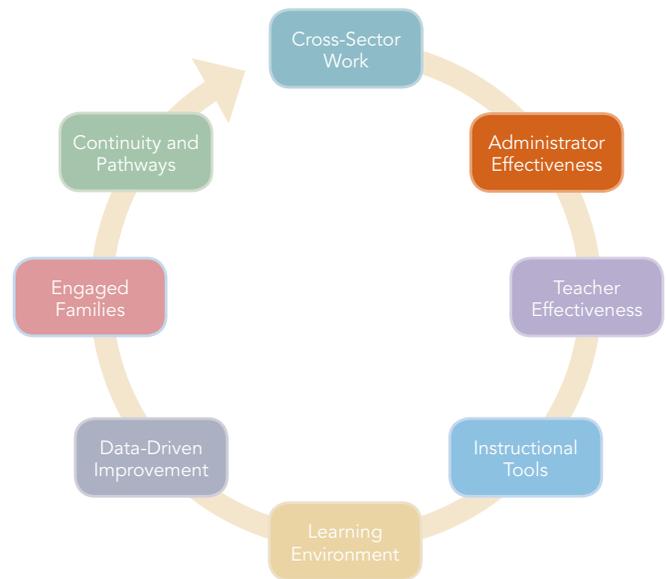
The *Framework in Action* series expands on the *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches*<sup>(1)</sup> and provides brief research reviews, practical strategies, and guidance for creating meaningful and tangible change in communities. Each *Framework in Action* corresponds with one of the eight buckets of alignment effort identified as essential to high-quality and comprehensive P-3 approaches.

## The ISSUE



Administrators are critical stakeholders in P-3 approaches. Administrators hold responsibility for creating an organizational culture, setting an inspiring and shared vision among diverse stakeholders, supervising teachers and staff, and supporting key priorities in which to invest both human and financial resources. In K-12, relevant administrators include elementary school principals, school district superintendents and central office staff, and school board members. For birth-to-five (0-5), relevant administrators include Head Start and PreK directors or program managers, child care or preschool directors, family child care owners, and others who supervise the operation and management of early care and education (ECE) programs.

Despite holding similar positions in their respective systems, elementary school and ECE administrators have entirely different preparation pathways, in-service training opportunities, professional associations, and professional norms.<sup>(2-4)</sup> Many K-12 administrators have not had coursework or formal training in early childhood development (birth through age 8) and many ECE administrators have not had formal training in managing



organizations or supporting teachers.<sup>(4, 5)</sup> To be most effective across the P-3 continuum, both ECE and elementary administrators need meaningful opportunities to develop as instructional, organizational, and system leaders.

The Issue	The Goal	The Strategies	What Does the Research Say?	Where to Start in Your Community	Common Pitfalls that Impede Implementation	Indicators of Progress	Spotlight: Promising Efforts and Success Stories	References
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## The **GOAL**

To create and sustain coherence across the P-3 continuum, administrators — from ECE programs, elementary schools, and school districts — actively create a culture and organizational structures that ensure the quality and alignment of learning opportunities, from birth through 3rd grade (P-3).



## The **STRATEGIES**

The following research- and evidence-based strategies are essential to ensuring that administrators actively and effectively contribute to P-3 approaches:

- **VISIBLE LEADERSHIP:** Administrators demonstrate that P-3 is a priority to both internal and external stakeholders by setting a clear vision for and prioritizing ECE and the early grades.
- **FOSTER TEAMWORK:** Administrators foster teamwork among individuals, especially teachers, both within and across ECE and K-3. Teamwork includes both horizontal (within age/grade) and vertical (between age/grade) teams.
- **INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:** Administrators manage the instructional program with clear, up-to-date, developmentally based understanding of early learning and the early grades.

## What Does **THE RESEARCH SAY?**

This section provides an abbreviated literature review that substantiates both the importance of this bucket and the promise of the strategies.

