

# Preface

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To do:

- Appoint task force to study half-day versus full-day kindergarten.
  - Approve preschool teacher candidate list.
  - Meet with Even Start and Head Start directors.
  - Read curriculum committee report on High Scope and Mastery Learning programs.
  - Attend mayor’s summit on school readiness—birth to age five.
  - Check on state licensing requirements for three-year-olds.
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**T**oday, more and more principals are finding early childhood items like these on their “to-do” lists. This has come about for two reasons: First, large numbers of children in the United States are currently enrolled in some kind of early education program. Children’s participation in preschool, childcare and kindergarten has grown steadily over the last fifty years. Whether accessing private or public services, today’s families eagerly seek early education for their children, which has resulted in approximately half of all the three- and four-year-olds in the country (4 million children) now being enrolled in “school.”

Second, schools and school districts are more active players in the early childhood enterprise than was true in the past. Their roles vary from serving as the administrative agent for early childhood programs; to providing space for nonschool administrated programs; to partnering with local agencies and providers to enhance children’s school readiness. In any case, schools are not standing on the sidelines. They are becoming more central to the world of early childhood education every day.

With this increased activity comes additional responsibilities for principals. Yet, many school administrators have little or no training in how to design, implement, and evaluate programs for very young children. *Getting It Right From the Start: The Principal’s Guide to Early Childhood Education* addresses this dilemma.

## PURPOSE

*Getting It Right From the Start: The Principal’s Guide to Early Childhood Education* is a practical, well-referenced manual especially created for busy principals who want to know what effective early childhood programs look like and how to achieve them in their schools and communities. Filled with useful information, it offers an insider’s view of the field, by touching on key areas of operation and discussing ways to avoid the pitfalls that can derail effective school-based early childhood initiatives. Most important, the *Guide* provides the kind of information principals need

to recognize and create effective programs, to “talk the talk,” to provide the kind of feedback staff need to improve, and to become key players in educating our nation’s youngest students.

## **USING THE GUIDE**

*Getting It Right From the Start: The Principal’s Guide to Early Childhood Education* can be read straight through or used as a reference manual as issues arise. In either case, it is meant to be a book you will return to again and again—one you will keep close at hand supporting your work in early childhood education.

## **CHAPTER ORGANIZATION**

*Getting It Right From the Start: The Principal’s Guide to Early Childhood Education* is divided into fifteen chapters. Our goal is to cover chapter topics thoroughly, by providing critical information that is immediately useful, without drowning readers in detail. Since topics vary in how much a principal needs to know, the length of each chapter varies accordingly. Thus, there are short chapters and long ones, depending on the breadth of the topic under discussion. In Chapter 1, we provide an overview of the current state of the field, and in Chapter 2, we consider the importance of quality in doing what is best for young children. How principals can become credibly involved in early childhood learning communities is the subject of Chapter 3. The full array of early childhood stakeholders is described in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, developmentally appropriate practice, a key early childhood educational concept, is explored, including both pluses and minuses. Chapter 6 discusses how very young students learn and what they should be learning in school. Chapter 7 provides descriptions of effective curricula. Chapter 8 follows up with information about learning centers and daily routines as vehicles for translating curricula into practice. Chapter 9 focuses on relevant assessment strategies. How early childhood programs are funded is the subject of Chapter 10. Classroom teachers are the topic of Chapter 11. Next, Chapter 12 describes how to find and maintain highly qualified staff. Effective indoor and outdoor early childhood environments provide the content for Chapter 13. Family engagement is the focus of Chapter 14. We close with Chapter 15, a summary of the actions principals typically carry out in early childhood education.

## **SPECIAL FEATURES**

Each chapter offers a blend of research-based content as well as implications for administrative practice. Numerous examples, charts, checklists, and resources are included to make key information clear and useable. All chapters end with a Principals’ Roles section that summarizes key strategies the successful early childhood leader will likely implement. In some cases, more extensive checklists and rating scales are necessary to promote and monitor high-quality early childhood programs. These are provided in a special tools section at the end of the book. We intend for these tools to be duplicated and distributed as needed. An index has also been provided for easy reference.

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