


**Superintendents & Early Childhood Education:  
Leadership at a Crossroads**

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**+ Why Superintendents and Early Childhood Education?**



- Pressures on public schools to close the achievement gap (NCLB)
- Evidence that high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs can support closing the gap
- Little, if any, information exists related to superintendents and ECE

## + Why Superintendents and ECE? Rationale



- Superintendents are leaders of educational institutions
- They are in positional authority in school districts, however...

a large portion of research related to educational leaders is about principals, not superintendents.

## + Research Questions



- How do superintendents view the current status of pre-kindergarten programs in their districts?
- What are superintendents' perspectives on early childhood education in the context of K-12 public education and related school policies?
- In what ways do superintendents describe their role in shaping the development of early childhood policy?
- What information do superintendents use when making decisions about implementing early childhood education programs in their own districts?

## + Methods

### ■ Sample

- 332 Minnesota Superintendents
- 174 surveys returned, 166 from Superintendents
- 50% Rate of return

### ■ Survey

- Paper survey mailed March 2009
- 24 questions-multiple choice, open-ended, demographic
- Covered questions related to ECE in the areas of current programming, issues & challenges, perceptions, beliefs and opinions.

## + Current Status of ECE Programs

- The majority of superintendents reported having some type of pre-K program in their district.
- Almost 70% reported using state 'general aid' funds to support pre-K programs; rural districts were more likely to use state funds while suburban/urban districts were more likely to use federal funds.
- Superintendents ranked "accelerating children's social, emotional, and cognitive development to become school-ready" as the greatest benefit of their pre-K programs 2:1 over other benefits listed in the survey.

## + Survey Question

Please rank and check the <u>three</u> greatest benefits Pre-Kindergarten programs provide <i>in your district</i> .	Level of Benefit		
	Greatest	Second Greatest	Third Greatest
Accelerates children's social, emotional, and cognitive development to become school ready.	41.3%	15.2%	19.2%
Saves district expenses in the long-term by decreasing remediation and special education costs.	10.7%	19.2%	13.9%
Helps boost student achievement.	27.3%	15.2%	19.9%
Reduces the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers.	12.0%	15.9%	17.2%
Increases student interest in school/learning.	4.0%	9.9%	14.6%
Reduces placement of children in special education.	2.7%	12.6%	11.3%
Reduces need to retain students in the primary grades.	1.3%	4.0%	2.6%
Provides a safe place for children during the day.	0.7%	7.9%	1.3%

## + Superintendent Perceptions of pre-K Programs

- In general, Superintendents agreed that....
  - All children should receive some type of formal education experience prior to kindergarten entrance
  - pre-K programs should be offered to all children rather than only targeted programs
  - There were not priorities more important than pre-K programs when considering resource allocation

## + Superintendent Perceptions of pre-K Programs

### ■ Superintendents perceptions also differed....

- Supts. from larger districts were more likely to agree that pre-K should be offered to targeted populations (low income, ELL) while those from smaller districts reported it should be offered to any interested family.
- Supts. who agreed that pre-K should be offered to 3- & 4-year olds considered low income or ELL were more likely to agree that children need to be formally educated prior to age 5.
- Supts. who agreed that pre-K was an important funding priority were more likely to agree that schools should provide pre-K programs to three- and four-year olds identified as low income or ELL.

## + Results—Superintendents role in policy....

■ Q: I have the primary responsibility for developing education policy proposals in my district:

- Yes: 76%
- No: 23%

■ Q: I have the primary responsibility for developing **early childhood education** policy proposals in my district:

- Yes: 40%
- No: 60%

## + Results—Superintendents role in policy....

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Q: I have promoted for early childhood education policy to be put on my school board's agenda in the last two years:</li> <br/> <li>▪ Yes: 52%</li> <li>▪ No: 48%</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Q: Early childhood education policy has been a critical topic for my district's school board in the last two years:</li> <br/> <li>▪ Yes: 36%</li> <li>▪ No: 65%</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## + Survey Question

**I have participated in the following activities in the last 12 months related to early childhood education policy. *Select all that apply.***