- Administrators are second only to classroom teachers among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn.<sup>(6)</sup>
- Literature on child care centers also recognizes the importance of directors and other administrators in improving the overall quality of children's learning experiences and in the ways that centers interact with others (e.g., elementary schools) in the community.<sup>(2, 7)</sup>
- Organizational theory emphasizes that effective administrators should set a clear vision and formalize goals in written and other communication strategies. Administrators develop and reinforce shared norms, beliefs, and values across the school/program community, ensuring that colleagues develop mutual understandings about their purpose and vision.<sup>(6, 8)</sup>
- Social psychology emphasizes the importance of building shared understanding and social capital across both internal and external stakeholders including families and partnering organizations. Administrators are instrumental in engaging with external partners beyond their individual schools/programs, creating structures and occasions for partners to interact for critical social bonds to develop.<sup>(9-11)</sup>
- Effective administrators facilitate trusting interactions and ambitious, structured professional learning for teachers, coaches, and other staff and stakeholders responsible for instruction. Administrators create and support both the time and space for teachers to work together and engage in critical dialogue with one another.<sup>(12-15)</sup>
- Research has long established the connection between effective schools and leadership focused on instruction.<sup>(5, 13, 16)</sup> However, effective instruction for young children, from birth through elementary school, must reflect the unique needs of the early childhood developmental continuum. ECE directors, as well as elementary principals, must have a robust understanding of how young children learn in order to establish conditions of quality for their teaching staff.<sup>(17-19)</sup>
- Whereas secondary principals often rely on teachers' curricular knowledge, research shows that the most successful elementary principals have curricular knowledge that rivals that of their teachers.<sup>(6)</sup>

## Where to Start IN YOUR COMMUNITY



There is no one best or right way to build and sustain administrator effectiveness for P-3 approaches. The following list provides a variety of ways that administrators can extend and deepen their P-3 efforts:

- **Ensure that high quality early learning, as well as coherence across ECE/K-3, are clear and explicit priorities in organizations' mission statements and strategic plans** (e.g., school improvement plans, district strategic plans). Providing clear statements about organizational priorities demonstrates to both internal and external stakeholders what is valued and where resources are invested.
- Beyond naming P-3 efforts as priorities, administrators can **develop clear and consistent communication strategies that provide regular updates** on activities and progress. Updates on P-3 efforts can become regular features on school/program web sites, in community or family newsletters, and during staff meetings.
- To begin to lay the groundwork for teacher teamwork across ECE/K-3, **identify who are your primary cross-**

**sector organizational partners ("feeder patterns")**. For elementary principals, this means working to identify the variety of programs that Kindergarteners attended in the year just prior to Kindergarten. For ECE administrators, this means working to identify the different elementary schools that 4-year olds will attend as Kindergarteners.

- Once feeder pattern programs/schools have been identified, invite their administrators to meet to **discuss opportunities to build collaborative efforts** that include, but are not limited to, shared professional development for teachers, PreK-to-K transition strategies for families and children, and co-hosted community meetings to highlight the importance of young children's learning and development.
- To hone understanding of and skill in leading across the P-3 continuum, administrators should **seek (at least annual) opportunities to engage in their own professional development related to early childhood development and learning**. Resources to help identify professional learning opportunities include statewide elementary principals' associations or [local affiliates](#) of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

## COMMON PITFALLS that Impede Implementation

P-3 approaches are simple in theory and complex in practice. When addressing administrator effectiveness, the following are common pitfalls to anticipate and plan for:

- ECE and elementary school administrators **lack a shared professional orientation (e.g., values, vocabulary, policy)**. For example, many early learning administrators are unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with K-12's systems of assessment, teacher credentials, teacher evaluation, students' learning standards, and classroom instruction. And many K-12 administrators are as unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with the same issues in ECE. To address these differences, it is important to invest plenty of time up front to recognize the strengths of both ECE and K-12 and to avoid "either/or" thinking (i.e., either the P-3 continuum needs to look more like K-12, or it needs to look more like ECE). Comprehensive P-3 approaches build on the best practices in *both* ECE and K-12.
- Administrators are regularly asked to juggle many competing priorities, and P-3 can easily become "just another project"

needing attention and support. To mitigate **initiative fatigue**, administrators need to streamline and prioritize the number and type of initiatives that demand teachers' and staff's attention. Having clear organizational/school mission statements that articulate core priorities is one way to filter which messages and initiatives are embraced...and which are left out.

- An important shift for all administrators is recognizing the need to build shared responsibility with teachers, not merely focus on supervising and controlling teachers. **P-3 approaches require administrators to create a culture of collaboration and to distribute leadership** among teachers, staff, and families. To accomplish this, it is wise for administrators to seek professional development opportunities that not only build their content knowledge about young children's learning and development, but also focus on the leadership skills and behaviors needed to cultivate collaboration and establish a shared culture of high expectations for all.

