LEADING FROM THE TOP:

A STUDY OF STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS LEADERS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Leading from the Top: A Study of State Early Childhood Systems Leaders

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The development of preschool systems and the expansion of leadership roles within these systems is evidence of a significant shift in how the early childhood field is being recognized. However, little is known about who is leading preschool system building efforts during this time of unprecedented change, as there is limited empirical research on state early education leaders.

This mixed methods study explored three main research questions: Who are state early education leaders and how did they get there? How do state early education leaders describe their work as system leaders? How do state early education leaders define and describe leading at the state level? Quantitative data was gathered using an electronic survey that was distributed to the population of state early education leaders (n=140), resulting in 89 survey respondents. Qualitative methods were then used to better understand the quantitative findings (Remler & van Ryzin, 2011) and gather first-hand accounts (Hardin, 1987) and in-depth descriptions of state ECE leaders' work and experiences through two semi-structured interviews.

This study's findings describe the demographics of state early education leaders and used leaders' experiences working in the field to identify and map the most common pathways into early education leadership. Leaders work included developing and communicating visions for early education in their states and creating policies and systems to unify early childhood services and early education offerings with the K-12 system. However, leaders reported that the fragmentation of early childhood services and the limited authority they were given in their positions meant they could only engage in system building at a superficial level. Finally, leaders described how working in a female-dominated field and the positioning of early childhood education as "less than" K-12 influenced their behavior as leaders. This study begins to build a more robust research base on state systems leaders and provides important insights into what types of preparation and professional development support these leaders need.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

The field of early childhood education is undergoing a period of transformation. Programming for preschool aged children is expanding catalyzed by accruing evidence that participation in a high quality preschool program can ensure children enter school ready to learn. Whereas programs serving 4-year-olds once operated independently from one another, policy makers are currently working to build early childhood systems that unify disparate preschool programs under a set of common goals, regulations, and accountability measures (Goffin, 2013; Kagan & Kauerez, 2012a). These system building efforts aim to ensure consistency in the quality of preschool programming that young children experience while being prepared for formal schooling (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998).

Ensuring access to high quality preschool opportunities is a priority as a great deal of research has demonstrated positive short- and long-term gains for children, their families, and society when children are able to attend high quality early education programs (Barnett, Jung, Youn, & Frede, 2013b; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). High quality preschool is associated with a combination of structural and process variables (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006). *Structural variables*, such as small class size, a small teacher to child ratio, and a certified or credentialed teacher, are often set by the program or state policy. *Process variables* describe what occurs in the classroom, such as how teachers structure time, interact with children and their families, and provide opportunities for children to interact with peers and developmentally appropriate materials. Process and structural variables interact together to generate positive social and

cognitive student outcomes (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000; 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has created ten quality standards, or benchmarks, that it uses to evaluate state and local public preschool programming. These benchmarks, which were updated in 2018, identify the components necessary for programs to be considered of "satisfactory" quality or above. At a minimum, programs must require: lead teachers to have a bachelor's degree (BA) and specialized training in early childhood; assistant teachers to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) or higher; at least 15 hours of in-service training a year with individualized professional development plans and coaching for lead and assistant teachers; and the program must have comprehensive early learning standards (ELS) that are horizontally and vertically aligned, supported, and culturally sensitive; supports for curriculum implementation; a maximum class size of 20 children or less; a teacher-child ratio of 1:10 or better; health screening and referral services; and a continuous quality improvement system (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). NIEER uses these ten benchmarks to compare state policies and program provision across the country. In the 2016-2017 school year, only three state programs met all ten benchmarks (Alabama, Michigan, and Rhode Island; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). This is not surprising given that many states rely on mixed service delivery models (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018) where they are trying to build quality in programs that, traditionally (e.g. childcare), have not been considered of a high quality (Raikes et al., 2013).

Quality Improvement Efforts

Policy efforts to address the inconsistent quality of publicly funded preschools have most often focused on either system-level reforms or those aimed specifically at improving the teaching workforce. Systems-level efforts include the development of early learning standards (ELS), which every state now has in place (Barnett et al., 2015). Standards are a clear effort to ensure that regardless of which preschool program a child attends, it is driven by the same goals. Quality rating and improvement systems (QRISs) are another widely used approach to improving quality at the system-level. QRISs identify criteria for quality and programs earn quality ratings based on their ability to satisfy the criteria. Currently, almost every state is in the process of designing or implementing a QRIS (National Learning Network, 2015) as a result of financial incentives from the Obama administration and the BUILD initiative (BUILD Initiative, 2015).

While QRISs and ELSs influence what happens in programs across a state or city, policy makers also recognize that teachers are responsible for much of the quality that children experience at the classroom level (e.g. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). As a consequence, state or local policies have been created in order to specify certification requirements and mandated ongoing professional development of their teaching workforce in an effort to place qualified teachers in public preschool classrooms (Barnett, 2003a; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). For example, New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program requires each lead teacher to have a bachelor's degree (BA) and a preschool through third grade (P-3) teaching certification in addition to access to fifteen hours of in-service training a year (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2010), similar to New York and Rhode Island (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). This

attention to lead teachers' qualifications can also be seen at a federal level in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, which required 50% of Head Start teachers in centers across the nation to have a BA or advanced degree in early education by September 30, 2013 (Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007).

While improving the qualifications and expertise of teachers is an important goal and has been linked to improved student outcomes (Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010; Whitebook, 2003), these efforts alone are not sufficient to ensure quality at a systems level. Teachers do not work in isolation, but rather in organizational contexts, which shape how they approach their work with young children (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). These organizational contexts are created and sustained by the leadership of early childhood programs. Similarly, state-level early education leaders organize their state's early childhood systems, which are most often comprised of four separate systems: early education; family support; health, mental health, and nutrition; and special education or intervention, and collaborate with individuals across their state who may have varying levels of expertise and experience in early education. If the system is going to work, capable leaders are not only necessary for classroom-level quality improvement efforts, but also at the systems-level in order for quality improvement efforts to be successful (Harris et al., 2002; Leithwood et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Van Velzen, Miles, Elholm, Hameyer, & Robin, 1985).

Leadership in Early Education

Most of the existing research on leadership in early education focuses on center directors. Research on quality in preschool settings suggests that center leaders' characteristics, particularly their level of education and experience, influence measures of

center quality, as they are more likely to create positive work environments for their staff, which leads to lower rates of staff turnover and higher job satisfaction (Bloom, 1990; Helburn, 1995; Hayden, 1997; Stipek & Organa, 2000; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Reducing staff turnover in early education settings is quite an accomplishment, as research indicates that high rates of teacher turnover are associated with lower program quality (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). Effective leaders who are able to reduce staff turnover can produce high quality environments (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Lower & Cassidy, 2007) for children to establish meaningful and consistent relationships with adults, which has been associated with improvements in student learning outcomes (Helburn, 1995; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2002; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003; 2004).

Another body of research that focuses on center directors is concerned with identifying the characteristics of center leaders' (e.g. Bloom, 1999), their practices (e.g., Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), and how they conceptualize their roles (e.g. Aubrey, 2007; Bloom, 1998b; 2000; Rodd, 1997). However, aside from a handful of studies on directors' professional development needs (e.g. Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011), advice on becoming a leader (e.g. Rodd, 2013), and explorations of how directors are navigating the rapidly changing policy landscape (e.g. Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2008b), there is very little recent work on what these leaders do and what they need to be able to do in order to do their jobs well.

While this body of work demonstrates that individual center leaders influence program quality, the implementation of publically funded preschool systems with state funding and oversight has led to the development of a range of new early childhood

leadership positions at the local, mid, and state levels. Center directors represent local leadership, while leaders at the mid-level and state-level are most often located in infrastructure organizations (e.g. resource and referral agencies). State-level early education leaders are often responsible for overseeing preschool provision from a state agency or department. Collaboration amongst leaders at each of these levels is necessary in order for states to build early childhood systems and provide public preschool (Goffin, Martella, & Coffman, 2011).

While it is recognized that state-level leadership is important, there is limited empirical research on these leaders to date. There are, however, three reports that have been constructed around interviews with higher-level leaders in order to learn more about states' system building efforts and the experiences of state leaders. The first of these reports is by Goffin et al. (2011), who drew on interviews with 20 state- or national-level leaders about establishing governance as part of systems leadership. In general, the authors of this study identify the challenges system leaders face in trying to unify services (Goffin et al., 2011).

Coffman & Wright (2011) authored the second report based on interview and survey data with key informants in 8 of BUILD's partnering states (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington). Participants reported that state-level leaders must have the ability to think at a systems-level and look across programs and services. In addition, state-level leaders must communicate well and be articulate, embrace change while recognizing that it can be a slow process, be willing to collaborate but also to take charge, able to inspire, and have in-depth knowledge of their field (Coffman & Wright, 2011). Coffman & Wright (2011) caution that having a

leadership structure in place is not enough to cultivate leaders, however they do not detail what type of preparation and support these leaders need.

The third report is comprised of survey and interview data with state-level leaders who work in state education agencies or early learning agencies (Goffin, 2013). The report aimed to inform the design of an Early Education Leadership Academy that has been developed by the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO). Goffin (2013) surveyed 42 state leaders (from 35 states) about participants' development needs and interests. Goffin (2013) also interviewed 17 state leaders (from 14 states) and 7 early education experts in order to gather participants' descriptions of their leadership experiences. Many participants mentioned the unique politicized contexts of state-level leaders demands special skills, but findings from the survey suggest that state leaders are most interested in training that develops their management and technical skills. However, this report only provides a brief overview of state-leaders' experiences and needs.

While these reports are an effort to shed light on the work of state-level leaders in building early education systems, they primarily rely on self-reports and present limited information regarding their methodologies. In addition, the reports capture some system-level issues state-leaders experience, but there is no information about who these leaders are and what their daily work entails (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011).

The K-12 system has always had separate credentialing and training for its leadership, but the same opportunities do not exist in early education where often teachers are promoted to leadership positions without any qualifications or training

(Bloom, 2000; Larkin, 1999; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997). Few leadership training programs exist in early education (Goffin & Daga, 2017; Goffin & Janke, 2013; Goffin & Means, 2009), and most focus on preparing leaders of early childhood centers, rather than on those interested in becoming systems level leaders. In this respect, Goffin's (2013) report demonstrates that some efforts are being made to address building capacity in higher-level early education leadership positions. However, at this stage it is unclear what types of training and professional development the state-level early childhood leaders have experienced and what they may need to be able to do their job well.

Leadership Preparation

Not only is there very little guidance available for policy makers regarding what preparation and supports state level leaders need in order to effectively build early education systems, but research on K-12 administrators suggests that the ability for people to be able to lead well at the systems level is also mediated by gender, race, and class (e.g. Brunner, 2000b; Brunner & Grogan, 2007). This body of research (e.g. Alston, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999) suggests that gender and race play formative roles in the experiences, opportunities, and career paths female administrators are able to pursue. For example, female superintendents' pathways to their role are more complex than male superintendents who are more likely to be promote through the ranks quickly (Brunner & Kim, 2010). Women of color experience longer pathways to the superintendency than White women (Brunner & Grogan, 2007) and are more likely to lack the mentor or sponsorship relationships that help women obtain the position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Brunner & Kim, 2010). Moreover, research on female superintendents would suggest that women are often not viewed as capable of

leading (e.g. Grogan & Henry, 1995; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986) and have documented instances where women superintendents are undermined by school boards or other colleagues (Brunner, 1998; Chase & Bell, 1990; Downing, 2009; Marshall, 1985). Female superintendents of color experience higher levels of scrutiny than their male or White female colleagues and are prevented from taking the actions they believe are best for their district (e.g. Jackson, 1999; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1993; 1995).

Purpose and Research Questions

The development of preschool systems and the expansion of leadership roles within these systems demonstrates a significant shift in how the early childhood field is being recognized and represented. However, little is known about who is leading preschool system building efforts during this time of unprecedented change, how they attained these positions, what their work involves, and how they approach their work. In addition, very little effort has been made to prepare the kinds of leaders needed for this systems building work (Austin, 2014; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011) or support them (Coffman & Wright, 2011) as they, in most cases, work under intense pressures while navigating a myriad of barriers and challenges (Goffin et al., 2011). Policy makers are investing money in system building efforts, but there is little evidence that they are preparing leaders who have the capacity to make these changes and sustain them. Without empirical research that explores this new population of leaders, it is impossible to create leadership preparation programs or structural supports that will allow state early childhood leaders to be successful in their work.

The primary purpose of this study was to begin to build a more robust research base on state systems leaders and provide important insights into what types of

preparation and professional development support these leaders need. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. Who are state ECE leaders and how did they get there?
    a. What are the demographic backgrounds of state ECE education leaders?
    b. What relationships and factors supported and hindered their pathway?
2. How do state ECE leaders describe their work as system leaders?
    a. What are the tasks/activities associated with being a state leader?
    b. What type of skills and expertise do they believe are necessary to be a state systems leader?
    c. What factors did leaders find made their work difficult?
3. How do state leaders define and describe leading ECE at the state level?
    a. Why did ECE leaders choose to pursue a leadership position in ECE?
    b. What experiences or factors do ECE leaders believe shaped their leadership approach?
    c. How do participants believe their experiences and identities have shaped their approaches to leading?

In what follows, there are three papers that address these research questions. Paper 1 examines the demographics of state ECE leaders and the pathways they traveled through the ECE field. This paper also identifies the factors that leaders believe supported and hindered their career trajectories. Paper 2 describes the work state ECE leaders do, the skills and expertise they believe are necessary to do their work successfully and describes challenges that they encountered. Paper 3 is a collective case study that presents 3 cases of state ECE leaders to explore how they described their approach to leading and

how their experiences and identities helped make them the leaders they are today. I then present a conclusion that summarizes the findings across the 3 papers and offer implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Who Are State Early Education Leaders and How Did They Get There?

The field of early childhood education (ECE), which is comprised of education and care opportunities for children birth through age eight, is undergoing a period of transformation. Programming for preschool aged children is expanding catalyzed by accruing evidence that participation in a high quality preschool program can ensure children enter school ready to learn. Whereas programs serving 4-year-olds once operated independently from one another, policy makers are currently working to build early childhood systems that unify disparate preschool programs under a set of common goals, regulations, and accountability measures (Goffin, 2013; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a). These system building efforts aim to ensure consistency in the quality of preschool programming that young children experience while being prepared for formal schooling (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a; Shepard et al., 1998).

As publicly funded preschool systems with state funding and oversight have expanded, new early childhood leadership positions have been created at the state level. State ECE leaders are responsible for administering preschool provision from within their state's division of early learning. In order to operationalize ECE policies and oversee the implementation of their state's preschool programs, these leaders must coordinate with other state agencies that offer early childhood services, as well as leaders and staff in the department of education, and district and infrastructure ECE leaders in their state (Kagan & Gomez, 2015). Historically, the ECE field has had an inconsistent and ad hoc approach to developing its leaders. For example, ECE teachers are often promoted to site-level leadership positions based on their teaching prowess, without leadership qualifications or training, even though leading an ECE site requires a different set of skills than teaching

(Bloom, 2000; Larkin, 1999; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997). While there is interest in building the leadership capacity of the ECE workforce (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council [IOM & NRC], 2015), few leadership training programs in early education exist (Goffin & Daga, 2017; Goffin & Janke, 2013; Goffin & Means, 2009). Even in the K-12 education system, which has long had separate credentialing and training expectations for its leaders, leadership programs do not focus on early childhood (Whitebook & Austin, 2015). The ECE field has struggled to reach a consensus regarding what it means to be an ECE leader (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Goffin & Washington, 2007) and tends to conflate ideas of leadership and management (Goffin & Daga, 2017), making it difficult to compare programs and determine if they are capable of developing leaders for site, infrastructure, and systems-level ECE leadership roles. Therefore, many state EC leaders may have little training or experience to lead their state's early learning system.

Complicating matters further is the dearth of research on early childhood leadership in general, and state leaders, in particular. Researchers have suggested that state-level ECE leadership is important (Goffin et al., 2011), but most of the research on EC leaders focuses on child care directors (e.g., Helburn, 1995; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). A handful of descriptive reports have examined the challenges state leaders face trying to unify ECE services (Goffin et al., 2011), the skills state leaders use in their work (Coffman & Wright, 2011), and their professional development interests (Goffin, 2013). These reports capture the complexity of state ECE leaders' work and suggest that the presence of leadership positions, on their own, is not enough to cultivate ECE leaders (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). Unfortunately,

these reports do not provide information about who these leaders are or detail what type of ECE work, preparation, or support these leaders have experienced that help them in their work. Policy makers are investing heavily in ECE system building efforts, but there is little evidence that the leaders tasked with this responsibility have the capacity to lead such change efforts.

The purpose of this study was to address this gap in the knowledge base and provide much needed information to prepare and support future leaders of early childhood services at the state level. This study sought to answer the research question, "Who is leading the field at the state level and how did they get there?" by learning more about the demographic backgrounds of state early childhood education leaders, the jobs they had held in the ECE field, and the factors that supported and hindered their pathways.

Methodology

As the purpose of this quantitative study of state early education leaders was to gather their demographic information and learn about their experiences in the early childhood field, a survey was employed.

Sample

The sample for this quantitative study was drawn from the current population of state ECE leaders whose responsibilities included oversight of their state's preschool program. While the majority of states use a mixed delivery model (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018), making use of a variety of settings from various funding streams (e.g., public schools, licensed child care, and Head Start) that meet the state's quality standards to provide their public preschool programs, oversight of states' public preschool efforts are

most often housed in their agency, office, or department of education. For the purposes of this paper, the term "department" of education will be used. As such, the sample for this study was drawn from leaders who were working in their state's department of education. Additionally, in an effort to capture a range of experiences some past state ECE leaders were recruited, to provide insights regarding their experiences working in the ECE field and shaping their state's preschool program(s).

The Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes' (CEELO, 2016) directory of state early education contacts was used to identify the population of current state ECE leaders from all fifty states and the District of Columbia (n=133) responsible for overseeing components of the state's preschool program. The researcher then worked with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE) and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to identify former state ECE leaders from the past 8 to 10 years. The list of past state leaders was reduced to represent a range of perspectives, resulting in a selection of 7 past state leaders. In total, 140 individuals were invited to participate in this study and asked to complete an electronic survey. Survey respondents (n=89) represented 46 states.

Data Collection

The survey was created using themes that appeared in the early education (e.g., Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Whitebook, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2010) and K-12 (e.g., Austin, 2014; Shakeshaft, 1989a) leadership literature. The survey was comprised of three sections and featured both closed and open-ended questions. In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked to identify which positions they had held within the early education field, how long they had held each position, and describe the auspice in which

those positions were located. Second, leaders were asked to identify and rank supports and challenges that they encountered on their career pathways from a prepared list of selections, which were drawn from themes in the early education and K-12 leadership literature. The survey also provided opportunities for participants to write in any positions, supports, and challenges that were not listed. As I was also interested in capturing leaders' demographic information, the final part of the survey asked about their age, ethnicity, languages spoken, gender, and their highest level of education. Leaders were also asked to identify degrees they had earned, if they held any teaching or administrative licenses or certificates, and if they had ever participated in a leadership training program.

The survey was uploaded into Qualtrics and leaders (n=140) received an email detailing the aims of the study and their rights as human subjects. They then received a second email with a link to an electronic version of the survey. The survey was available online for four months (May through August, 2016) and participants received several email reminders asking them to participate. The survey had a response rate of 64% and completion rate of 84%.

Data Analysis

Survey data were cleaned and analyzed using statistical analyses. Then, in an effort to identify and visually represent the pathways leaders had taken through the ECE field, descriptive analyses were used to create data maps of participants' ECE work experiences.

Statistical analyses. Survey data was analyzed using SPSS, a statistical analysis software package. A description of the sample was made using measures of central

tendency, frequency distributions, and variability in order to develop a general understanding of the survey responses and identify areas of difference within the data that should be explored further. Inferential statistics were then used to explore differences and to examine relationships between variables, such as leaders' demographic information and supports and challenges leaders identified, to see if any conclusions could be determined.

Data maps. Creating visual representations of the data, or data maps, allowed the researcher to further analyze and understand leaders' pathways, make sense of the relationships revealed by the quantitative findings, and notice new patterns and discrepancies that could be explored (Tufte, 2001). Drawing on Kim and Brunner's (2009) work on pathways to the K-12 superintendency, I created maps of the data that allowed for easier comparison and analyses of leaders' ECE career trajectories.

It is widely recognized that the nomenclature of the ECE field is problematic in that similar roles will have different titles depending on the auspice or the age of children served (Ryan & Whitebook, 2012). For example, a person who provides instructional support to teachers might be called a "mentor coach" in Head Start programs, a "master teacher" in public preschool programs, and an "EC curriculum specialist" in public elementary schools. Therefore, creating a visual map of a leader's pathways necessitated several analytic steps. First, the most common roles respondents had held were identified. Only positions held by more than 5% of respondents were included, which resulted in "researcher" and positions held at advocacy organizations to be cut. The position of "adjunct professor," which was held by 27% of participants (n=86), was excluded as it was most often held simultaneously with another position.

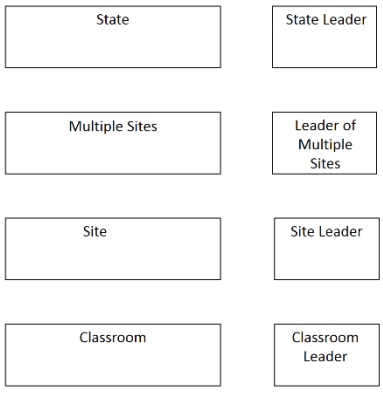
Second, positions were then sorted into broad categories (classroom, site, multiple sites, and state) to represent the context(s) the person was working in or responsible for overseeing. Additionally, an extra four categories were added to show when a person held a leadership position in a particular context. For example, a Head Start center director has similar duties to a Department of Defense elementary school principal and a tuition-based, child care center manager, as all are responsible for leading and managing a site while meeting district, state, and/or federal requirements and policies. Therefore, this group of leaders was classified as "Site Leaders." Table 1 demonstrates how various positions were organized into larger categories to reflect the sites where state leaders had worked.

Table 1
Categories of Early Education Positions

Category	Examples of ECE Positions
Classroom	Paraprofessional or Individual Student Aide Assistant Teacher
Classroom Leader	Lead Teacher
Site	Family Worker
Site Leader	Principal, Director, or Center Manager Elementary Principal
Multiple Sites	Coach or Master Teacher Education Coordinator Child Care Resource and Referral Agency Personnel
Leader of Multiple Sites	Principal of District's Pre-Kindergarten Program Assistant Superintendent Superintendent
State	Analyst Trainer or Technical Assistance Provider Staff Member of a State Education Agency
State Leader	Head of State Education Agency Director of Early Learning Division, State's Department of Education Director of Head Start State Collaboration Office

Third, these categories were arranged to create a chart that could be used to represent leaders' movements through various roles and contexts in the EC field. To gain a sense of how leaders may have moved through these roles, the researcher consulted with experts from various auspices to identify what was considered the typical path for advancement within their contexts (e.g., moving from assistant teacher to lead teacher; coach/master teacher to educational coordinator). Research on teachers' wages and how they vary according to auspice and the age of child taught (e.g., Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016) were used to make assumptions concerning what advancement could look like across contexts (e.g., moving from lead teacher of an Early Head Start infant/toddler room to the lead teacher of a public kindergarten classroom). This process resulted in a chart (see Figure 1) that sorted early education positions into broader categories and identified rules for likely pathways that individuals travelled to create an early education pipeline.

Figure 1. Participants' Most Common Early Education Positions.



Fourth, to visually represent participants' early education-related career paths, each participant's history of early education work was then mapped using individual versions of the pipeline chart. These individual charts were tagged with the participant's demographic information that the quantitative analysis suggested was salient, including

their gender, age, race, highest level of education, and the participant's state. Finally, data from the whole sample was compiled into one comprehensive chart. Versions of this chart were made to highlight variables the quantitative findings suggested created patterns in leaders' career paths, specifically gender, age, race, and level of education. Each of these charts used different colors to represent individuals' characteristics related to the variables being examined.

This process made quantitative findings (e.g., that a participant's age was related to the length of her pathway) visible, while also exposing other potential relationships between pathway, role and demographic characteristics.

Findings

Little is known about the individuals leading the ECE field at the state level. This section begins therefore with a description of participants, including their demographics, training and credentials related to ECE and educational leadership. Given that the ECE field has no agreed upon pathway for individuals interested in becoming leaders, the most common pathways participants traveled prior to becoming state ECE leaders are described. Last, this section reports on the supports and challenges that leaders encountered along their pathways through the field.

Demographics

Research suggests that 75-80% of the ECE teaching workforce is White, with slightly more (81-85%) directors of early childhood programs identifying as White (IOM & NRC, 2012). Whitebook et al.'s (2010) data had similar trends, finding directors of infrastructure organizations were the least ethnically diverse group in their study, with 76% identifying as White, non-Hispanic. Similarly, the majority of leaders in this study

identified as White (86%), with 8% identifying as Black or African-American, 4% as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% as Latina or Hispanic (See Table 2). The average age of leaders was 52 years, with participants' ages ranging from 29 to 71 years of age.

Across the United States, early education is considered to be a female-dominated profession (e.g., England, 2005; Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014; IOM & NRC, 2012). It was unsurprising, therefore, to learn that the majority of state ECE leaders who responded (n=80) identified as female (89%). Compared to data on the ECE teaching workforce, which suggests that 90 to 98% of those working directly with children are female (IOM & NRC, 2012), the number of leaders in this study who identified as male (11%) suggests that men might be disproportionately represented.

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	n	%
Gender (n=80)		
Male	9	11%
Female	71	89%
Race/Ethnicity (n=80)		
White/Caucasian	69	86%
Black/African-American	6	8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	4%
Latinx/Hispanic	1	1%
Decline to State	1	1%
Education (n=79)		
Bachelor's Degree	13	16%
Master's Degree	44	56%
Doctoral Degree	20	25%
Other	2	3%

As there is no agreed upon set of names for particular roles within the ECE field, participating state leaders had a range of job titles. The majority of participants were administrators or executive directors of the "early learning" or "early childhood" agency or division within their state's department or office of education. However, some leaders

had titles that linked their positions to specific federal ECE funding initiatives, including the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, Preschool Development or Expansion Grant, and State Advisory Councils (e.g., Preschool Expansion Grant Manager, Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge Grant Coordinator). Regardless of their location within their state's education infrastructure, their titles signified that they were working with younger children.

While there is great variety in the education and professional preparation of the ECE workforce (IOM & NRC, 2012), state ECE leaders in this study were highly educated, with 57% having earned a master's degree, 25% a Ph.D. or Ed.D., and 2% another post-baccalaureate degree. The majority of leaders (56%) reported working in the early education field for twenty or more years, including time spent in their current role, with a range from one year to thirty years or more. Sixty-one percent of participants had taught children (ages birth through eight) prior to becoming a leader and 57.5% had obtained a teaching credential during their career. Along their pathway, 21% of leaders had obtained an administrator license or certificate; 71% of these were related to elementary leadership and 29% were related to early education or center leadership. Although there are few opportunities for leadership training within the field (Goffin & Daga, 2017), 64% of respondents reported having participated in a leadership program. Leaders identified these programs as specializing in early education (33%), public policy (48%), general leadership or management techniques (15%), or early education and public policy (4%).

