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# Early Childhood Preparation for School Leaders:

2017

Lessons from New Jersey Principal Certification  
Programs

**Center for the Study of Child Care Employment**  
Institute for Research on Labor and Employment  
University of California, Berkeley





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# Early Childhood Preparation for School Leaders:

## Lessons from New Jersey Principal Certification Programs

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Established in 1999, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) is focused on achieving comprehensive public investments that enable the early childhood workforce to deliver high-quality care and education for all children. To achieve this goal, CSCCE conducts research and policy analysis about the characteristics of those who care for and educate young children and examines policy solutions aimed at improving how our nation prepares, supports, and rewards these early educators to ensure young children's optimal development. CSCCE provides research and expert analysis on topics that include: compensation and economic insecurity among early educators; early childhood teacher preparation; access to educational opportunities and work environments; and early childhood workforce data sources and systems. CSCCE also works directly with policymakers and a range of national, state, and local organizations to assess policy proposals and provide technical assistance on implementing sound early care and education workforce policy.

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**“Effective leaders align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self.”**

**(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 12)**

# 1 Introduction

It is widely accepted that high-quality early care and education (ECE) experiences, inclusive of the period from birth through age eight, are essential to the success of children’s early and ongoing development. These initial experiences lay the foundation for future learning and have the potential to narrow the achievement gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds — particularly children of color and those living in low-income families — and their more advantaged peers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council [IOM & NRC], 2015; Tout, Halle, Daily, Albertson-Junkans, & Moodie, 2013). Critical to providing high-quality services, early educators and leaders are tasked with creating environments that are safe and nurturing, rich in resources, supportive of both cognitive and socioemotional development, and sensitive to children’s diversity of culture and language — responsibilities that reflect the complexity of teaching across the 0-8 age span (IOM & NRC, 2015). In addition, research provides evidence of the cumulative development of young children and, thus, the importance of aligning educational experiences across the early years, further underscoring the significance of educators’ knowledge and expertise not only in one age group or grade, but across the pre-K-3 continuum (Goncu, Main, Perone, & Tozer, 2014; IOM & NRC, 2015; Mead, 2011).

Reflecting this scientific evidence that learning across the age span is continuous and the growing acknowledgement of ECE as a public good, government investments have increased over the last several decades, most notably in publicly supported preschool. The National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) has documented this expansion of publicly funded preschool in the United States. During the 2015-2016 school year, 43 states and the District of Columbia provided state-sponsored pre-K, compared to 38 states a decade ago, and across the nation, nearly 1.5 million children attended state-sponsored pre-K programs (Barnett, Friedman-Krauss, Weisenfeld, Horowitz, Kasmin, & Squires, 2017; Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). This figure represents 38 percent of all four-year-olds, up from 20 percent a decade ago.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This percentage represents a fraction of children in early care and education. Nearly 12 million children age 0-5 are in some type of out-of-home ECE setting on a regular basis (United States Census Bureau, 2013). In 2015, 38 percent of three-year-olds, 67 percent of four-year-olds, and 87 percent of five-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary programs, including both publicly funded (e.g., Head Start, state-sponsored pre-K) and privately operated (e.g., community-based nonprofit and for-profit) programs (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Many states, including New Jersey, provide state-funded pre-K in a mix of settings that includes public elementary schools and licensed child care centers (Barnett et al., 2017). While efforts to ensure the quality of pre-K programs include programs across settings, those operating within public elementary schools raise unique concerns (IOM & NRC, 2015). Nationally, more than one-half of elementary school principals work in schools serving pre-K children and are responsible for guiding developmentally appropriate instruction and fostering a school culture inclusive of pre-K classrooms (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2014). However, expectations about principals' knowledge and skills related to early care and education are misaligned with their professional preparation. Many lack experience and expertise in ECE. Given that early learning trajectories rely on quality early learning experiences before, during, and after pre-K (Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017), specific training is necessary to prepare for transitions throughout the early learning continuum.

