



McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership



Research Supporting the Aim4Excellence™ National Online Director Credential

As the gatekeepers to quality, early childhood administrators set the standards and expectations for staff performance. Research has consistently shown that directors' ability to effectively address the staffing crisis in their own programs and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education and specialized training in leadership and management. Directors' level of formal education has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of program quality (Bella & Bloom, 2003; Bloom, 1990; 1992; 1996; Bloom & Bella, 2005; Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; MTCECL, 1998; Culkin, 2000; Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Phillips, et al., 2000; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000; Whitebook, et al., 1990). In a number of powerful ways, directors influence the climate of their programs both as a workplace for the teaching staff and as an educational and nurturing environment for children.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) acknowledges the importance of strong leadership in early care and education programs. The NAEYC accreditation standards now call for nine semester hours of specialized training in program management for early childhood administrators.

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University has responded directors' need for leadership and management training through the development of the Aim4Excellence National Online Director Credential. Aim4Excellence includes nine modules (the equivalent of 9 semester hours of coursework) that provide the essentials of early childhood program administration for early childhood directors at the pre-baccalaureate level.

Five content specialists (all Ph.D.s with expertise in early childhood administration) wrote the content for the nine modules based on principles of instructional practice and the unique needs of this segment of adult learners (Learner-Centered Principles Work Group, 1997). The main concern was to shape the curriculum development for each module so it promoted active learning and cognitive engagement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Interactive activities, problem-solving tasks, video clips, and scenario-based assignments, are just some of the design features to help ensure a deeper understanding of concepts as well and retention of information (Bonwell, & Eison, 2003). Each module includes practitioner reflections, interactive exercises, quizzes to check for understanding, and field assignments to apply the concepts learned.

Each module is the equivalent of approximately 16 clock hours (or 1 semester hour) of instruction. The nine modules are:



- Leading the Way
- Recruiting, Selecting, and Orienting Staff
- Promoting Peak Performance
- Managing Program Operations
- Building a Sound Business Strategy
- Planning Indoor and Outdoor Environments
- Supporting Children's Development and Learning
- Creating Partnerships with Families
- Evaluating Program Quality

The Aim4Excellence modules align to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Standards (NAEYC advanced programs), as well as the *Program Administration Scale* (PAS). In addition, NAEYC recognizes Aim4Excellence™ as an alternative pathway for meeting part of the director qualifications for NAEYC program accreditation. Additional information about Aim4Excellence and its alignment with national standards can be found at <http://aim4excellence.nl.edu>.

For more information about Aim4Excellence and or to inquire about research opportunities contact:

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