Leaders' Pathways

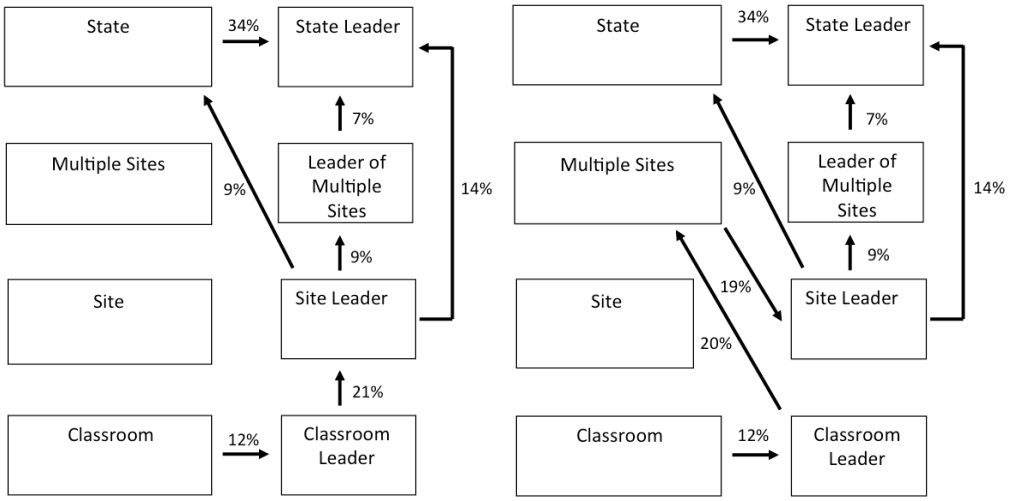
In contrast to the K-12 education system, which has clear career paths, credentials, and pivotal experiences that leaders are expected to have before advancing (e.g., Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass & Franceschini, 2007), early education has no clear pathways or requirements for leading beyond the site-level. Findings from this study illustrate that there are multiple pathways within the field that one can travel to become a state ECE leader. This section will discuss the most common pathways leaders travelled, discuss the leaders that circumvented the common pathways, and then detail three variables that shaped the length of leaders' career paths.

Leaders' journeys through the ECE field reveal common pathways into state leadership positions. The majority of participants (54%) reported having been the leader of an ECE site during their career, which is unsurprising as, until recently, leading an early childhood setting was one of the most available opportunities for advancement within the field (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a). As Figure 2 shows, how participants came to be a site leader and where they went from there varied. Twenty-one percent of leaders transitioned from being a lead classroom teacher to leading a site. For example, one leader went from being a lead classroom teacher to an assistant director and later became the director of a child care center.

The lead classroom teachers that did not directly become site leaders went, instead, into positions where they were able to work with multiple sites (20%). These leaders then, most often, transitioned into site leadership roles (19%). Moving from lead classroom teacher to working in multiple sites (e.g., as a master teacher or educational coordinator) represents a common Head Start pathway, where individuals first act as instructional leaders before being promoted to a leadership role in one site. A similar

pathway is also evident in public school settings. For example, one leader had worked as a public school teacher in kindergarten and first through third grade classrooms before spending a number of years as a coach for teachers in the public school system. The leader then went on to be a principal of a district preschool building before becoming the director of the district's preschool program.

Figure 2. Common Pathways of State Early Education Leaders. These figures illustrate the most common transitions leaders made, with percentages, between positions within the early education field.

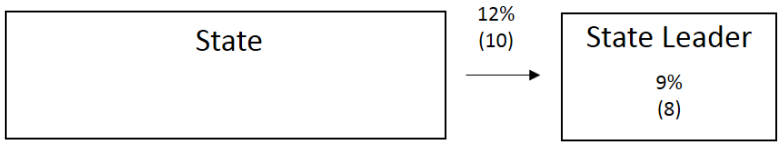


After being the leader of a site, some (14%) bypassed other early education positions and went directly into leading at the state level, while others progressed to leading multiple sites (9%) or working as a staff member at the state level (9%). While the chart shows other routes that individuals took, the most common transition leaders experienced (34%) was working at the state level in some capacity before becoming a state leader of early education, suggesting that these leaders are most often promoted from within the system.

In contrast, 21% of participating leaders (n=86) began at the state level. Of these, 56% entered as members of a state education agency, while 44% moved directly into a

state leadership position without reporting that they held any of the common positions within the ECE field. These individuals' pathways were labeled as "alternate routes," as they differed from what other leaders did and seemed to circumvent the field's traditional positions. Figure 3 shows the percentage of participants whose early education experiences seemed to occur at the state level. The 12% of survey participants who identified starting in the ECE field by working in the state context may have specialized in another field, likely one that incorporated knowledge of young children, such as mental health before transitioning to work in the ECE field. Of the 9% of respondents who started in a leadership role at the state level, 25% had also reported working for a non-profit or private organization, where they may have done work related to early childhood or education.

Figure 3. Alternate Route to State Early Education Leadership.



Of the 21% of state leaders who entered the ECE pathway at the state level, most (50%) reported having been in the ECE field for 11 or more years, while 22% had four years or less of experience in the field. Thirty-nine percent of the leaders who reported only working state level jobs in the ECE field identified being part of the ECE field for the length of time that they had held their current job, all for less than 5 years. It is unclear what outside expertise leaders brought to their positions, but this finding suggests that leaders with little early education experience may end up leading the field at the state level.

Factors that mediate leaders' pathways. Although there was variability in the experiences participants had prior to becoming state ECE leaders, the data suggest that leaders' pathways were shaped by teaching experience, auspice, and gender.

Teaching experience. Data suggested that ECE teaching experience lengthened participants' pathways into their state leadership positions. State leaders who had ECE teaching experience (62%) were older (53 years old), on average, than their non-early education-teaching peers (38%; 49 years old). Leaders with early education experience spent an average of 20 years in the ECE field prior to reaching their state leadership positions, while the pathways of those who had not taught in ECE averaged 12 years.

Auspice. ECE has historically been a fragmented system, with care and education offerings for children five and younger often siloed by auspice depending on the agency responsible for overseeing and funding the program (Goffin & Washington, 2007). As a result, ECE programs, such as Head Start and public preschool, have each developed their own norms, regulations and institutional identities (Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a).

Research on the ECE workforce has demonstrated a relationship between the auspice of a setting where one works and teachers' wellbeing (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989; 1998; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 1993; 2014). The most secure and best paying jobs are often those associated with public funding, which typically start serving children at 3 to 5 years of age, leaving those that care for and educate our youngest children at a disadvantage financially (Whitebook et al., 2014). Findings from this study suggest that auspice, and the age of children taught, also plays a role in the length of leaders' pathways. For example, in every instance where leaders had taught

infants and toddlers (22%) or had worked with young children in home-based care settings (8%), those leaders also taught older children (five- to eight-year-olds), in some cases working their way from assistant to lead teacher positions with multiple age groups of children. In contrast, individuals who had taught preschool, kindergarten, or first through third grade in public settings held fewer teaching positions and spent less time during their careers in the classroom. It is likely, therefore, that leaders who experienced teaching infants and toddlers did so in settings where advancement was less possible.

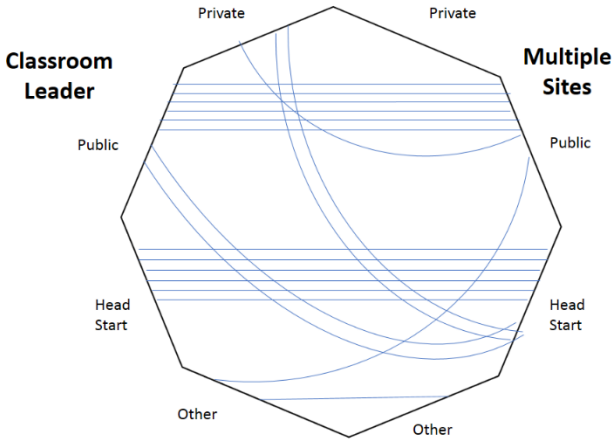
To illustrate how leaders transitioned between positions and ECE settings, which often varied in auspice, the figures below break each position into four common auspices (private, public, Head Start, and other) and then use a line to represent each leader's move into the new position. The designation of "other" was given to settings that were either mixed auspice (e.g., a site that housed both public preK and Head Start programs) or an auspice that was rare, such as programs run by the Department of Defense. A straight line was used when the leader changed position within the same auspice and a curved line was used to represent that the leader changed both their position and the auspice in which they were working.

When leaders' ECE experiences were mapped out according to auspice, those who worked in Head Start had the most unified pathway. It is likely that this unified pathway reflects how Head Start, in comparison to other auspices, is more established and has been, historically, one of the most widely available organized early education systems. Head Start has roles with delineated job responsibilities that are consistent across its contexts and has a hierarchical structure that includes opportunities for advancement within its system. When examining leaders' trajectories, those who had

site-based experiences in private settings and did not advance directly into a site leadership role instead moved through a series of Head Start or public infrastructure positions (e.g., as an educational coordinator, master teacher, district subject area specialist) and then were able to pursue leadership opportunities across auspices.

As shown in figure 4, of the 20% of participants who transitioned from being a classroom leader to working in multiple sites, equal numbers (35%) made this switch within public settings and (35%) within Head Start settings, while 6% made the transition staying in a mixed auspice setting. For those who switched auspice during this transition, 12% went from being a classroom leader in a private setting or a public setting (also 12%) to working in a Head Start position across multiple sites, while the remainder moved from private (6%) or other (6%) to public (6%).

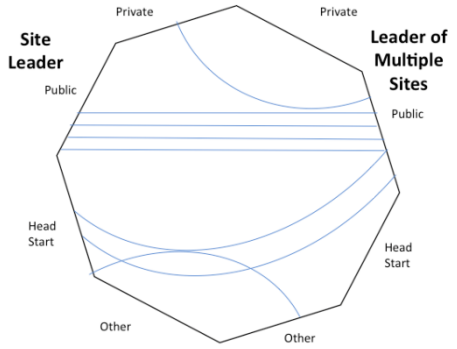
Figure 4. Transitions from Leading a Classroom to Working in Multiple Sites.



Public education settings were almost exclusively the only auspice able to offer individuals the opportunity to lead multiple sites. Only 9% of participants reported transitioning from leading a site to leading multiple sites and most of these individuals (50%) did so within public settings. Of those that transitioned into leading multiple sites

while also changing auspice, 25% moved from leading a Head Start site to overseeing multiple public settings, 12.5% from private to public and 12.5% from a Head Start site to a site categorized as other. As figure 5 suggests, opportunities to lead multiple sites were most often available in publicly funded programs and positions included being the director of a public school district's preschool program (63%) and a district superintendent (25%).

Figure 5. Transitions from Leading a Site to Leading Multiple Sites.

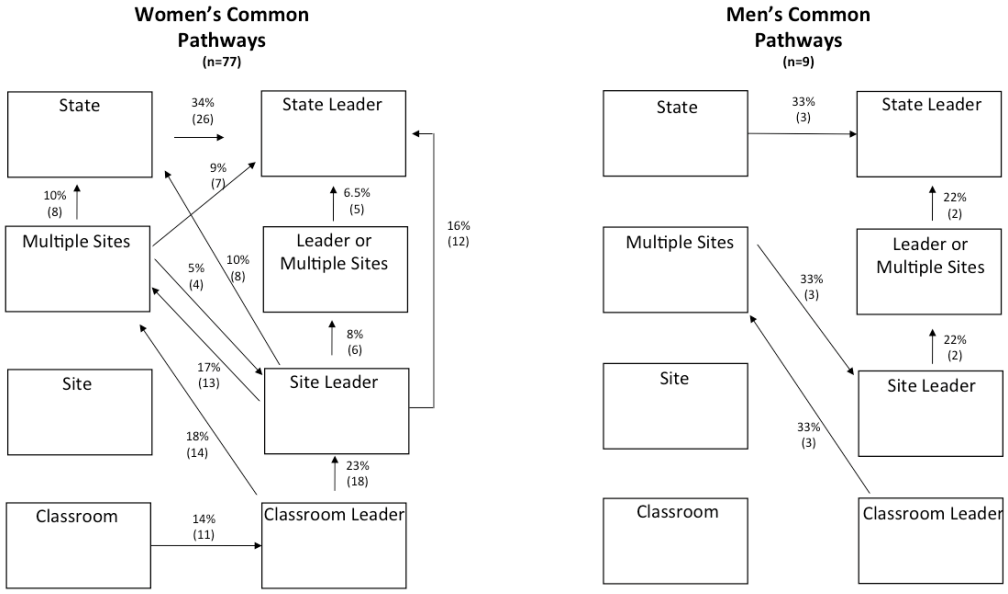


In summary, Head Start and publicly funded settings were able to provide additional opportunities for advancement that were not available to those working in private settings, which most often offered only site-based roles.

Gender. While leaders' pathways were mediated by many variables, gender seemed to be one of the most salient. When examining Figure 6, there is an obvious difference between the pathways men and women travel through the field. When leaders' time working in the field had been adjusted to exclude the years spent in their current role, men's time in the field averaged 10 years, while women's averaged 17 years. Women spent more time en route to their positions and less time leading than their male counterparts. These findings echo research on the career paths of individuals who became

K-12 superintendents. Kim and Brunner (2009) found that men experienced faster "career mobility," than women.

Figure 6. Common Pathways – Gender. This figure illustrates the common pathways for men and women.



Over half of the male participants (56% of n=9) reported teaching young children during their career: 60% had been a lead preK teacher; 20% had been a lead teacher in kindergarten and first through third grade; and 20% had been a lead teacher in preK, kindergarten and first through third grade. None of the men reported working as an assistant teacher or working as a teacher for infants or toddlers, suggesting that even at the classroom level men might be more likely than women to achieve a leadership position and work in the better paid levels of education and care.

As mentioned above, there were a number of survey respondents (21%) who entered early education at the state level. The men who became state level leaders with no classroom, site, or multiple site early education experiences (17%) make up 33% of the

total men in this study's sample (n=9), while only 9% of the women in this study (n=77) reported starting in the field as a state leader.

Supports and challenges on leaders' pathways. The research on leaders in ECE and K-12 suggest that a number of factors, such as mentorship (e.g., Austin, 2014; Brunner, 2000a) and access to professional networks (e.g., Brunner & Grogan, 2007) and training (e.g., Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014), can help individuals successfully journey through the education field to become leaders. To learn more about state ECE leaders' pathways, I drew upon the K-12 and ECE leadership literature to identify 21 factors that could have helped or supported leaders and 19 barriers or challenges that they may have encountered on their pathways to becoming state leaders. As leaders may have experienced supports and challenges unique to the ECE field that had not previously been captured by the literature, spaces were provided where leaders could select "other" and write in their responses. Leaders were asked to select and rank 5 descriptors on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating "most helpful" or "most challenging," and 5 indicating "least helpful" or "least challenging."

Eighty-two participants identified and ranked factors that helped them successfully navigate through the ECE field. For each descriptor, participants' responses were counted and a percentage was generated to identify the most common supports experienced by survey respondents. Participants' ranked responses were then totaled and averaged. Table 3 illustrates the mean scores and percentages for the top five responses, ranked from most to least helpful.

Similar to research on K-12 superintendents, state ECE leaders' ranked responses suggested that to move through the ECE field, leaders needed mentorship, knowledge of

ECE, access to education or training, positive relationships with state agencies, and confidence in their capabilities. The two most commonly reported factors that helped leaders on their pathways were being knowledgeable about early childhood education (53.7%) and having confidence in their capabilities (43.9%). Taken together, these findings suggest that while many leaders relied upon their knowledge and confidence to move them forward, they also needed external supports and relationships in order to successfully navigate and advance in the ECE field.

Table 3
Average Ranking of Supports on ECE Leaders' Pathways

Rank (Most to Least)	Mean Score	Descriptor	% of Responses (n=82)
1	2.0	Presence of mentors	35.4%
2	2.1	Knowledgeable about early childhood education	53.7%
3	2.7	Gained key experiences, education, or training	36.6%
4	3.0	Positive working relations with state agency(ies)	34.1%
5	3.7	Confidence in personal and professional capabilities	43.9%

Presence of mentors was ranked as being the most important support leaders experienced, but it was only identified by 35% of participants. The K-12 literature has suggested mentorship is instrumental, especially for women of color, in helping them advance, as mentors provide guidance and helped individuals gain access to new opportunities (e.g., Brunner, 2000a; Grogan, 1996; Ortiz & Marshall, 1998). Given how highly leaders' ranked access to mentors and positive working relations with state agencies, it seems likely that similar interpersonal relationships are occurring in early education, although more research about what this looks like is needed.

To learn more about the types of supports individuals might need along their pathways into state ECE leadership roles, leaders were also asked to identify and rank barriers or challenges that they encountered en route to their state positions. The leaders who responded to this question (n=70), identified the absence of a support system within their job as the most common (51.4%) and most challenging (m=2.5) factor on their pathway to becoming a state leader. Participants' rankings (see Table 4), also identified not having strategies for maneuvering politically charged environments, unsupportive supervisors, an absence of mentors, and a lack of professional networks as challenges that they had to overcome in order to advance. These findings not only echo K-12 research on the importance of mentors and professional networks (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), but also highlight the need for leaders to be prepared to navigate complex social situations and environments. Research on mid-career ECE infrastructure leaders has found that leaders' jobs required them to be adept at maneuvering politically charged situations, such as negotiating for resources, and many worried they did not possess the political strategies needed (Austin, 2014). In Goffin's (2013) report on state EC leaders' professional development needs, participants mentioned the unique politicized contexts in which they work and the special skills it required, but overall findings from the survey suggested state leaders were most interested in better developing their management and technical skills.

Table 4
Average Ranking of Challenges and Barriers on ECE Leaders' Pathways

Rank (Most to Least)	Mean Score	Descriptor	% of Responses (n=70)
1	2.5	Absence of a support system within your jobs	51.4%

2	2.9	Lack of strategies for maneuvering politically-charged environments	48.6%
3	3.0	Lack of support and encouragement by supervisors	28.6%
4	3.1	Absence of mentor(s)	34.3%
5	3.2	Lack of professional networks	24.3%

Of all the relationships explored, an Analysis of Variance found there were significant differences between the challenges experienced by leaders depending on whether or not they had a teaching credential $F(1,78)=5.47$ $p<.05$. Leaders without a teaching certificate reported not having access to professional networks and a lack of ECE knowledge as challenges on their pathway ($M=4.2$, $SD=3.3$), in contrast to those with teaching certificates ($M=2.5$, $SD=3.0$).

In sum, these findings suggest that leaders felt knowledge of ECE, presence of support networks, especially access to mentors and professional connections, were integral to moving through the field and successfully.

Discussion and Implications

Most early childhood workforce initiatives have focused on improving the qualifications and expertise of teachers. This emphasis has resulted in little being known about those who lead early childhood programs, especially at the state level. Yet state early childhood leaders are charged with a complex task, unifying historically segregated early childhood programs to create a coordinated system of public preschool. At the same time because state EC leaders are often housed in Departments of Education, they also must navigate the K-12 world where ECE has had little status. The purpose of this study was to describe state ECE leaders and their ECE pathways to leadership with the aim of identifying how the field might prepare members of the workforce and ensure there is a

pipeline of qualified leaders in the future. The findings of this study suggest that there are three workforce issues that need to be addressed.

The first of these relates to the lack of diversity, particularly concerning age and race, in the state leadership workforce. As the majority of participating state ECE leaders in this study were 46 years or older, including 9% of participants who were over age 65, there is the possibility that the field will experience significant turnover in its leadership pool in the coming years. A few researchers in the ECE field have raised concerns that a leadership vacuum may occur when the field's most established and influential leaders retire (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2010) and the findings of this study emphasize the need to recruit and ensure that younger members of the field have the capacity to lead.

Additionally, similar to trends found in research on the ECE workforce (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2010), the findings of this study echo concerns about racial stratification in the field's leadership positions. Most of the state ECE leaders in this study (86%) identified as White. Some caution must be used here because the diversity of the workforce shifts by auspice (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2012; Park, McHugh, Zong, & Batolova, 2015). Taken together, this research suggests that members of the ECE workforce are more likely to be White in state-funded education settings (preK-third grade) and in the field's leadership positions (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2012; Whitebook et al., 2010). Literature on K-12 superintendents has demonstrated that race, gender, and sexuality (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 1999; Wallin & Crippen, 2007) can slow down or prevent individuals from achieving their career goals. While there is no similar, definitive research base in ECE, this study's findings on leaders' demographics and career paths suggests that Head Start, which offers roles for advancement not found in private, non-

profit centers, could be settings where strategic supports can help keep diverse individuals in the leadership pipeline. While it is important to recruit and support new leaders for state positions, the findings of this study also suggest that attention be given to ensuring that a diverse pool of new leaders is recruited.

Findings related to leaders' gender are more complicated to interpret given how the ECE profession has historically been considered "women's work" (e.g., England, 2005; 2014). The new state ECE leadership roles represent a crossroads where gender trends in the education leadership literature converge. As 11% of survey respondents identified as male, this sample seems to have a slightly larger percentage of men than it is believed comprise the broader ECE workforce, which has been estimated to be 90 to 98% female (IOM & NRC, 2012). Whitebook et al.'s (2010) study of ECE infrastructure personnel found that 92% of all infrastructure staff identified as female, but only 85% of directors, suggesting that men were more likely to be in ECE leadership positions. Research on K-12 leaders demonstrates similar trends, with men disproportionately represented in leadership roles when compared to the field's female-dominated teaching workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a; 2013b; 2013d). Early education and K-12 have both been identified as gender stratified professions, with early education (as a profession) being labeled as female-dominated and K-12 leadership (specifically defined as superintendents and above) considered male-dominated (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The findings of this study suggest that men may be obtaining top-level leadership roles with fewer years of ECE experience, raising concerns that ECE leadership roles could become places where, similar to trends in K-12, men are disproportionately represented compared to the female-dominated workforce.

This study also draws attention to a second workforce issue concerning the lack of a clearly articulated pathway for those who would like to pursue leadership positions within the field. The findings of this study demonstrate the multiple pathways state ECE leaders have taken through the field and the great variations of these paths reflects the field's fragmentation and, until recently, limited opportunities for advancement. At the same time, the pathways taken by leaders, the length of leaders' time in the field and the number of positions that they held prior to becoming a state ECE leader was mediated by teaching experience, auspice, and gender. In general leaders with teaching experience had longer pathways compared to their non-teaching colleagues, but leaders who had teacher credentials experienced fewer challenges along their pathways. Teachers of infants and toddlers seemed to be penalized, taking more time to get to a state leadership position, while those who taught older children advanced through the field more quickly or entered top positions with little ECE experience. If a leader started in a publicly-funded preK program, whether it was run by a public school system or Head Start, they advanced into a state leadership position more quickly.

The complexity of mapping ECE employment opportunities highlights the unique nature of the field in comparison to K-12 and suggests that ECE, as a field, currently needs to be conceptualized as a system comprised of multiple subsystems. Creating a clear set of criteria and pathways for achieving leadership positions within the ECE field, similar to that of the K-12 education system, would ensure that those leading were prepared for their positions and could intentionally choose roles or settings that would help them advance. These pathways could also help ensure that individuals would have

had experiences the field considers pivotal, such as working in an ECE setting, prior to attaining top-level ECE leadership positions.

The third workforce issue that demands attention is the need for the ECE field to come to a consensus regarding what preparation is required for leading in ECE. Leaders in this study reported encountering challenges on their pathways due to a lack of skills and support from others in the field. The statistical analyses suggested that leaders who had teaching credentials experienced fewer challenges along their pathways. Although there is still great variation across auspices within the ECE field, many states (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018) and Head Start (Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007) have been increasing the education and certification requirements for teachers over the past decade. Even so, the K-12 public school system has degree and/or certification requirements for its teachers, while only 20 states require lead teachers in their public preschool programs to have at least a bachelor's degree (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018; Whitebook et al., 2016). Findings from this study support researchers' and policymakers' efforts (e.g., Sakai, Kipnis, Whitebook & Schaack, 2014; Whitebook, Schaack, Kipnis, Austin & Sakai, 2013) to make education and training opportunities more accessible to the early education workforce. These experiences could help individuals gain field-related knowledge, but also help them develop a support system and network outside of their workplaces to help them be successful in ECE.

Although 64% of participants reported completing a leadership program, many still identified experiencing challenges as a result of not having specific skills or access to supports in their workplaces and in the ECE field. Mentoring and more support from organizations within the field could help keep individuals in the pipeline and encourage

them to pursue leadership roles. While professional ECE organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, exist, the ECE field has few role-specific organizations that can offer support along leaders' pathways. In contrast, K-12 education has national and often within-state groups that offer support to education leaders throughout the K-12 leadership pipeline, including principals (e.g., National Association for Elementary School Principals), superintendents (e.g., American Association of School Administrators), and other roles (e.g., National Association of State Boards of Education). As more ECE leadership positions are developed, the need to support individuals in those positions also increases.

Whilst this study did not ask leaders about the specifics of their leadership programs, it is evident from this and other studies (e.g., Austin, 2014; Goffin, 2013; IOM & NRC, 2015) that ECE leaders need support and specialized training, as their work cuts across a variety of subsystems. Currently, early education leadership programs are scarce and do not share a consistent focus (Goffin & Daga, 2017). The IOM and NRC's (2015) report has already resulted in efforts to develop strategies that better support workforce development (e.g., National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine [NASEM], 2018), help improve the workforce (e.g., McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership), and identify research and policy that enhance the quality and status of the workforce (e.g., Center for the Study of Child Care Employment; Foundation for Child Development). Additionally, recent conversations surrounding the Task Force's recommendations for Decision Cycles 3-5 of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) national collaboration "Power to the Profession," (e.g., Foundation for Child Development, 2018) are evidence that members

of the ECE field are not only ready but are willing to engage in difficult conversations about the pathways and preparation of the ECE workforce.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of preschool systems and the expansion of leadership roles within these systems has demonstrated a significant shift in how the early childhood field is being recognized and represented. However, this study suggests that these positions may go to outsiders with little ECE experience unless the field determines the skills and competencies necessary for ECE leaders and creates preparation programs and pathways that allow individuals to advance through the field. While this study was limited by its reliance on state ECE leaders' self-reported data, it draws attention to the lack of data available on the ECE workforce. In contrast to the K-12 education system, which gathers data on its leaders (e.g., Brunner & Grogan, 2007), the ECE field, currently, does not have any systems in place that allow researchers to consistently track individuals as they move through the field or collect the demographic information of those in leadership positions. More empirical work on the pathways of the ECE workforce is needed, but the data is not available. Many states are developing ECE workforce registries, which could provide the opportunity to better understanding how individuals are navigating the ECE field, especially if current efforts were expanded to include positions beyond direct caregiving. State ECE workforce registries provide a starting place for researchers interested in engaging in this work. Additionally, if a national organization or collaboration of organizations were willing to assist in data collection efforts or bring separate state databases together on a national scale, researchers could then examine trends in the data and make recommendations for

improving policies that affect the ECE workforce and inform those interested in enhancing the practices and preparation of the workforce.

Chapter 3: What Does It Mean to be an Early Childhood Systems Leader?

The expansion of public and private early childhood offerings and new investments in early learning, such as the Obama administration's Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grants, have made coordinating and administering early childhood services more complex than ever before (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012b). As state early childhood education (ECE) leaders try to expand and improve the quality of their state's ECE offerings, they are also working to establish integrated systems of high quality ECE (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a). These system building efforts aim to ensure consistency in the quality of preschool programming, both private and public, that young children experience while being prepared for formal schooling and comprise a large part of state ECE leaders' work (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a; Shepard et al., 1998).

There are two main types of system building efforts in ECE, one that focuses on creating a system of education and care programs for children birth through age eight, and another that focuses on early childhood services more broadly. The first requires state ECE leaders to unify disparate early education offerings, such as Head Start, child care, and public preschool, which are likely housed in different state departments, under a set of common goals, regulations, and accountability measures (Goffin, 2013; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a). State ECE leaders must also collaborate with state elementary education leaders to align birth through kindergarten education and care opportunities with the early elementary grades. For example, aligning preschool standards, curricula, and assessments to the early elementary grades in an effort to create preschool through third grade (P-3) systems (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012b). The second type of system building expands beyond educational contexts as state ECE leaders work across state agencies and departments to

unite historically compartmentalized early childhood services (including early education, family support, health and nutrition, and special education or intervention) into cohesive systems that allow for better coordination and collaboration (Goffin et al., 2011; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012b).