## TERMINOLOGY

Pre-K: Prekindergarten or preschool; an educational experience for children who are typically three to four years old, before entering kindergarten at age five.

Pre-K-3: The period from prekindergarten through third grade, in which increasing attention is being given to the importance of alignment of curriculum, expectations, and professional development to enhance children's early learning and readiness for school success.

Principal Candidates: Educators participating in principal certification programs.

Internship: Field-based learning experiences completed by educators participating in principal certification programs.

## Principal Leadership

Principals wear multiple hats. In addition to administrative skills necessary to successfully lead a school, principals require knowledge of what children and teachers should know and be able to do. Principals, particularly those working in schools with pre-K and early elementary grade classrooms, need additional expertise in integrating pre-K with older grades and creating and implementing shared opportunities for teachers' professional development and planning time within and across grades. Combined, these skills are critical to ensuring high-quality experiences for children and support for teachers (IOM & NRC, 2015; NAESP, 2014; National Governor's Association [NGA], 2013).

Yet, the reality is that most principal candidates are not required to have a background or experience in leading pre-K programs prior to attaining certification; only Illinois includes ECE content in their licensure and accreditation process (Brown, Squires, Connors-Tadros, & Horowitz, 2014; Lieberman, 2017; Szekely, 2013). Perhaps because there are so few requirements in this regard, most principal certification programs do not provide comprehensive instruction focused on children prior to kindergarten (IOM & NRC, 2015; Lieberman, 2017). To strengthen professional standards for principals, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) have recommended that all principals should have the following:

- An understanding of developmental science and instructional practices that support pre-K student learning;
- Knowledge of developmentally appropriate assessment principles and methods;
- Knowledge of professional competencies for teachers and how to support teachers' efforts to provide quality learning environments for young children;
- Knowledge of appropriate assessment of educators to improve child outcomes and inform professional learning;
- The ability to develop partnerships in the community within and across disciplines that touch the lives of children and families; and
- Knowledge and skills for effective school administration and management (IOM & NRC, 2015).

A recent report revealed that only one in five principals with pre-K programs at their school felt they were well trained in instructional methods and developmentally appropriate perspectives for early educators, and this lack of preparation and support contribute to high levels of stress associated with their job ("New Principals: A Data Snapshot," 2015). Studies of principal retention and attrition found that between 15 and 20 percent of elementary school principals leave their job each year and more than one-half do not stay more than five years (Fuller & Young, 2009; Goldring & Taie, 2014). These findings are troubling, particularly in light of the negative effects principal turnover has on student achievement, teacher improvement, and the policies and practices that impact a school's performance, in addition to the considerable added costs to develop, hire, and onboard new principals (School Leaders Network, 2014).

## State-Funded Public Pre-K in New Jersey

New Jersey funds three preschool programs, the largest of which is commonly referred to as the Abbott Preschool Program. In 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling mandating the availability of full-day preschool for all three- and four-year-old children in 31 of the state's lowest-income or "Abbott" school districts (Abbott V). In response to this court ruling, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) created a mixed-delivery, publicly funded state pre-K system that included Head Start and private child care as well as district-run pre-K programs. In the 2015-2016 school year, the Abbott program served more than 43,000 children across 35 school districts (Barnett et al., 2017).

In addition, the non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) provides services to children in districts in which 20 to 40 percent of children meet the criteria for free or reduced-price lunch services, and the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) offers services to all the state's four-year-olds from low-income households in non-Abbott school districts (Barnett et al., 2017; Education Law Center, 2017). During the 2015-2016 school year, New Jersey's state-funded preschool programs served more than 52,700 children in approximately 135 of the state's 584 operating school districts (Barnett et al., 2017; State of New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.a). Fifty-seven percent of these children were enrolled in public elementary school classrooms (Education Law Center, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In 2008, the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) sought to expand state-funded preschool and provide high-quality early education to all children across the state, but these efforts have been slow, primarily due to a lack of state funding and recruitment (Education Law Center, 2017; Farrie, 2014).

