

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS

IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Palm Beach County, Florida





The mission of the Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education at Palm Beach Community College is to provide the child care workforce of Palm Beach County with a comprehensive approach to career development in the field of early education. The Institute has a special interest in providing education and training opportunities consistent with the needs of professionals who work in the programs for children and youth.

A major factor in achieving the goal of excellence is having talented, knowledgeable, and committed leadership at the center's helm. Researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill state, "The performance of the program director, particularly as it relates to providing leadership in program functioning at the administrative level and providing high quality supervision and feedback, predicts program quality" [1].

Since 2006, Palm Beach Community College and the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County have collaborated to specify core competencies. The premier effort resulted in the development of **CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS**. In 2007, two initiatives followed, resulting in **TRAINER-TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS** and **COACHING CORE COMPETENCIES FOR CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS**. This booklet, **CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS**, is aimed at those professionals in the field who hold a management and leadership role. It has been developed because quality care and education for children and youth is more than a concept. It is an obligation and a requirement.

This booklet, and the entire collection, could not have been completed without the dedication and commitment of many people. We acknowledge all of those individuals for their contributions to this core competency initiative. Special thank you to Dr. Paulette Ebbs who oversaw the development of these Core Competencies. And a special recognition to all Directors for their continuous dedication to improving the quality of care and education for children and youth in Palm Beach County.

To request copies of the
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IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS**
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What is the purpose of the Core Competencies for Directors?

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS was developed to supplement the existing competencies both for early childcare and youth workers. These new competencies are needed for effective administration of programs for children and youth. They are based on local and national research, and draw heavily from work done in several states: Delaware, Pennsylvania, Kansas/Missouri, Illinois, New York, and Nevada to name a few [4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9]. Similar competencies developed by universities and professional organizations committed to early care and education, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children [10], were examined. Competencies in the general area of management were explored. In addition, a dedicated and tireless committee helped to select, shape, and build consistency in this final set of management core competencies.

What are the Key Assumptions?

The CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS are anchored to a set of assumptions that guide their use:

- ◆ Research consistently reports that competent directors are essential to a successful program for children and families [1].
- ◆ Effective administration of a center requires a strong foundation in child development and education as well as business and management knowledge [11].
- ◆ Managerial functions relate to the orchestration of tasks and the design of systems to carry out the program's mission. Leadership requires that managers have the vision to focus on the larger picture, anticipate trends, and set new goals [11].
- ◆ The role of the director is multifaceted and dynamic. Though all competencies may not be required in a particular job, directors should strive to acquire all the skills and knowledge reflected in the competencies.
- ◆ Competencies are emergent and develop over time with experience, education, and intention [4].
- ◆ Competencies related to training and trainers and the coaching competencies may be needed by directors depending upon their job responsibilities.



What is the role of the Director?

For the purposes of this booklet, the term ‘director’ is selected to describe the role of the person or the team responsible for the day-to-day operation, supervision, and administration of the program and for planning, implementing, and evaluating. It is a broad role, requiring leadership and oversight of the place, the program, and the people. ‘Director’ is inclusive and represents a variety of titles used in programs for children and youth to describe the person on the front line: director, manager, curriculum specialist, supervisor, executive director, principal, coordinator, family child-care provider, or administrator.

Like the term ‘director’, the word ‘program’ is also inclusive of various environments such as corporate centers, family homes, schools, afterschool programs, and child-care centers. As described earlier, the responsibilities of the director vary according to the needs of the program. Numerous factors shape the work of the director in Palm Beach County: the age and background of the children enrolled, the services provided, the philosophical orientation of the program, the local sponsorship of the center, the size of the program, the accrediting agency, and so on. Depending on the structure of the program, a director may not use all of the core competencies in his/her current job, but all are relevant for continuing professional development as a director in this field.

Why is it important to establish Core Competencies for Directors?

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS and **CORE COMPETENCIES FOR THE AFTERSCHOOL PRACTITIONER** describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be successful in working with children and families. **THE CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS** describe the additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in a management role.