Systems building requires state ECE leaders to have a deep understanding of the programs and services they are trying to unify (Coffman & Wright, 2011) and the governance and politics of the contexts in which they are working (Goffin, 2013), but research suggests ECE leaders may not be adequately prepared to navigate these contexts (Austin, 2014; Goffin, 2013; Whitebook et al., 2010). The ECE field lacks clear pathways and preparation requirements for its leaders and leadership programs focusing on ECE are rare and of uncertain quality (Goffin & Daga, 2017). Therefore, it is unclear if state ECE leaders have the capacity to implement ECE programs while building and navigating the systems work that is expected of them.

To date, there has been limited research on state ECE leaders and how they engage in system building work or what their work as system builders entails. Federal and state governments are committing money to public preschool expansion and system building efforts, but research on quality improvement has predominantly focused on teachers (Bueno et al., 2010; Whitebook, 2003) and research on leading in ECE mainly reflects what has been learned from those who run their own centers (e.g., Aubrey, 2007; Rodd, 2013). Little is known about leaders at other levels of the ECE field (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2010) and fewer than a handful of works examine the needs and experiences of state ECE leaders (e.g., Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). This study adds to this body of literature by reporting findings from a

qualitative interview study with ten state ECE leaders. Data for this study was gathered as part of a mixed methods study to gain a better understanding of state ECE leaders' responsibilities and experiences, to identify the skills and expertise that their roles require, and the supports these leaders need to do their jobs more efficiently. The following research questions guided this study:

4. How do state ECE leaders describe their work as system leaders?
    d. What are the tasks/activities associated with being a state leader?
    e. What type of skills and expertise do they believe are necessary to be a state-level systems leader?
    f. What factors did leaders find made their work difficult?

Literature Review

As this study aimed to learn more about the work of state ECE leaders, this review of the literature will present what is known about approaches to leading at different levels within the early childhood field. It will begin by describing what can be learned about the work of center directors and then review research that focuses on mid-level or infrastructure leaders (e.g. Whitebook et al., 2010). This section will then conclude by detailing the work of state system building leaders, who work as state agency administrators (e.g. Goffin, 2013) and leaders that oversee system efforts in one state or across multiple states (e.g. Goffin et al., 2011).

Center Directors

The majority of the research available on leadership in ECE focuses on the work of center directors, not system level leaders, as, until recently, being a center director was one of the most widely available leadership roles within the ECE field. The research on

center directors that is relevant to this paper describes the knowledge and skillsets center directors should have and identifies some of the most common challenges that these site leaders have encountered. As the purpose of this research has been to gather information about center directors' experiences, this body of work is comprised mostly of qualitative studies.

Since the 1990s, Bloom has been one of the leading researchers of center directors and what their work entails. She has described the director role as comprised of many parts, including "budget analyst, building and grounds manager, staff supervisor, record keeper, receptionist, community liaison, public relations coordinator, curriculum developer, fundraiser, nurse, nutritionist and child advocate," saying, "the director wears many hats and needs a repertoire of competencies to effectively carry out these diverse roles" (Bloom, 1992, p. 139). In order to find balance in this role, Bloom (2000) suggested directors needed to have three competencies: knowledge, skill, and attitude. Knowledge refers to a deep understanding not only of child development but also management in order to motivate staff towards the director's goals for the center. Directors also need to be have the skills required for fiscally managing and maintaining a high quality center and an attitude that is attractive to children, teachers, and families (Bloom, 2000).

Even though the center director role is complex and requires competence and expertise across multiple bodies of knowledge (Bloom, 2000), center directors often highlighted their work with children and teachers, including acting as a pedagogical leader, rather than tasks related to managing or leading when discussing their responsibilities (Aubrey, 2007; Rodd, 1997; 2013; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997). When

responding to a survey in Rafanello and Bloom's (1997) study, directors (n=840) identified "educational programming" as the administrative skill area that they had the most knowledge of both when starting out as a director and when completing the survey. In telephone interviews with center directors and program administrators who had recently started to provide public preschool in their sites or districts, participants in Whitebook et al.'s (2008b) study emphasized using their prior teaching experience to help build relationships with staff. These studies suggest that directors with teaching experience feel the most comfortable with two of the three competencies that Bloom (2000) described, as they use their knowledge and expertise of early childhood and a positive attitude to build relationships with children and families in their center. Missing, then, or underdeveloped, are the management skills required to lead a center.

There is consensus across studies that center directors must be able to manage their site's finances, budget their time, communicate effectively, and be able to create a vision and inspire their staff to follow it (Larkin, 1999; Rodd, 1997). However, the research also documents that center directors struggle with these skills (Rafanello and Bloom, 1997; Rodd, 1997). Directors who participated in a survey of licensed or license-exempt ECE programs in Illinois (n=840) reported feeling the least competent performing tasks related to legal or fiscal management, leadership and advocacy (Rafanello & Bloom, 1997). In focus groups with site-based leaders (n=76) from a variety of ECE settings, Rodd's (1997) participants identified struggling most with interpersonal relationships (51.3%), administration tasks (21.1%), and aspects of the leadership role (7.9%). This research suggests that while directors have a clear idea of the

skills required to lead a center, they may not have the capacity to do them (Rafanello & Bloom, 1997; Rodd, 1997).

Research suggests that effective center directors learn to navigate the tension of leading a center, rather than a classroom, and are able to find a sense of balance in their responsibilities. Quantitative studies of classroom quality (e.g., Mocan, Burchinal, Morris, & Helburn, 1995) and qualitative studies that have delved more deeply into quantitative findings (e.g., Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Sylva, Mehuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004) reveal that effective directors were more likely to be instructional leaders in their centers, modeling best practices for their teachers. Conceptions of effective center leadership (e.g. Mocan et al., 1995; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Sylva et al., 2004) suggest that distributed styles of leading, where staff members feel invested and responsible for managing aspects of their work (e.g. Aubrey, 2007), are seen as the best approach and associated with increases in quality (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), lower rates of teacher turnover (e.g. Taggart et al., 1999), and higher rates of teacher job satisfaction (Hayden, 1997).

While the literature on center directors illustrates the multi-faceted nature of the position (Aubrey, 2007; Bloom, 1998a), research on center directors whose sites operated using multiple funding streams and, therefore, had to abide by and navigate additional regulations demonstrates how complex center leadership can be (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2008b). However, the literature that focuses on center directors does not examine system leadership, where a leader is responsible for multiple sites.

Mid-level Leadership

Many mid-level leaders can be found in infrastructure organizations, an umbrella term used to describe the myriad of organizations that support early education efforts (through advocacy, teacher training, or those that provide extra special education supports) and other childhood services (such as case management services or social workers) that children, families, and educators have access to (Gallagher & Clifford, 2000). These leaders fill many roles, but may be responsible for devising how to translate policies into action, training the early education workforce, and navigating inter-agency collaborations to help schools and families access services (Whitebook et al., 2010). Studies of infrastructure leaders have focused on learning more about this sector of the workforce, the skills they use in their roles, and what supports they need in their current work.

The skills necessary to be a mid-level leader are similar to those expanded upon in the center director literature, but the research indicates that infrastructure leaders need to be able to apply these skills in more complex environments. In Austin's (2014) qualitative study of mid-level leaders (n=9), participants stressed that understanding early education at a systems level, or how different programs fit together, was integral to doing the job well. Those that did not have that knowledge tried to learn it on the job and felt held back by the complexity of early education offerings (Austin, 2014). Additionally, leaders at this level had to be adept at maneuvering politically charged situations, such as negotiating for resources, which required excellent communication and interpersonal skills, as leaders had to collaborate with individuals who had different perspectives or positions (Austin, 2014). Whitebook et al. (2010), who used surveys to conduct an exploratory study of staff working in a selection of infrastructure organizations in

California (n=1,091), found that one-third of leaders, who identified as managers and supervisors, felt they needed more training on administration and supervision.

Leaders in Austin's (2014) study identified leadership programs and mentoring as two supports that helped prepare them for their work and improve on the job. Austin (2014) purposefully designed her sample to represent leaders who had experienced a range of leadership preparation and concluded that all leaders could benefit from attending leadership programs focused on early education and public policy. Regardless of their backgrounds, these programs could address gaps in leaders' knowledge, help leaders establish professional networks, and better prepare them to shape and navigate ECE systems. Additionally, leaders reported relying on formal and informal mentoring relationships for advisement and support (Austin, 2014). This was especially true for participants of color, who, in Austin's (2014) study, emphasized the importance of having a mentor of color or belonging to a community group where racial identities could be reinforced and celebrated.

Early Education and System Leadership

The literature on state ECE leaders is comprised of three works that utilized interviews with state-level leaders to provide insight regarding the skills necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of their jobs and the challenges leaders experience as system builders. The first work is a research report designed to inform the design and implementation of the Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes' (CEELO) Early Education Leadership Academy (Goffin, 2013). The second is a "Cross-State Evaluation Brief" (Coffman & Wright, 2011), in which key stakeholders from eight states participating in the Build Initiative reflect on leadership development in their state's

system building efforts. The third work reports findings from an exploratory study that sought to document what state leaders have learned about governance in ECE system building work (Goffin et al., 2011). These reports document the complexity of leading ECE at the state level and the challenges these leaders encounter as they work to build multiple types of ECE systems.

Skills and training required to lead at the state level. Drawing from interviews with 17 state-level early education leaders, who were administrators of their states' early learning agencies or departments of education, and 7 early education experts, Goffin (2013) identified 6 abilities that participants considered necessary for leading at the state level. Participants believed that state leaders should have vision, a deep understanding of early education and their state's policies, and demonstrate perseverance, fortitude, creativity and courage (Goffin, 2013). They should also have the ability to create and sustain trusting relationships, collaborate with others, and navigate their agency's political context (Goffin, 2013). Considering early education leaders' must oversee their state's preschool provision while also working to align the early education and K-12 systems, these 6 skills suggest the process of change is slow and that leaders must not only be creative and independent but also able to coordinate with others both within and outside of the education system. Participants in Coffman and Wright's (2011) study also identified that state leaders need to be able to operationalize big ideas, be willing to share resources and power, be flexible amidst change, have a strong desire to be inclusive, and the ability to encourage others to lead. Creating and navigating early childhood system building requires leaders to find alignment across programs and funding streams, while bringing local, state and federal policies together (Hibbard, 2015).

Goffin (2013) used survey responses from 42 state-level leaders across 35 states and one territory (a 38% response rate) to examine what supports were in place to develop or sustain the leadership abilities of those working at the state level. More than half reported participating in leadership trainings organized internally by their agencies, higher education courses (20%), and mentoring or coaching (12%). Respondents reported experiencing trainings related to working collaboratively (80% of respondents), change management (66% of respondents), leadership style and practices (63% of respondents), visioning (63% or respondents), and staff supervision (60%). Even though the majority of leaders reported attending trainings on these topics, leaders still identified some of these areas and engaging new partners, as training topics that they felt were integral to improving their effectiveness in their current position (Goffin, 2013).

Stakeholders, state-level early education leaders, and early education experts described effective system building leaders as those who used a collaborative leadership approach and were able to share power with others, while also making quick, informed decisions when necessary (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013). This type of distributed leadership approach and a willingness to collaborate, both within and across agencies and systems, seemed necessary to ensuring that early education systems run smoothly (Goffin et al., 2011).

Challenges. State ECE leaders experienced challenges related to hiring and managing their staff. Leaders mentioned struggling to find individuals with the content knowledge required for the job who were able to work as part of a team (Goffin, 2013). When engaging in systems building work, state ECE leaders found it difficult to collaborate with staff and leaders who were not able to think at a systems-level and see

the bigger picture of early education in their state, as these individuals, instead, pushed their own agency's agenda or personal interests forward (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). State leaders also reported having difficulty establishing their leadership presence within their agencies, which could be related to complaints that there were too many demands on their time (Goffin, 2013) or the inferior position of early education compared to K-12 (Ferguson & Folbre, 2000).

State leaders, similar to mid-level leaders (Austin, 2014) also reported difficulty navigating the political environment of their agencies (Goffin, 2013). The early education system is an umbrella system that brings together other functioning systems, such as Head Start, private or home-based childcare, and public preschool and some leaders found these environments impeded their work (Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). For example, state and national leaders found the "complex and entrenched bureaucracies" (Goffin et al., 2011, p. 7) present in state agencies to be an obstacle that was decades in the making and could not be overcome. While state early childhood systems most often work to unify the four separate systems that relate to children (early education, family support, health and nutrition, and special education/early intervention) leaders in Goffin et al.'s (2011) study dismissed, outright, the idea of unifying these agencies into one large early childhood agency. They described the bureaucracy of each system as so dense and difficult to navigate that communicating across agencies has continued to be a major obstacle in many states (Goffin et al., 2011). Leaders asserted that the complexity of trying to build early childhood systems out of existing systems that are also comprised of systems was nearly impossible.

Political environments are also comprised of complex social dynamics and power relationships which can make collaboration efforts high-stakes and fraught with anxiety for state level leaders (Goffin, 2013). These leaders interact with policy makers and actively assist in developing policies, but they often lack training that explicitly addressed how to interface with these leaders and maneuver in those politicized environments (Goffin, 2013). This includes negotiating for limited resources, which requires a set of specific skills (Goffin, 2013).

In summary, the literature on leadership in early education settings provides evidence that leaders are integral to shaping the quality and climate of their center (e.g. Mocan et al., 1995; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) and the organization of their state's early childhood systems (Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). While there were multiple areas of overlap in the skills associated with effective state leaders and leadership at other levels, these reports demonstrated that systems building leaders require additional training in skills such as negotiating and navigating political environments, which are unique requirements of their positions (Austin, 2014; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011; Whitebook et al., 2010). None of these reports addressed the day-to-day responsibilities of state ECE leaders or provided descriptions of how leaders approach their work. While all seemed to agree that a distributed leadership style was associated (anecdotally) with effective leading (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011), how leaders use this approach or what this approach looks like in practice was not discussed. This study adds to this very small body of work by exploring how state ECE leaders define leadership, the skills necessary to do their job, and how they approach leading at the state level and work to build ECE systems in their states.

Methodology

Qualitative methods allow researchers to better understand quantitative findings (Remler & van Ryzin, 2011) and access in-depth first-hand accounts of participants' experiences. As there is little data on state ECE leaders and the work that they do, leaders were positioned as knowers (Harding, 1987) in this study who could provide insight into the lived experiences of leading ECE at the state level. As the purpose of this study was to learn more about what it means to be a state ECE leader, qualitative methods were used to gain a deeper understanding of leaders' experiences. Data was collected using two semi-structured interviews with a subset of state ECE leaders.

Sample

The sample for this qualitative exploration of leaders' work was drawn from a larger pool of state ECE leaders who had participated in the survey portion of a mixed-methods study. A subset of individuals (11%) from the mixed-method study's survey respondents (n=89), were chosen to act as "key informants" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001) was used to identify and select information-rich cases. A sampling strategy of maximum variation (Patton, 2001) was used in an effort to capture diverse perspectives and achieve maximum variation so findings could reflect patterns across leaders' experiences.

To identify potential participants, a matrix was developed to organize leaders' survey responses that included information pertaining to leaders' demographics, the supports and challenges they reported, the purview of their state ECE role, and the characteristics of their state's public preschool program. Items included on the matrix reflected trends in the research on K-12 systems leaders (e.g., Brunner & Grogan, 2007)

and ECE leaders (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2008a; Whitebook et al., 2010). Leaders' age was also included, as 6% of study participants had identified their youthfulness as a challenge they encountered in their ECE work. To ensure variation in leaders' experiences and help identify information rich cases, the matrix also included the top three supports and challenges leaders' reported experiencing while working in the ECE field and descriptions of their current responsibilities. *The State of Preschool 2015 State Preschool Yearbook* (Barnett et al., 2016) was used to gather characteristics about each leader's state (e.g., the percentage of four year olds served by state preschool program(s), the auspice or delivery method of those programs), so that it was possible to ensure variation in the size of preschool program state leaders oversaw.

This process resulted in 14 state ECE leaders being identified. Each of these leaders was then invited to participate in two, hour-long telephone interviews. Ten of these leaders agreed to participate in both interviews. As participating leaders stressed the importance that their and their states' identities remain anonymous, leaders were each assigned a pseudonym and characteristics that could be used to identify them or their state, such as the names of specific preschool programs or grants awarded to their state, have been changed or withheld from this paper.

Most of the state ECE leaders in the final sample were female (80%) and identified as White/non-Hispanic (60%). The average age of leaders was 48, ranging from 32 to 66 years with a median age of 49 years. The majority of leaders had a master's degree (Table 5).

Table 5
Frequencies and Percentages of Participants' Demographic and ECE Characteristics

Variable	n
Gender	

Male	2
Female	8
Race/Ethnicity	
White/not Hispanic	6
Persons of Color*	4
Age	
30 – 39	2
40 – 49	3
50 – 59	4
60 – 69	1
Highest Degree Earned	
Master's	7
Doctoral	3
ECE Teaching Experience	8
Years in the ECE field	
Less than 10	1
10 to 20	2
21 to 30	5
30 or more	2
Years in current role	
Less than 5	7
5 to 10	2
20 or more	1
% 4-year-olds served in state preschool	
0 – 20%	4
21 – 40%	3
41% or more	3

*To ensure confidentiality leaders who identified as Black/African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Latinx were grouped together.

The final sample of state ECE leaders each represented different states (n=10) and the majority of these leaders (80%) had worked as an ECE teacher (for children ages birth through eight) during their careers. While 70% of leaders reported working in the ECE field for over 20 years, most (70%) had been in their current role for less than 5 years. These leaders were responsible for overseeing or coordinating components of their state's preschool program and worked to help build early childhood systems in their state. The size of their state's public preschool program, represented by the percentage of 4-year-olds served (Barnett et al., 2016), reflected ranges that could be considered small,

medium and large (see Table 5). Fifty percent of participants reported having attended a leadership program, although the focus of the program varied (see Table 6).

Table 6
Participants' Names and Leadership Program Training

Name	Leadership Program – Specialization
Amanda	Yes - Early Education
Ameena	No
Andrew	Yes – Public Policy
Eleanor	Yes – Public Management
Grace	No
Joyce	No
Molly	No
Richelle	Yes – Public Policy
Sara	No
Sean	Yes – Education

Data Collection

Leaders were invited via email to participate in two semi-structured telephone interviews with the researcher. Using semi-structured interviews ensures continuity across interviews regarding the topics and questions asked while also providing the interviewer the freedom to ask clarifying questions and be more responsive to information the participant is sharing (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Interviews were conducted over the telephone and the length of each interview ranged from 25 to 98 minutes in duration. All interviews were conducted at times that were convenient for leaders and, often, interview dates and times were adjusted to accommodate the changeable nature of leaders' schedules. While, ideally, leaders would have had two weeks between their first and second interviews (Siedman, 2006), the space between leaders' interviews varied. One leader chose to participate in the first and second interviews in one day, while the space between other participants' interviews ranged from

1 to 16 days with an average of 6 days between the first and second interview. All interviews were audio-recorded using two devices and I created memos before, during, and after the interviews to capture my impressions and reactions (Creswell, 2013).

The two semi-structured interview protocols developed for this study were drawn from four bodies of literature, including research on leadership in early education, female superintendents, feminist labor theories, and intersectionality (See Appendix B and C). The first interview had 23 questions and focused on leaders' experiences in the ECE field and the work they do in their current roles as system leaders. As part of this interview, participants were asked to share in-depth information about their pathways through the ECE field and about leaders' transition into their position, a topic that has only been explored at the center-level in early education leadership literature (e.g. Larkin, 1999). Drawing on the female superintendent literature concerning the importance of mentoring, participants were then asked about the relationships that have helped them along their journey and in their current position in addition to any other supports or challenges they have experienced. To gain a better understanding of early education within leaders' states, participants were also asked to describe their position within the context of their state's education agency and their relationship with their K-5 education colleagues. The second interview consisted of 20 questions and asked leaders to describe their leadership styles and reflect on how their gender and race may have influenced their experiences in early education.

Data Analysis

Recordings of participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim and loaded into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis program. I first read through each transcript multiple

times and then began to code each interview deductively based on my research questions. I then sorted my data by research question so that each research question was its own "bin" (Merriam, 2009) of data. I then focused on transcripts from three leaders and began coding in more detail; coding mentions of topics that were present in the research, which I used as my theoretical framing for this study, and my quantitative analysis (such as mentoring), double coding any excerpt that addressed multiple codes, and continued to further refine my coding scheme. I then used inductive coding, identifying concepts that were emerging from leaders' accounts (Patton, 2001). At this point, I began looking for larger patterns in the data (Walcott, 1994) that may be unique to state-level early education leaders across the three leaders' transcripts. Once I felt I had developed a more finalized coding scheme, comprised of codes that were each defined and mutually exclusive (Creswell, 2013), I went on to code the remaining leaders' transcripts to see if my codes held; if they did not, I refined the codes (by renaming or merging) in order to capture a larger or more nuanced idea.

Once all interviews had been coded, I sorted the data by code in relation to each of my research questions. I was then able to look across interviews to identify patterns in the data and better explore relationships between codes that might explain differences in leaders' experiences.

Validity of the data analysis was ensured through three strategies. First, the design of the larger mixed-method study allowed for some triangulation, or the corroboration, of the data through the use of multiple methods and sources across time (Lather, 1991). Although data gathered through surveys and interviews relied on participants' self-reports, I was able to check participants' state-related data through other sources to help

ensure the credibility of any claims (Creswell, 2013). Second, I also participated in peer review, or group debriefing, throughout the research process and kept a research journal where I logged memos that captured my impressions, reactions, and evolving understandings. Additionally, I engaged in self-reflexivity and reviewed my research journal to promote self-awareness about my process and instances of possible bias where I may have influenced the research and when the research influenced me (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Finally, as qualitative research aims to better understand participants' experiences, leaders' voices were used in this paper whenever possible in an effort to share participants' first-hand accounts and support the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

To learn more about the work of early childhood system leaders, a variety of state ECE leaders, each of whom had slightly different roles in shaping and overseeing components of their state's early childhood system, were selected to participate. This section begins by presenting an overview of state ECE leaders' responsibilities and then details the skills and expertise they felt were required to perform those tasks. This section then closes by describing the challenges leaders encountered in their work.

Work of State ECE Leaders

The tasks state ECE leaders were responsible for varied according to their contexts and the purview of their positions; however, as all leaders in this study were engaged in building early childhood systems in some capacity, there were areas of overlap. Leaders' work, or the tasks and activities they engaged in as part of their state

ECE leadership role, fit into two main categories: developing and sharing a vision of early childhood and creating policies and systems.

Developing and sharing a vision of early childhood. System building required leaders to think abstractly and stay focused on the "big picture." The ability to take a broader perspective and conceptualize of early childhood services as a system comprised of sub-systems, each with their own functioning parts and understood how they fit together seemed an important trait for participating ECE leaders. Keeping the systems and their pieces in mind, leaders in this study were able to work strategically towards achieving a vision or goal for their agency or across early childhood. With the support of their state's governor, legislator, and public, state ECE leaders can set the tone of their state's ECE system and early childhood system building efforts (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin et al., 2011).

In many ways, state ECE leaders' existence and work depended on their state's vision of, and commitment to, providing early childhood services. In states that had a clear vision or plan for their early childhood systems, leaders' work focused on continuing to implement that vision and push it forward. Sara, a state ECE leader in a state with a small public preschool program (serving fewer than 20% of her state's 4 year olds), described her role, saying:

> My level and below me, we are the worker bees. We get the work done, right? The people above us have the ideas, put the ball into motion, but we're really the ones that operationalize the policies, the practices, the decisions. We make them happen.

In states where the commitment to expanding early education and building early childhood systems was newer, ECE leaders were at the forefront of designing, advocating, and operationalizing a vision for their state. Joyce shared that when she first

started in her role, her organization lacked direction, which meant that she was able to shape the focus of her work:

> We created a vision. We shifted our mission. We started doing a work plan. The first thing we did was, there was a workforce study already in place and we took the data and we started to take a policy position right away. We just kept building out pieces of this work to make sure that we could really stake our claim and people started to pay attention. We had colleagues that said, "How come you're doing that?" and I thought, "Well, because nobody else is doing it." We were very careful to not do anything that someone else was doing; if people see you as a threat to their work, they're likely not going to share with you. If people think you're adding value, they're likely to let you suggest and watch what you do.

In both cases, whether states had an established vision for early childhood or were just developing one, state ECE leaders emphasized the importance of keeping children and families at the forefront of their work. Ameena, for example, a retired state leader who was instrumental in developing her state's preschool program, shared:

> Everyone may not listen to you when you tell them, but at least you need to know and need to learn how to stand on your own two feet and how to advocate for children. Because a lot of the things that are going on out there now, the child's the last person being considered. We're developing a system, we're doing this, we're doing that, but no one ever says, "children."

Andrew, a state leader who had been working in the field for about ten years, was driven by a similar commitment and kept it at the forefront of his system building work.

> I want to make sure that we're valuing what families offer even when those families seem to have more deficits than assets; that we're latching onto and focusing on supporting and empowering those assets. That's very important to me. One of the reasons I really was excited about this role, coming into it, was that our state focuses a lot of energy on family engagement and family support. Family support, to me, is one of the most important parts of our early childhood system.

All of the state ECE leaders who participated in this study framed their work as helping to improve the lives of children and families in their state, whether it was through increasing the quality of programming, access, or working to keep early education policies developmentally appropriate. Their beliefs about the importance and purpose of

ECE came to be embodied in their visions and plans for developing and pushing their states' ECE programs and systems forward.

In addition to creating and operationalizing a vision of ECE for their states, ECE leaders were also responsible for disseminating that vision and inspiring others to work towards specific goals. Across interviews, state ECE leaders discussed the importance of getting their staff, other leaders, and policy makers to buy-in to their big picture ideas of what ECE should look like in their state. Amanda, who had recently transitioned into overseeing ECE programs after years of working in another sector of early childhood, emphasized how these newer relationships influenced her ability to keep her vision moving forward:

> I had been in the field for a long time and people knew me and trusted me. Then I got into this new field where I'm working with newer people and I have had to be patient while that trust is being built. I can charge forward [with my vision] if I feel like charging forward, but often I have to pause and look back at things to see who is still with me because it's not the same level of trust that I have had in other leadership positions.

Leaders communicated their vision with their staff members and often created an implementation plan to ensure that, as a team, they were working towards the same goals. Seven of the ten participating leaders discussed that the difficulty was not in getting their staff committed to achieving their vision, but rather helping them remain flexible about plans for implementing the ECE vision. For example, if there was a decrease in funding or a policy recommendations they put forward had not been approved, leaders felt that their staff could become too focused on achieving specific aspects of the vision and get disheartened, not recognizing the incremental gains that had been made. Therefore, state ECE leaders tried to manage their staff's expectations and increase their understanding of the political processes involved with moving the field forward. The majority (70%) of the

leaders who participated in this study mentioned how they encouraged their staff to stay focused on the bigger picture and long-term goals that they were trying to accomplish. Sean, a leader of a state with a medium sized preschool program, said:

> Part of being a leader is knowing when to hold the line based on your beliefs and values and when there is a gray area around the line that accomplishes the greater good. I do this quite often with my staff, saying, "What are the core essential elements of what we do that are given?" There are so many policies, procedures, protocols, rules, and regulations, but what are the core things that really do help children and families and will help them grow and develop into healthy members of our society? And those are the ones that we hold the line on.

However, leaders located in states with large preschool programs (serving more than 41% of their state's 4 year old population) or those who worked in states that were geographically large also had to inspire trust and keep their staff focused on the broader vision remotely. Richelle, whose state has a large preschool program, explained:

> It's hard for folks because sometimes, and I understand this, their tendency is to say, "No, we should stay the course and keep moving on that," but you have to choose the battles you can win and the battles that keep you moving towards that [bigger goal]. You don't have to forget about that [goal], but now might not be the time or now might be the time when you need to get more information or more data or more research about the impact of something. We have consultants all over the state and that's challenging for them to understand that bigger picture and communicate it to them and getting them to trust and follow your lead even when they don't have all of the information that I do.

