Wisconsin 4K Policy and Its Influences on Early Childhood Leaders

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Abstract

Early childhood education continues to be a field that evolves in the areas of curriculum, instructional practices, and parental involvement (Slaby, Loucks, Stelwagon, 2005). Yet, there is a dearth of information regarding early childhood leadership. This creates difficulty for leaders when interpreting policies that have a direct impact on early childhood teaching and learning. In the State of Wisconsin, the education of four year old children is written in its state constitution. School districts are required to provide education beginning at the age of four to all children in the State of Wisconsin. As policy evolves around this concept of educating four year old citizens in Wisconsin, there has been little attention given to the role and responsibilities of leaders who support and supervise the teachers working with Wisconsin's youngest students. The purpose of this study is to analyze Wisconsin 4K policy and its interpretations and implications for 4K leaders as they support 4K teachers, as well as provide the perspective of leaders as they strive to implement policy at the school and/or site level. The researchers are interested in best practices of effective leadership in early childhood education programs in relation to student success and well-being in 4K programs in three settings. Utilizing a qualitative method of interviewing and analysis over three different auspices (School District 4K program, University Based Child Care, 4K Head Start program), this study found various strategies and methods that school leaders use to support their teachers to adhere to Wisconsin 4K policy. The study also exposed how the leaders of three different auspices found challenges in supporting their teachers while adhering to Wisconsin 4K policy and how those leaders responded to those challenges. Leaders in 4K programs supported their teachers in various ways, such as providing spaces for collaboration, allowing teachers to have autonomy, and providing instruction and emotional support for teachers. It is recommended that school level leaders engage in shared governance with teachers in order to implement 4K policy with fidelity. Policy makers should draft policies that support developmental appropriate practices related to early childhood curriculum and assessment. Policy makers should also consider the multitude of roles that 4K leaders have when addressing practices that support teachers. Future research should focus on leaders in early childhood and how they navigate local, state, and federal policies.

Introduction

The influence of leaders and the quality of leadership in early childhood settings are critical to staff and families as well as children. School leaders play an important role in supporting student achievement, well-being, and professional staff success (Slaby et al., 2005). Effective early childhood leadership is accepted as a key factor in achieving organizational improvement (Office for Standards in Education, 2008). As Covey (1991) states, to distinguish leaders from managers, leaders are those who have long-term vision, set direction for change, and inspire people to achieve results with followers. Effective leaders who demonstrate great leadership inspire staff to collaborate, take program ownership, and express their individual and collective voices (Carr, Johnson, & Corkwell, 2009). In addition to that, Carr, Johnson, and Corkwell (2009) also discuss additional aspects of leadership, which are decision-making, fostering communication, respect, and cooperation among staff. Furthermore, leaders encourage positive relationships and work environments based on trust (Covey, 2004). The meaning of leadership is likely to be changed and conceptualized by situational, social, and cultural context (Hujala and Puroila, 1998). Moreover, the role of leaders in diverse early childhood settings are varied, such as, guides, motivators, strategists, and business visionaries (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2012). The field has begun to realize and emphasize the importance of the roles of leaders and the quality of leadership.

Rationale

Early childhood education leaders often find difficulty in providing support to teachers while adhering to best practice for early education and care (Allred & Hancock, 2015). In addition, they struggle to balance integrity, humility, and vulnerability when it comes to their approach to supporting early childhood teachers (Allred & Handcock, 2015). Traditional models of leadership are often situated using hierarchical means of power, but shared leadership is viewed as most beneficial in early childhood settings (Allred & Hancock, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to investigate how leaders approach this conflict in serving as school level leaders for early childhood. This problem in the field, strengthens the importance to investigate how policies influences leaders to support 4K teachers.

Literature Review

Leadership Quality

Strong principals, school directors, and child care managers are needed to provide quality early education in public schools and child care centers. Young children need this support from their educational leaders to develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills (National Board, 2015). Leadership require innovation, creativity, problem-solving skills, open-mindedness, risk-taking, goal-oriented mindset, being a change agent, inspiration, and communication (National Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Lowenberg, Shayna, Bornfreund, Lieberman, 2016; Foundation for Child Development 2016).