Called a MN legislator representing my school district	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent a letter to a legislator	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent an email to a legislator	<input type="checkbox"/>
Testified at the legislature	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spoken with local business groups/leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written an article that was published in a professional journal or magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>
Become a member of or renewed a membership to an early childhood professional organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
Become a member of or renewed a membership to an educational administrative organization that has early childhood education issues on its agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>

## + Results—Superintendents role in policy....

- Q: I have participated in the following activities in the last 12 months related to early childhood education policy:
  - Called a MN legislator representing my school district: **54%**
  - Spoken with local business groups/leaders: **46%**
  - Sent an email to a legislator: **41%**
  - Sent a letter to a legislator: **23%**
  - Testified at the legislature: **7%**

## + Survey Question

Please rank and check the three most important roles the federal government should have in pre-kindergarten education:

	Most important Role <i>(select one)</i>	Second Most important role <i>(select one)</i>	Third Most important role <i>(select one)</i>
Provide federal funding for districts to establish and expand quality programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish measures or benchmarks for quality programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide incentives to improve program quality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide tools to improve program quality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disseminate best practices research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide funding for joint training and professional development for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3 teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage alignment of early education content standards with K-12 academic content standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Require assessments for children in Pre-Kindergarten programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## + Results—Superintendents and the role of government....

- Q: Please rank and check the three most important roles the federal government should have in pre-kindergarten education.
- Items ranked as Most Important:
  - Provide federal funding for districts to establish and expand quality programs: **84%**
  - Provide funding for joint training and professional development for pre-K through Grade 3 teachers: **28%**
  - Disseminate best practices research: **22%**

## + Survey Question

How much influence has each of the following had in your own decision making related to early childhood education policy?

	A great deal of influence	Moderate influence	Little influence	No influence
Individual School Board Members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Agency Administrators	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media Coverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
County Agency Administrators	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School District Early Childhood Administrators	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elementary Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-Kindergarten Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research information related to outcomes in early childhood education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal knowledge about Pre-Kindergarten programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal experiences with Pre-Kindergarten programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Results—Superintendents' decision-making is influenced by...

- Q: How much influence has each of the following had in your own decision making related to early childhood education policy?
  - Early Childhood Administrators: **62%**
  - pre-K Staff: **57%**
  - Research information about ECE: **53%**
  - Personal Knowledge about pre-K programs: **47%**
  - Personal Experiences with pre-K programs: **43%**
  - Parents: **39%**
  - Principals: **38%**
  - Individual School Board Members: **21%**



## Results—Superintendents role in policy....

There was a significant relationship between certain types of influence in superintendents' decision making and whether they performed some action related to EC policy;

that is.....

the more a superintendent was influenced by a particular 'entity', the more likely they were to engage in one or more activities related to legislators, business leaders, or EC organizations.

## + Results—Superintendents role in policy....

Area of Influence	Correlation Coefficient
Early Childhood Administrators	.063
Pre-Kindergarten Staff	-.061
Individual School Board Members	.195*
Parents	.172*
Principals	.204*
Research Information about ECE	.186*
Personal Knowledge about pre-K Programs	.211**
Personal Experiences with pre-K programs	.227**
Media Coverage	.238**

Spearman Rho; \* $p=.05$ , \*\* $p=.01$

## + Summary

### ■ Superintendents.....

- believe that children should receive some types of formal pre-K experience before kindergarten entrance;
- believe that accelerating children's social, emotional, and cognitive development to become school ready is the most important benefit of the pre-K programs in their districts;
- disagree about to whom pre-K services should be directed; sometimes this is related to the size or location of the district in which they serve;
- believe that government has a role in supporting ECE through funding and disseminating research findings; and
- are influenced by multiple resources for making decisions related to ECE, including research and personal experience.

## + Summary

### ■ Finally....

What happens in the 'real world' of superintendents (i.e., personal experiences & knowledge, media) appears to have a larger effect on the number of activities in which they engage related to contacting legislators about early childhood policy issues than the people whom they say influence their decision making.