The size of a state's preschool program also seemed to matter when it came to how and with whom leaders communicated their vision more broadly within their states. Four of the ten leaders interviewed mentioned that advocating for ECE and early childhood services in their states took up a significant amount of their time. Interviews with state ECE leaders of larger state preschool programs suggested that being able to communicate their vision effectively and efficiently was especially important given the convoluted nature of the field and the frequency with which they had to engage with individuals who did not understand the field's complexity. These leaders felt that

inspiring others to see the value of their ECE vision required not only detailing the gains for children and families, but also identifying how the ECE vision would affect the stakeholder they were speaking with. When describing one of the ways she has gathered support for her ECE work, Joyce shared:

> I learned the importance of precision and I learned how people make compelling arguments; if you can make a compelling argument you're likely to get what you need. Take the time to figure out why someone should be interested.

Participating state ECE leaders universally agreed that it was important for their ECE vision to be recognized and supported by their state's Governor and legislators in order for them to have the time and funding to do their systems work. Leaders of smaller programs or programs that were more recently established described the insecurity that came with having to rely on policymakers' support. Molly, whose state had a small public preschool program, said:

> We are constantly in a fight for funding for our preK programs. So I can get my work started and I can get going a preK program in place and kind of have a plan ready to go, but then the next thing I know the funding has been cut or I'm constantly taken off tasks so I can address advocating for why preK is even a thing. I feel like when legislative session hits we are just constantly in defense mode. We just have to defend what we do and we're at the whim of whomever. I mean, they could just decide to come up and cut all funding- could just cut my position! Could just cut anything! So there's just that kind of unknown, which I think is really hard to live with.

In contrast, Grace, a leader in a state with a large preschool program, shared the consequences of working in a state whose governor does not support ECE:

> If your Governor does not support either PreK or early childcare programs or Head Start that is a real, real difficult place to be in because a lot of grant opportunities come through the Governor's office. If the Governor says no, then the money does not come to your state. The Governor has to embrace early childhood in the state or you're almost beating a dead horse. These fights have gotten very ugly… involving the Senate, lobbyists, legislators, it's not fun and what a devastation it would be to our state. We don't know if it's going to happen again, but there are still some rumors out there.

Richelle echoed the importance of connecting her ECE vision to her audience, especially policymakers:

> Many times what you see at the state level, at the agency, what we may see so clearly as a solution to a problem or a great program for kids or families, but if you don't see policy makers- the legislature, law makers, budget people, if they can't see that same vision then that's a problem. You have to be able to see how your initiative for early childhood programs connects to a larger picture. How do they become part of the economic driver in your state? Why is it important to business? Why is it important to K-12? How do you talk to legislators about why it's important to their local community or their workforce? Just saying that it's good for little children only goes so far. So I talk about why it is important for child development but I also connect to why it's important for teachers and how it will connect to them being able to have a higher credential, which might mean a higher salary, it might mean they qualify for state benefits, etc. You've got to be prepared to continually tie it to a larger picture that may be more palatable for your audience and you've got to be able to change that quickly depending on where the person's coming from.

All of the leaders who participated in this study spent time developing and sharing a vision for ECE in their state. Their state's history of ECE provision and commitment to an ECE vision shaped leaders' roles in the development process, while the size of their state's preschool program seemed to influence who leaders had to get buy-in from in order to make their vision a reality.

Creating policies and systems. Kagan and Kauerz (2012a) acknowledge that building systems within and across early childhood is difficult, since ECE is a "nonsystem" that continues to be plagued with issues. While, additionally, systems work, the authors argue, "simultaneously introduce[es] a myriad of new issues (e.g., the potential leverage of subsystems and the best use of limited resources when faced with the simultaneous needs of expanding programs *and* building system infrastructure)" (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012b, p. 5).

Most of this study's participants held top leadership roles in an agency devoted to overseeing early learning or specific components of ECE, but a few leaders were responsible for coordinating early childhood services out of multiple agencies or an early learning umbrella agency. Regardless of their positioning, all were involved in some aspect of system building, whether it was unifying ECE offerings, aligning and articulating ECE with K-12, or collaborating with colleagues across agencies. Joyce, who had been working in the ECE field for over 30 years, described system building work:

> Systems building is not static; it is incredibly organic and dynamic and if you're not okay with that ambiguity and things being messy you can't be a systems builder. There is no linear in systems building and I think the day that I got comfortable and realized that it's not linear the pieces came together like, "Oh! This is a crazy mess, okay!" I can do mess.

While the "messiness" of early childhood systems building work caused frustration among leaders interviewed for this study, it also excited and energized them, as they were able to engage in different and challenging work every day. The majority of leaders enjoyed finding solutions to problems and discussed using published research, data, and their experiences to consider various perspectives on situations and topics before making a decision. Andrew, a leader who worked in a state with a medium-sized public preschool program, said:

> I enjoy really digging into and solving problems and figuring out why something isn't working. Why is there a barrier and what can we do to fix this? For example, I enjoy this work right now around workforce and figuring out: how can we use what little money we have left of our [grant] to really advance the workforce? How can we latch onto opportunities that we have to make some concrete changes and next steps and really solve problems and overcome barriers? It's exciting.

Participating leaders were motivated and energized by the system-building aspects of their work and the real-life impact they could have on children and the lasting impact on their state. Sean, a leader almost 20 years of experience in the field, said:

> You can't let the system kind of suppress you, in the status quo of government. There are jokes about, "Oh, that's a typical state employee," and you can read into that as you would, but I don't feel that culture in the majority of our state Department of Education. We are not producing widgets, we are not just paper pushers, or compliance check-off people. We actually are producing changes in systems that influence children and families.

Given the complex nature of the work it was not surprising to learn that the state ECE leaders interviewed for this study spent a lot of their time attending meetings where they collaborated within their agency, within the broader department in which their agency was nested, or across agencies and departments. Many also served as a chair, co-chair, or member of Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECAC) or Governor's councils. Eleanor, who worked in a geographically large state, said,

> Honestly, I feel like all I do is sit in meetings. Everything we work on has a committee of some sort put together with it. I'm in a lot of meetings. We do try to use video conferencing and phone conferencing so we can be inclusive across the state. Even if you're not traveling to a meeting, it still takes up a lot of time and we try to combine where we can. I'll give you an example. We have three evaluation projects going on right now. We can't meet once a month for each project, so I've combined them and talk about them as one evaluation.

While meetings often comprised a large portion of leaders' time, they were important spaces for communication, collaboration, and planning, especially for ECE leaders, like Eleanor, in large states who often had staff located in different regions of their state. Molly described the importance of these meetings after detailing the components of preschool that she was responsible for overseeing:

> But we have a lot of other pieces like the child care licensing office and the child care grants office and they are all in different pockets of different departments so they don't really work cohesively so we have a cross sector coordinating council that works together, it's me and the person most like me in the Department of Health and Human Services and a lot of statewide partners and a lot of early learning community partners. In that way we work together and coordinate but we are fairly segmented or fragmented I should say throughout different departments. I don't think it's the most efficient system and it makes for a lot of cross duplicate work if we aren't on the same page.

Participating leaders' positions seemed to dictate the type of system building efforts they were able to engage in. All participating leaders had experience collaborating and engaging in system building work with leaders from various early childhood services and the majority of participating leaders also interacted with K-12 leaders as they tried to create alignment between ECE and K-12 systems. However, leaders who oversaw grant funding or preK expansion for their state tended to work exclusively with early childhood leaders. These individuals, Andrew and, temporarily, Amanda, were more segregated from system building work as they most often oversaw the funding components rather than planning and implementing of the preK system work. This relegated them to supporting roles with less authority than some of the other leaders in this study. Amanda, who had briefly left her ECE leadership role to oversee early childhood grants in her state, described the differences between the roles and her decision to return to her leadership role.:

> I had been in a world of systems thinking and relationships, where I could raise myself above my own work and see how it fit into the larger picture. I'd been in that world! And I went into this world where it was all about me, my, and mine; and the politics were horrible. I was spoiled because I'd been in this world where systems thinking and playing well in the sandbox were things I took for granted, but that's where I need to be. I couldn't go back to the siloed me, my, and mine mentality.

Many of participating leaders' system building efforts attempted to break down the siloes between different sectors of the ECE field; however, most often leaders were only able to work across silos, accommodating the different rules and regulations of each silo as leaders created ECE systems. State ECE leaders designed and revised different kinds of policies, budgets, and supports to enable people in the field to enact their state's ECE vision. These efforts required leaders' ECE expertise and knowledge of their state structures, funding streams, and regulations. While policy and budget work are standard

for many leaders at the state level, ECE leaders felt that their jobs were, perhaps, more complicated than those leading in other fields due to the breadth and complexity of ECE program offerings. Sara, a state ECE leader who had worked in the field for almost 25 years, described the intricate working knowledge she had to apply when designing policies that could be implemented in multiple ECE settings without confusion.

> [In ECE] there are multiple laws and regulations that we follow. There's just a lot of crossover into other fields and other legislation that we need to have a diverse understanding of. When I'm making policy for my state's preK program, which is one set of regulations in the school code, I also have to consider our child care regulations and how those two are going to interact and impact sites because some of my preK sites are also child care centers and I don't want them to have to have any inconsistencies in the way things are interpreted. We have sites that are part of up to five different programs that our office monitors, so we have to make sure we have an understanding of all the complexities of that if we are making decisions.

In addition to creating regulations, some of the state ECE leaders interviewed for this study were also responsible for ensuring that programs and providers complied with regulations. Even when leaders or their staff made efforts to build relationships with districts and providers, they weren't always seen as partners. When describing how skittish or difficult some relationships could be, Eleanor acknowledged, "My job was to hold people accountable and in some areas of the state people were scared they were going to lose some of their funding. I got that." However, state ECE leaders reported continuing to make efforts to shift how others saw the monitoring process, from one of high stakes accountability into one of partnership for improvement. Sara shared what this looked like in her state, saying:

> We prescribe regulations, monitor regulations and hold them accountable. Actually sending licensing reps and preK specialists to monitor their practices and make sure they are upholding what they need to be doing, make sure they are of the highest quality. We have a whole cadre of folks that are going in on a regular basis to monitor the schools. When school districts come into our state preK

> program because they are an eligible provider type for the program they are usually flabbergasted at the amount of not just monitoring, but the amount of actual technical assistance and monitoring that they get from our specialists that are in there on a very regular basis.

Similar to descriptions of center directors' work, but at a heightened level, state ECE leaders' work was multifaceted and complex. Their work involved not only being responsible for overseeing their own program, agency or department, but also actively collaborating with others to build early childhood systems and, occasionally, monitor compliance. While the work leaders engaged in varied depending on their position, there were some areas of overlap, including the need to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECE and advance regulations and ECE systems in their states.

Skills and Expertise Required

The ECE field lacks consistent expectations for its leaders regarding the qualifications and credentials required to lead, as, currently, these vary across setting by auspice, state or local regulations, and the age of children served (IOM & NRC, 2015). As the ECE field has quickly evolved and expanded (Kagan & Gomez, 2015), individuals who are prepared to lead the field are now more necessary than ever and don't always have the skills they need (Goffin, 2013). In this study, participating state ECE leaders identified skills and expertise that they considered necessary in order to do their jobs successfully. These skills and areas of expertise include knowledge of early childhood and how government works.

Early childhood knowledge. Research on site-based and mid-level early education leaders suggests that having knowledge related to children's development and, in some cases, teaching experience resulted in leaders feeling the most confident performing tasks where they could apply that knowledge (e.g., Aubrey, 2007; Rodd,

2013). Due to the nature of state ECE leadership, participants in this study reported rarely interacting with children as part of their work; however, leaders still needed to apply their knowledge of ECE best practices at a higher programmatic and policy level.

The majority of this study's participants (80%) had experience teaching young children and the remaining leaders had taught older children or college and graduate students. When discussing the early education knowledge they needed to do their work, most leaders found teaching experience helpful. For Molly, a leader with almost 20 years of experience in the field, teaching provided a foundation she could use to make sense of different issues that arose in her work and she felt she could make more informed policy and budgeting decisions based on her understandings of the lived realities of teaching and life in schools.

> Actually having that classroom experience has been really helpful overall in my career, but it's not critical. I would say that, even though you may not think it, classroom-based experience is probably really important to rely on. Had I not had classroom-based experience it would be really hard to conceptualize things.

Sean, on the other hand, who hadn't been an ECE teacher, but participated in multiple leadership trainings and a leadership program focused on education, recognized that he brought other expertise, including leadership knowledge, to his work but made sure he had access to practical teaching knowledge through his staff and ECE network.

> I'm not a teacher of young children, but I realized the expertise of my staff to educate people. I make sure that I have a solid foundation to stand on even though I might not have a mountain behind or underneath me. That's how I feel that I'm somewhat effective as an administrator because I can't be the expert in every single outfit and every nuance of early childhood, much less educate the field of education and then translate it into K-12. I have to rely on the team that I put together and we have to have mutual respect that each of us plays a role in executing our duties.

Sean reported making efforts throughout his career to learn more about teaching. For example, he sought out training on classroom quality assessment tools and spent time

conducting observations in classrooms to experience spending time in different types of classrooms around his state. Sean also worked to build a strong network of ECE educators whose expertise he could call on when he felt he needed their perspectives.

The nature of leading ECE at a systems level, however, required leaders to not only be experts concerning the field's traditional knowledge, such as child development and developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), but also to have a more expansive and in-depth understanding of the ECE field.

In addition to being aware of the ECE history within their states, ECE leaders reported that they had to be experts on the regulations tied to the multiple funding streams that fund early childhood services. Eleanor, who has worked in the ECE field for almost 30 years, described how the complexity of the field's funding streams could act as road blocks to unifying preK services in her state, saying:

> There are so many different funding sources and they all have different requirements. We are all trying to say preK funded by this grant has to be for four year olds, it can't serve any three year old. But that four year old's family has to be under the 200% mark. Our state preK doesn't have those eligibility requirements. We then also have a dual language learner program and a preK program for children from low-income neighborhoods. Everything, Title 1 funding, all of it, special ed. funding, they all have their own requirements. I think it's hard sometimes to say, "Okay, let's all just call it preK and be good at it" when it's funded like that.

Seven other leaders in this study echoed Eleanor's experiences. Six of those leaders were in states whose public preschool programs would be considered medium or large compared to Eleanor and Sara, whose states had smaller programs. Grace described how, as a state ECE leader in a local control state, took away some of the power from her role:

> The hardest individuals to work with are the local education agencies. The districts are so different in everything they do. They're not really open to ideas and information from other sources. Everything is, "This is how we do it. This is how we need you to engage with us." We have Head Start programs that are

> operated by school districts. They also have preK, which is very different. They have the state preK and they may have a Head Start on the same campus. They have different rules, different regulations; Head Start is a licensed childcare program, there's licensed preK programs, and the preK program from the districts are not all licensed. So there are different sets of rules that you have to play by and I have to make sure they are as consistent as possible, but that arena is a tough place to be.

These findings suggest that participating state ECE leaders needed to bring ECE content knowledge and a deep understanding of regulations tied to separate ECE funding streams, as they often varied in ways that made looking across them difficult, and the historic fragmentation of the early childhood services in their states.

Bureaucratic knowledge. Bureaucracies are the administrative processes and procedures that are put into place to provide an organizational structure that helps institutions, including state governments, function. State ECE leaders had to navigate the bureaucratic processes of their own agencies, but also those of districts, other departments, and the federal government. As a result, there were multiple levels to the bureaucratic knowledge participating state ECE leaders felt they had to master in order to be successful in their jobs. This started with understanding the day-to-day procedures for navigating bureaucracy and "red tape," which refers to particularly frustrating, excessive, or redundant aspects of the bureaucracy, but also included knowing how legislative processes worked and the nuances of the political contexts of their state.

State ECE leaders' work regularly involved collaborating with other agencies and departments at the district, state, and federal level. Eleanor, whose role included overseeing ECE grant funding, shared:

> Being able to follow the guidelines is important, especially anything with funding. A lot of projects are just hinging on, "Did I follow the purchasing rules? Did I do the contract right?" All of that is so important. You have to know several regulations up to a point.

In addition to mastering the nitty-gritty of the different bureaucratic processes, leaders also needed to understand the government's legislative processes and the political contexts, including local, state, and federal, as these affected their work. As participating leaders' jobs often required them to act strategically, especially with regards to creating and revising regulations and budgets as they tried to realize their ECE vision, legislative knowledge was something they had to gain. Sara explained why understanding the nuances of legislation was necessary for her work:

> I learned that if it's statute it's law and we really need to follow what it says in the statute. So then it's, "Ok, what does it really say in the statute?" Then there are regulations, which are also law, but they're more easily changed than statutes. Then under regulating, is the guidance and interpreting. That can be changed pretty easily, but every time you change it you have to communicate that change and make sure everybody understands the change and what it means. Then really the guidance is to policy, like it's this tiered level thing. That was really one of my biggest first ah-has, "Oh this is how this works!" There's stuff I really need to follow because it's law, and then there's stuff I have the power to weigh in on and change. If I want to change a law, I better start five years in advance because that's how long it takes. Understanding that process is important.

State ECE leaders tried to keep their work bipartisan and went out of their way to connect with policy makers from both sides of the aisle, but this could get complicated when their supervisors were political appointees. When describing how navigating political identities is part of state leaders' work, Richelle shared experiences working under a commissioner:

> She tends to be more reactive to concerns of legislators and she's much more driven by partisan politics than I necessarily would be because there are times when I have to be cognizant that I work under a Republican governor and need to think about things from that policy level. I always hope to find what's best for kids and families, but I'm also thinking about things like funding strategy and keeping bipartisan support for our program.

While many state leaders discussed experiencing difficulties related to the political climates they were working in, this was particularly the case in states with conservative

leadership. In states that didn't have consistent legislative support for ECE, state leaders felt anxiety about their program's survival. Amanda, who had almost 30 years of experience in the field, said:

> Every state has their challenges. One of the challenges in my state is that we have a very conservative legislative population and we have worked for years and years and years to try to even get the work that we are doing on their radar. My motto is, "If you build it, they will come," and they have come finally! We finally have a connection to the Governor's office, but had we given up and we would have missed out on that opportunity. So tenacity and focusing on what you can do now, do what you can do and do it well.

State ECE leaders had to apply different aspects of their bureaucratic knowledge – understanding government procedures and their political contexts, in order to strategically use their own power and push their own agenda forward. Ameena, a leader who was at the forefront of system building in her state, described how even ordinary procedures could become politically charged moments:

> The worst was politics- politics and turf. Especially when what I knew I needed to do conflicted with what the administration- the superintendent or my assistant superintendent, wanted done. It was kind of, do I stand up for what I want to do and challenge them or try to buck the system? Especially when it's allocation of funds and they want to give preferential treatment to certain types of programs. Either you stand up for what you believe or you say, "Ok, I'm just a little man on the totem pole and if I'm told I have to do it I'll do it."

Leaders all developed strategies to not only accomplish their work, but to stay sane in the process. Joyce said, "I have a tremendous sense of urgency about the work, but I have bureaucratic patience. I understand that it's not going to happen tomorrow. Even though there should be absolutely nothing standing in our way, there is." State ECE leaders knew the pace of government and factored in their bureaucratic and political realities as they planned how to best implement their vision for ECE in their state. Richelle, who had attended a leadership program focused on public policy, said:

> In a state education agency it's important that you have [ECE] content knowledge and you understand, like for me particularly child development and programs and all those things. But it's equally important that I understand how state government works and that I know how to read people and work within that system. I talk with the people I work with about choosing the hills they're willing to die on because you're not going to win everything. When you have to make changes that maybe aren't what you want to do. You have to know how to bide your time and wait and know that right now is not forever. Be forward thinking about where you want to be in five years because it's probably going to be five years in state government. What's that vision and how do you move towards that? Knowing that you're working in a really complex system both at the agency level and you've got to deal with the politics and work with other state agencies.

Andrew, who also attended a leadership program focused on public policy, echoed the importance of being strategic as a leader and identifying spaces where change was possible and where it wasn't:

> There's navigating the environment, navigating roles and responsibilities, which you have to learn as early as possible. It's pretty critical. And really getting a clear understanding of where there are various opportunities for change and where there are things you sort of have to leave alone and accept. It's important.

State ECE leaders in this study reported that having knowledge of ECE and bureaucracy helped them navigate their responsibilities. These areas of expertise were not only expressed by leaders who had these skills, but also by leaders who did not and had to gain them as they navigated their state leadership work.

Factors that Challenge Leaders' Work

There were multiple pathways that participating leaders traveled prior to arriving in their state ECE leadership positions (Northey, 2018a) and, as a result, they all had different levels of preparedness and reported having to engage in some on-the-job learning. These leaders identified a number of challenges that interfered with their ability to engage in system building work. Looking across interviews, it became clear that there was a mismatch between the visionary work leaders were being asked to do and the

realities and constraints of the existing bureaucratic and ECE systems that they had to work within.

Bureaucratic realities. Since all leaders in this study brought a variety of early childhood expertise to their roles, the challenges they encountered tended to reflect gaps in their knowledge of governmental processes and procedures rather than ECE. Leaders reported lack of clarity and support regarding the bureaucracies they were working in.

Every state ECE leader interviewed for this study reported experiencing frustrations due to bureaucracy. As mentioned earlier in descriptions of the bureaucratic knowledge leaders needed, many participants described challenges that resulted from them being unfamiliar with bureaucratic procedures, situations that were further exacerbated by variations in practices among different departments within their states. Confusion over bureaucratic processes was something that affected many aspects of participating state ECE leaders' work and seemed to be the steepest learning curve leaders encountered.

The majority of interviewed leaders (80%) mentioned that they did not receive training on the bureaucratic processes of their agency or department. As a consequence, leaders struggled to navigate even day-to-day protocols and procedures until they found someone to help them. Andrew, who had worked at different types of organizations, including non-profits, prior to becoming a state leader said:

> As a state leader, you have to understand how very differently the government operates. There are these very rigid processes that guide certain things with no clear way of always understanding or accessing them. So something as simple as, "We need to purchase something," or, "We'd like to contract someone," or, "We have money for a project!" In a non-profit world you'd hear, "Great, get a couple of bids and sign a purchase order," but at the state it can be a year long process. But, wait! What makes it difficult isn't just the fact that it's a yearlong process, but that the process isn't really written down anywhere. That makes it very

> challenging. Everything kind of relies on one person's institutional memory and that person gives it to you in very small bits of information.

The challenge of having to follow a procedure that is only known or understood by a few individuals was mentioned by three state leaders who all encountered this roadblock when they were trying to teach themselves the bureaucratic protocols they were expected to follow. For example, Eleanor, described how high rates of staff member turnover in other departments complicated her work, especially during legislative sessions when a lot of demands were placed on their office:

> Our biggest barrier is our fiscal department because they've had a lot of turnover. It's difficult for them to have someone who really understands our grants at a stable point. Then a lot of their policies and procedures are out of date. You can ask, "Well, where is that written?" and it's from ten superintendents ago and hasn't been updated. It's my biggest frustration every day.

Leaders often lamented how much more efficiently and effectively they could have accomplished their work had they had access to someone to help them learn the ropes early on. After describing some of the on-the-job learning she had to do, Amanda, who had participated in a leadership program focused on early education said, "The most difficult thing to adjust to was that there were a lot of grant reporting requirements that came with this position and my predecessor did not have a chance to mentor me on or teach me about."

Leaders whose states received federal funding also experienced challenges due to a lack of clarity and support beyond the state level. Grace, who was a leader with over 30 years of experience in the field, gave an example:

> For the new grant process we were given the guidelines and the guidance on the grant, but we received no training. When you have a new grant application process you literally need some training on how it's supposed to be done. Otherwise you just read and interpret your stuff and no two people have the same interpretation. I really wrestle with that because that's our grant funding! If it's inaccurate or there are errors your grant is rejected. I reached out to my program

> specialist and the national office and they told me to follow the guidance. It was new to them, too. You have to work with your partners and your boards to get this work done, but, again, there wasn't any training or guidance and they didn't seem to know either.

Additionally, 50% of participating leaders identified challenges related to a lack of knowledge about legislation generally and the legislative histories of their state, which they had to learn in order to carry out their responsibilities. Molly, who had worked at different levels of her state's public preschool program before becoming a state leader, described how she is still figuring out the nuances as she goes about her work:

> Understanding how to work within systems, you know? I have to pull on a lot of different things that I didn't think I would - budget reports, grantee reports, and dealing with employee contracts and procurement contracts and things that nobody prepared me for. It was just on-the-job learning: budgeting, legislating, and state regulations were all new. Right now we are in the process of reviewing and revising some regulations and that has been a complete bear to me because I just didn't understand that process and so gaining experiences in that area [prior to becoming a state leader] would have been really helpful.

The lack of support leaders received to address gaps in their knowledge was ubiquitous across interviews and inspired a few leaders to be more involved in helping new staff get adjusted. Sara reported that she now makes concerted efforts to teach her staff about the information she wished she had known, such as bureaucratic procedures, ECE policies, and legislative information, as soon as they start within her department:

> They did start an onboarding process here for both departments. I don't know if it's statewide since each department handles it differently, but that goes through the basics of government protocols and red tape. It's not really extensive, but at least it requires a supervisor to sit down on day one or within the first week and go through the standard orientation things. I did put a lot of these practices in to place because, to be quite honest, I felt like I didn't get it. I am a manager that really follows through with that onboarding process and I make sure I sit down with new staff - I dedicate time in the first week, but I also do general information sessions with all of my staff almost weekly so we can stay up to speed.

The ECE leaders interviewed for this study seemed to be aware of the skills and knowledge they were lacking and reported make efforts to rectify those gaps in order to

fulfill their responsibilities. The challenges they encountered related to not having access to support or information that could have helped them navigate bureaucratic realities, including the slow pace of government change, the high rates of turnover at the state level, and unclear reporting requirements or out-of-date protocols and regulations.

Lack of authority and a lack of coherence. As state ECE leaders made efforts to unify disparate ECE offerings and early childhood services into cohesive systems they experienced challenges related to a few key issues that have historically plagued the field, including funding structures that divide programs into siloes and produce equity issues within the ECE workforce. Interviews with state ECE leaders suggested that they felt the limited authority of their positions and the unresolved issues in the field challenged or prevented them from being as successful in their systems building efforts as they wanted to be.

In many states, the historic fragmentation of the ECE field continues to be reflected in how state early childhood services are organized, as often they are housed in departments based on their funding streams. For example, in the states included in this study, leaders responsible for Head Start and childcare oversight were most often housed in the Department of Health and Human Services, while public preschool and the leader responsible for overseeing mixed delivery of public preschool were situated in the Department of Education. A few states housed multiple early childhood services in one agency or office of early learning, but the different funding streams and their associated regulations continued to complicate the system building work that leaders were expected to engage in.

State ECE leaders who participated in this study had power within their own agency or sectors and, as a result, they could only act as consultants or informants during system building work that did not come under their direct purview. For example, Richelle described how she intentionally deploys her opinion during P-3 system building meetings with her state Department of Education's early elementary leadership and staff, saying:

> I tend to pick the things that are most important and then be really vocal about those things because it's too much to care or be vocal about everything, especially when we are pushing into the K-12 groove. For example, we are developing a kindergarten entry assessment, but really *they* are developing that. A few of us from our agency are on the development team, but it's clearly their project.

Similarly, Andrew described how, in his state, building the ECE systems state leaders are expected to doesn't seem possible without creating a new overarching leadership position with the authority to engage different agencies in systems work and hold them accountable for change:

> State leadership should be focused on coordination and collaboration. A very clear, shared vision that leads to very clear changes so that things are being done in alignment and not in competition. Now with the various silos we have people who are very focused on either their particular setting or their funding stream. In our case, where we don't have cross-system leadership, there isn't necessarily the level of authority to then bring those systems together. Even when we can point out that there is a tremendous benefit to everyone involved in doing so there's a lot of squabbling over fairness. Whose responsibility is it to develop the workforce? Why is that coming out of my budget and not someone else's?

Repeatedly, leaders came back to the issue of funding streams and how these have worked to divide the field in ways that they, as state leaders, could not overcome. Seventy percent of state leaders expressed that system building needed to first occur at the funding stream level or they wouldn't be able to unify disparate programs together. Eleanor wondered if something could be done at the federal level to mitigate the issues she experienced:

> If systems could be more aligned at the federal level it would be really helpful. They talk about state leaders collaborating across programs, but the funding streams keep us from really collaborating and make it difficult to look at the big picture.