Competencies are measurable and observable skills that are organized around Core Knowledge Areas, a set of content areas that define what directors should know and understand in order to operate a quality program. Distributing learning across all core knowledge areas helps professionals build a balanced approach to providing quality education to children and youth.

- ◆ Core competencies define what directors need to know and be able to do to provide excellent services and operate high quality programs for children and youth.
- ◆ Core competencies provide guidelines and priorities for education and training programs to meet the needs of directors in the field.
- ◆ Core competencies establish a standard for directors in settings that serve children and youth.
- ◆ Core competencies permit consistency among directors, regardless of the differences in their work settings.

How can the Core Competencies for Directors be used?

- ◆ Competencies provide a tool for self-assessment so directors can measure their levels of skill in each competency
- ◆ Competencies can drive the design of courses, workshops and trainings
- ◆ Competencies help create job descriptions for directors
- ◆ Personal and professional growth plans can be designed around the competencies
- ◆ Competencies can be considered as a basis for compensation incentives
- ◆ Competencies can be linked to career pathways leading to qualifications, degrees and credentials
- ◆ Researchers can study the link between director competencies and child/youth outcomes

The Director Credential in Florida

In order to improve the quality of education opportunities for children and youth, more and more states are requiring higher standards of care. Since 2003, Florida has required a Director Credential in order to operate a program [2]. This credential brings higher status and recognition for administrators, increases their knowledge and skill, lends credibility to the profession, and improves the overall quality of programs.

The credential is a comprehensive program consisting of educational and experiential requirements at three levels: Level I, Level II, and the Advanced Level. All levels include competency-based coursework in one or more of these broad curriculum areas: Special Needs; Child Care Management; Organizational Leadership; Financial and Legal Issues, and Education Programming. Courses are offered at many accredited post-secondary institutions throughout Florida. (For more information about the credential requirements, contact Palm Beach Community College at 561-868-3300)

There is intentional alignment between the requirements of Florida's Director Credential and the competencies in this booklet. The competencies supplement the broad range of knowledge required for the credential by specifying skills that define and shape the director's activities. The articulation of the specific management competencies in this booklet is a further step toward quality, consistency, and professionalism among directors.



WHAT ARE THE SIX CORE KNOWLEDGE AREAS?

THE CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS are organized around six core knowledge areas. All of the competencies are relevant for continuing professional development as a director in this field; however individual programs may not require a director to use all of the competencies. Acquiring knowledge about the core competencies can promote growth and development both for the director and for the organization

CORE AREA 1

ORGANIZATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND PROGRAMMING:

Directors are role models. Staff members look to the director to set the course, to create the tone of the program, and to build the best learning community. Directors incorporate programming that is based on best practices in education, and they involve all stakeholders in program improvement.

CORE AREA 2

FISCAL AND LEGAL:

Directors need to conduct the financial matters central to the program. Budgeting, cash flow management, grant writing, and fundraising may be required. Additionally, directors need a working knowledge of the many regulatory systems governing the operation of all aspects of the facility and the program services.

CORE AREA 3

PERSONNEL:

Critical to program excellence is a qualified and motivated staff. The ability to hire, motivate, supervise, and evaluate employees is an essential component of the director's role. Creating a working environment that builds loyalty requires effective staff development, fair performance appraisal, and appropriate incentives and benefits such as career advancement opportunities.

CORE AREA 4

HEALTH, SAFETY, NUTRITION, AND EXERCISE:

Keeping children and staff safe and healthy is a fundamental requirement of any facility. The director's job is to ensure that policies designed to promote sound health, safety, nutrition, and exercise practices are effectively implemented.

CORE AREA 5

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS:

Programs need partnerships with families and with members of the community. Directors must know their families, advocate on their behalf, and build alliances to ensure that children and families have the opportunities they need to be successful.

CORE AREA 6

LEADERSHIP:

Leadership requires that directors see beyond the day-to-day concerns of program operations. They constantly help the program clarify its values and live its vision. They influence within and beyond their program, reaching out to the profession at large and the well-being of children/youth in general.

CORE AREA 1: ORGANIZATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND PROGRAMMING

Directors are role models. Staff members look to the director to set the course, to create the tone of the program, and to build the best learning community. Directors incorporate programming that is based on best practices in education, and they involve all stakeholders in program improvement.