## INDICATORS of PROGRESS

P-3 approaches do not emerge overnight, but take time to nurture and build. Progress can be challenging to identify and measure. The following list provides sample indicators of progress that signal administrators are engaging meaningfully and effectively in P-3 approaches:

- Information about P-3 priorities and strategies is communicated not only from teachers and mid-level managers, but also “comes from the top” with superintendents, principals, directors, and other key administrators providing clear, publicly visible leadership on behalf of early learning and the early grades.
- Communication and information about P-3 is shared not only in meetings and informal discussions, but also in formalized venues such as school district, school, or program web sites, board meeting minutes, teacher professional development calendars, and newsletters shared with families and the community.
- Opportunities for teachers to engage in teamwork that is focused on collective and continuous improvement of their instruction occurs on a regular and predictable schedule. Within schools/

programs, this requires administrators to standardize the weekly and monthly schedule to create explicit and protected time for teacher collaboration.<sup>(20)</sup>

- To expand vertical or cross-sector teacher teamwork, administrators plan and support shared professional development that includes both community-based ECE teachers and school-based PreK-3rd grade teachers.
- Analysis of administrators’ work calendars demonstrates that administrators themselves participate in informal workshops and/or formal professional learning and education opportunities that address early childhood development, effective instructional strategies in early learning and the un-tested grades (K-2), and working collaboratively with communities and families.
- Because administrators usually have the authority to hire teachers and staff, administrators make strategic decisions about the hiring and assignment of teachers, based on teachers’ experience and expertise working with young children and supporting early knowledge and skill development.

## Spotlight: PROMISING EFFORTS and SUCCESS STORIES

The following programs reveal ways in which practitioners are taking up P-3 approaches in their home communities, and implementing elements of P-3.

### **Washington P-3 Executive Leadership Certificate Program**

This program provides a cross-sector approach to strengthening P-3 administrator effectiveness and is led by an institution of higher education in Washington State. The *Washington P-3 Executive Leadership Certificate Program* co-enrolls administrators from ECE programs and elementary schools to engage in a ten-month, credit-bearing course of study at the University of Washington. Built on foundations of child development and equity, the Program equips administrators to capably support a high quality continuum of learning for children that begins at birth and extends through elementary school regardless of race, class, culture, or zip code. The innovative curriculum provides administrators with: [a] knowledge of relevant P-3 pedagogy, equity-driven decision making, and policy; [b] skills, dispositions, and effective strategies to lead complex change;

and [c] specific guidance to implement P-3 approaches in their home schools, programs, and communities through the design and enactment of Action Research Projects. The Program began in 2014 and enrolls approximately 50 ECE administrators, elementary school principals, and district central office staff in each annual cohort.

### **New Jersey Early Childhood Academy**

This program focuses on public school administrators in local education agencies and is led by the New Jersey Department of Education, in collaboration with the national Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes. The *New Jersey Early Childhood Academy* (NJECA) is a cross-district professional learning community that meets several times a year. The aim of the NJECA is to build the capacity of educational leaders and teachers to lead change in teaching and learning in Kindergarten through third grade via a continuous

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improvement cycle. Districts bring a leadership team of at least one central office administrator, one building-level administrator, and one teacher. Over a three-year engagement, the participating district teams focus on: [a] increasing knowledge of developmentally appropriate and rigorous instruction in the early grades, as detailed in the [New Jersey 1st-3rd Grade Guidelines](#); [b] implementing a systemic approach to a continuous improvement cycle using data to guide the implementation of the guidelines; and [c] developing a realistic plan for districts to align instruction, school policies, and practices.

**Lead Learn Excel**

This program focuses on ECE administrators and is led by a statewide not-for-profit organization in Illinois. Designed by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, *Lead Learn Excel* focuses on building directors’ skills to support more effective teaching and learning in early childhood classrooms. Lead Learn Excel empowers early childhood directors to develop into instructional leaders for high quality early learning. The program takes place over a 9- or 16-month period and provides participants with a strong foundation in building systemic change through a combination of training, coaching, peer learning communities, and access to tools and resources to improve instructional excellence in classrooms. The curriculum is partly based on an intensive effort to mold rigorous K-12 school improvement research into an early childhood professional development intervention.<sup>(5)</sup>

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**For a list of additional resources please visit the [National P-3 Center website](#)**

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The National P-3 Center focuses on the learning opportunities that young children experience from birth through 3rd grade. Our work spans the traditional boundaries of early care and education (ECE) and K-12 education and is grounded in the intersection of research, practice, and policy.