In New Jersey, principal certification authorizes principals to work with all grades, pre-K through 12th (State of New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.b). Principals of schools with public pre-K classrooms are not required to have a background in or complete college-level coursework on early care and education (Brown et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2017; see also **Box 1**). In recognition that elementary school principals are minimally, if at all, exposed to issues relevant to early education or alignment across the pre-K-3 continuum in their certification programs, the New Jersey Department of Education offers voluntary in-service professional education focused on early learning, with a specific emphasis on alignment of pre-K through third grade learning to educational leaders in select districts (e.g., Brown et al., 2014; Riley-Ayers & Costanza, 2014).

### **Box 1. Requirements to Attain the New Jersey P-12 Principal Certificate**

**Minimum education required:** Master's degree

**Additional course requirements:** At least 30 graduate credits (either within or in addition to a master's degree) in an approved principal preparation program with content aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015)

**Educational experience requirement:** Five years of educational experience under a provisional or standard New Jersey certificate (any grade level or any subject except career/technical education) or equivalent out-of-state certificate

**Internship experience:** 300-hour internship in educational leadership; not grade specific

**Other requirements:** Must pass the School Leader Licensure Assessment

Sources: Lieberman (2017); State of New Jersey Department of Education (n.d.b).

In light of the changing landscape of state-funded public education, as well as the changing expectations for principals in elementary schools, now seemed the appropriate time to examine the status of principal certification programs in New Jersey in order to allow policymakers, institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders to assess the capacity of the state's higher education system and inform policy, practice, and investment related to the pre-K-3 continuum.

To undertake this assessment, the New Jersey Department of Education commissioned the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) to implement the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory: Principal Certification Programs* (CSCCE, 2016), a research tool used to assess the inclusion of early education in required course content and internships. To date, such an assessment has not been conducted in New Jersey.