School Principal Leadership

The results of this literature review shows that educational leaders have important and multiple roles in order to support student achievement and well-being (National Educational Administration Standards, 2015; Waniganayake, R. Kapsalakis & A. Kapsalakis, 2000). The goals between public school principals and childcare centers are quite similar, but the way in which they view approaches to this goal can differ greatly (Waniganayake, R. Kapsalakis & A. Kapsalakis, 2000). School level leaders must address 4K in the context of meeting the needs of students in all elementary grade levels, but child care center directors has a more narrow student population to serve (Stegelin, 1990). Those multiple tasks are but not limited to hiring staff, making important decisions, monitoring student assessments, teacher evaluations, facilitating professional development, managing financial and human resources, conflict resolution, engaging with external and internal stakeholders, and easing transitions from Pre-K to public schools (Myers & Palmer, 2015; Lowenberg et al., 2016; Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014).

The Role of Professional Leadership Standards

School and childcare centers have professional standards for educational leaders. The themes of the standards include concepts, such as goals, missions, plans, governance, rules, regulations, and policies (National Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015). These leadership standards support students, administrators, teaching staff, families and communities (National Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015). In the City of Madison, administrative program standards are utilized for child care based center leaders (Administrative and Program Standards For City of Madison Child Care Center and School Age Program Accreditation, 2016; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Despite the author of the standards, professional standards have equivalency in respect to leadership positions in organizational hierarchy (Administrative and Program Standards For City of Madison Child Care Center and School Age Program Accreditation, 2016; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.) As accreditation processes are similar in terms of defining administrative standards for leadership, the foundational principles of leadership communicate the importance of leadership both at the school and district levels (National Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015).

The Wisconsin Context

The State of Wisconsin's Department of Public instruction strives to collaborate with leaders in the field of early childhood education, both in the private and public sectors (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The policy and procedures that are produced by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction surrounding early childhood addresses concepts in early learning standards, delivery models of early childhood, professional development for educators, financing, and families (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The Wisconsin of Department of Public instruction does not address the need to cultivate leaders in early childhood, aside from what could be implied from standards for k-12 leaders (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Wisconsin is not alone in the lethargic response to cultivate policy that address the needs and challenges of early childhood leaders.

Nationally, there is a dearth of academic literature regarding the needs and challenges of early childhood leaders (Bush, 2012).

The National Context

Early childhood policy literature surrounding leadership approaches, methods, challenges, and culture is virtually non-existent in current research (Bush, 2012; Bloom 1997, 2000). Nationally, research in early childhood leadership has been heavily anecdotal, and there is a significant gap in research that engages in concepts of leadership for early childhood (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004). Through a federal government lens, the Department of Education did not have an office of early learning within the U.S. Department of education until the presidency and administration of Barack Obama (McGuinn, 2012). Neither during the Obama administration, nor the current presidential administration has addressed the need for quality leadership in early childhood education. There is a lack of national guidance, pressure, and accountability to support and produce research encompassing the topic of leadership in early childhood (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Muijs et al., 2004). This lack of research in early childhood leadership is detrimental to the organizational culture, climate, and the overall organization of the field (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Muijs et al., 2004).

Objectives and Goal of Research

The researchers have identified three objectives for research and a goal statement for aligning research to deepen the understanding of policy and its implementation.

Objectives

- The researchers will identify best practices for 4K leaders to support 4K teachers in response to 4K policy
- The researchers will identify the impacts of 4K policy on three different settings
- The researchers will establish implications for practice and research in response to the dearth of research on early childhood leadership

Goal of Research

The Wisconsin Constitution states that schools, "shall be as nearly uniform as practicable, and such schools shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010)". In response to the Wisconsin Constitution, the researchers' goal is to investigate how leaders interpret 4K policy and support their teachers with the implementation of teaching and learning of 4 year old children.

Methodology

Research Question

What are best practices for principals/leaders to support for 4k teachers?

Our understanding of the policy problem governed by 4 guiding questions that are essential to our inquiry:

1) What policies govern leaders in their prospective settings?

2) How those policies influence school and site based early childhood leaders?

3) What are the best practices for principals/leaders to support for 4k teachers within the parameters of governing policy?

4) What practices do leaders use at their individual sites to adhere to 4k policy?

Sites and Participants

For this project, the researchers selected three different sites in the Madison metropolitan area: Madison school district, University based child care, and Head Start.

This 4K program is located in the public elementary school. The school has students from diverse cultures and backgrounds, and the children of this 4K program reflect the same diversity. The participant of this research has been working at this school as the leader of the 4k program as well as the principal of the entire elementary school.