DIRECTORS

administer an effective organizational structure.

- 1A1. Create an inclusive, bias-free, and diverse environment that values reflective thinking and an exchange of professional ideas
- 1A2. Establish effective communication and decision-making structures with program staff and other stakeholders
- 1A3. Employ effective skills in group process, team building, and conflict resolution
- 1A4. Develop the strategic plan for the program and implement goals and objectives into daily practice
- 1A5. Integrate the code of ethics into practice, policies, and instruction.
- 1A6. Model ethical conduct as it relates to the field and to stakeholders
- 1A7. Use safe and effective technology for communications and program management
- 1A8. Develop targeted marketing strategies and materials using a variety of media

DIRECTORS

implement developmentally appropriate programming.

- 1B1. Develop and implement a curriculum based on principles of child development, best practices, and early learning, and afterschool standards
- 1B2. Evaluate the center and programs and use results for program improvement
- 1B3. Select appropriate informal and formal child/youth assessments and guide staff in their use
- 1B4. Design and implement written policies for using appropriate positive child/youth guidance

CORE AREA 2: FISCAL AND LEGAL

Directors need to conduct the financial matters central to the program. Budgeting, cash flow management, grant writing, and fundraising may be required. Additionally, directors need a working knowledge of the many regulatory systems governing the operation of all aspects of the facility and the program services.

DIRECTORS
are fiscally responsible.

- 2A1. Develop written fiscal policies and procedures following generally accepted business practices and basic accounting principles and that assure compliance with applicable guidelines
- 2A2. Develop and operate within a balanced budget
- 2A3. Prepare and present budget and business reports to appropriate entities
- 2A4. Apply concepts of budgetary projection, including sliding scale policies and fee policies
- 2A5. Develop a compensation structure and manage payroll
- 2A6. Manage the purchase and maintenance of supplies, materials, and equipment
- 2A7. Manage county, state, and federal reimbursement funds
- 2A8. Identify available financial resources at federal, state, and county levels
- 2A9. Engage in effective grant writing, grant management, and evaluation
- 2A10. Develop and implement a fundraising plan driven by program needs and philosophy

DIRECTORS
comply with legal regulations and standards.

- 2B1. Adhere to all applicable federal, state, and county laws, codes, and regulations as they relate to: family law; child custody; confidentiality; child neglect and abuse; non-discriminatory practices; classroom ratios and class size; labor laws, Americans with Disabilities Act; Occupational Safety and Health Administration; cyber safety; religious exemptions, etc.
- 2B2. Comply with program policy, liability, and licensing regulations
- 2B3. Implement strategies for working cooperatively with regulatory agencies

CORE AREA 3: PERSONNEL

Critical to program excellence is a qualified and motivated staff. The ability to hire, motivate, supervise, and evaluate employees is an essential component of the director's role. Creating a working environment that builds loyalty requires effective staff development, fair performance appraisal, and appropriate incentives and benefits such as career advancement opportunities.

DIRECTORS

oversee personnel.

- 3A1. Develop and implement written personnel policies that comply with applicable laws and regulations and align with best practices
- 3A2. Coordinate and administer benefits program for employees
- 3A3. Develop and maintain staffing patterns that provide consistency and continuity of care
- 3A4. Develop a system to manage and maintain personnel records
- 3A5. Write effective job descriptions using core competencies and use these in recruiting, hiring, supervising, and evaluating personnel
- 3A6. Create a positive and proactive work environment that supports staff
- 3A7. Implement policies and procedures for recruiting, hiring, evaluating, and terminating staff

DIRECTORS

commit to staff development.