Aside from the different bureaucratic procedures associated with different funding sources, leaders found the separate ECE funding streams problematic mostly because of the various regulations and procedures that accompanied them. As described earlier, the regulations that accompanied each funding stream were varied and numerous, making leaders' jobs more complicated because they had more details to juggle as they worked to design cohesive programs. Joyce a leader who was positioned across ECE offerings described how leaders from different departments seemed burned out or weighed down by the amount of regulations they had to navigate, which affected their engagement in systems building work.

> We have a wonderful relationship with the state Department of Education. We work closest with them and we have a great, like daily if we want, back-and-forth, open relationship. And we absolutely must have a relationship with the Department of Families and Human Services, but that office is really challenging. We have a much more comprehensive vision, a lot more energy around innovation and they feel very mired by regulation and requirements so they are a working partner, but less of a creative partner than we would like.

Additionally, differences in funding source often produced programmatic variations and many leaders reported challenges due to entrenched assumptions about differences in program quality. Sara, who had to navigate more funding streams and programs than most of the other participating leaders, commented:

> For the most part they follow the same standards, but out in the field there's definitely a perception that the state's preschool program is more professional and of higher quality than our programs funded through DHS. Even within the same building. A lot of it has to do with funding streams. For the most part the state's teachers are paid more and they don't have to work as long. It's something you can't necessarily put your finger on but it's the reality of it, but the way the system is set up and the funding sources and how the regulations are written are what really make those differences happen.

As Sara's quote indicates, the variations among funding streams also produced a lingering effect on the ECE workforce. State leaders in this study who interacted with K-12 leaders to align birth through third grade reported that the complexity of the ECE field made efforts to engage in system work with leaders outside of the field frustrating. Eleanor shared her experience discussing differences in the professional development needs of the ECE and K-12 workforce in her state:

> At the K-12 level, they are dealing with charters and public schools. Below that, we're dealing with anything from childcare centers to a family home provider to a family friend and neighbor- very informal care. And so it really is different and the focus is different. Just thinking about those people's backgrounds and what they're coming to the table with are very different, their needs are very different. It's hard. We like to talk of a professional development system across the board through third grade, but when you're talking about professional development and you're talking about what teachers bring to the table versus the childcare provider you have to focus differently on how much they can do. We want to see an aligned system, but it's not going to be the same system.

Leaders felt that the different funding streams were the root of many of the challenges that they experienced, as the funding continued to shape the organization of their states, limit the authority they had in their positions, create complex policy landscapes they had to navigate and left lasting equity issues within the field's workforce. All of the leaders interviewed for this study enjoyed their work and seemed to thrive in the moments when their positions offered them the opportunity to see potential, think about the field as a whole, and work to improve and bring order to the puzzle of ECE offerings in their state. The challenges they encountered related to the structures and realities of working within state bureaucracy and the ECE field.

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study bring into sharp relief one of the challenges facing the field- how do we prepare and advance the ECE workforce, whose members these

findings and Northey (2018a) suggest, have a wide range of skills, expertise, and experiences? The state ECE leaders who participated in this study had varying degrees of expertise, especially concerning the bureaucratic and legislative knowledge they considered necessary for their roles. Additionally, they felt there were structural and systemic challenges in their states' bureaucratic and ECE systems that they could not address, which limited the efficiency and effectiveness of aspects of their work. As the ECE field has yet to determine consistent credentials for its leadership (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2015), attention must be paid to the types of experiences and knowledge state ECE leaders suggested were required to do their work. For example, while the majority of leaders considered their teaching experiences to be helpful, if not integral, to their work, the field should be cautious in mandating ECE teaching experience as a qualification. Sean serves as an example of how a reflective leader lacking hands-on teaching experience can still come from within the ECE field and, in some cases, bring more in-depth ECE knowledge to the role than individuals who had been practicing teachers.

Given the limited research currently available on state ECE leaders, this study provides important insights regarding the work that leaders engaged in and identifies the early childhood and bureaucratic skills and expertise they felt were required in order for them to do their jobs well. It also reveals the factors that challenged leaders that deserve more attention so leaders can be successful building early childhood systems in their state. Findings from this study suggest three sets of implications for the field.

First, leaders' described the ECE knowledge and bureaucratic skills they needed in order to successfully lead ECE at the state level. Leaders in this study reported needing a deep understanding of early childhood, including not only knowledge and expertise

related to child development, but also the history of the field's funding streams and regulatory history, both nationally and within their states, as both produced the structures that undergird the ECE field. They also needed in-depth knowledge of legislative processes, the political nuances of their state, and the bureaucratic procedures in order to complete the tasks they were expected to. Finally, the leadership programs that leaders attended often focused on either early education or public policy, but leaders needed to understand how these two complex bodies of knowledge came together and interacted in a theoretical and practical sense at the federal, state, and local level in order to engage in the visionary systems building work that was expected of them.

This information should be used to inform preparation programs and identify sustainable approaches to prepare leaders from within the field. In their compendium, Goffin & Daga (2017) draw attention to the number of leadership programs included in previous versions (Goffin & Janke, 2013; Goffin & Means, 2009) that have ceased to exist and highlight that many existing programs do not have sustainability plans to ensure their funding and services can continue. Leadership programs' reliance on short-term funding through grants or special funding can serve as an example of the ad hoc and inconsistent investments of funding that the ECE field has historically relied on to fund improvement efforts (e.g., RTT-ELC grant funding).

Taken together, these findings suggest that leading ECE at the state level is unique and, therefore, requires a new type of preparation program. State ECE leaders' work was different and required additional skills compared to leading ECE at the site-, local-, and mid-level. The needs of state ECE leaders were also distinct in relation to K-12 state leaders, whose workforce has collectively had access to consistent preparation

experiences and leadership training that targeted the different tiers of its system's leadership structure. This study suggests that state ECE leaders need preparation programs that address the gaps in their early childhood and bureaucratic and legislative knowledge and draws on communities of existing state leaders who can act as mentors and share knowledge and best practices for rising above systemic and structural challenges to engage in system building work. There also seems to be a need for opportunities to share state-based, supplemental early childhood and bureaucratic knowledge, as leaders desired training that was specific to their contexts and constraints.

As state ECE leaders are already in their positions and likely will not participate in leadership preparation programs, the findings from this study suggest a second area of implications for supporting current leaders. Additionally, the on-the-job supports leaders had access to should be expanded so they can address gaps in their knowledge more directly. While many leaders found NAECS-SDE engaging and helpful, leaders were also craving more support and wished the organization was more "dynamic" and able to connect leaders to resources and each other more quickly. Leaders seemed to want both context-specific support and information about national trends. If possible, states with similar geographic areas or ECE histories and offerings could work together in smaller support groups. In-depth case studies of leaders' successes and best practices would inform ECE leaders and help combat the isolation that a few leaders reported feeling in their roles. Additionally, these could be used by states that are looking to cultivate environments where ECE programs and early childhood system building efforts can expand and thrive.

Finally, the challenges state ECE leaders in this study encountered as a result of persistent issues in the ECE field suggest that the system building work of leaders is not enough to overcome issues that have plagued the field historically, including a lack of investment in ECE and the myriad of issues related to funding streams, specifically the unequal training and treatment of the ECE workforce (Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a). Findings suggested that leaders in some states reported having to spend a disproportionate amount of their time advocating for ECE's existence and had fewer opportunities to engage in collaborative work with other agencies. State leaders' roles were often poorly defined and either encompassed too many responsibilities or were linked to specific programs by funding stream, resulting in leaders having limited authority and power to actually build systems across early childhood services.

Recent attention to funding in ECE (e.g., NASEM, 2018) is a step in the right direction, although the document itself is confusing and needs to be interpreted into actionable steps for the field. If leaders' systems building efforts are to be effective, more research on governance structures and leaders' experiences are needed. This work can then inform states who would like to reorganize their infrastructure to improve systems building opportunities, making early childhood services more unified, equitable, and accessible to children, their families, and the ECE workforce. While the equity and workforce issues that plague the field don't seem to be going away, the field is finally engaging in discussion and seem ready to take steps towards professionalizing the field of ECE. This study adds new perspectives to those discussions.

This research was limited as it relied on leaders' self-reported data and cannot be generalized to all state ECE leaders. This study provides a foundation for future research

on state ECE leaders. One future study should focus on how leaders network with each other and access training or professional development they need to fill the gaps in their knowledge. Additionally, researchers should explore how states' infrastructures, funding streams, and ECE policies map together to affect the work of leaders. This information could then be used to inform the systems building work of leaders in other states or to help policy makers intentionally restructure their states to allow for deeper and more authentic systems building work.

Conclusion

State ECE leaders' decisions affect the lived experiences of children and families across their state and shape the organization of their state's early education offerings and systems (Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). The ECE field can do more to prepare members of its workforce for state-level leadership roles, which require unique skills and expertise compared to leading K-12 or other levels of ECE. The leaders in this study identified some significant challenges that the field also has to address if the systems work policy makers are expecting leaders to accomplish are to actually be successful and not just surface-level solutions.

Chapter 4: "We are underfunded and undervalued, just like the rest of the field": Descriptions of leading ECE at the state level

For more than two decades, the field of early childhood education (ECE) has been engaging in conversations about how to develop its leaders and what it means to lead in ECE (e.g., Goffin & Washington, 2007; IOM & NRC, 2015; Kagan & Bowman, 1997). However, as attention to leadership in ECE has primarily focused on center directors (e.g., Rodd, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), there is limited research examining the preparation and leadership practices of state ECE leaders (e.g., Coffman et al., 2011; Goffin, 2013). State ECE leaders' system building work requires leaders to develop and sustain positive working relationships with local leaders, policymakers, and colleagues across departments in order to effectively advocate for ECE and its workforce in their state (Coffman et al., 2011; Goffin, 2013). In a field where leaders often do not experience (e.g., Aubrey, 2007) or have access to leadership training (Goffin & Daga, 2017), it isn't clear how the individuals working in state ECE positions are prepared to lead or how they approach leading.

The field's inconsistent expectations and limited availability of leadership programs (Goffin & Daga, 2017), stand in contrast to the K-12 system, which has an extensive body of research focused on its leaders and how they lead in addition to credentials and trainings that prepare leaders for different positions within its system. As state ECE leaders are responsible for building ECE systems that not only unify historically disparate types of early education programs, but also align education and care offerings for children birth through five with the existing K-12 system, the differences in leaders' preparation may put state ECE leaders at a disadvantage (Goffin, 2013). This

situation is especially worrying as ECE is a female-dominated profession (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014) and research on K-12 system leaders has suggested that regardless of their capacity, female superintendents encounter several challenges, or even a loss of opportunities, due to their gender and race (e.g. Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan, 1996; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Skrla, 2000b). ECE is also considered a gendered profession because it not only has a predominantly female workforce but is associated with characteristics, including caring and nurturing, that are considered to be feminine (Ferguson & Folbre, 2000; Larkin, 1999) rather than professional (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006). Therefore, it seems that being a state ECE leader, especially one who identifies as female, may put leaders at a disadvantage during their systems building work.

The emerging body of work on state ECE leaders has focused on the supports these leaders need (Goffin, 2013) and their system building work (Coffman et al., 2011; Goffin et al., 2011). However, researchers have not examined why these individuals chose leadership positions, how they developed or conceptualize of their approaches to leadership, or how they experience leading a gendered profession at its highest levels, where the norms and nature of the work are likely to be different. As state ECE leaders who participated in this study (Northey, 2018b) reported that the positioning of the ECE field as "less than" K-12 (e.g., England, 2010; Park, 2000) complicated their system building efforts, this is an aspect of state ECE leaders work that is worthy of closer examination. This paper addressed the following research questions:

5. How do state ECE leaders define and describe leading early childhood at the state level?

a. Why did ECE leaders choose to pursue a leadership position in ECE?
b. What experiences or factors do ECE leaders believe shaped their leadership approach?
c. How do participants believe their experiences and identities have shaped their approaches to leading?

Theoretical Framework

This paper explores how three state ECE leaders conceptualized leadership at the state level and what they believed influenced their leadership approach. Participants were asked to consider how their gender, race, personal histories, and contexts worked to shape their leadership experiences, the meanings they ascribed to those experiences, and their everyday decision-making processes and work. Underlying these aims was an interest in exploring the tension between the female-dominated nature of early education (England, 2005; 2014) and the masculine characteristics associated with leadership within our society (Skrla, 2000b). For these reasons I draw on three bodies of literature to frame this paper: feminist labor theory, intersectionality, research on early education leaders.

Feminist Theory of Labor

Feminist research argues that we live in a patriarchal social system, a system that privileges men and their ways of knowing and being (Harding, 1986; 1987). Social norms are typically associated with masculinity except in arenas where women can dominate, such as the domestic sphere, and, therefore, women's opportunities to lead are often limited (Cohen, 2004; Ferguson, 1989; 1991; Ferguson & Folbre, 2000). Feminist theories call for the foregrounding of women's voices and experiences in research and feminist views of labor draw attention to the paid and unpaid work women engage in

while highlighting the social system that continues to develop and reproduce inequities for White women and women of color (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Mezey, 1992). Additionally, feminists argue that research on gendered occupations done by outsiders can overlook the complexity of the work (e.g. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and, as such, have explored the formal paid labor women engage in while also documenting their unpaid labor. I draw on this literature to learn from state ECE leaders themselves how they have navigated the patriarchal social system successfully and how gender mediates the way they lead and the political contexts in which they work.

Historically the United States' labor market relied on formal barriers to limit the occupational choices of women. While efforts have been made to integrate occupations and address the gap between men's and women's wages, gender segregation in employment continues to be an issue for women particularly in gendered occupations (Hegewisch & Matite, 2013), such as education where 75% of workers are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). For example, the position of superintendent has been described as the most gender stratified (male-dominated) executive position in the country (Björk, 1999) because although women have made up the majority of the K-12 teaching workforce since 1905, K-12 leadership positions, except for elementary school principals (e.g. Edson, 1981; 1988; 1995), have continued to be occupied predominantly by men (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989a).

Research has found that female-dominated jobs often have fewer benefits, lower status, and are lower paying than jobs traditionally held by men (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014). Women continue, on average, to earn less than men. It has been estimated that White women who worked full time in 2014 earned 79 percent of what men made

(American Association of University Women, 2015). Women's low wages, however, are further complicated by the type of work women do. Feminist research on labor has highlighted the disproportionate ways women's work is valued when compared to men's and exposed how the work of women is most often unacknowledged, made invisible, and undervalued by society (Cancian, 2000; Folbre, 1994). This is especially true of educating and caring for young children, which continues to be a female dominated profession and seen as *women's work* (England, 2014; Ferguson, 1989; 1991; Ferguson & Folbre, 1999; Folbre, 1982; Fraser, 1997; Mitchell, 1972; Okin, 1989).

Gendered nature of early education work. Educating young children has long been considered inferior work compared to the teaching of older children (Ferguson & Folbre, 2000; Larkin, 1999). For example, prior to the last 15 years, few states required certifications or training to educate and care for children younger than five years old (Zigler & Marsland, 2009), while the education of older children has been seen as requiring intellectual skill and management training (England, 2010; Park, 2000). As a consequence, those who work with young children have long been undervalued and underpaid for their labor (England & Folbre, 1999; Hoskins, 1983; Larkin, 1999; Whitebook et al., 1989; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). The low pay and status of early education reflects its value within our society and, unfortunately for women, the younger the children, the lower the status (Stonehouse, 1994), and the lower the wages or salaries of workers (Whitebook et al., 2014). For instance, using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Whitebook et al. (2014) found child care workers (who care for infants through three-year-old children) were ranked at the 3rd percentile of earners in 2013, while preschool teachers (who teach three through five year olds) ranked in the 19th

percentile, and kindergarten teachers (who teach five through six year olds) ranked in the 60th percentile.

As states' public preschool opportunities expand and become aligned with their state's K-12 public education systems, it is unclear how early childhood is being positioned at the systems level within each state and how state-level early education leaders' expertise and work is seen in comparison to their K-12 counterparts. Feminist labor theory suggests that early education leaders could be seen as inferior and their expertise as more innate rather than learned, compared to their K-12 colleagues, which might act as an added burden to these leaders' systems building efforts.

Viewing early education work through a feminist labor lens allows women to speak about their experiences and highlight the many forms their work takes.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to draw attention to the ways Black women were being marginalized as a result of institutional discourses, particularly anti-discrimination laws that focused on either gender or race, which she found was inadequate to protect women of color from discrimination. Crenshaw (1989) argued that Black women's marginalization was reproduced and reinforced through feminist and antiractist theories and politics, which, again, conceived of gender and race separately, overlooking the intersection of race and sex.

In drawing attention to the inadequacy of existing institutional conceptions of otherness and the tendency of liberation groups and movements to overlook "intragroup differences" (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1242), Crenshaw (1989) also presented intersectionality, a term to connote the myriad ways that race and gender interplay with

Black women's experiences. Intersectionality is used as a framework to better understand the circumstances of individuals as they navigate numerous converging power structures that each work to position them according to their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexuality (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). By acknowledging that these power structures exist and inviting participants to examine how these systems have worked to privilege or marginalize them, researchers gain a deeper understanding of how this positioning has influenced participants' circumstances, experiences, opportunities, and choices (Carbado et al., 2013).

Crenshaw (1993) has argued, "the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (p. 1244). An example of why race and gender must be considered together is evident in the demographic data of K-12 superintendents. While White women have historically been under-represented in the superintendency (Blount, 1998; 1999), women of color could not hold the position until after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Numbers of female superintendents, especially those who are women of color, still remains incredibly low. White women comprise only 18% of superintendents nationwide and only 1% of all superintendents are women of color (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

State ECE leaders who participated in interviews for this study were asked how their experiences and work may have been shaped not only by the intersection of race and gender, but also by other identity markers, as well.

Early Education Leaders

At this time, the literature on system leadership in early education is limited to only a few studies, so I have drawn on research on leadership in early education across different levels. When looking across the literature on leadership in early education, two themes emerge concerning leaders' experiences. The first is center directors' descriptions of the tension and isolation of their roles. The second is the broadly accepted conceptions of what effective leadership looks like in early education.

The research on center directors has suggested that the majority of participants transitioned into the leadership role from a teaching position (e.g. Aubrey, 2007; Larkin, 1999; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997; Rodd, 1997; Whitebook et al., 2008a). Directors found this transition difficult and many reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared when they first took on the role (e.g. Bloom, 1998b; Larkin, 1999; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997; Rodd, 1997). In these studies, directors hint at an underlying tension they feel between wanting to lead a center and missing the satisfaction that comes from hands-on time with children and teachers (e.g. Aubrey, 2007; Rodd, 1997; 2013; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997).

Researchers have provided possible explanations for the tension that directors experienced in their roles. First, is the prioritization of management responsibilities, as directors argue that the time needed for these responsibilities resulted in them having less time with children and teachers (e.g. Aubrey, 2007; Rodd, 1997). A second cause could be that directors' responsibilities require them to go beyond their comfort zones. This is evident in Rafanello and Bloom's (1997) study, in which the majority of participants reported feeling the most confident in the aspects of their work that pertained to education and the least confident and satisfied in their management tasks. However, a third possible explanation involves the isolation center directors reported experiencing in

their new roles (e.g., Larkin, 1999; Rodd, 1997) and the lack of professional supports or mentoring available to them (e.g., Larkin, 1999; Rafanello & Bloom, 1997).

Due to their responsibilities as systems builders, state-level early education leaders may feel tensions between what their jobs require of them and what they want to do, similar to what center directors described (e.g. Larkin, 1999). Austin's (2014) research on mid-level leaders identified tensions related to leaders' age and race, suggesting that some aspects of state leaders' jobs or identities may also make them feel isolated from their colleagues or the families and communities that they design programs to serve.

Conceptions of effective ECE leadership seems to be tied to distributed styles of leading, where staff members feel invested and responsible for managing aspects of their work and members are working towards a common goal (Coffman & Wright, 2011; Goffin, 2013; Goffin et al., 2011). However, the research on state ECE leaders have not addressed the nuances of this style of leading at the state level.

Early education is in a double bind as it is a female-dominated and gendered occupation, but also located at a subservient level in the hierarchy of the overall education system. The cases reported in this paper explore areas of influence and tension in state leaders' work.

Methodology

This qualitative collective or multiple case study (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995) includes three state ECE leaders' accounts of leading ECE in their states (Merriam, 2009). As,"the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social

worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), this study uses qualitative methods to explore how participants describe themselves as leaders and make sense of their experiences. Case study research allows for in-depth exploration of an issue, while a collective case study, "selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue" and "show different perspectives on the issue" (Creswell, 2013, p. 99). The "cases" in this study were the leaders and the issue being examined was leading ECE at the state level. Doing a collective case study allows the complexity of each leader's experiences to be explored while also allowing for cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Sample

This paper focuses on three state ECE leaders who were selected based on their pathways through the ECE field, their characteristics and those of their state, and their descriptions of leadership (see Table 7). The three leaders represent different pathways through the ECE field and participated (or not) in different types of leadership preparation programs. Additionally, they oversee ECE in states that serve different percentages of four-year-old children in public preschool programs, which influences the type of work leaders engage in and the number of staff or programs they oversee (Northey, 2018b).

Table 7
Participants' Demographic and ECE Characteristics

Name	Race	Gender	Age	% 4-year-olds served in state preschool	Leadership Program (Specialization)
Molly	White	Female	40s	0 – 20%	No
Richelle	White	Female	40s	41% or more	Yes (Public Policy)
Sean	White	Male	30s	21 – 40%	Yes (Education)

Data Collection

Data were collected as part of a larger mixed methods study on state ECE leaders. Data from multiple sources, including participants' survey and interview responses, were used to get a more in-depth understanding of leaders' experiences (Creswell, 2013). The survey (see Appendix A) was developed using research on leading in ECE and K-12, particularly literature on female superintendents. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions and consisted of three separate questions. First, leaders were asked about the jobs they had held in the ECE field and why they chose to pursue a leadership role. The second section asked leaders to identify and rank the factors that supported and challenged them on their pathways and in their state leadership roles. Finally, leaders were asked to provide information about their demographics. This paper and the semi-structured interviews leaders participated in were informed by their survey responses.

The three state ECE leaders also participated in two semi-structured interviews that were conducted over the telephone and ranged in length from 25 to 98 minutes. The semi-structured interview protocols provided continuity across interviews while also allowing for follow-up questions based on participants' answers (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The two interview protocols were created using four bodies of literature: research on female superintendents, state-level early education leadership, feminist labor theories, and intersectionality. The first interview (see Appendix B) consisted of 23 questions and focused on leaders' early childhood experiences and their work as state ECE leaders. As part of this interview, participants were asked to share in-depth information about their pathways through the ECE field and about leaders' transition into their position, a topic that has only been explored at the center-level in early education leadership literature (e.g. Larkin, 1999). Drawing on the female superintendent literature concerning the

importance of mentoring, participants were then asked about the relationships that have helped them along their journey and in their current position in addition to any other supports or challenges they have experienced.

The second interview (see Appendix C) had 20 questions and asked leaders to describe their leadership styles and reflect on how their gender, race, and age have influenced their experiences in early education and the work they do as leaders. As ECE is a female dominated profession (IOM & NRC, 2012) and more often associated with caring and women's work than education (e.g. England, 2005; 2010; 2014; England & Folbre, 1999), state ECE leaders were asked how they believe their gender, race, and age had influenced the work they do as leaders. All interviews were audio-recorded using two devices and I created memos before, during, and after the interviews to capture my impressions and reactions (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

Audio data from leaders' interviews were transcribed verbatim and combined with their survey responses to create one complete file for each of the three leaders. This combined transcript was then loaded as a new project in Dedoose, a qualitative analysis program, to be analyzed. I began my analysis of this data by engaging in within-case analysis and reading through one leader's file multiple times and wrote memos to capture my initial thoughts about the data related to my research questions. Information about the leader's pathway, or their experiences in the field prior to being a state ECE leader, was gleaned from both the survey and the interview data and gathered to create a "history of the case" (Creswell, 2013, p. 101). Then, I began to inductively code, identifying excerpts that reflected key issues or themes in the leader's case to help me better

understand its complexity (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2001). I then engaged in deductive coding, by further refining my coding scheme using topics from my theoretical framework, making sure my coding scheme was comprised of codes that were defined and mutually exclusive (Creswell, 2013). I then repeated this process on the other two cases. Once all three participants' survey responses and interviews had been coded, I engaged in cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013), by looking across cases for common themes or patterns that transcended the individual cases (Walcott, 1994).

Findings

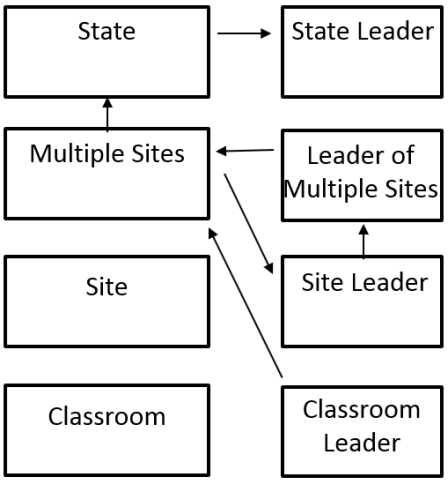
The collected case study presented below explores how three participants described themselves as state ECE leaders while highlighting the experiences and factors, both along their pathways and in their roles, that leaders felt helped shaped them into the leaders they are today. As "multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented, but there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view" (Stake, 1995, p. 108), each case showcases the experiences and factors that leaders felt most shaped them, while also sharing themes from the analysis. Each of the three cases below (Molly, Richelle, and Sean) is organized into two sections, "becoming a leader," which describes the experiences and relationships that participants felt were most responsible for their development as leaders, and "leading," which describes their approach to leading, including a subsection that highlights how their identities influence their experiences and behavior as a leader.

Molly

Becoming a Leader. Molly is a White woman in her forties who became a leader because of her "dedication to the field of early learning" and she wanted the "ability to

impact policy decisions" and engage in "program design at a state level." Molly travelled one of the most common pathways that leaders participating in the broader study (Northey, 2018a) had taken through the ECE field (see Figure 7). Molly transitioned from being a lead preschool teacher to a coach or master teacher at the district level before becoming a director of a preschool center and later the director of the district's program. All of these experiences occurred in state-funded preschool settings, allowing her to advance within one organized system. She then did some regional coaching before taking a job at the state level as a content-area specialist before becoming a state ECE leader. Molly advanced into a leadership position when the person in the role retired, saying, "I felt like that [leadership position] was a better fit and so did the department so I moved into this position."

Figure 7. Molly's Pathway to State Early Education Leadership.



While many of the other participating leaders felt surprised by the work they had to do in their positions and reported experiencing difficult transitions into their state leadership roles, Molly felt confident in her ability to do the job and turned down an opportunity to receive guidance from the person who was exiting the role.

> In my state, it's a really small community so you tend to know everyone in the field anyway. So I think knowing the person who had previously held the position and then also knowing the community that person worked within and having them know me from previous work I think helped not to just get in the position, but also understand the position. The person prior to me had already retired. They did have a contract in place for him to stay on in the event that I needed more support, but I really felt like I knew what I wanted to do in the position and I felt really comfortable in it. Coming in I didn't have a sense of being overwhelmed. I had already been in the field long enough in my state that I knew all the partners and various things that went into it, so I felt pretty confident going in.

Molly credited her experiences working in the field as part of the reason she felt prepared to be a state leader. She was already familiar with the network of people she needed to interact with, which is a testament to the expansive ECE network she built throughout her career, but it likely also reflects the small size of her state's preschool program.

Molly also credited her teaching experiences and the support work she had done in a range of ECE programs for helping to prepare her for her position, as she could refer to these when making decisions in her leadership role.

> Teaching experience and working in a broad range of early childhood programs at the school district helped me. I never worked in a Head Start program, but I've worked for Head Start when I was coaching. So assessment, adjunct work, just having a broad range of knowledge has been really helpful because in this position you are responsible for so much.