The university based child care site is located on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. This child care site houses students and teachers that come from different countries. The site serves children who are infants, toddlers, school age, in addition to the 4K program. The 4K classroom has two teachers who are DPI(Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction) certified and eligible to teach in public schools. Typically, one assistant teacher works with 4K teachers full time to cover breaks and planning times. The participant of this research is the director of this child care site and the leader of the 4K program. This university based site child care site is led by a 44-year experienced leader and teacher.

The federal early childhood program, referred to as Head Start, is a program housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Federal head start is designed to support students from families that have been economically disenfranchised. They assist families in the areas of education, nutrition, health, and social services. This Madison area Head start site, houses 12 classrooms that serves children ages three to five. This Madison Head Start site currently has half day programs and a full day pilot program. The leader at this site has over 25 years of experience as a teacher and a leader in early childhood settings.

Data Collection

Researchers collected data primarily through the analysis of relevant policy documents and semi-structured interviews. For the policy documents, the researchers navigated a wide range of policies available that influence each research site. Using various sources, such as the Department of Public Instruction, Madison Metropolitan School District, National Association of Education of Young Children, State of Wisconsin Child Care Licensing, Federal Head Start, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Children and Families, City of Madison, Core Values for UW-Madison, UW office of Childcare and Family resources, etc. Most policy documents were collected from websites of professional organizations, Wisconsin local, state, and federal government organizations.

The researchers conducted 45 minutes semi-structured interviews with the director or principal of the three sites: Madison school district, University based child care, and Head Start. The researchers did formal interviews with an interview protocol that had open-ended questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to inquire with leaders regarding the policies and resources at their disposal and how they support teachers in carrying out policies. After conducting the interviews, researchers transcribed the interviews and conducted open-coding to find themes and categories. Following the open-coding, the researchers analyzed codes and themes, referencing data and drawing conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Policy Analysis and Findings

Policy Document Analysis

The researchers analyzed and reviewed the policy documents from the three different sites that our participants lead. This multi-level policy analysis allowed for researchers to make connections to policy and leadership practices described by participants during interviews. Policies will be analyzed by investigating the intentions of state level constitutional framers and policy makers, and how school level leaders, in efforts to support their 4K teachers, are shaped by these policies that are interpreted by their organizations.

Wisconsin 4K Policy for Early Education Leaders

Inclusive of the Wisconsin State constitution that children at the age of 4 are to be offered enrollment into educational programming. Wisconsin made this constitutional commitment to early childhood education in 1848 and today this commitment continues (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017). The commitment made in 1848 appears much differently than it does today, but it still strives for the education of 4 year old children in Wisconsin. Wisconsin statutes outlines the requirements for implementing 4K programs in the state (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017). These outlines include but are not limited to: funding, parent outreach, eligibility, teacher licensure, transportation, program content, etc. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017).

Department of Public Instruction Leadership Standards

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has outlined its standards for leaders in public school settings and other settings that serve 4K students. Additional policies describe what leaders should gain from leadership preparation programs in the state of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The standards for leadership preparation programs are the closest documents that relates to leaders in schools. These standards support principals in knowing how to provide quality leadership to students, teachers, staff, and communities (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). There are no standards that address the practices and implications for leaders that lead 4K programs. It is implied through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that leaders should have been exposed to several standards in their leadership preparation programs that will be useful in their position as leaders. For example, "the administrator manages by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to pupil learning and staff professional growth (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.)." This was written for all educational administrators in Wisconsin regardless of grade or age level served. Post-secondary principal preparation programs utilize standards like this one to align curricula, coursework, and assessments for their students in their programs (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

All leaders who work in school based 4K settings have gone through a principal preparation master's or doctoral degree program that is approved by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. In child care or non-public school sites, leaders are not required to obtain principal certification from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Even though, the majority of 4k leaders outside of the public-school settings did not go through a principal preparation program, they are still expected to adhere to the 4K policy. Leadership standards that will be explored will have a direct impact on leaders in the public-school settings, but leaders outside of the public-school system will be indirectly impacted because they still have to adhere to public policy in their role.

Department of Public Instruction Leadership Framework for School-level Leaders

Wisconsin has developed a framework to inform policy detailing the characteristics of a quality school level leader. The researchers will analyze these standards and framework through the lens of school level leadership.

As a leader, policy states that leaders should assign teachers to classrooms based on quality of teaching, effectiveness, school goals, and maximizing student outcomes (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The policies drafted for school level leaders allows for much autonomy when it comes to making decisions that will support the overall goals of the school (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction).

