

**EARLY CHILDHOOD CHAMPIONS:  
Exceptional Administrators of School-Based Programs  
Tom Schultz, Bonnie Arnold, Judy David, Therese Keegan, and Katherine Fraser, 1997**

**Overview**

This report is the fourth in a series of publications by the National Association of State Boards of Education about creating high quality educational programs for young children. It focuses on public school-based programs for young learners starting in preschool and extending through the early elementary school grades. It specifically analyzes the important role of public school administrators who are improving the way that young children are educated. It also discusses the growing influence of early childhood principles on educational practices in elementary schools.

**The Role of School Administrators in Supporting Effective Programs for Young Learners**

- a. Many innovative school reform efforts will fail over time. This study argues that the quality of leadership is a major factor when attempting to initiate a reform. Principals are both administrative as well as symbolic leaders who set a tone and a climate for their schools.
- b. It is important for administrators to encourage a 'child-initiated' learning strategy. Child-initiated classes recognize that children are active learners and expect them to move around, interact, work and choose projects to accomplish alone or in groups.

**Title 1 as an Engine for Comprehensive School Reform**

- a. Many districts typically use Title 1 funds to establish 'pull-out' programs, in which specialists take children out of their regular classrooms for separate remedial instruction. However, the most effective schools have stopped using this strategy and have begun to instead improve teaching and learning for all students in elementary school classrooms.

**Early Childhood Leads the Way**

There are four main elements of a good early childhood education program:

1. An appropriate curriculum and engaging instructional practice
2. An authentic assessment of children's progress
3. Ongoing staff development
4. Public support and parent involvement

**Conclusion**

Leadership is idiosyncratic, and as such, all administrators develop their own styles and approaches for dealing with their jobs, the people around them, and their communities. All of the administrators surveyed for this study have learned how to work successfully in a particular context. In taking everything into consideration, several characteristics stand out as qualities of effective, successful leaders:

1. Working from strongly held beliefs about children, families and schools
2. Skillfully engaging the participation and support of others
3. Being skilled in managing change
4. Being a personal model for others

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