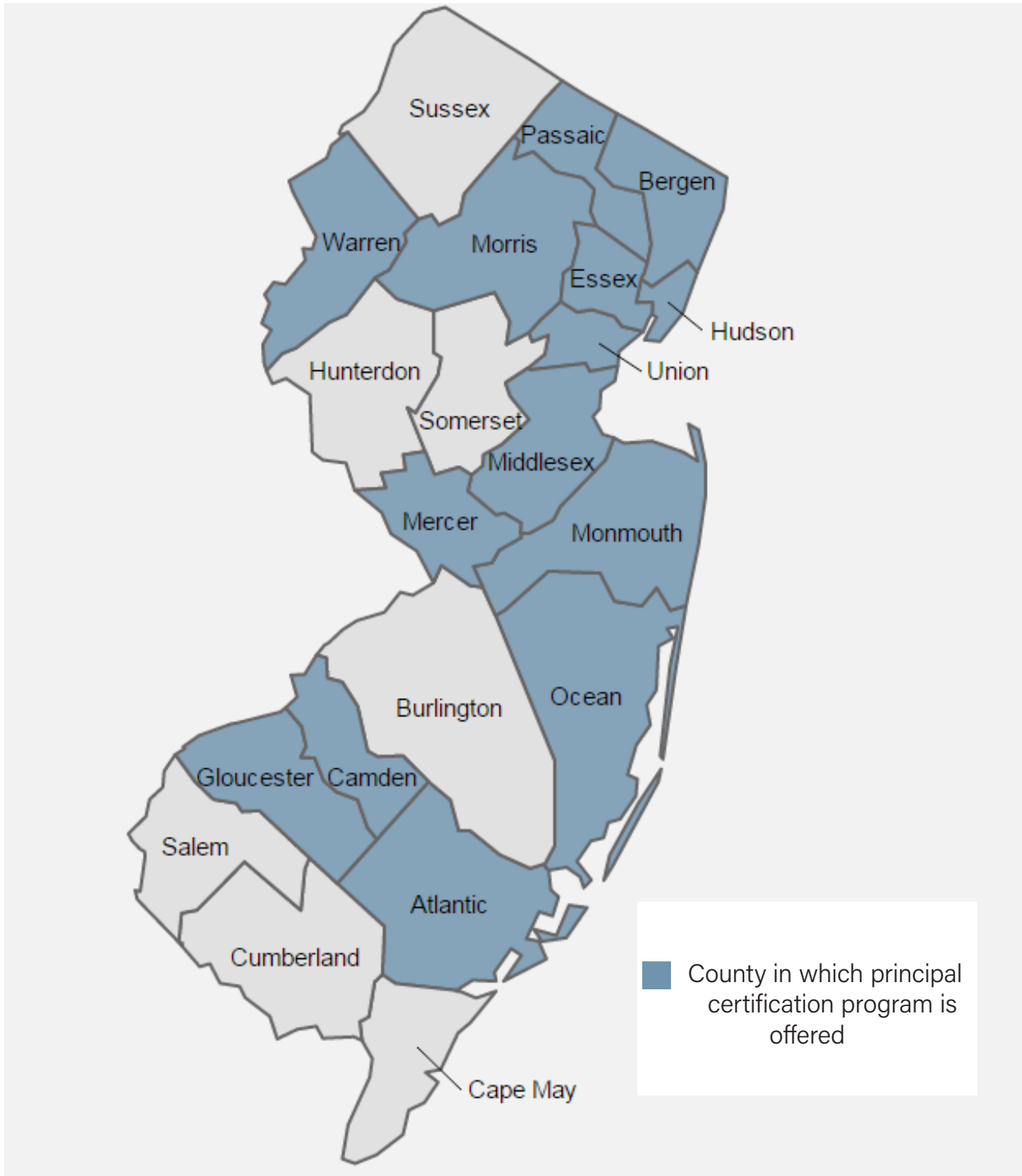
Across New Jersey, 23 institutions of higher education (10 public, 10 private colleges/universities, and three professional development organizations) offer a program of study that leads to principal certification. The findings in this report represent the majority of these programs and include the current state of principal certification programs in New Jersey with regard to the following:

- ◆ The format in which the certification program is offered;
- ◆ The extent to which New Jersey principal certification programs require principal candidates to attain the knowledge, skills, and experiences associated with effective school leadership, including:
  - What young children should know and be able to do;
  - The ability to guide and supervise teachers working in pre-K-3 classrooms;
  - How to implement pre-K within public schools; and
  - How to encourage family and community engagement;
- ◆ The extent to which programs provide opportunities for principal candidates to engage in internship experiences in schools with pre-K-3 classrooms; and
- ◆ The challenges facing programs associated with preparing principal candidates to lead schools with pre-K-3 classrooms.

## Box 2. Study Design

In the 2016-2017 academic year, researchers from CSCCE implemented the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory: Principal Certification Programs* (CSCCE, 2016), which consists of: (1) a mapping of the population of principal certification programs in New Jersey; and (2) an online survey completed by the certification program lead (e.g., dean, chair, or coordinator). The findings reported here are drawn from a final sample of 18 programs. See **Appendix 2** for a detailed description of the methods of this study, including the sampling frame and selection, field procedures, and response rate.

## Distribution of New Jersey Principal Certification Programs



# 2 The Landscape of Principal Certification Programs in New Jersey

1

## FINDING ONE: PROGRAM STRUCTURE Format, Enrollment, and Status of Faculty

*New Jersey principal certification programs offer multiple formats in which to complete coursework (e.g., traditional/on-campus or online), as well as opportunities to attain certification through a stand-alone program or as part of master's degree program. In the fall 2016 term, 1,449 principal candidates were registered in principal certification programs in the sample. Part-time faculty members comprised 76 percent of the estimated 144 faculty members employed in principal certification programs participating in the survey.*

### What we asked about program format, principal candidates, and faculty members:

Program leads participating in the *Principal Inventory* were asked to indicate the format or formats of the principal certification program (e.g., online/distance learning; traditional/on-campus programs; a “blended” program combining online and in-person courses) and the paths by which principal candidates can attain the principal certification (e.g., as a stand-alone certification [post-master’s degree] or within a master’s or doctoral degree program).