The Wisconsin framework for leadership specially addresses how principals should address the way in which they manage policy. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has detailed how school level leaders should manage policies at their schools (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Policy at schools should never conflict with district, state, or federal level law or policy (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Policy

makers of this particular policy have intended that principals decipher policy at the school level to determine if it could potentially conflict with any district, state, or federal level policy (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Principals are expected to maintain all documentation related to policies that have a direct impact on school level culture and climate (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The constant theme these policies exhibit is that autonomy should be given to school level leaders. Policy must be interpreted by principals not as a punitive measure by governing bodies, but as a way to operate in their position through a lens of policy to serve teachers, students, staff and communities (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

It is expected of policy makers within the Department of Public Instruction that school level leaders themselves communicate with local, state, and federal policymakers in order to have input on policies that directly impact school leadership (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Gatekeepers may keep school level leaders from being involved the way that written policy intended. Gatekeepers could be system/district level leaders, state level educational leaders, or federal and state policymakers themselves.

Additional Policies

In addition to policies adhered to through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction regarding 4K programing. Head Start and the University Child Care Center have policies that are designed to meet the needs of their specific sites. These policies are created by various local, state, and federal agencies that may have an impact on the types and amounts of supports given to 4K teachers.

Head Start Policies.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, policies for Head Start leaders stem from the laws and regulations related to legislation regarding federal head start (What Head Start Leaders Need to Know: Laws and Regulations, 2016). Through the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, federal policy is enacted by congress that details the types of services offered, population served, evaluations used, and administrative requirements (What Head Start Leaders Need to Know: Laws and Regulations, 2016). Policymakers intended that Head Start leaders follow and enforce the performance standards and objectives that support a quality program for all children they serve (What Head Start Leaders Need to Know: Laws and Regulations, 2016). Leaders at Head Start site level are shaped by the federal laws and regulations by having to support a program and structure for monitoring and enforcing the quality standards detailed in policy (What Head Start Leaders Need to Know: Laws and Regulations, 2016). For example, Head Start policy regarding program instruction directly impacts leaders at the site level when providing quality programing (Head Start Policy and Regulations, 2017). Leaders are expected to lead their programs to implement program standards that focus on program quality and effectiveness (Head Start Policy and Regulations, 2017). Leaders in Head Start sites are shaped the most by policies that occur at the federal level as the federal government is responsible for its existence and implementation (What Head Start Leaders

Need to Know: Laws and Regulations, 2016).

University Based Childcare Policies.

The university based childcare site governs itself through University of Wisconsin(UW)-Madison's core values that reflect care, creativity, excellence integrity, optimism, respect, and stewardship (University Housing, 2017). This university based childcare site demonstrates these values through their interactions with families, delivery of services to children and families, honest teachers and leaders, enthusiasm for mission, and caring staff interaction (University-Housing, 2017).

Often, as a measure of support leaders manage additional resources to 4K teachers based on the student characteristics of their classrooms. For example, the leaders work with resources to provide students with special needs the quality and appropriate education they need (City of Madison, 2016). Local policy requires that the leader has staff meetings and allows staff to engage in professional Development (City of Madison, 2016).

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families along with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction guides the child care program through its 4k policies related to teaching staff support in terms of management (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017; Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2016). Teacher licensure states that 4K teachers need to have a state license to teach despite the site location of the classroom (Wisconsin Department of public Instruction, 2017). Leaders must conduct evaluations of their teachers in order to provide feedback regarding instruction and support of students (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2016). Leaders who provide staff evaluations to their 4K teacher strengthen their program by providing support regarding best practices for teaching young children.

Analysis and Findings

Public School District Findings

Policies for 4K

The leader of 4k program in the public elementary school setting emphasized the application and implementation of the policy into their school setting and 4k classroom. In addition, the leader emphasized the role of professional judgement when they make decisions while applying the policy.

Application and Implementation.

In the Madison school district, the 4k program in this public elementary school site needs to follow the policies and guidelines from both the Madison Metropolitan School District and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction as the principal stated. The 4k program, teachers, and the principal are focusing on the application and implementation of the policies in the 4k program. One school level leader describes how leaders describes the importance of the implementation process as it relates to policies. School level leaders are provided with general

information regarding the 4K program housed in this public school. This creates a reliance of professional judgement when making decisions related to the delivery of 4K programing that aligns to Wisconsin 4K policy.

Professional Judgement.