Molly seemed confident and prepared for her role and when asked if she attended any leadership training at the state level, as she did not participate in a leadership program, she shared that she did not. There were general leadership trainings available through her state.

> I have access, but I haven't used it. We do have some things in place at the state that are offered to supervisors, but I haven't accessed it because I just don't have the time. I probably should. It isn't early childhood specific.

When pressed to discuss if anything had helped her develop her leadership style or approach, Molly admitted that she did not feel inspired by any leaders in the field.

> There's just not leadership that really inspires me particularly in my work where I can say, "Yeah! That's somebody that I really want to be." So I don't really have anybody in our state that I can say, "Oh, I want to do that. They are in my field doing exactly what I want to do."

Molly felt that her state's context and her needs as an ECE leader were specific enough that she needed a role model or mentor that was located in her state.

> I don't have anybody that I really look to and go, "Ah! That person is who I want to be and I could go to them with my concerns," because I really don't feel like anybody has the same picture that I do so it's really hard to get advice from anyone. Trying to go outside the state they just don't get it. How could they even help me?

Molly compared ECE to K-12 education by saying early childhood "isn't seen the same," "it is seen as an outlier," and "isn't seen as an integrated part of the K-12 system, but as an add-on program." While Molly drew attention to the positioning of ECE as less than K-12 as a systemic issue in the field, she was also aware of how this positioning influenced her current job and what was expected. Molly was under the impression that the job comparable to hers in K-12 would have had stricter requirements regarding training and, as a result, seemed to doubt her own leadership capabilities.

> Compared to K-12, [ECE] leadership is inconsistent. There's not a shared understanding of what is needed or the leadership qualities that should go into leaders. So I think that being a leader in early childhood education, like I don't know necessarily if I would've had a harder time, but I know it would have been more competitive if I was applying to be the director of K-12 education or math and science education for example. I think I would have had to work hard to show my skills. But because early childhood is seen as such an outlier I think they didn't know what they were looking for.

When she compared herself to her K-12 equivalent, she sensed disparities in their responsibilities and the level of respect they garnered. In our conversations, these differences seemed to have a palpable impact on how she perceived her workload, the size of her staff, and how she saw herself as a leader; positioning her more as a corralling force than an educational leader.

> When I compare my position with K-12, I'm over early childhood for example, but if you think about the person that's over K-12 education in our state has an entire department that follows behind him to do that! So then you take out early childhood and you say, "Okay, you're in charge of early childhood," but that has so many things that could go under it. Like huge departments! Like Health and Social Services and child screenings and we are so fragmented that it's frustrating when I kind of think about that bigger picture. There's just a difference.

Molly saw her education and training experiences as an asset in her work but lacked mentorship and role models that could inspire her as a leader. Instead, she compared herself to her K-12 colleagues, which may have had more of an influence in shaping her leadership approach than she intended.

Leading. Molly described herself as an analytical, logical, and fair leader. As an analytical person, Molly was able to thrive in situations where she got to think of the big picture and take logical steps towards advancing her vision for ECE in her state. It was important for her to have ECE expertise, so her staff, other leaders, and policy makers could trust her decisions.

> Being well-versed in early childhood is really important because you work with a lot of people that know the field really well and if you don't know the field they can't look to you for expertise and guidance and why would they trust you with policy and program planning?

If a decision would affect a range of people, she was comfortable asking others for insight.

> Sometimes I have too much [autonomy]. I think I get to the point where I'm really looking for feedback. I always try to make sure that in bigger decisions that I'm engaging a broad range of stakeholders to give feedback, but, in the end, I have the autonomy to make that decision. A lot of times I do have to run it through our commissioner, but I usually make decisions that are not going to be in conflict with what they would want.

Perhaps as a result of not being able to find a role model or mentor of her own, Molly often acted as a mentor to others and created her own network or group of leaders that could support each other.

> For early childhood I struggle. I mean, I pull a lot of mentor opportunities so it's like I've created my own group. I'll go to a specific person for this or I'll reach out to another person for that. But yeah, no one I look up to, you know?

As a leader, Molly also created her own network of support even though she didn't have a mentor in her state that she could access for advice.

When discussing leading at the state level generally, Molly talked about bureaucracy and turnover as factors that challenged her.

> I think bureaucracies are difficult to adjust to in any capacity. It's easier to move small boats than big ships. At the state level you also have a lot of transitions, like we have gone through 3 commissioners in the past year and every commissioner that comes in is going to have new ideas and new understanding of your work, so you constantly have to learn how to step back and fill them in and it's hard to not feel like you're taking one step forward and two steps back.

When reflecting on what it meant to lead ECE at the state level she said, "We are underfunded and undervalued just like the rest of the field." While she didn't see this difference in positioning as a reflection of the field being female dominated or gendered, she did highlight the gender disparities that she saw.

> I don't see that the equity [in the state ECE leadership position] is any different than any other position. I don't think leading early childhood at the state is considered women's work, but it's interesting when you go to leadership meetings or when you look at state-wide ed. leadership, or you look at high levels of leaders. You start to see more men involved at the leadership levels, the top levels. It makes me wonder if they are just, because they are men if they get promoted more or seen more as leaders. I really don't know why, but there are more male leaders than teachers. At least that's my perception.

Regarding her leadership work, Molly felt the early childhood leaders were more collaborative than K-12.

> Early childhood leaders tend to need to work with a lot more collaborative agencies than K-12. We work far more with child care programs, Health and Human Services' programs, pediatricians, mental health, and we work in a far more collaborative way [than K-12] but they don't have to do the work we do, you know?

Molly described her relationships with her staff as "good and really well balanced" and help her bee an effective leader. Her comments suggest that she has

established a collaborative work environment, where her staff is able to help her be successful in her ECE work.

> We are really limited and short on staff, but I would have to say the willingness of the staff that we do have to really pitch in and do work is great because I don't ever feel like I've hit barriers. We've go good people in and around the department. I think you know my budget isn't big, but I have enough to do what I want and also having that autonomy is really helpful because I can just map out a plan if I want to get something don and generally get it done. So we don't have a lot of staff, it's just the mood or attitude of the staff that we do have.

Molly said that she had an "equitable" approach to leading and made efforts to interact with everyone equally and consistently. When asked if she prepared differently for meetings depending on who would be there, she stressed that she did not and mentioned that she had "just had a talk about this today with someone," which suggested this is something that has been on her mind.

> I try not to because I came from the early childhood world, I remember in some of our early childhood trainings and things we used to do for staff, we used to have a lot of movements and songs and play things on the tables and I stopped doing that. Because I think that at a systems level we have to start treating early childhood professionals like the professionals they are. So I expect those people to sit through a training in the same way that I would treat superintendents and other leaders. I won't treat them differently, even at a training level, whether you're a Head Start paraprofessional or a superintendent or a statewide regent for a university. I treat them all the same and I expect the same level of participation. I want to make sure that our early childhood professionals realize that they are professionals and they need to be treated as such.

Molly's desire to hold everyone to the same standard of professional behavior extended to her own behavior and appearance. While research on female superintendents found women often made changes to their physical appearance and leadership behaviors in response to their contexts (e.g., Skrla, 2000b; 2003), Molly was determined to present herself (in her physical appearance and the content of her work) the same regardless of her audience. "I just decided that I would make a consistent effort to present in the same way that I would present to others."

Molly's lack of ECE leadership role models and her desire to elevate the standing of the ECE workforce in her state and the perceptions of her agency led her to develop a leadership style that was meant to inspire respect. She adopted an air of fairness and worked to set high expectations for herself and her staff.

"Dial it back". When reflecting on how different aspects of her identity may have influenced her leadership style or her experiences, Molly was uncertain. As a White woman in her forties, Molly described herself as similar to her peers, except when looking across departments or above her position within her state's leadership hierarchy.

> I tend to be around the common age of who I'm interacting with and I tend to have just enough experience that I'm not too young and not too old. As a woman, I do have to say I see more advancement, overall, because I'm in education. When we pick commissioners and when we pick directors they always seem to be men that are getting advanced in those positions. I think that being a leader in early childhood education it's a bit different, but I really don't know why more men get promoted.

Molly reported more women in leadership roles within her state's department of education when compared to other departments, but she still felt that men got the highest roles in her department, suggesting that this might be a glass ceiling that women were having trouble breaking through.

When pressed to think about her race might be interplaying with her gender and age, she said:

> My race and gender probably have influenced my career. I'd like to see more leaders of color, but that doesn't describe me so that's something I can never be. But I do think that there needs to be more representation from our native communities in state leadership.

Molly reported feeling a bit of tension between who she is as a person and who she has to be as a leader in early childhood.

> Sometimes I need to dial back my personality. Stop dropping the f bomb, that doesn't go over really well in early childhood. I mean I don't drop the f bomb all the time, I don't want to give you that impression.

While Molly wanted to make sure I didn't get the impression that she was inappropriate, her comment (and reassurance) demonstrate the tension women K-12 leaders report due to traditional conceptions of leadership, which is associated with aggressive or masculine characteristics. Female leaders who adopt masculine behaviors are punished (e.g., Brunner, 2000b, Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999) or try to "pass" (Skrla, 1999) and position themselves as subservient (Marshall, 1985; Skrla, 1998). As a representative of ECE, Molly recognized that the "f bomb" wasn't part of the normalized ECE culture and, therefore, felt at odds and like she needed to change her personality. She expanded upon this tension saying the characteristics she associated with female leadership didn't always align with how she saw herself.

> When I look at other women leaders they come across as much more pulled together and organized and cool, calm, and collected and I don't see myself as cool, calm and collected. I'm really analytical and I like to get in there and brainstorm and think. I'm trying to emulate that Hillary Clinton kind of demeanor, unshakeable, you know? But I'm just not quite doing a great job about it all the time.

Perhaps without realizing it, Molly had created an idealized expectation of what an ECE leader needed to be by conflating the feminine or nurturing norms of the ECE field with that of a strong female leader. She also saw her "analytical" nature and desire to "brainstorm and think" as things that ran counter to that idealized version of a female leader, a conception that seems limited to presentation and emotional stability rather than the work that leaders need to do.

Richelle

Becoming a Leader. Richelle is a White woman in her forties and leads ECE in a state with a large preschool program. Richelle became a leader because she believes,

"Early childhood needs leaders who have taught in ECE settings." This is not only a sentiment Richelle heard from one of her own mentors, but it also offers her a connection to her past years spent in the classroom. Even as a state leader, she mentioned that she dreams of returning to teach young children and might do so part-time after she retires. Richelle also sees "ECE as the foundation for all future learning" and has spent her time in the field, both as a teacher and as a leader, improving and advocating for children to have greater access to high quality ECE.

Richelle's reasons for becoming an ECE leader and her pathway through the field demonstrate the important role auspice and mentors can play in helping someone advance through the ECE field. Richelle was a lead classroom teacher for over fifteen years, in a variety of grades, and credits her mentors for encouraging and supporting her development as a leader and ECE professional:

> There were different people in the positions who identified me as someone who could be a leader and gave me opportunities not only to lead, but also opportunities for my own personal growth, professional development, conferences and things.

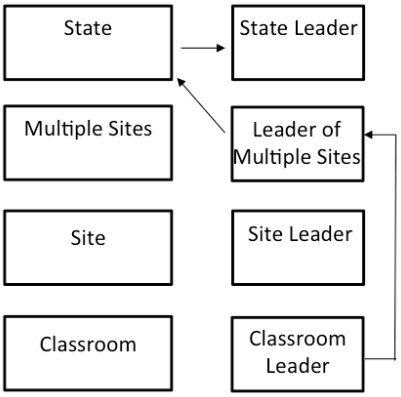
Richelle started her career by teaching infants and toddlers in fee-based settings before transitioning to teach at a public elementary school. Richelle's pathway is unusual in that she fluctuated in the ages of children she taught. Her fee-based experiences with very young children were prior to her earning her bachelor's degree, which then allowed her to become an elementary school teacher, where she taught third and fifth grades. After a few years she decided to return to working with young children as a preschool and kindergarten teacher because she wanted to make more of a difference in the lives of her students:

> I taught in a very low-income area, a Title 1 school with a significant number of minority children, and I realized how far behind my kids were. I had an interest in

working in preschool and preK and looking at intervention and starting earlier. Then for a few years I taught kindergarten because I looped with my preK kids to kindergarten and the following year I went back to preK.

Richelle's pathway map (see figure 8) demonstrates how she moved from being a classroom leader, to the leaders of multiple sites, and then transitioned to working at the state level. Her trajectory stands out when compared to the pathways of other participating state leaders. Data from the broader study (Northey, 2018a) suggested that elementary teaching experiences allowed leaders to advance more quickly through the field. Examining Richelle's trajectory, specifically her move from being a lead teacher to a leader of multiple sites, suggest that even though she had returned to teaching in ECE, her third through fifth grade teaching experiences may have helped her move outside of the more common transitions to leadership.

Figure 8. Richelle's Pathway to State Early Education Leadership.



Richelle's experience of being tapped for positions by mentors echoes trends in the research on center directors (e.g., Aubrey, 2007; Larkin, 1999) and female superintendents (e.g., Brunner, 2000a; Grogan, 1996; Marshall, 1988). In the research literature, individuals reported being encouraged to apply for leadership positions (e.g., Larkin, 1999) or even sponsored, when the person who was encouraging them to apply helped prepare them for the role (e.g., Brunner, 2000a). Being part of the public school

system expanded her network and opportunities for advancement and she went on to become the leader of her district's preschool program, although she was reluctant at first.

> At that time in my career I really wasn't ready to lose the classroom, however, this person, who had been a mentor to me, really was interested in me applying for her position. She was retiring and I said, "no," but she came back and explained that no one that had taught preK or kindergarten was applying for the position and convinced me to apply. So I did and I got the position.

After a few years leading her district's program, Richelle was again tapped to pursue a new opportunity, this time as a mid-level leader at her state's early learning agency. "Someone at the state agency was retiring and reached out to me about applying to her position [mid-level preK management role]. That's how I came to this department." She stayed in that role until she was promoted to her current leadership role. It seems her mentors' perceptions of what an ECE leader should be and that they recognized those qualities in her spurred Richelle to apply for and accept leadership roles and develop her leadership skills.

Richelle had attended a leadership preparation program, which focused on public policy, but credited other experiences, such as other leaders' modeling and training she received on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) as key experiences that shaped her leadership style.

> My dad was an elementary school principal and I watched how he interacted with every level of his staff and the relationships he had built with them- the custodian of his school was one of his dearest friends, his relationship with the superintendent of his system- he was really intentional about that and I think that was innate in me. I also have had other experiences where people have modeled that for me including my previous supervisor. I also think I'm impacted by some of the work that we've done around interactions and the PD we've done focusing on the importance of interactions in the classroom, for instance some of the work we've done with CLASS, and how that really is the same anywhere.

Leading. As a leader, Richelle was driven by her commitment to ECE and saw building relationships as central to her leadership approach.

Richelle dedicated time for relationship building into her staff meetings each Monday. Prior to sharing and reviewing the agency's tasks and priorities for the week, she engaged her staff in conversation about their lives and set the expectation that these practices should be carried out with their teams, as well:

> It's a relationship building time, "What did you do over the weekend?" and not just between them and myself, but I try to facilitate that relationship among my directors because I need for them to know and care about each other in order for us to be successful. I'm really strategic in thinking about how to create those relationships and then devoting as much time to those things as I do to the other work that we do.

Additionally, Richelle went out of her way to connect with providers in her state, learning their names and faces and following-up with personal notes after meetings or visits. She was strategic in her style with these notes, "the communications I send to them tend to be less formal. I sign things with just my first name and do things that just, there's a nature of how you interact with people that helps to prove a relationship." Even with all of her attention to relationship building she found it difficult to establish relationships with leaders in other departments.

> I'm luck that my agency is fairly small. I think that makes a difference. Most everybody knows everybody. I think it takes awhile to build relationships, especially across state agencies. Like for the Department of Education or Department of Public Health, learning and establishing a relationship with those people, for me, has been a little more challenging.

When pressed to describe why relationship building was such an integral component of her leadership style, Richelle linked it back to her experiences and training about the classroom, while also acknowledging the low pay of the profession:

> Everything we know about successful people is based on relationships. If you look in the classroom, we know the most important things that are going on in the classroom that lead to improved outcomes for children are based on relationships. It's the same with adults, especially because we work really hard for not much money, so these connections make a difference.

Richelle's commitment to advocating for ECE was a driving force in her work and it was through this passion that Richelle expressed a sense of belonging as an ECE leader. "Really understanding the development of young children and a passion to help other people understand that fuels me. Many times, I have been in positions where I was the lone person thinking about a child's development." She felt this was a quality she shared with other ECE leaders:

> I'm always shocked as I work with other leaders, especially early childhood folks, a large majority of them are there because they have a strong commitment to the work. They don't necessarily strive to be a leader, but they are not there because they from the beginning wanted to be a commissioner or an assistant commissioner. They ended up there because they are really focused on improving things for kids and families and outcomes. Maybe it isn't unique to early childhood, but it's fairly consistent within our field.

This quote not only reflects Richelle's interest in pushing ECE, as a cause, forward and that she has found a community of like-minded colleagues, but also suggests she saw her own experience of not actively seeking out leadership roles mirrored in other ECE leaders.

Richelle understood the responsibility that came with her leadership roles and described having to get more comfortable with being decisive throughout her career.

> It's always a surprise to me how much control individuals have at any level, whether it was at a school system level or the state level, how many policy decisions that affect a lot of programs and children are really developed by individuals. People along the way had to tell me, "Just do it, it will be fine. Stand up there and make the decision. If it's not the right one, we'll fix it later but make a decision." Sometimes it's the right decision. Sometimes it's not, but sometimes you just need a decision to move forward. It took me awhile to learn that. To not be paralyzed by the fact that there was so much. Just pick a path and go there and if it's not right you'll figure it out later.

Similar to the research on female education leaders, which describes how women put on a "professional performance" (e.g., Brunner, 1998) by changing their style of dress or tone of voice to embody the dominant conception of professionalism (Butler, 2004),

members of the ECE workforce often struggle with how to present as professionals due to the perception that their work requires little preparation and is associated with caring (Osgood, 2011). Some researchers have argued (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006) that the framing of the ECE workforce as caring work has resulted in the workforce being "insecure about their professional status," which can lead them to "distrust and under estimate their own professional insights" (Osgood, 2006, p. 194). This positioning then leads ECE workers to adopt more traditional, dominant conceptions of what it means to be a professional rather than reflecting on their leadership and developing their own approach (e.g., McDowall & Murray, 2012; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006). When considered through this lens, Richelle's descriptions of how she prepares for meetings suggests that she intentionally "performs" leadership based on who she is speaking with and how she wants to be seen.

> I always, always dress the part. Always. Earlier when you asked about our interactions with the DOE I am always suited up. Not only do I try to act the part but I look the part, too. People have more respect for people that act the part and look the part, so you have to look professional. But on the flip side there are times when you meet with other people and you might choose not to be as dressed up.

Richelle acknowledged shifting how she prepared and performed her role depending on her audience and whether she needed to exude respect, for example at the Department of Education, or someone down to earth when visiting providers.

Richelle's anecdotes demonstrated leadership prowess and strategy. For example, she carefully selected the "battles" she engaged in and only did so when she would win or if a loss would push her closer to her goal. She knew the power of being concise and making her ideas relevant to her audience.

> I learned the importance of drilling down my ideas to one page. Figure out how to get it on there and make it meaningful. It's necessary when working with legislators or proposing ideas. If there happens to be $500,000 left in the state

> budget who gets it? The person who can very succinctly say how they would spend it and how that impacts kids.

Richelle reported being more attentive when preparing for interactions with legislators or her K-12 counterparts, identifying "leverage points" for her positions ahead of time and being "more cognizant of [her] role and [her] place, too."

> When I'm interacting with people that are my level at the Department of Ed, I think I tend to defer to them a little bit unless I get an opportunity to really connect with the work we are doing and then I take that opportunity to be really vocal. I stay out of stuff that may tangentially affect us but isn't really our lane. You have to know your purview and some if it is deference to working with K-12, they have more power, so you need to be careful and make sure that you're protective of them seeing you as an expert.

She intentionally reserved her "voice" for topics that she cared most about because she believed that if she spoke up too often they would start to ignore her. Richelle recounted a recent victory after speaking up in a meeting when the early elementary team wanted to do something that she didn't think was developmentally appropriate.

> The DOE person said, "Richelle said we can't do that." You know? It wasn't, "That's not the right way to x, y, z," it was very apparent that the reason they weren't going to do it was that they had listened to what I said, but I have to be strategic about that.

Richelle changed her approach and embodiment of leadership depending on the context she was in. She learned to be decisive and strategic and deployed these skills with prowess in the anecdotes that she shared but didn't highlight her use of strategy or intentionality when discussing her leadership attributes.

"I won't ever be a commissioner". When reflecting on how different aspects of her identity influenced her actions and choices as a leader, Richelle provided multiple examples related to her age, race, and gender. She described actions she took to try to mediate the effects of her youthfulness (trying to make herself seem older by being vague about her years of experience) and Whiteness, "I have to actively work to not let the

White privilege that I have, because I have it, impact how I see things. And it's a challenge". However, the most poignant experience for her, which continues to affect her, was being passed over for a promotion due, she believes, to her gender. In her survey, Richelle reported hitting a glass ceiling during her career. In her interviews she said, "My next step up is to be commissioner of an agency and those are political appointments. I have had to accept that I won't ever be a commissioner."

Richelle described her state as "very conservative" and "a good old boys club," but she had been able to advance in her career because she was effective and had positive working relationships with her supervisors.

> The previous commissioner, who was a man, valued me and thought I was good at my work. He supported me and knew that I was integral to his success. Still, he chose to appoint a man over me and he was shocked that I was upset about it. You could tell by the look on his face that it had never occurred to him that I would want the position. It was old school thinking. He assumed that I was a woman so I wasn't interested. "Richelle wouldn't care about opportunity because she's a woman, a wife, a mother." The belief that a woman would not want to pursue a particular honor or task or position because she would always choose her family first- like it's a choice or whatever, but not in a way a man would, and that I would not be offended by such a statement.

Even though the previous commissioner moved on to work in another department, Richelle said:

> You can probably tell I still have a hard time with it, but I was committed to the work I was doing and the people that worked with me so I focused on that. In state government you learn that things change if you hang around long enough and what we know is commissioners come and go."

Richelle is still coming to terms with the experience. Her description of the events not only captures the emotions she experienced at the time, but also the emotional toll of continuing to work in her role and having to navigate the situation as newer commissioners come in above her.

Richelle's performance of professionalism echoes findings of research on female leaders who adopt markers of the dominant culture (e.g., Brunner, 1997; 1998; 2000b; Butler, 2004; Grogan, 1996; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006), which in this case is K-12, a part of education whose leaders are mostly male in contrast to their female workforce. Richelle's assertion that she suits up and "dresses the part" to go to meetings at the Department of Education is interesting, as her own position as a leader in the state is comparable to those she meets with, so it is the positioning of her department that causes the contrast. Richelle's leadership approach was also influenced by her experiences watching other leaders, her mentors, and the training she received.

Sean

Becoming a Leader. Sean is a White male in his thirties. He pursued leadership positions in ECE because he is interested in empowering the next generation of leaders and he has a commitment to the field based on his personal experiences.

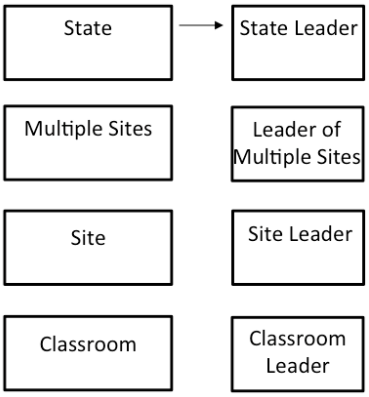
Sean's background and upbringing have influenced his interest in the ECE field and the work he does. "The majority of my work has been erring on the side of at risk children and families- children who live in very unstable situations or don't come from the best backgrounds, because I can completely identify." As Sean grew up in a family with trauma and stress, he states how now, as an adult, "Those things are not things people can see so they don't understand or know the extent to which that influenced who you are. I lived the culture of poverty for many years. I lived the culture of these families."

Sean's pathway through the ECE field (see Figure 9) is an outlier. When the pathway chart was designed as part of the broader study (n=89, Northey, 2018a), only

positions that had been held by 5% or more of participating leaders were included in the design of the diagram. Sean's ECE experiences were quite unique and, therefore, space for them was not incorporated into the design of the diagram, which was meant to chart only the most common ECE positions. Therefore, Sean's pathway chart only shows his two state-level positions. Sean entered ECE as a researcher and then went on to work for a variety of advocacy organizations that focused on ECE. In his positions Sean often made use of his extensive knowledge of human development and families and public policy, while continuing to learn and achieve higher-level positions within different organizations. Sean also participated in a number of intensive fellowships or training opportunities to further develop his leadership skills. Eventually, Sean was recruited for a position at the state and then advanced into his current leadership role. He described his pathway as a product of his hard work and others recognizing the value of the skillsets he brought with him.

> Having opportunity and the right mentors who opened doors. Although they saw something in me, I worked hard for it. I had a tremendous amount of knowledge, but not practical application. Yet, for whatever reason, individuals overlooked that and saw the benefit of having someone with the knowledge, who could also be humble enough to utilize experts, meet their staff and others in the field, and have an open ear. That was the right fit and put me into leadership positions where I got respect.

Figure 9. Sean's Pathway to State Early Education Leadership.



Although Sean was never an ECE teacher, he has sought out experiences and developed a network of practitioners to help inform his work. He has used adjunct teaching experiences and the classroom quality trainings he had access to through his job to get as close to classroom life as he can.

> I started [teaching as adjunct faculty] because that was something I thought I would enjoy, but then that also allowed me to stay on top of the current research in the field because I had to prep for classes, so that was a mechanism for my continued personal development for education…I seek out opportunities and fill the gap [in my knowledge]. I wish I did have some experience in the classroom. Although in my role I have gotten the closest that I can, as we do quality assessments of the classrooms, so I got trained in the tools and that training then put me in the classrooms to do the observations. That was the closest proxy I had. Thankfully technology has helped quite a bit in being able to see environments so I can learn about what I actually know knowledge-wise, as I can see it play out in front of me.

Sean also has staff members and a network of ECE practitioners that he has built up over his years in the field who he can consult when he needs it. He described this as a mutually beneficial relationship, as they, for example, would be able to help him better understand how research needed to be translated into practice, and they, in turn, would have their message heard as he, "had the ability to be that voice for a community that would traditionally struggle to get their voice heard."

These experiences also influence Sean's desire to help others. Throughout his career, Sean has been driven by "being a conduit to change other's lives, seeing others succeed and knowing that I play a small part in their success."

Leading. Sean's approach to leading was anchored in Greenleaf's (2003) concept of servant leadership, which features a leader who defines and devotes himself to the service of others. Therefore, it was not surprising that he described himself as an altruistic, humble and confident leader. His interest in supporting others and his passion for ECE has meant that part of his leading involves supporting others. As the field is

anticipating a leadership vacuum as leaders retire (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2010). Sean makes a point of "helping [staff] move down line or into leadership positions" and dedicates time to attend to staff needs and concerns. "It's about giving them direction and ensuring that I have their back, empowering them in their jobs."

Sean's approach to leading involved knowing the official and unofficial policies of the early childhood systems, K-12 system, and ECE system within his state in order to do his job more effectively.

> In order to get my vision, my leadership, to be effective, I don't live within the rules in a very rigid manner. I don't learn the rule to enforce the rules. I know all of those are part of my job, but I learn all the parameters to know where I can push them within the legality of the whole system so that I can achieve greater results for kids. It's all about learning the system in order to manipulate the system for the benefit of children and families.