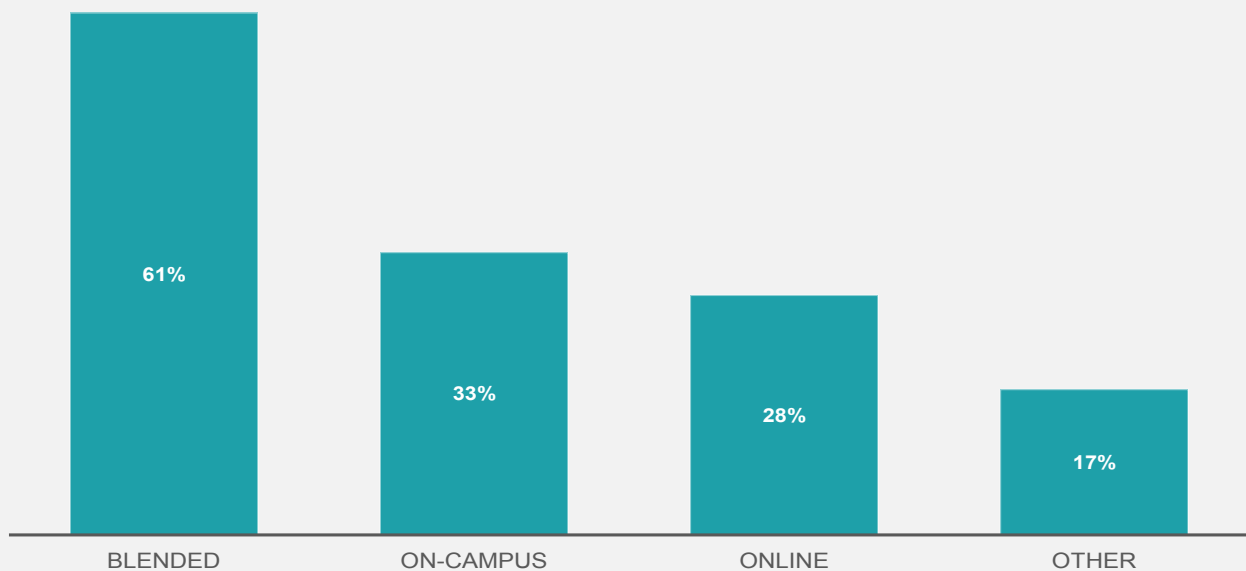
Program leads were also asked to estimate the number of principal candidates who were registered, the number of principal candidates who successfully completed the program, and the number of full-time and part-time/adjunct faculty members teaching in the principal certification program during the fall 2016 term.



## Program Format

A network of 23 public and private colleges and universities and professional development organizations offer principal certification programs across New Jersey. (See **Appendix A-1** for a complete list as of fall 2016). Typically, candidates enrolled in principal certification programs are classified as “returning students,” as they must already hold a college degree and, in general, currently work full time (Brock, 2010; United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Reflecting the needs of these students, principal certification programs in New Jersey, participating in this study, reported providing several options for candidates to complete required coursework (see **Figure 1**). Three out of five programs (61 percent) offered a blended program (i.e., combination of both online/distance learning and traditional/on-campus courses), and more than one-quarter (28 percent) offered a distance learning certification program in which all courses are completed online. One-third of programs (33 percent) offered a traditional on-campus program.