Many of these policies are often written for the entire elementary school system in Madison school district and are rarely written specifically for the 4k programs in the public elementary school setting. Therefore, it is important to note how the 4k program applies those general policies into 4k classrooms properly and developmentally appropriately. Hence why professional judgement takes an important role to make decisions about the policy's implementations as the principal emphasized in her response.

Providing support align with policies

There are many different policies and guidelines from MMSD and DPI which influence the actual application and implementation of the 4k program in the public elementary school setting. As a result, the principal provides various types of support aligned with those policies and the actual situations of the school, such as structural and logistical support, instructional support, and emotional support.

Structural and Logistical Support.

During the 4K program's year of inception at this school based site, the principal had to provide lots of structural and logistical support at the beginning of starting the new program. With the principal focused on structural and logistical support, teachers were able to focus more on teaching and the needs of children rather than addressing structural issues. The principal provides support to 4k teachers not only for the instructional purposes in the classroom, but also for the structural and logistical support for inside and outside of the classroom to manage and maintain the 4k program in the elementary school.

Instructional Support: Professional learning, Educator effectiveness, Reflective feedback.

Based on the Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching, adopted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, principals provide reflective feedback to teachers as an instructional leader and an evaluator (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017). After observing the class in terms of instruction, relationship building, and connection with the community and families, the principal has an intimate conversation with the 4k teachers and provides reflective feedback. Therefore, the principal, as a 4k leader, provides instructional support with class observations and reflective feedback as a part of the educator effectiveness process and professional learning.

Moreover, the principal makes sure that the teachers always have access to instructional coaches and encourages teachers to take the benefits of instructional coaching and professional learning. Also, the principal supports the teachers' professional development through professional learning, which happens both at the district level and the school level.

Emotional Support: Trust and Valuing Teacher Professionalism.

In addition to the principal observing the classroom teaching and providing feedback as an evaluator, the leader also trusts the ability and professional knowledge of teachers, and values and appreciates the great work of the 4k teachers as well. As a leader, the principal has a strong belief of the power of high expectations, which means that everyone can succeed, develop to the next level, and increase their potential. Therefore, the principal shows her trust for teachers, value of teachers, and belief and expectations for teachers as a form of emotional support.

University-Based Child Care Findings

Workload (Multiple Job Duties) and 4K Policy

When supporting 4K teachers in order to carry out Wisconsin's 4K policy. Leaders can have multiple roles and duties in order to make sure that programs are implemented with fidelity. This child care leader explains the unpredictability and fluidity of the daily routines and challenges that make it difficult for leaders to adopt a set of best leadership practices. This leader describes her workload.

> Every day is so different and no day looks like any other day. From student enrollment student issues to addressing issues with financial aid, helping out in classroom. I have to administer assessments, hire new staff, support staff, responding to parent complaints, and addressing any conflicts.

This leader also refers to the brevity and fragmentation of her leadership roles while managing and leading the organization as well as the lack of structured processes to deal with complex issues of an educational organizational setting. In addition to the workload that the leaders have to endure, leaders have to support teachers in implementing various curricula that align with the expectations of 4K policy.

Curriculum support and 4K policy

The analysis of the data shows that leaders in childcare settings are dedicated to addressing culturally relevant practices, best instructional practices for early childhood, diversity, anti-bias education, child initiated curriculum, and peace education. These various points that addresses curriculum often requires leaders support for teachers to be confident in implementing them in the 4K classroom. This leader expresses how policy can impact the way curriculum is viewed and implemented.

> I would say that the policies support 4K children's success are our school approaches like play-based curriculum focuses on social skill development. What public schools want for 4K is not the same as what EC programs on campus want for 4K children. We continue to use the curriculum (EC best practices) that we are successful with our children but not 100%. Public schools do not have their regulation/licenses for 4K children. The policies that we use are school policies, City of Madison, Young Star etc. policies. We can

> operate our program because of those policies so MMSD allows us to do 4K program, otherwise we would not be able to operate this program.

4K leaders understand the importance of curriculum in 4K programs. This importance is magnified by 4K policy in the State of Wisconsin. As a mediator between policy and practice, leaders should be able to support their teachers in improving classroom practices that strengthen curriculum and student learning. A significant duty of being a mediator of policy is to be a mentor to teachers as they implement 4K teaching and learning. One way to improve the mentor-mentee relationship between teachers and leaders is to provide the teachers with autonomy in the classroom.