As one of Sean's reasons for becoming a state ECE leader was an interest in working with the K-12 system, it was unsurprising to learn that part of his approach to leading focused on engaging with K-12 colleagues. He felt working with K-12's traditional system was harder than building early childhood systems because at least in early childhood, all parties were working with similar bodies of knowledge and commitments. With K-12, Sean goes out of his way to establish a connection and find common ground. "I almost play ignorant in the conversation to bolster their ability to trust me. I'm the student to that field, because we're [ECE] the stepchild of education." He approaches K-12 as if they are speaking a different language and he intentionally uses their terminology so they know he understands their world.

> An example is multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) or responsive intervention. That is like the hottest things since sliced bread for K-12. If you look at the core elements of what our MTSS system is, they're all embedded in a coherent early childhood approach to education: differentiated learning; student-centered support; data-driven decision making; fidelity of implementation of your curriculum. This is just a natural part of an early childhood program with a child

> at the center of it. This is not new, but it's new to them. I can say I know exactly what you guys are doing, but we're speaking a different language. When I talk about developmentally appropriate practices, I'm talking about MTSS. But if I use the words "developmentally appropriate practice," it gets discounted quickly by K-12 because that's what you early childhood people do, use touchy-feely words.

Sean models this approach with his staff, as he believes it's important to have a shared understanding and commitment to their ECE vision.

> I had to tell my staff this, saying "I'm not going to use that [ECE] phrase anymore when I'm with this group [of K-12 leaders] because all it does is set me up for being more defensive, having to do more work to get my ideas across. So let me use their terminology. It's like speaking a different language for the same concepts.

"A trusted messenger". Sean is in his thirties and while he believed his youthfulness caused him to stand out from his peers, he also felt that it had been a benefit to his career. His colleagues assumed he brought a fresh perspective and he thinks he has taken more risks since it is still early in his career.

Sean openly discussed how his gender benefited him, saying, "being male is an asset to breaking barriers down in the world of early childhood leadership," he did not think his Whiteness had necessarily hindered or helped him. His ability to recognize the privilege he received as a result of his gender most likely reflected his work in a female dominated field, as his gender was the most obvious thing that set him apart from his colleagues, most of whom were also White. He shared that for most of his career he has been either the only man or one of a few men working in the organization or agency. These experiences could have led him to focus on his gender as a point of difference, rather than also seeing how his race also worked in his benefit. As a White male working in a female-dominated field, his race and gender interact to place him in a particularly privileged position.

> The governor's a man and all the leadership of the house and senate are men and so they absolutely, and it's unfortunate, but they hear me and are willing to listen. They listen to what I have to say, and I can't say that's the same thing as if some of my female counterparts go and speak in the same situation.

After acknowledging that his state is currently conservative and the policy makers he interacts with are all men, Sean explained how his gender allowed his voice to be heard outside of the ECE field:

> In the political world, when speaking about early education, the expectation is that this is a manifestation of childcare, a female dominated world. So when a male comes in and talks with authority on issues that are rooted in evidence and research they don't see my passion as emotional and vulnerable, they see passion as power.

In contrast, within the field, being a White man could complicate his work or make individuals hesitant to trust him. For example, his desire to help at risk families occasionally resulted in him having to prove his connection and commitment to ECE work in order to be accepted by others in the field.

> There was a Black woman leader who made assumptions about me- that because I'm a White male I can't know. Once there was an opportunity for networking and sharing she was willing to accept me as a peer. I actually had to divulge my background to be able to garner acceptance as a While male.

Sean knew that some were hesitant to accept him, which may have also been due to his lack of ECE teaching experience and he shifted his presentation style, if his ECE colleagues were in the room, to demonstrate that he understood and respected the field.

> I do not [change anything] if I'm alone. I am willing to be the same person, regardless of if I'm in an early childhood setting or in a K-12 setting. However, if I'm with others, like my staff, I am willing to bend to the audience for their benefit. So many of my staff are older than me so it goes to that generational piece. My former supervisor, every presentation had cutesy, crayon stick figure children, all that stuff embedded in every presentation. I don't do that. For me personally and I don't know if it's because I'm a male or if it is because of my approach strategy, but I feel at this point in time when we're on the cusp of real progress toward alignment of preK and K-3 in particular, great potential alignment and acceptance as the next step in an evolution of education, I don't think having the traditional cutesy early childhood approach is helpful. So I don't change my physical appearance, but I do change my PowerPoint; but not if I'm

> doing it by myself. I only do it if I'm with others who still have a part of that "this is what we do as a field- if we love children we've go to be cutesy!" concept rooted in them. So I'm not fully committed to that, but I'm not opposed to it so I do give into it.

In this example, Sean's desire to move the field forward and his approach to leading with respect and service to others came into conflict, as he had to choose between supporting the needs of the field or his staff. Another example of Sean having a different strategy than what he sees as the ECE approach involves advocacy:

> [In ECE] you have to create the sky is falling to get attention to your issue so for early childhood to get off of the label of stepchild education, and that it's real and it's meaningful, I tell my colleagues nationally, you have to change your approach. The field of early education has had to fight for recognition for decades. Only in the last five to eight years has there really been a wave of recognition or acceptance. However, the older generation in the field of early childhood, they're still rooted in that and the fact that the majority of them are women, they're rooted in the experiences that they've had. The socio-emotional experiences they've had with civil rights movements, women's rights movements. Fighting for recognition, advocating for their beliefs. So it's hard to stop something that's so ingrained, but when we're trying to build bridges across early childhood into K-12 the showcasing aspect of baby stroller parades and things like that to draw attention to the causes of early childhood, I don't think are as effective. Actually, they probably do more harm than good. We need to take a different approach that really works to showcase what we do and what they do are not very different. They're labeled differently and they may be executed differently, but we have more similarities than differences in our approach to education.

Given Sean's occasional feelings of being an outsider, he reported being surprised and struggling the most with how quickly those in the field have accepted him as an authority figure.

> There was an appreciation knowing that, as the world of education is primarily dominated by male decision-makers, at least in government, they [ECE] could have a male on their side fighting their battles because they felt that they had an advantage in finally having a messenger who would be listened to a little more than they would. That gives meaning to this work as well, knowing I'm a trusted messenger.

While Sean's socio-economic status and upbringing shaped his commitment to the field and his desire to help others succeed, his race, gender, and age also interplayed to influence his leadership style and career opportunities. Sean reports how his race, gender and age worked together in ways that allowed him to have his voice heard and respected in a field where his female colleagues' voices were often ignored.

Discussion and Implications

These three cases were intentionally selected to demonstrate three different pathways leaders traveled through their ECE careers and provide more information about their experiences and perceptions of themselves as leaders. As there are no consistent expectations for the preparation state ECE leaders require, the three cases demonstrate how different backgrounds, pathways, and experiences result in leaders having varied understandings of leadership.

Given the different pathways leaders traveled through the ECE field and the lack of consistent expectations for what is required to lead in ECE (Goffin & Washington, 2007; IOM & NRC, 2015), it was unsurprising that each leader reported having a different approach to leading. Additionally, it is worth noting what influenced their leadership styles. Sean was the only leader who said his leadership training had significantly shaped his identity as a leader. Molly and Richelle reported being influenced more by their experiences teaching in the ECE field than anything else. These experiences suggest that leadership preparation may involve on-the-job learning at different points in a person's career and that leadership programs may not be especially helpful for every leader. While the K-12 system requires specific training and

credentialing, perhaps the ECE field will choose a different model, but it should be done intentionally and accessible.

While their experiences and identities helped them develop their leadership styles, Richelle and Sean seemed to have stronger conceptions of their leadership styles than Molly. A difference that could reflect mentorship, which was something Richelle and Sean both credited with helping them develop in ECE and as leaders.

Sean, Molly, and Richelle all used relationships in their leadership. Richelle spent the time getting to know her staff and expected them to do the same, as she firmly believed relationships were key to a cohesive team and healthy, caring work environment. Molly also built positive working relationships with her staff and valued being "balanced" and "consistent." She was able to unify her staff around her vision and motivate them to work hard as they implemented it. Sean saw helping his staff achieve and advance as central to his leadership approach and, therefore, prioritized getting to know them, their ambitions, and kept an open door to help them when they needed something. Although their purposes varied, relationships were central to their leading. Leadership approaches that make use of interpersonal relationships, such as relational, collaborative, distributed, and shared leadership, are considered to be more feminine styles of leading (Miller, 2006) and are associated with ECE (McDowall & Murray, 2012; Siraj & Hallet, 2014). Within this style of leadership, everyone's ideas are valued and included (Blackmore, 1993; 1999; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Jackson, 1999; Skrla, 1998; 2000b). Women often see collaborative approaches to leading as something that not only disrupts the masculine conceptions of leadership, but also reclaims the stereotyped feminine behaviors (being nurturing or caring) that had previously been seen

as a weakness and barrier that prevented women from leading effectively (Blackmore, 1989; Brunner, 1997). Men who adopt feminine leadership qualities or relational approaches to leading are not penalized, and Blackmore (1999) suggests they benefit over women who do the same. The ECE workforce is notoriously low paying (Whitebook et al., 2014), which is also suggested to reflect the caring and feminine nature of the work (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014). Richelle's suggestion that leading through personal relationships can motivate people to stay in low paying jobs that require them to work hard suggests another reason why relationship-based leadership approaches may be associated with ECE.

All three leaders were tapped or encouraged to apply for positions during their careers, often by the leader who was vacating the position. These findings echo other studies on female superintendents, which found that women who had support in the form of mentors or a steward who helped them navigate the hiring process and get pass the "gatekeepers," or the school board members who appointment the superintendent (Brunner, 2000a; Grogan, 1996; Hudson, 1991; 1994; Maienza, 1986). Researchers have found that a female superintendent candidate's gender is seen as a threat to "trustworthiness and predictability" (Bell, 1988, p. 55; Chase & Bell, 1990). This tension puts women without a sponsor at a disadvantage during the hiring process and can result in politically tense interactions with the school board (Brunner, 1999; Grogan & Henry, 1995; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). However, if a man in power advocates or "sponsors" a female superintendent candidate she is evaluated more positively by the school board, which Ortiz and Marshall (1988) refer to as sponsored mobility. Richelle, who hit a glass ceiling and did not receive sponsored mobility from her mentor, felt resigned and was

trying to accept that fact that, at least for now, her career was stalled. Sean, who mentioned having to prove himself as someone who cared about the field of ECE, was able to not only benefit from sponsorship by his mentors, but also acted as a sponsor to others, which is one of the reasons he became a trusted voice in and spokesperson for his state's ECE community. Molly, in contrast, reported having access to an ECE network of support, but not a mentor or a role model she found inspiring within the field. Research on K-12 superintendents (e.g., Brunner & Grogan, 2007), Austin's (2014) study of mid-level leaders suggested that mentors were an important part of leaders' transitions into and success in their roles, which was especially true for leaders of color. As leadership programs in ECE continue to be rare (Goffin & Daga, 2017), mentorship could be what is currently filling the gap and preparing individuals to lead the field at the state level.

The experiences of the three leaders featured here suggest that it might be common for state ECE leaders to be identified by those exiting the position, which could mean that working in specific roles or within a certain ECE network might result in better access to state ECE leaders and, therefore, potentially, a higher likelihood of learning about a position, getting asked to apply, and getting hired. If this is the case, having a better understanding of the pathways leaders travel through the field can lead to intentional efforts to diversity the feeder positions, such as public school district ECE leaders, and ECE networks allowing a more diverse pool of candidates for higher level leadership positions.

In seeking to professionalize the ECE workforce and align education and care for children younger than six with K-12, leaders seemed to strategically borrow strategies from K-12 colleagues. Molly emulated the K-12 style of leading, which she saw as

something preferable to what she had experienced while working in the ECE field prior to becoming a leader. In her desire to treat everyone the same, she adopted the dominant culture of professionalism, which she saw reflected in K-12, and saw this as a way to professionalize the field. Richelle performed professionalism in much the same way as Molly. She deferred to her K-12 colleagues and was protective of maintaining her expert status when in the room with them. Additionally, Richelle "suited up," which was a nod not only to the dominant culture she was mimicking, but then she dressed more informally for meetings with providers, allowing her to code switch or adopt behaviors to reflect different norms depending on what would be valued in the situation. Molly and Richelle aimed to be respected when meeting with ECE or K-12 colleagues, but Molly aimed to get ECE workforce to perform professionalism with her and Richelle shifted her own professional performance to match the audience. Sean tried to build bridges with K-12 by identifying common ground between their beliefs and practices and ECE. He then employed K-12 language to accomplish his ECE agenda, recognizing that if he used the ECE words his own credibility might be questioned and his voice ignored or discounted by his use of "touchy-feely words." While his ECE staff and networks recognized him as a "trusted" representative, he also seemed to sense that his position was precarious, as his K-12 colleagues also trusted him and assumed he was more similar to them than ECE.

While these three leaders are intentionally adopting and employing markers of professionalism, they are also, perhaps inadvertently, assimilating into the K-12 system. Aside from Molly, who made efforts to be consistent in her presentation across settings, how these leaders enacted being an "ECE state leader" changed based on their contexts. Again, these were strategic acts - to distance themselves from field-specific language, to

"act the part" and "dress the part" of being a state ECE leader, which meant different things depending on if you were meeting at the Department of Education or with a provider. While these may help leaders accomplish short-term goals for the field, it is unclear what the longer-term implications of these acts are. In their efforts to fight stereotypes or negative perceptions of ECE, are leaders unintentionally reifying or validating them? For instance, by using the K-12 language for educational concepts because the ECE language is devalued, does this reinforce the perception of the terms and will other leaders get the impression that ECE expertise is not required to lead the field? Leaders' identities further complicate this scenario as the choices made by Molly, who chose to eschew the toys and games she associated with a lack of professionalism in ECE at trainings, stands in contrast to the privilege Sean has of choosing whether he wants to include cutesy details in his presentations as a way of proving professional belonging in ECE.

Finally, as a White woman conducting this research, I brought my own "concealed standpoint" (Smith, 1999, p. 43) to my discussions with participants and my interpretations of their experiences (Deliovsky, 2017). The three participants chosen for this paper also identified as White and it often proved difficult for leaders to identify how their race had an impact on their experiences or identity as leaders, as their whiteness likely gave them privilege that was invisible, unacknowledged, or untroubled (Gallagher, 2000; Twine, 2000). "Whiteness as a particular racial location has only recently come under the critical researcher's gaze. Much work remains to be done in terms of excavating the terrain of whiteness as it relate[s] to qualitative research practices" (Best, 2003, p. 909). In ECE, which research suggests is a racially stratified field especially

concerning its leadership (Northey, 2018a; Whitebook et al., 2010; Whitebook et al., 2006a; Whitebook et al., 2006b), troubling the intersections of race and gender in research on leadership could help the field understand the barriers women and men of color face when navigating the ECE field.

Conclusion

This study used feminist theories and multiple data sources in an effort to illuminate how state leaders' race, gender, and other aspects of their identities influenced their leadership and experiences as state ECE leaders. Findings suggest that participating state ECE leaders felt their teaching experiences, mentors, and trainings helped shape their approaches to leading. Leaders tended to use relationship-based approaches to leading and described different strategies for getting their ECE vision enacted. Leaders' gender and age were easiest for leaders to reflect on regarding how their identities influenced their leadership experiences, which most likely reflected the female-dominated nature of the ECE profession. The privilege that state ECE leaders get due to their whiteness is something that was harder for them to reflect on with the same depth. This work was limited as it relied on leaders to self-report and the small sample size cannot be seen as generating results that can be generalized to the broader population of ECE leaders. However, the three cases do suggest the importance of continuing, as a field, to develop and advance a professional identity that does not discount the value of caring work and ECE. These conversations have mostly been limited to examining the work and professionalism with regards to ECE teachers and often focus on credentials (e.g., Brock, 2012; Moyles, 2001), but leaders, especially working at the state level, experience additional pressures to present as professionals. Additional research on how

those leading at the multi-site levels and higher conceptualize of leadership in ECE and their leadership styles can help the field further articulate a vision for ECE leaders concerning their preparation, approach, and whether or not ECE wants to assimilate to the dominant norms that become more present as leaders advance in their careers.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The roles and responsibilities of state ECE leaders are expanding (Goffin, 2013), but the field has not yet identified clear expectations for the preparation leaders need or the pathways members of the ECE workforce can travel into leadership positions. The purpose of this study was to learn more about the individuals leading ECE at the state level, their experiences in the field, the work they do in their leadership positions, and their understandings of leadership. The study focused on answering three questions: Who are state-level early education leaders and how did they get there?; How do state early education leaders describe their work as system leaders?; and How do state leaders define and describe leading ECE at the state level? Data to answer these questions was gathered using a survey distributed to the national universe of state ECE leaders and two semi-structured interviews conducted with ten purposefully selected state leaders. In this conclusion, I review the design of the study, discuss the study's findings and implications, offer suggestions for future research, and identify the study's limitations and significance.

Study Design

As little is known about state ECE leaders, this study used different methodologies to gain both a breadth and depth of understanding (Clark & Creswell, 2008) concerning who these leaders are and what their work entails. Quantitative methods were used to provide an overview of state ECE leaders and their experiences. Quantitative data was collected using a survey developed using themes from the ECE (e.g., Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Whitebook, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2010) and K-12 (e.g., Austin, 2014; Shakeshaft, 1989a) leadership literature. This survey was distributed electronically

to the population of state ECE leaders who were engaged in system building work and responsible for overseeing components of their state's ECE offerings (n=140). The survey had a response rate of 64% and yielded 89 participants across 46 states. Survey data was then analyzed using SPSS, with a description of the sample made before inferential statistics were used to explore differences and relationships between variables. Visual representations of participating leaders' ECE experiences were also made to identify common pathways into state ECE leadership positions.

Qualitative methods were then used to better understand the quantitative findings (Remler & van Ryzin, 2011) and gather first-hand accounts (Harding, 1987) and in-depth descriptions of state ECE leaders' work and experiences. Qualitative data was collected through two semi-structured interviews with ten state ECE leaders. This subset of leaders (n=10), were selected from the survey respondents (n=89) using a sampling strategy of maximum variation (Patton, 2002) in an effort to capture diverse perspectives. The protocols used for the two semi-structured interviews were developed using the ECE and K-12 leadership literature, feminist labor theories, and intersectionality. Interviews were conducted over the telephone at the leaders' convenience and varied in length from 25 to 98 minutes.

Interview data was analyzed in Dedoose. Data was sorted by research question. To address the second research question, data was first coded deductively using themes that had appeared in the literature used to theoretically frame the study or had been revealed in the quantitative findings. Data was then inductively coded to capture concepts that emerged (Patton, 2001). Once I felt I had developed a more finalized coding scheme, comprised of codes that were each defined and mutually exclusive (Creswell, 2013), I

went on to code the remaining leaders' transcripts to see if my codes held; if they did not, I refined the codes (by renaming or merging) in order to capture a larger or more nuanced idea. I looked for patterns across the data and relationships between codes to understand the nuances among leaders' experiences before, finally, outlining assertions based on my findings.

To address the third research question, three leaders were selected from the ten who had participated in interviews. The visual maps of all ten leaders' pathways were examined to select compelling cases where leaders' trajectories followed the most common route, offered commentary on the importance of setting auspice, or presented as an outlier. Leaders' time in the field, position, their leadership training, and the size of their state's preschool program (as represented by the percentage of four year olds served) were also considered. This resulted in three leaders being selected to serve as cases in a collective case study. The transcripts from their interviews and their survey data were combined into one file per leader and analyzed in Dedoose. Data analysis was first conducted within-case, by reading the leader's materials and coding inductively to identify key issues (Creswell, 2013). Deductive coding was then used to explore the data from the lens of my theoretical framework. I then looked for common patterns or themes across the three leaders' cases.

Three different strategies were used to help ensure the validity of the data analysis. First, the survey data allowed for some triangulation, or the corroboration, of the interview data through the use of multiple methods across time (Lather, 1991). Although data gathered through surveys and interviews relied on participants' self-reports, I was able to check participants' state-related data through other sources to help ensure the

credibility of any claims (Creswell, 2013). Second, I also participated in peer review, or group debriefing, throughout the research process and kept a research journal where I logged memos that captured my impressions, reactions, and evolving understandings. I also engaged in self-reflexivity and reviewed my research journal to promote self-awareness about my process and instances of possible bias where I may have influenced the research and when the research influenced me (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Finally, as qualitative research aims to better understand participants' experiences, leaders' voices were used in this paper whenever possible in an effort to share participants' first-hand accounts and support the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

The findings of this study provide insight regarding the pathways, work, and experiences of state ECE leaders, which can be used to improve the recruitment, preparation, and supports given to those who would like to pursue leadership positions in the field. Here the findings are presented by research questions.

Who are state ECE leaders and how did they get there? As the field is known to be a female dominated profession (IOM & NRC, 2012), it was not surprising that the majority of participants identified as female (89%). However, looking across participating state ECE leaders' demographics, as reported in paper one, findings do suggest that researchers' concerns regarding racial stratification in the field's leadership positions (Whitebook et al., 2010) might be valid. As 86% of participating leaders identified as White, there is a concern that the field's leadership does not reflect the at-risk populations that many ECE programs are designed to serve or the members of the workforce in childcare or Head Start settings, who tend to be more diverse (e.g., IOM &

NRC, 2012; Park et al., 2015). The literature on K-12 superintendents has found that race, gender, and sexuality (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 1999; Wallin & Crippen, 2007) can slow down or prevent individuals from achieving their career goals. While more data is needed on the demographics of the ECE workforce, especially beyond the teacher level, the pathways leaders traveled through the field suggest that more can be done to keep diverse leaders in the pipeline.

Participants' ECE experiences prior to becoming state leaders showed some common trends regarding how they came to be in their leadership positions. The most common pathways involved moving from being a lead teacher to either the leader of a site or working in multiple sites. Then individuals either transitioned into working at the state level or became a leader over multiple sites. While this pathway was the most common, participants' career trajectories were slowed down if they had been teachers, especially of infants and toddlers, or had worked in settings that did not allow for career advancement. Head Start and state-funded preschool programs seemed to offer more opportunities beyond site-level leadership compared to private or fee-based settings. These opportunities included work across multiple sites, for example as an education coordinator, or as a leader over multiple sites, such as the director of a district's public preschool program. Similar to trends in the K-12 literature, where men experience more career mobility and faster routes to leadership positions (Kim & Brunner, 2009), female participants spent more time en route to their leadership roles than men and their pathways through the field were more complicated.

How do state ECE leaders describe their work as systems leaders?

Participating state ECE leaders all engaged in system building work, but the different

histories of their state's preschool provision and organization of their state's infrastructure meant that their responsibilities and function varied. Echoing descriptions of center directors' (e.g., Aubrey, 2007; Bloom, 1998a; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) and mid-level leaders' work (e.g., Austin, 2014), participants felt their system building work was multi-faceted and interdisciplinary. Leaders who were interviewed described the different tasks and responsibilities they had to accomplish as they worked to develop and share a vision of early childhood for their state and work to create policies and systems. Leaders reported needing not just ECE expertise, but also bureaucratic and legislative knowledge so they could act strategically within the complex and often political contexts in which they worked. Austin (2014) found that mid-level ECE leaders also wanted help and additional training to navigate the political aspects of their work and this study's findings echo mid-level leaders' desire for mentorship and guidance, as the limited availability of appropriate training means that much of this learning occurs on the job and is context specific. Leaders in this study felt challenged by a lack of support to help them understand and navigate the different bureaucratic procedures of their agencies, departments, states, and the federal government. They also reported struggling with the limited authority of their positions and the lack of coherence and fragmentation within ECE.

These findings add to the existing body of work on state ECE leaders and, indeed, echo the findings of those reports regarding the skills needed (Coffman et al., 2011; Goffin, 2013) and the challenges of system building without support or buy-in to the vision (Goffin et al., 2011). However, the leaders in this study provided detailed accounts of the challenges caused by the field's different funding streams, such as describing how

meticulous they had to be when creating policies that could be implemented across auspice, and highlighted some of the unintended burdens of the field's fragmentation.

How do state leaders define and describe leading ECE at the state level? As the field begins to become more committed to differentiating between management and leading (e.g., Goffin & Daga, 2017), it was important to explore participating leaders' perceptions regarding their own leadership approaches and preparation. The varied pathways leaders took through the field and the dearth of ECE leadership preparation programs available (e.g., Goffin & Daga, 2017) meant that many leaders did not have formal training in ECE leadership. Of the three leaders whose cases were presented in paper 3, one participated in a leadership program focused on education, the second participated in one on public policy, and the third did not participate in an ECE leadership program at all. Each of these leaders reported experiencing some general leadership training in either previous jobs or their current roles, but only one leader, Sean, reported that these experiences influenced his leadership approach. Instead, these leaders credited mentoring and classroom quality training as helping to shape their leadership styles, which were often relationship-based and focused on elevating others and professionalizing the ECE workforce.

The second paper drew attention to how the positioning of the ECE field as "less than" K-12 (e.g., Ferguson & Folbre, 2000; Larkin, 1999) complicated participating leaders' system building efforts and paper 3 described how this positioning influenced the three leaders' behaviors. All three leaders described how they strategically worked to counter this positioning. Molly and Richelle both changed their behaviors to reflect the dominant culture of leadership seen in K-12, similar to research on female

superintendents (Skrla, 2000b; 2003). Molly emulated the K-12 style of interacting, trying to professionalize the ECE workforce by adopting K-12 norms. Richelle dressed more professionally, deferred to her K-12 colleagues, and used her voice intentionally in an effort to protect her "expert" status. Sean, as a White male, found his voice held more authority in K-12 settings and while he did not change his appearance, he changed his leadership approach as he attempted to "build bridges" with K-12 colleagues, by using K-12 language for ECE concepts. While research on similar performances of professionalism (Butler, 2004) has been examined in ECE (Osgood, 2011), they have not been done with state ECE leaders, who are navigating new systems of norms at the state level. Leaders' conceptions of ECE as a gendered profession (England, 2014) and their own gender identities also shaped the experiences that they had. The findings of paper 3 should be considered along with the findings of paper 1, regarding gender as something that slowed down and complicated participating leaders' career pathways. Together, these findings suggest that leaders' gender, in addition to race, age, and potentially other characteristics, such as sexuality, interplay with the female-dominated nature of the field in ways that should be explored further.

Implications and Future Research

The primary purpose of this study was to begin to build a more robust research base on state systems leaders and provide important insights into what types of preparation and professional development support these leaders need. This study accomplishes that goal by not only providing insight regarding the demographics and ECE career experiences of a national sample of state ECE leaders', but also provides in-depth accounts for a subset of the overall sample regarding the work systems leaders do,

the skills they need, and examines what it means to lead in ECE, a female dominated profession. Looking across all three papers, the findings suggest five implications for research, practice, and policy.

First, many of the underlying issues that have long plagued ECE, including those relating to funding streams, ad hoc investments (e.g., Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012), and equity issues within the workforce (e.g., Whitebook et al., 2014) continue to need attention. Participating leaders described their system building work as most often limited to surface-level work or short-term solutions that are unable to address the fragmentation of the field in significant ways to bring about change. Recently, there have been efforts to examine these issues more coherently, as a field (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2012; IOM & NRC, 2015; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018). State ECE leaders in this study described how their system building efforts were often only surface-level solutions due to the limited authority of their positions, both to reference to their inability to hold other agencies accountable and their lack of power to reshape the underlying, fundamental structures of the ECE field. The research to improve the quality and preparedness of the ECE workforce and explorations of the funding structures of ECE (IOM & NRC, 2015; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018) have proven to be conversation starters that have helped engage different stakeholders in finding agreement and, hopefully, working towards a solution. This study demonstrates that these efforts are not only important to the field, but are also necessary if state ECE leaders are expected to build early childhood and ECE systems in substantial ways.