**Figure 1: Format(s) of New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



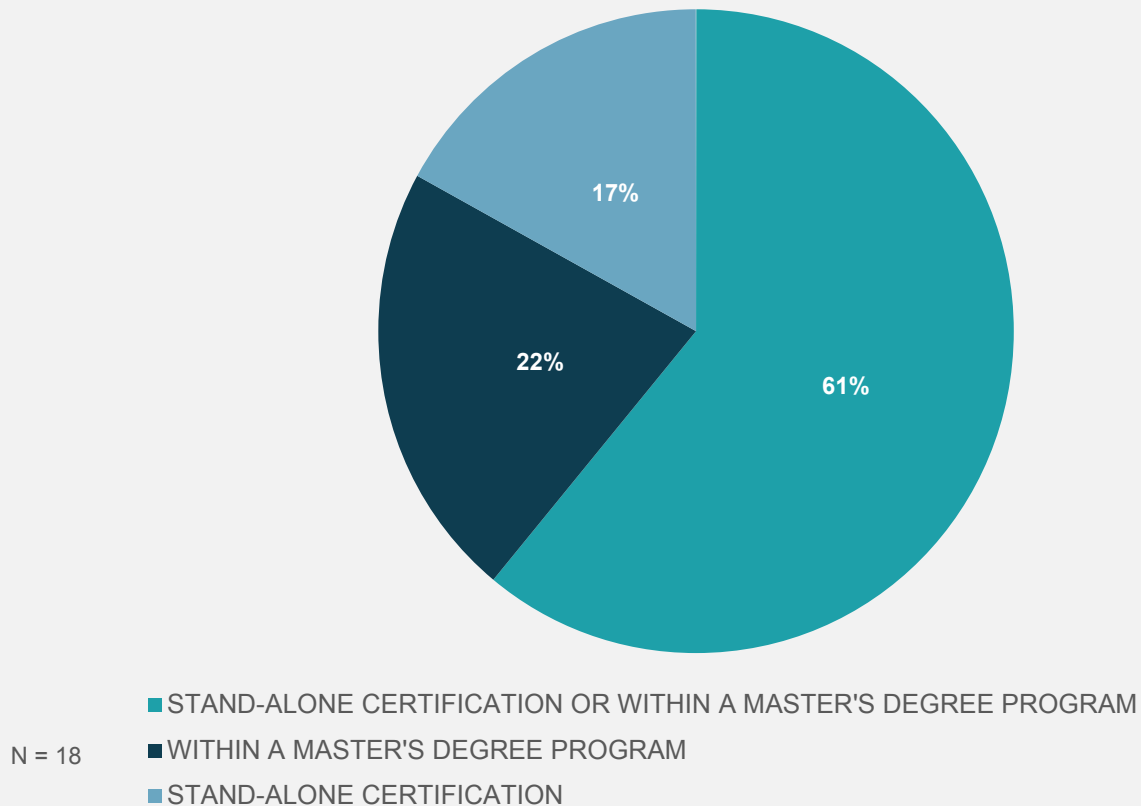
N = 18

*Note: Program leads could indicate multiple formats in which the principal certification program was offered, and thus, percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.*

We asked program leads to indicate the paths by which principal candidates may attain principal certification. In most programs (61 percent), candidates had the option of attaining certification as part of a stand-alone certification program (post-master’s degree) or within a master’s degree program (see **Figure 2**). In less than one-quarter of programs (22 percent), principal candidates may attain certification only within a master’s degree program, and in 17 percent of programs,

candidates may attain certification as a stand-alone certification only. When certification is attained within a master's degree program, most programs (80 percent) were in Educational Leadership, 40 percent were in Curriculum and Instruction or Instructional Leadership, and 33 percent were in Educational or School Administration.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2: Paths to Certification in New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



## Principal Candidates

Based on information provided by programs participating in the survey, it is estimated that during the 2015-2016 academic year, 1,449 principal candidates were registered in principal certification programs in New Jersey. Three-quarters of programs reported 50 or fewer registered candidates. During this same period, certification programs that participated in the survey estimated that 311 candidates successfully completed the program. Of note, although principal candidates are required to have five years of educational experience under a provisional or standard certificate prior to attaining a certification in New Jersey, two-thirds of programs (67 percent) reported that they did not know which credentials current candidates held (e.g., Preschool to Grade 3, Elementary School, Middle School, or Individual Subjects (P-12) Credential).