Teacher Autonomy and Empowerment and 4K Program

Teacher autonomy and empowerment is a theme that this child care leader noted throughout the analysis. In relation to curriculum and best practices, she explains about how leaders support 4K teachers adhering to the mission and vision of the program. Data analysis shows that she conceptualizes her role as a leader who attempts to hire the best teachers whose personal values match the values and mission of the school. She specifically indicated that she supports 4K teachers adhering to the mission and vision of the program

> By hiring really good teachers and by leaving them alone. We know that they support the school and we support them.

Some may view this desire to leave teachers alone as a form of neglect by the leader, but by giving teachers the space and time to be on their own allows for teacher empowerment and autonomy to take place. This form of autonomy given to teachers is a critical component when building trust between leaders and teachers.

Leader-teacher trust to implement 4K policy

Without leader and teacher trust, 4K policy implementation at the school/site level will be difficult to achieve. This leader draws attention to the need for trust when supporting 4K teachers.

> I make a point to not interfere with their work in the classroom. I know teachers get nervous why an administrator walks around and check them. I do not require them follow lesson plans in certain time. I trust them. Teachers know what is best for their children. I do not know how they describe me but I hire the best teachers and trust their expertise. I hope they know that I trust them.

As noted by this leader, trust has to be carried out by actions. This leader states the need not to interfere with the work in the classroom that the teacher is doing in order to build trust. The leader details the need for leniency in requirements and expectations in order to build trust. This trust is needed in order to successfully implement 4K policy in schools/sites.

Leader -Teacher Quality Expectation for 4K Program

The following excerpt from the interview data shows that she has high expectations for herself as well as her followers at her school. In order to provide quality 4K programming, leaders must support teachers in a way that improves program quality. This can be done by leaders using best practices such as linking quality to child assessment and outcomes. This leader details how she supports her teachers to improve quality through various assessments including PALS, an early childhood assessment.

> I support teachers and back them up with PALS based program. They want to do whatever is the best for 4 years old in their program. The expectation from the teaching staff is that administration would support them with best practices. There are expectations for teachers in MMSD program for 4K. We have a contract with them. There are rubrics, assessments of teachers and children. We need to use the PALS (Phonological Assessment). Even though it is not appropriate. Even with DLL children. Assessment expectation is not appropriate. We have to do it. There is a contract we do here with MMSD. We need to do what we needed to do.

Even though this leader criticizes the types of assessment being given to students, she notes that her site has to do it. This is because Wisconsin 4K policy supports the use of formative and summative assessment practices.

4K Support for Assessment

The following excerpt from the interview lens support for the importance of recognizing and responding to the needs of 4K teachers. In order to carry out the expectations of Wisconsin's 4K policies for programs, assessments must be included in classroom practices. These practices can be enhanced through the support of 4K leaders. There is a great amount of time that goes into teachers conducting classroom assessment. Many teachers struggle to find ways to meet the requirements for assessment on their own. This leader details how she creates space and time for teachers to conduct assessment required by 4k policy.

> I work with the teachers to come up with an alternative away from them to assess. Instead of pulling the teachers from the classrooms to do their assessments, we as the administrators sit with children and do their assessments. I administer the PALS. Teachers know their children inside out. We also get their opinions about each child's development. Scores are not surprise to the teachers. But we have a strict schedule. We do not pull the teachers out of the classrooms. This is an example of how I support my teachers.

Assessment is a critical component for any 4K program. Leaders must find ways that allow teachers to have opportunities to become familiar with assessment practices and expectations. This may require that leaders conduct assessments themselves and debrief with teachers. 4K leaders to meet the guidelines required for assessment by 4K policy, have to find creative ways to meet the goals outlined by policy while supporting their teachers to be successful.

Head Start Center Findings

Responsive Leadership

As a leader of any organization, it is critical that you are responsive to the needs of the people that you lead. To support 4K teachers, they require a leader that will assist them with issues inside and outside of the classroom. One leader of a school based 4K program highlights the roles that she will take on in order to help teachers.

> I walk the talk, I wouldn't ask anything of them I wouldn't do myself, I vacuum, I do all the stuff. So, if a kind comes in and has a accident and it's on the carpet, Ill clean it. I've been in their shoes, but not with this clientele before.

In order to provide support to 4K teachers, leaders must be willing to address the needs of their staff and that may require that they take on roles outside of what is traditionally expected from leaders. Leaders show their responsiveness in their ability to model different duties. Leaders also serve as a mentor or counselor to their 4K teachers. A participant details assisting a teacher who is calling child protective services for the first time.