- 3B1. Incorporate a collaborative professional development model using core competencies that helps staff self-evaluate, set goals, embrace learning opportunities, and evaluate their growth
- 3B2. Use professional development plans to develop talent, and use the information for retention and succession planning
- 3B3. Develop a reward/recognition plan related to performance and professional development
- 3B4. Develop a plan for ongoing staff development based on the core competencies
- 3B5. Supervise, coach, and mentor staff in a way that maximizes capacity and program quality
- 3B6. Support staff in their pursuit of various career pathways in the field of education and share knowledge of formal and informal training and education possibilities to encourage their professional ambitions

CORE AREA 4: HEALTH, SAFETY, NUTRITION, AND EXERCISE

Keeping children/youth and staff safe and healthy is a fundamental requirement of any facility. The director's job is to ensure that policies designed to promote sound health, safety, nutrition, and exercise practices are effectively implemented.

DIRECTORS

maintain systems related to health, safety, nutrition, and exercise practices.

- 4A1. Evaluate the facility for meeting county, state, and national standards
- 4A2. Adhere to health requirements as defined by state codes for children and staff and maintain necessary records
- 4A3. Develop and implement written policies and procedures to ensure a healthy and safe environment for children and staff
- 4A4. Develop and implement an emergency preparedness plan to include policies and procedures that address staff training, maintenance of emergency supplies and equipment, and the continuation of business
- 4A5. Develop procedures to ensure that state and federally mandated Child Abuse and Neglect Regulations are followed
- 4A6. Create menus that provide a variety of foods and comply with nutritional regulations
- 4A7. Plan and monitor a system for sanitary preparation and food service in compliance with all regulations
- 4A8. Plan and monitor a system to ensure healthy children/youth through exercise

CORE AREA 5: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Programs need partnerships with families and with members of the community. Directors must know their families, advocate on their behalf, and build alliances to ensure that children and families have the opportunities they need to be successful.

DIRECTORS

promote their programs and build alliances on behalf of children and families.

- 5A1. Develop collaborations with agencies and community resources to meet the needs of children and families
- 5A2. Incorporate all aspects of the cultural diversity of the community in comprehensive services
- 5A3. Design and use multiple strategies to involve families in the program
- 5A4. Explore key issues, barriers, and resources for working with families and local schools to develop school readiness and transition strategies

CORE AREA 6: LEADERSHIP

Leadership requires that directors see beyond the day-to-day concerns of program operations. They constantly help the program clarify its values and live its vision. They influence within and beyond their program, reaching out to the profession at large and the well-being of children/youth in general.

DIRECTORS

**influence their program,
the people, and the
profession to achieve
excellence.**

- 6A1. Articulate the program's vision, mission, and values, and create a culture built on norms of diversity, continuous improvement, and ethical conduct
- 6A2. Define problems, gather data to inform decisions, and apply necessary skills to solve problems
- 6A3. Engage in self-assessment, set personal and professional goals, and demonstrate continuous learning
- 6A4. Participate in professional organizations in a leadership capacity
- 6A5. Expand sphere of influence to bring needed change to the program, the community, and to the profession
- 6A6. Implement strategies to influence public policy on behalf of children/youth and families

More about Leadership

In the process of specifying the management competencies, there was much lively discussion about managing and leading. Questions included: How are the concepts of management and leadership different? How do these terms overlap? Are good managers good leaders and vice versa? It was agreed that ‘managing’ and ‘leading’ are not synonymous terms [12]. Leadership represents a commitment to excellence that goes beyond the mastery of the technical competencies associated with management. Ideally, directors will acquire the leadership competencies in this booklet and will shape their individual perspectives of leadership. Using that perspective as a guide will contribute the positive outcomes and the impact directors will have on all stakeholders.

A word about Reflective Practice

Reflecting upon experiences as a vehicle for learning is a sound adult learning principle. Reflective practice requires one to be observant while working, mindful of intentions, and critically thoughtful about actions. It requires time, honesty, and self-awareness [13]. The competencies provide benchmarks for assessing strengths and limitations. Making a habit of reflection is an excellent vehicle for personal and professional growth.

The Director Academy

There is ongoing discussion occurring about creating a Director Academy in Palm Beach County. The goal of this Academy would be to act as a central clearinghouse that would coordinate formal and informal, personal and professional development in the areas of early childhood and afterschool programming. The Academy would provide a continuum of developmental support for directors, to include, but not be limited to, leadership skills, mentoring skills, social/emotional wellness, and networking opportunities. These opportunities might take place at retreats, conferences, and monthly gatherings. **THE CORE COMPETENCIES FOR DIRECTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS** will be a core component of the training and other services this Academy initiates and supports.



COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

To help you monitor and manage your professional development, you may wish to create a Competency Development Plan. A logical first step is to complete a self-assessment. The second step involves creating and implementing a specific plan for your professional development.

STEP ONE: Self-Assessment.

Set aside some time to read each competency and to think about your mastery of that competency. Self-assess using the following three levels:

- N = This is not a competency that is currently essential in my work
- D = This is a competency that I am currently developing
- M = This is a competency that I have mastered

Use the results of your self-assessment to focus your Competency Development Plan

STEP TWO: Competency Development Plan.

The template below serves as a basic structure for organizing your plan for self-improvement as it relates to the management core competencies. You may wish to add a time line. Suggestions for strategies include such things as training, shadowing, reading, testing new behaviors, requesting feedback, and using a mentor.

<i>Competencies to Develop</i>	<i>Strategies for Development</i>	<i>Reflections</i>

KEY TERMS

BEST PRACTICES: practices in programs for children and youth that are based on knowledge and research; these practices are shown to promote optimum development and learning for children in cooperation with their families and are characterized as a family-centered, high-quality, comprehensive, inclusive, coordinated, and equitable

DIRECTOR: for the purposes of this booklet, the term is selected to describe the role of the person or the team responsible for the day-to-day operation, supervision, and administration of the program and for planning, implementing, and evaluating

PRACTITIONER: a person who works in the field of early childhood education and/or afterschool programming, inclusive of the various roles and positions in a program, who desires further training and preparation in a core knowledge area in order to improve his/her performance in the processes and responsibilities of the job

PROGRAM: inclusive of various environments such as corporate centers, family homes, schools, afterschool facilities, and childcare centers

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: the process of thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice

STAKEHOLDER: all people with a legitimate interest in preparing children for school and life

*The Key Term Definitions were adapted from
COACHING CORE COMPETENCIES FOR CHILD CARE
AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS.*

HISTORY

In 2004, the Palm Beach County Early Care and Education Community contracted with a consultant to conduct an Education and Training Needs Analysis to study the state of child-care and childcare providers in Palm Beach County. In that report, one of the four recommendations was the establishment of core competencies for practitioners. The core competencies identify the knowledge and skills that all practitioners need to know and be able to do to be successful in the workplace. These competencies drive the training and education of child care practitioners in Palm Beach County.

Since 2006, stakeholders in Palm Beach County have collaborated to develop three sets of core competencies that address the child care and youth education workforce. The core competency documents include:

- ♦ *CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS*, published in 2006, indicates what early childcare practitioners need to know and be able to do to support child development and school readiness.
- ♦ *COACHING CORE COMPETENCIES FOR CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS*, published in 2007, identifies the skill sets needed by coaches and mentors to provide services to practitioners who educate and care for children and youth.
- ♦ *CORE COMPETENCIES FOR THE AFTERSCHOOL PRACTITIONERS*, published in 2008, indicates the knowledge, observable skills and attributes that practitioners need to know, understand and do to support youth in their care.

Additionally, *TRAINER-TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS* was created to ensure that professional development workshops address these competencies (and any additional competencies that follow) through quality instruction.

All of the core competency booklets have relevance for the program director, but those most significant to a director are those in this booklet, in *CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS*, and in *CORE COMPETENCIES FOR THE AFTERSCHOOL PRACTITIONERS*.

Operating a program for children and youth requires that directors continually grow on and in the job, and constantly upgrade their skills in and knowledge of early childhood and youth education and management practices. Having management proficiency is not enough; having knowledge of early childhood and youth is not enough; having experience is not enough. A combination of these is required to operate a quality program successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contributions of individuals representing early care and education and afterschool programs, and agencies made this endeavor possible. Identifying, classifying, and streamlining the director core competencies to ensure they are meaningful to a wide range of program directors required collaboration and cooperation. These characteristics were abundant among the professionals who worked diligently on this project.

ACHIEVEMENT CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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