Second, this study's findings suggest that more research is needed on how gender and race interplay with leaders' trajectories and work experiences. Given the small sample of this study it is not possible to draw assertions, especially concerning race, but for the participants in this study, gender influenced the lengths of their ECE pathways, the opportunities available to them, and, in some cases, male leaders reported getting differential treatment compared to their female colleagues. As paper one argues for the field to make a more concerted effort to recruit and support more leaders of color, the field should be wary of disproportionate numbers of male leaders. ECE and K-12 leadership have both been identified as gender stratified professions, with early education (as a profession) being labeled as female-dominated and K-12 leadership (specifically defined as superintendents and above) considered male-dominated (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Estimates of the ECE workforce suggest that the field is 90 – 98% female (IOM & NRC, 2012). Additionally, Whitebook et al.'s (2010) study of ECE infrastructure personnel found that 92% of all infrastructure staff identified as female, but only 85% of directors, suggesting that men were more likely to be in ECE leadership positions. The findings of this study suggest there may be a slightly larger percentage of men than is believed to comprise the broader ECE workforce, as 11% of survey respondents identified as male. Research on K-12 leaders demonstrates similar trends, with men disproportionately represented in leadership roles when compared to the field's female-dominated teaching workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Third, this study identifies the most common pathways leaders traveled en route to their state leadership positions, but the field needs to clearly articulate pathways to leadership so those interested in becoming leaders can plan their work experiences.

Findings from paper 1 suggest that if you teach infants and toddlers or you work in fee-based settings your pathway to leadership will be longer and involve more positions often resulting in leaders switching to a publicly-funded setting in order to access opportunities for advancement. Establishing a pipeline could also help recruit and support members of the ECE workforce who are interested in pursuing leadership positions at pivotal moments in their careers. The lack of racial diversity seen at the mid- and state levels (Whitebook et al., 2008a) of ECE leadership suggests that there are places along the pipeline where leaders of color are not able to move through. Knowing more about where these spaces are could allow for targeted support, perhaps in the form of mentoring opportunities or leadership training, to help prepare potential leaders for future positions and help them move forward in their careers.

Fourth, the findings of this study also identify the skills and expertise participating leaders felt were required to lead ECE at the state level. This information should be used to inform or develop leadership preparation programs at different leadership levels across the ECE system because, currently, leaders are arriving at their positions with different levels of preparation and experience (e.g., Austin, 2014). These programs should help leaders develop both ECE expertise and legislative and bureaucratic knowledge, as this study found that leaders needed to have an understanding of both and how the concepts worked together. Additionally, by agreeing on the content and skills necessary to lead, the field can also set expectations or criteria for the knowledge and experiences leaders must have, which could potentially help members of the ECE workforce advance into leadership positions rather than outsiders with little ECE experience.

Finally, state ECE leaders need more support in their roles. The findings of this study suggest that leaders currently have diverse educational backgrounds, varied experience in the ECE field, and limited training on leading in ECE beyond the center level. Therefore, until the field sets criteria or certification for its leaders they will need access to an array of additional supports and trainings that help them address gaps in their knowledge. Additionally, the findings from this study suggest that leaders also want state-specific support that helps them learn about the history of early childhood in their state (provision, regulations, and political support) and the legislative processes and political players of their state. As leadership in ECE evolves and new roles are created, support organizations for specific positions, similar to what the K-12 system has at both the national and state level (e.g., Superintendents Organization, State Principal and Superintendent Organization) should be created to give leaders access to targeted networks of other leaders. Finally, echoing other research in ECE (e.g., Austin, 2014; Coffman et al., 2011; Goffin, 2013) and K-12 (e.g., Brunner, 2000a; Grogan, 1996), findings suggest that mentors were instrumental in leaders' career trajectories and their ability to navigate political contexts in which they were working. Mentors provided meaningful guidance and support to leaders and these relationships should be encouraged as the ECE workforce has limited access to leadership programs or support networks at different points throughout the pipeline.

Limitations and Significance

This study obtained first-hand accounts of state-level ECE leaders' experiences, however it also has particular limitations. First, although efforts were made to corroborate information, the data was self-reported by participating leaders. Second, this study's

findings are not generalizable to all state ECE leaders or early childhood systems builders in the United States.

This study paves the way for future explorations of state ECE leaders and draws attention to the need for a more robust body of work on leadership in ECE. This work should focus on the pathways of leaders and efforts should be made to collect demographic data on the ECE workforce beyond those who care directly for children. Researchers can then identify leaky spaces in the ECE pipeline and design targeted supports to keep diverse members of the workforce interested in leadership positions advancing in the field. Additionally, more research is needed on the work that state ECE leaders do and the ECE networks that support them as they navigate politicized structures that they might not be prepared for. Research identifying how state's infrastructure, ECE policies and funding streams interact and documenting leaders' system building efforts would also help inform leaders and state policymakers who are interested in setting state ECE leaders' system building efforts up for success. Finally, this study suggests that gender, race, age, and, potentially, as it did not come up in this study, sexuality might work together to influence leaders' experiences. Research on leadership in ECE has examined neither how leaders' identities shape their work and decisions nor how the identity of the field as a gendered profession changes at the state level. The findings of this study suggest that ECE at the state level is transitioning to look like K-12, which won't work for childcare, home daycare, or, Head Start programs, potentially leading to additional fragmentation in the field. More research is needed to better understand how to prepare, support, and improve leaders within ECE as the field experiences new levels of representation and recognition.

This study addresses important gaps in the research on state ECE leaders, who have not been studied empirically at a national level. The findings of this study can be used by those who train and support state ECE leaders, such as Build or CEELO, and policy makers, who are relying on effective leaders to organize and carry out systems building efforts in their states, to address the challenges participating leaders reported. This study provides information that can be used to recruit and support members of the ECE workforce interested in leadership and inform preparation efforts. Additionally, the findings of this study will likely be of interest to other state ECE leaders who, my conversations with study participants suggest, are curious about the responsibilities and experiences of system building leaders in other states.

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Appendix A: Survey

This survey is part of Kaitlin Northey's doctoral dissertation entitled, **"**Leading from the top: A study of state early childhood systems leaders." You previously received a description of this study (including any potential risks and benefits of your participation) and the contact information of the researcher and the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research and Sponsored Programs staff via email. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns (Kaitlin.Northey@GSE.Rutgers.edu or 413-530-2205).

Participation in this survey is voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty.

This survey is designed to gather information about your career as a state early education leader, including any barriers or supports you experienced on your path to or in your current position, and your demographic information.

You are being asked to participate in this survey because you are (or were within the past ten years) a state-level early education leader. This survey should take you approximately 20 minutes to complete and consists of 21 questions.

Please know that all of your responses will be kept confidential and your name and state will not be used in any study reports or presentations.

By clicking "next" (the arrows at the bottom right of your screen) you consent to participate in this voluntary study.

Pathway To Being A State Early Childhood Leader

For this survey, “early childhood education” (ECE) is conceptualized as education and care experienced by children between the ages of birth and 8 years old.

Q1. How many years have you worked in the field of early childhood education?

Less than 1 year

1 to 4 years

5 to 10 years

11 to 15 years

16 to 20 years

21 to 25 years

26 to 30 years

30 or more years

Q2. The field of ECE encompasses many different roles and settings. Do you have experience TEACHING in an early education (birth through 8 years old) classroom setting?

Yes

No

(If participant selects “yes” on Q2, Q3 displays.)

Q3. Please select all of the early education teaching roles that you have held:

Lead Teacher: Infants/Toddlers (Children Ages Birth – 2)

Lead Teacher: Preschool (Children Ages 3 - 5)

Lead Teacher: Kindergarten (Children Ages 5 - 6)

Lead Teacher: First through Third Grade (Children Ages 6 -8)

Assistant Teacher: Infant/Toddler (Children Ages Birth – 2)

Assistant Teacher: Preschool (Children Ages 3 - 5)

Assistant Teacher: Kindergarten (Children Ages 5 - 6)

Assistant Teacher: First through Third Grade (Children Ages 6 – 8)

Home-based family child care provider: Infants/Toddlers (Children Birth – 2); Preschool (Children Ages 3 - 5); Kindergarten (Children Ages 5 -6); or First through Third grade (Children Ages 6 – 8).

For each item selected in Q3, relevant questions display for participants to answer:

The setting of the Infant/Toddler context where you were a Lead Teacher could be best described as a:

Tuition or fee-based preschool or child care center

State funded preschool setting

Early Head Start setting

Other

How long did you work as the Lead Teacher in an Infant/Toddler setting? (In Years)

The setting of the Preschool context where you were a Lead Teacher could be best described as a:

Tuition or fee-based preschool or child care center

State funded preschool setting

Head Start setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Lead Teacher in a Preschool setting (In Years)

The setting of the Kindergarten context where you were a Lead Teacher could be best described as a:

Tuition or fee based school

State funded elementary/primary school setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Lead Teacher in a Kindergarten setting? (In Years)

The setting of the First through Third grade context where you were a Lead Teacher could be best described as a:

Tuition or fee based school

State funded elementary/primary school setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Lead Teaching in a First through Third grade setting? (In Years)

The setting of the Infant/Toddler context where you were an Assistant Teacher could best be described as:

Tuition or fee based preschool or child care center

State funded preschool setting

Early Head Start setting

Other

How long did you work as the Assistant Teacher in an Infant/Toddler setting? (In Years)

The setting of the Preschool context where you were an Assistant Teacher could best be described as:

Tuition or fee based preschool or child care center

State funded preschool setting

Head Start setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Assistant Teacher in a Preschool setting? (In years)

The setting of the Kindergarten context where you were an Assistant Teacher could best be described as:

Tuition or fee based school

State funded elementary/primary school setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Assistant Teacher in a Kindergarten setting? (In Years)

The setting of the First through Third grade context where you were an Assistant Teacher could best be described as a:

Tuition or fee based school

State funded elementary/primary school setting

Other:

How long did you work as the Assistant Teacher in a First through Third grade setting? (In Years)

How many years were you a home-based family child care provider for:

Infants/Toddlers?

(Text box)

Preschoolers?

(Text box)

Kindergarteners?

(Text box)

First through Third grade children?

(Text box)

Q4. I'd like to know about your previous NON-TEACHING early care and education experience. Please tell me how long you worked in each of the following positions. (In Years)

Family Worker for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Family Worker for a state funded preschool:

Family Worker for Head Start:

Family Worker for a district:

Family Worker for other (include context and years):

Coach or Master Teacher for Head Start:

Coach or Master Teacher for a district:

Coach or Master Teacher for a region of your state:

Coach or Master Teacher for Other (Include context and years):

Assistant Director for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Assistant Director for a state funded preschool:

Assistant Director for a Head Start center:

Assistant Director for a district's preschool program:

Assistant Director for Other (Include context and years):

Director for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Director for a state funded preschool:

Director for a Head Start center:

Director for a district's preschool program:

Director for Other (Include context and years):

Assistant Principal for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Assistant Principal for a state funded preschool:

Assistant Principal for a Head Start center:

Assistant Principal for a district's preschool program:

Assistant Principal for Other (Include context and years):

Principal for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Principal for a state funded preschool:

Principal for Head Start:

Principal for a district's preschool program:

Principal of Other (Include context and years):

Educational Coordinator for a tuition or fee based preschool or child care center:

Educational Coordinator for a state funded preschool:

Educational Coordinator for Head Start:

Educational Coordinator for a district's preschool program:

Educational Coordinator for a region within your state:

Educational Coordinator for Other (Include context and years):

Early Care and Education Specialist for a district's preschool program:

Early Care and Education Specialist for a region within your state:

Early Care and Education Specialist for Other (Include context and years):

Assistant Superintendent of a district:

Assistant Superintendent of other (Include context and years):

Superintendent of a district:

Superintendent of Other (Include context and years):

Staff member at agency or state department (Include title and years):

Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (Include title and years):

Instructor or professor at a college or university (Include title and years):

Researcher at a college, university, or organization (Include title and years):

Head of other agency or state department (not your current job; Include title and years):

Other (Include title and years):

Other (Include title and years):

Please answer the following with information about your current position.

Q5. What is the title of your current position?

(Text box)

Q6. How long have you been working in your current position?

(Text box)

Q7. In your current position, what early care and education programs and/or policies are your responsible for overseeing?

(Text box)

Q8. Please describe your top 3 reasons for pursuing a leadership role in early education.

Once you have typed your responses, please rank them from 1 (representing MOST IMPORTANT) to 3 (representing LEAST IMPORTANT) by dragging and dropping the text entry bars.

1

2

3

Supports Experienced During Your Pathway To Become A State Early Education Leader

Q 9. Educational leaders report experiencing a number of factors that helped or supported them ON THEIR PATH to becoming leaders.

Please choose 5 prompts from below that you have encountered on your journey to your current job. Please rank these five items from 1 (representing what you found to be the

MOST HELPFUL) to 5 (representing those that were the LEAST HELPFUL).

Presence of a support system outside of your job

Presence of a support system within your job

Presence of mentor(s)

Mentoring others within your field

Belonging to professional networks

Positive working relations with district(s)

Positive working relations with school board(s)

Positive working relations with state agency(ies)

Positive working relations within early education field

Able to maneuver politically-charged environments

Knowledgeable about early childhood education

Support and encouragement from supervisors

Work with a team of experienced and qualified staff

Promoted to a leadership position

Experienced a "glass escalator" during your career (experienced by men in female-dominated fields, such as early education, who get promoted quickly and to higher ranks than women in male-dominated fields)

Perception that you would be a good leader due to your gender

Perception that you would be a good leader due to your race

Gained key experiences, education, or training

Nature of work was attractive as a career

Confidence in personal and professional capabilities

High levels of motivation or aspiration

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Barriers Experienced During Your Pathway To Become A State Early Education Leader

Q10. Educational leaders report experiencing a number of barriers or challenges that they have had to overcome ON THEIR PATH to becoming leaders.

Please choose 5 prompts from below that you have encountered on your journey to your current job. Please rank these five items from 1 (representing the MOST CHALLENGING) to 5 (representing the LEAST CHALLENGING).

Absence of a support system outside of your job

Absence of a support system within your job

Absence of mentor(s)

Lack of professional networks

Lack of positive working relations with district(s)

Lack of positive working relations with school board(s)

Lack of positive working relations with state agency(ies)

Lack of positive working relations within early education field

Lack of strategies for maneuvering politically-charged environments

Lack of early childhood education knowledge

Lack of support and encouragement by supervisors

Lack of experienced and qualified staff on team

Passed over for promotion for leadership position

Hit a "glass ceiling" during your career (a barrier that affects if, and how quickly, women and minorities advance in a profession)

Perception that you wouldn't be a good leader due to your gender

Perception that you wouldn't be a good leader due to your race

Lack of opportunities to gain key experiences, education, or training

Nature of work made it an unattractive career

Lack of confidence in personal or professional capabilities

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Supports In Your Work As A State Early Education Leader

Q11. Educational leaders report experiencing a number of factors that help or support them IN THEIR ROLES AS STATE EARLY EDUCATION LEADERS.

Please choose 5 prompts from below that you experience in your CURRENT job. Please rank these five items from 1 (representing what you found to be the MOST

HELPFUL) to 5 (representing those that were the LEAST HELPFUL).

Presence of a support system outside of your job

Presence of a support system within your job

Presence of mentor(s)

Mentoring others within your field

Belonging to professional networks

Positive working relations with districts

Positive working relations with school boards

Positive working relations with state agencies

Positive working relations within early education field

Able to maneuver politically-charged environments

Knowledgeable about early childhood education

Work with a team of experienced and qualified staff

Perception that you are a good leader due to your gender

Perception that you are a good leader due to your race

Gained key experiences, education, or training

Confidence in personal and professional capabilities

High levels of motivation or aspiration

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Barriers In Your Work As A State Early Education Leader

Q12. Educational leaders report experiencing a number of barriers or challenges that they have had to overcome IN THEIR ROLES AS STATE EARLY EDUCATION LEADERS.

Please choose 5 prompts from below that you have encountered in your current job. Rank these items from 1 (representing the MOST CHALLENGING) to 5 (representing the LEAST CHALLENGING).

Absence of support system outside of your job

Absence of a support system within your job

Absence of mentor(s)

Lack of professional networks

Lack of positive working relations with districts

Lack of positive working relations with school boards

Lack of positive working relations with state agencies

Lack of positive working relations within the early education field

Lack of strategies for maneuvering politically-charged environments

Lack of early childhood education knowledge

Lack of support and encouragement by supervisors

Lack of experienced and qualified staff on team

Passed over for promotion for leadership position

Hit a "glass ceiling" in current role (a barrier that affects if, and how

quickly, women and minorities advance in a profession)

Perception that you aren't a good leader due to your gender

Perception that you aren't a good leader due to your race

Lack of opportunities to gain key experiences, education, or training

Lack of confidence in personal and professional capabilities

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

State Early Childhood Leader's Demographic Information

Q13. What is your age?

(Text box)

Q14. What is your ethnicity? (You may choose more than one)

Asian/Pacific Islander

Black/African-American

Latino/Latina/Hispanic

White/Caucasian

Decline to state

Other (Please specify):

Q15. Please check all the languages you speak fluently:

English

Spanish

Mandarin and/or Cantonese

Tagalog

Vietnamese

German

Korean

Arabic

Russian

Other (Please specify):

Other (Please specify):

Q16. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Transgender

Other

Decline to state

Education and Training Experiences

Q17. Check ALL degrees that you have obtained during your career and write in your major or area of specialization.

CDA

AA/AS

BA/BS

MA

Ph.D. or Ed.D.

Other degree (Please specify degree AND content area specialty):

Q17a. If your Bachelor's Degree major was in Early Childhood, Child Development, Education, or Other (Education-related area), did you experience coursework related to public policy?

No college courses

Some college courses

Not applicable

Q17b. If your Bachelor's Degree major was in Public Policy, Psychology, Business, Math, Science, Health, or Other (Non-education related area), did you experience coursework in early childhood education, child development, or education during this degree?

No college courses

Some college courses

Not applicable

Q17c. If your Master's Degree was in Early Education, Child Development, Education, Educational Leadership, or Other (Education-related area), did you experience coursework related to public policy?

No graduate-level courses

Some graduate-level courses

Some undergraduate-level courses

Not applicable

Q17d. If your Master's Degree was in Psychology, Policy, Business, Math, Science, Health, or Other (non-education related area), did you experience coursework in early childhood education, child development education, or education leadership during this degree?

No graduate-level courses

Some graduate-level courses

Some undergraduate-level courses

Not applicable

Q17e. If your Doctoral Degree was in Early Education, Child Development, Education, Educational Leadership, or Other (Education-related area), did you experience coursework related to public policy?

No graduate-level courses

Some graduate-level courses

Some undergraduate-level courses

Not applicable

Q17f. If your Doctoral Degree was in Psychology, Policy, Business, Math, Science, Health, or Other (Non-Education related area), did you experience course work in early childhood education, child development, education, or educational leadership during this degree?

No graduate-level coursework

Some graduate-level coursework

Some undergraduate-level coursework

Not applicable

Q18. Are you currently participating in a degree program?

If yes, what degree are you working towards AND what is the area of specialty?

No

Yes

(Text box)

Q19. Have you been certified or licensed to TEACH at any point during your career?

If yes, please identify what AGES/GRADES you were/are certified or licensed to teach and identify the NATURE of the certification or license (e.g. General elementary education, Special education for secondary grades, K-8 art)

No

Yes

(Text box)

Q20. Please describe any certificates or licenses pertaining to EDUCATION LEADERSHIP or ADMINISTRATION you have obtained during your career:

Title of license:

Title of license:

Title of license:

Title of license:

Not applicable

Q21. Have you participated in a formal (either degree or non-degree) LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM?

No

Yes

If participants select yes on Q21, Q21a will appear.

Did your Leadership Training Program include:

Specialized training for early education?

Specialized training for public policy?

Specialized training in another subject area? If yes, please specify. (Text box)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the survey for my doctoral dissertation, "Leading from the top: A study of state early childhood systems leaders"!

Just a reminder that all of your responses will be kept confidential and your name and state will not be used in any study reports or presentations. Please contact me (Kaitlin

Northey) via email (Kaitlin.Northey@GSE.Rutgers.edu) or phone (413-530-2205) if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you!!

Appendix B: Protocol for Interview One

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. We are speaking today because your state identified you as the top early education leader. For this first interview, I am interested in learning more about your pathway to becoming a leader and your experiences as a leader within your state. I just want to remind you that I am audio recording this interview. Are you ready to begin?

Leaders' Career Trajectories

I'd like to begin by learning more about your path to becoming a high-level early education leader.

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background in early education.
    a. Where did you grow up?
    b. What motivated you to pursue early childhood education?
    c. Did you study early education in college? If not, what did you study?
2. Please tell me more about your path to become a state-level early childhood leader. Can you take me through your career from your first interest in early education and your first job in the field until your current position?
    a. What did you do next?
    b. What made you pursue that position?
    c. Where did you work next?
    d. How did you get that position?
    e. How did you get your current position?

   f. Were there any barriers (such as trouble getting education or training) that you had to overcome? How did you do so?

3. Reflecting back on your pathway to your current position, what relationships supported you and made moving up the career ladder attainable?
   a. Who were the most influential people in your life? Why or how so?
   b. Who were the most influential people in your career? Why or how so?
   c. Was there anything or anyone that you found 'opened doors' for you?
4. Who do you go to for advice regarding your career? Why?
5. I'd like you to think back to when you first started in your current role as a state leader. Can you describe what your transition into this role was like? What were the most important supports that you had access to? What was the most difficult thing for you to adjust to in the beginning?
   a. What emotions were you feeling?
   b. What anxieties did you have?
   c. What were you most excited about?
6. If you were mentoring someone interested in becoming a state level early education leader, what would you talk to him or her about? What advice would you give them? How would you help them along their pathway?
7. Reflecting back on the path you've taken to your current job, do you feel there were any doors of opportunity that were closed to you? Why do you think that? Can you tell me more about what happened?

8. Have there been any relationships with people you've worked with that have made it difficult for you to succeed? Can you tell me more about those? How did you navigate that situation? Were there any supports you wish you had had?
9. Research on early education leaders, especially women, has suggested it can be difficult to break into established networks. Have you experienced this? How did you build your professional network?
10. What was the best piece of advice you ever got? Who gave it to you?

State-Level Leadership

Now I'd like to talk more about the work that you do as a leader within (-insert the name of participant's state-).

11. Can you tell me about where your current position sits in your state's early childhood system?
    a. Who do you report to? Who do you oversee? Who do they oversee?
12. Can you describe how early education fits into the organization of your state's department of education?
    a. Is there a separate department or sub-department for early education?
    b. Is there a feel that the early education staff is isolated or integrated into the larger department?
13. What ages and grades are you responsible for? Who is responsible for the other areas of early childhood education?
    a. Who oversees birth through kindergarten?
14. How would you describe the relationship between you and the leader who oversees elementary education for your state?

a. What work has gone into forging this relationship?

15. How is collaborating with this person encouraged and supported, or not?

I'd like to know more about your work as a systems leader.

16. How would you describe an average day (or a recent day) that you have experienced as a state leader?
    a. What activities do you have to do?
    b. Who do you need to collaborate with?
    c. What are the kinds of decisions you have to make regularly?
17. Have there been any aspects of this job that were unexpected?
    a. Can you share an example? Why was this unexpected for you?
18. What supports are in place to support your work as an early education leader?
    a. Are there any resources (e.g. car, extra administrative assistant) that you have access to?
    b. Are there any people in your early education network that act as mentors?
    c. Is there any professional development or training opportunities that you have access to?
19. What are some barriers or roadblocks you experience as a state early education leader? How do they prevent you from doing your work? Can you give me specific examples?
20. What type of skills and expertise do you believe are necessary to be a state-level systems leader? How did you gain these skills or areas of expertise?

a. Were there any specific people or experiences that helped you develop these skills? For instance, did you have a mentor within or outside of the early education field?
b. Have you had access to any professional development opportunities that help you continue to develop as a state leader?
c. In what ways does your state support your work as a state leader?
d. When you first took the job, was there anyone to guide you?

21. What experiences from your career path helped you be the leader you are today?
22. Is there anything you wish you had had access to (at any point in your career) that could have better prepared you for your current role? How would having that experience have made a difference for you?
23. If you had unlimited power to make any changes to improve your current position, what would you wish for?

Thank you for participating in this interview. That's the end of the first interview. I really appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions and share your experiences with me. When would you like to speak again for the second part of the interview?

Appendix C: Protocol for Interview Two

It was wonderful to speak with you during our first interview. I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in the second part of the interview. Last time, we spoke about how you became a state leader and what your current position entails. For this interview, I would like to revisit what you do as a systems leader and discuss the politics of your work. That means I'm going to ask you some questions about challenges and how you resolve them. But I'm also going to ask you about how your race and gender influence the work you do and, perhaps, make it difficult. I just want to remind you that I am audio recording this interview. Are you ready to begin?

Leadership Approach

1. I want to begin by asking you to think back over your time as a state systems leader and identify a particular time when you felt it was difficult to be the leader that you wanted to be. Perhaps a moment when you were challenged and you had to adjust your approach to leading.
    a. Can you tell me more about that?
    b. Who was involved in that situation?
    c. What was said?
    d. Where were you?
2. What four words would you use to describe yourself as a leader?
    a. How would you describe your leadership style?
    b. How would you describe the relationship between you and those you lead?

3. What activities or trainings helped you develop your current leadership approach? When did you experience those trainings? How did they help you?
4. System building, as you know, is very complex; early education, in particular, has a lot of separate layers and networks that you have to be able to coordinate with as a state leader. How do you navigate through these different systems and work with the myriad of players involved in early education (from policy makers to agency personnel)? Can you give me an example? How did you learn to do this?
5. The field has not come to a common understanding of what it means to lead in early education. How would you describe *leadership* in early education at the state-level? How is it different from leading at other levels in early education? How is it different than leading in the K-12 system?

Intersectionality and Leadership

There is extensive literature on how race and gender affect leaders, especially superintendents, in K-12 education, but there are few studies on early education leaders and no studies on state-level early education leadership. I'm curious to learn more about your experiences. If there is a question that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know and I will move on to the next question.

6. What does it mean for you to be a state leader in a profession that is more often associated with caring and nurturing, or what some people consider "women's work", rather than education? How do you think the positioning of early education as women's work affects your K-12 colleagues' views of you or your work? Why?

    a. Is this something that you find empowering or limiting? Why?

7. How does the positioning of the field as women's work influence how you lead? In what ways do your interactions with colleagues from within the early education field differ from those with your colleagues in the K-12 education system? How do you prepare for interactions with early education colleagues versus those from the K-12 system?
    a. Are there any differences in how you present yourself?
    b. Are there any differences in how you express yourself?
8. How did your identity as a (-use participant's race and gender identify-) influence your path to become a state early education leader? Can you share an example? How did you handle that?
    a. Why do you think your gender and race did *not* influence your journey?
9. On your path to becoming a state-level early education leader, were your peers similar to you concerning their race and gender? Why do you think that was the case? How did this influence your feelings about the field?
10. As a state-level early education leader, are your peers similar to you concerning their race and gender? Why do you think that is the case? How does this influence your feelings about the field?
11. How do you find that your race and gender interplay with the work you have to do as a leader? Can you give me some examples from your career pathway and in your current work?
    a. Can you tell me more about that?

12. As someone who is familiar with the needs and struggles of children and families across your state, how does your race and gender influence the way you lead, or your approach to leadership?
    a. Can you share an example?
    b. How do your background or experiences influence the work you do?
13. Does your race and gender influence your priorities concerning what the children of your state need? What else influences your priorities concerning early education services in your state?
14. Does who you are as a person make being a leader easy for you? Can you give me an example?
15. How has who you are as a person made being a leader difficult for you? Can you give me an example?
16. What internal challenges or pressures do you experience that prevent you from leading the way you want to? How have you tried to overcome them? Do you feel you were successful? Why or why not?
17. What external challenges or pressures do you experience that prevent you from leading the way you want to? How have you tried to overcome them? Do you feel you were successful? Why or why not?
18. If you were mentoring a young, (-add participant's race and gender identity-) interested in becoming a state level early education leader, what would you talk to him or her about? What advice would you give them?

Thank you for your patience and for being willing to reflect on your experiences and share them with me. I only have some closing questions for you.

19. Is there anything you want the general public, researchers, or policy makers to know about state early education leaders?
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences or your work as a state-level leader?

That concludes our second interview and I can't thank you enough for sharing your experiences and time with me.