> Many of my staff have never had to make a call, we come together in my office, we put the phone on speaker, we talk about what to expect, because making the first call is pretty scary if you never had to call CPS, so we talk a bit about what to expect before making that call.

There are also times in which leaders must switch places with the teacher in order to give them the support they need. A 4k leader discusses how she supports her teachers by creating space and time for the teacher to address personnel issues with the human resources department.

> Our human resources manager was on site one day dealing with another issue and a day before an employee had injured themselves on the job. I said to him, do you want to meet with this teacher? He said yeah, is it possible? I told him yes, I'll go in, I'll be the sub. So, I went in the classroom and he kids were finishing up snack. We did the wheels on the bus…… They were so engaged, but this gave that teacher, the DPI person, time to go and talk to the HR director for maybe 10-15 minutes.

This 4k leader was able to demonstrate responsive leader by stepping into the teaching role in order to support a 4k teacher and their needs. Leaders should be able to demonstrate to their teachers that they appreciate the work they are doing by actually stepping in every so often to do the work. When teachers have to address trauma with children, they themselves may have experienced the same type of trauma. As a leader, it is critical to support teachers in addressing any issues 4k teachers have personally that may be affected how they work with the students. A 4k leader describes how she works with her teachers who may have been affected by trauma.

> We are all going into training about trauma enforced care, we started that this pass year. So that we understand that that families and children, and maybe some of your colleagues that you worked with may have been in this kind of trauma. I try to understand and work with my staff who have experienced the same trauma as these children.

Leaders that support 4k teachers also reflect on their own professional development and how their professional development can result in being a form of support for their teacher. A 4k leader was responsive to the need of substitute teachers in her in her building. There was a lack of substitutes in order to give teachers the time they needed to work with parents, grade assessments, and other administrative duties. This leader took it upon herself to go through the certification process to become a sub in order for her teachers to have release time to complete paperwork.

> So there have been times where we have gone 2-3 months without a DPI sub, so I am the sub. Cause I got my sub license, so anyway there are times that we do that because I know there is so much paperwork they have to do, and they're salaried so its whatever it takes to do the job.

4K leaders like this participant, often take on responsibilities to support their 4k teachers, but there are organizational and structural responses that leaders can do that does not require their direct participation in the classroom. This 4k leader describes how she addresses supporting teachers and communicating with emergent bilingual students.

> Every classroom in our center has a staff member that is Spanish speaking. I strive to make sure that happens. The teacher may not necessarily speak Spanish, but there is a classroom aid to help make accommodations for those students.

Responsive leadership is a major finding from the interview data, but often times it suggested another theme of leadership, which is collaboration. Collaboration and fostering collaboration is an effective way for leaders to support 4k teachers.

Collaboration

The support of 4k teachers can not only come from the leaders directly, but leaders must create a culture of distributed leadership among the staff. This collaboration of leadership is critical and 4k leaders train their experience teachers on how to mentor novice teachers. This 4k leader notes how she mentors veteran teachers to address the new teachers in her building.

> Any new documents for new staff, I have 4 lead teachers to walk through those documents with them. I said 'even though you have all be with me from anywhere from 3-10 years, I want you to read the documents and thing about it as what its like to remember back to your first years as a teacher, and what was difficult and what about it was great.

To support 4k teachers, using experienced staff to reinforce policy allows for the school to have a culture that is knowledgeable about the polices related to curriculum, district level policy, state level policy, federal level policy, and organizational policy. This culture of collaboration facilitated by 4k teachers ensures a universal understanding of policy and how to support teachers in addressing issues of policy. Many polices are communicated by the leader to staff through staff level meetings, and leaders who are supportive of 4k teachers include their teachers in the planning process of meetings. This 4k leader expands on how she drafts meeting agendas three days in advance in order for staff to have input.

> I put the agenda 3 days in advances so that they can add things they want to talk about, additional things, and then we go through it all, we going to be having an open house and we talked about the week the young children.

4K leaders that allow for their teachers to be in the planning process get buy-in from teachers regarding meetings and other policy concerns at the school level. This buy-in from the teachers make supporting 4k teachers easier as they often will have a positive view of their leaders. This leader describes how her staff would describe her as a leader.

> My teachers would say, I'm umm, always available, competent, I mean they-I feel like I'm mother to all of them because of my age and their all in their 40s or less, my own kids are 38 and 40 so you know, I walk the talk, I wouldn't ask anything of them I wouldn't do myself, I vacuum, I do all the stuff , so if a kid comes in and has an accident and it's on the carpet, I'll clean it up. I've been in their shoes.