<sup>3</sup> Principal certification programs obtained within a master's degree program may be offered within multiple degree programs at an institution, thus, the percentages for master's degree programs of study add up to more than 100 percent.

## Employment Status of Faculty Members

Institutions of higher education rely primarily on part-time faculty; across disciplines, two-thirds or more of faculty members in colleges and universities nationwide are employed part time (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014; Curtis & Thornton, 2014), which can pose multiple challenges for both faculty and students. Part-time faculty are often not integrated as members of the department in which they teach or engaged in curriculum planning and professional development. Furthermore, they are typically paid to teach particular courses and are not paid for additional responsibilities, such as student advising or program evaluation (CCCSE, 2014). This situation can lead to full-time faculty taking on a greater share of administrative, institutional, and student-advising responsibilities in addition to their teaching load (CCCSE, 2014; Curtis & Thornton, 2014; Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, & Sakai, 2005). A dependence on part-time faculty persists in New Jersey principal certification programs. Adjunct faculty comprised 76 percent of the estimated 144 faculty members employed in certification programs participating in the survey. Four programs reported employing no full-time faculty members. This reliance on part-time faculty can be particularly problematic for programs attempting to expand course offerings focused on preparing principal candidates to work with pre-K, early elementary, and primary school classrooms.

### 2

#### FINDING TWO: PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Required Course Content and Age-Group Focus

*New Jersey principal certification programs require course content on a range of topics related to what children and teachers should know and be able to do, the integration of pre-K-3 in public schools, and the promotion of family and community engagement. Course content on human development and on leadership to inform curriculum and instruction focused on children pre-K through third grade is notably underrepresented. Few programs offer an in-depth focus on topics related to human development and alignment and integration within and across grades pre-K-3.*

There is broad consensus that principal certification programs should include course content that encompasses theories of development and learning, instructional methods, supervision, and leadership and program administration (IOM & NRC, 2015). Additionally, specialized training focused on pre-K-3 is essential for effective pedagogical leadership for principals working in elementary schools with pre-K programs.

“**Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.**” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12)

## What we asked about course content and age-group focus:

Program leads were asked to identify whether course content was required for candidates to attain principal certification, whether the content was optional (i.e., content is available, but not required), or whether course content was not offered as part of the principal certification program. Content areas focused on four domains:

1. What children and teachers should know and be able to do:
  - Human development;
2. Leadership to inform curriculum and assessment:
  - Supervision; and
  - Early childhood competencies and standards;
3. Administration of pre-K programs in public elementary schools:
  - Leadership and management;
  - Law, policy, and finance;
  - Family engagement; and
  - Diversity and equity; and
4. Age-group focus and alignment across pre-K-3.

For topics related to “human development” and “leadership to inform curriculum and assessment,” respondents were also asked to indicate whether a series of specific topics were required, and if so, the age-group or grade-level focus of each required topic.