4k leaders that show collaboration between leaders and teachers creates a culture of collaboration through modeling humility and dedication to their work. 4k leaders demonstrate their support through the collaboration that takes place in the school. The very facilitation of collaboration shows the greatest support for 4k teachers.

Effects of Policy

4K leaders in various sites have to adhere to their governing body's policies in addition to any polices required by other local, state, or federal entities. When supporting 4k teachers, leaders can be given more autotomy or have limited autonomy in how they support their 4k teachers based on policy. On a larger scale, policy can affect the organizational structure by limiting or increasing resources, this can have major implication for what types of support and the frequency of support that 4K leaders give their 4K teachers. One leader discusses how federal level policy could affect their ability to adhere to 4K policy.

> Out federal policy really affects us, they could come and tell us that we can't afford a particular model of delivery for our students, such as a full day that can be beneficial for parents to find a job, go to school, find housing, but hopefully we will still have Mondays off so we can plan and they (teachers) can work together, home visits, call parents. This can have an impact on how we view 4K policy, one kinda overrides the other.

This particular policy would have implications for staffing needs, which would have effects on how often and in what capacity this particular 4k leader could support 4k teachers. Other policies at the school level policies create an environment where teachers can feel supported by their leaders. This leader describes how they implement supportive policies to aid teachers in the implementation of the 4K program.

> I have an open-door policy. The previous leader did not, but I have always had it in any of my jobs. The only times its closed is if it's something confidential that I'm talking with somebody, otherwise its open and they can come by.

This leader views their open-door policy as a way for teachers to initiate support as they see fit while they are implementing the teaching and learning of state level 4K policy.

Professional Development

Another way in which 4k leaders support their teachers is through professional development. Professional development can be delivered to 4k teachers in many different ways. Leaders can offer support to teachers in their professional development and help then navigate the areas of improvement. One 4k leader describes how they utilize individualized goal setting with teachers to help them address areas of professional development.

> In the goal setting, they put their comments in the areas of strengths, and I as a supervisor discuss their goals with them. They will put down goals they want to work on, let's say out kids are not doing good in math, so maybe they want to take more classes on how to teach math to 4k children.

Teachers initially develop their own goals and present them to their supervisor, but often times a supervisor will recommend or revise goals and then develop a course of action. 4k leaders show support to 4k teachers and their goals by providing opportunities to work towards those goals by embedding them into other times for collaboration such as professional learning communities(PLCs). This leader describes how PLC groups are used as an opportunity for support.

> So, we been doing PLC groups for the teachers to kinda learn from other teachers, what works for you, what are some of the activities, we are looking at fall assessments and winder assessments, and did they achieve more in their math area, so we have school readiness goals that are math and literacy based.

Providing time and space for collaboration through professional development is essential when supporting 4K teachers. Many teachers look for times in which they can collaborate with their colleagues, but they have difficulty finding a time due to the workload of paperwork to complete.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the data analysis of findings from the researchers, the researchers provide several implications and recommendations for policy and practice.

Policy needs to be closely aligned to curriculum, assessment, and developmentally appropriate practices for leaders to provide targets support to teachers. This policy effort will increase the connection of policy and practice in early childhood education.

 Wisconsin state policy should be written with the intention of serving families and children. By policy addressing the needs of families and children, policy makers are increasing support to leaders and their ability to provide support to 4K teachers.

Policies needs to be written in order to allow leaders the autonomy to use funding for substitute teachers at their discretion. This flexibility allows for leaders to use additional support

for teachers who could benefit from the extra assistance in the classroom or time to conduct other instructional related duties.

The researchers recommend a policy audit regarding the use of 4K program assessments to confirm that program expectations align with developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood. This is an area that would lessen the stress and workload of leaders in the field while implementing 4K policy.

In practice, early childhood leaders must create spaces of support for teachers to collaborate. By allowing teachers to support themselves, leaders are facilitating that support.

Conclusion

There is without question that leaders in early childhood education are a critical component when conceptualizing school leadership approaches to 4K policy in the State of Wisconsin. Providing support to 4K teachers is one way that 4K leaders view their role in adhering to 4K policy in the state of Wisconsin. They are the ones who can troubleshoot any issues that arise in the implementation of providing quality 4K experiences to young children. There is a need for further research regarding the effectiveness of supportive leadership practices and how 4K teachers view these practices.

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