## What Children and Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do

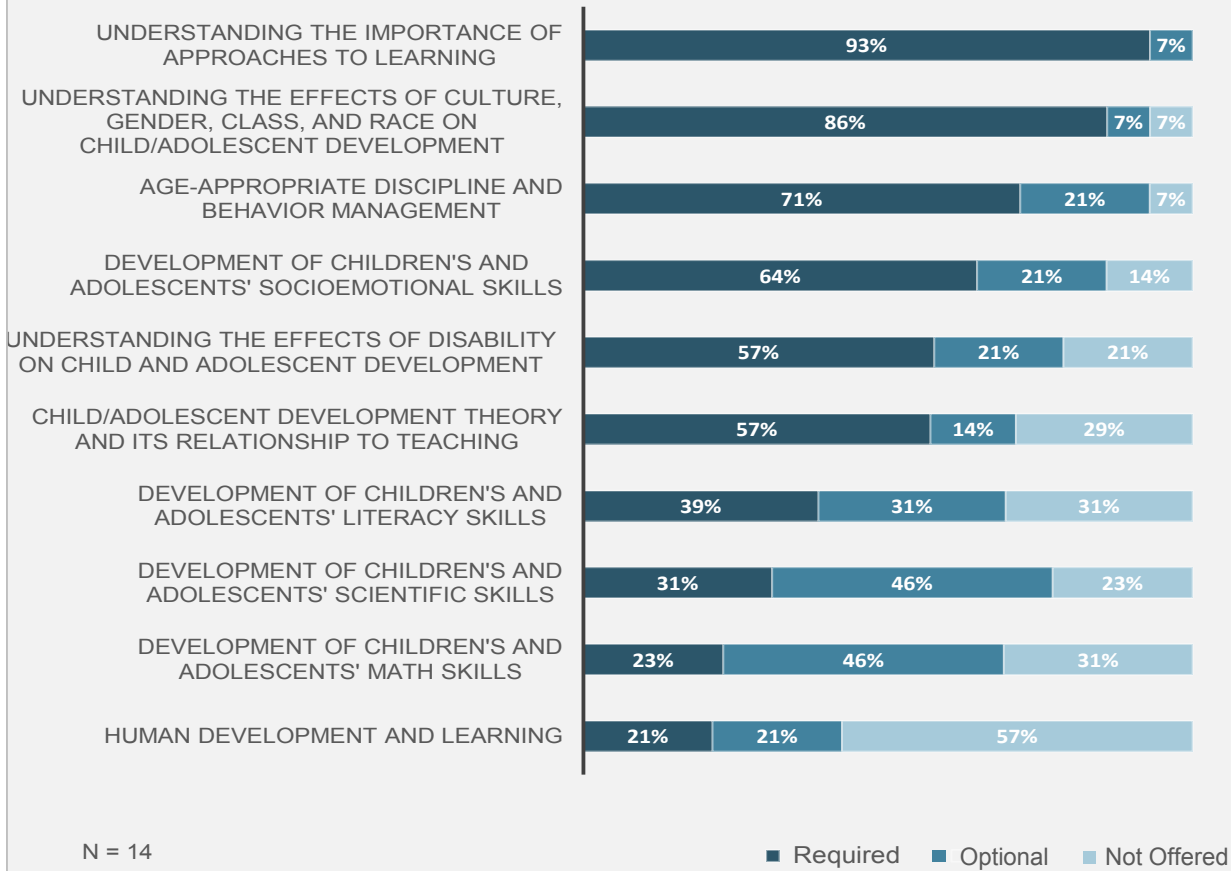
### Human Development

To be sufficiently prepared to support young learners’ cognitive and socioemotional development, educators need to understand the course of typical and atypical development as well as age appropriate expectations for learning and behavior. A lack of understanding about developmentally appropriate behavior has been linked to labeling of normal behaviors as inappropriate or problematic, which may result in unnecessary disciplinary action of young children (e.g., suspension or expulsion) (Qi & Kaiser, 2003). Course content related to areas of child development was not consistently offered to principal candidates.<sup>4</sup> Only three of the 10 topics examined in the survey — “understanding the importance of approaches to learning,” “understanding the effects of culture, gender, class, and race on child/adolescent development,” and “age-appropriate discipline and behavior management” — were required by two-thirds or more of all programs (see **Figure 3**).

More than one-half of programs reported that “human development and learning across the lifespan from birth to adulthood” was neither required nor offered as part of the principal certification program. Less than one-quarter of programs (21 percent) required this topic, and less than one-quarter (21 percent) reported that a course on “human development and learning” was available but not required for principal candidates to attain certification (see **Figure 3**).

<sup>4</sup> Survey questions about course content related to human development and learning were asked only for programs not embedded within a master’s or doctoral degree program.

**Figure 3: Coursework on Human Development Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



### Leadership to Inform Curriculum and Assessment

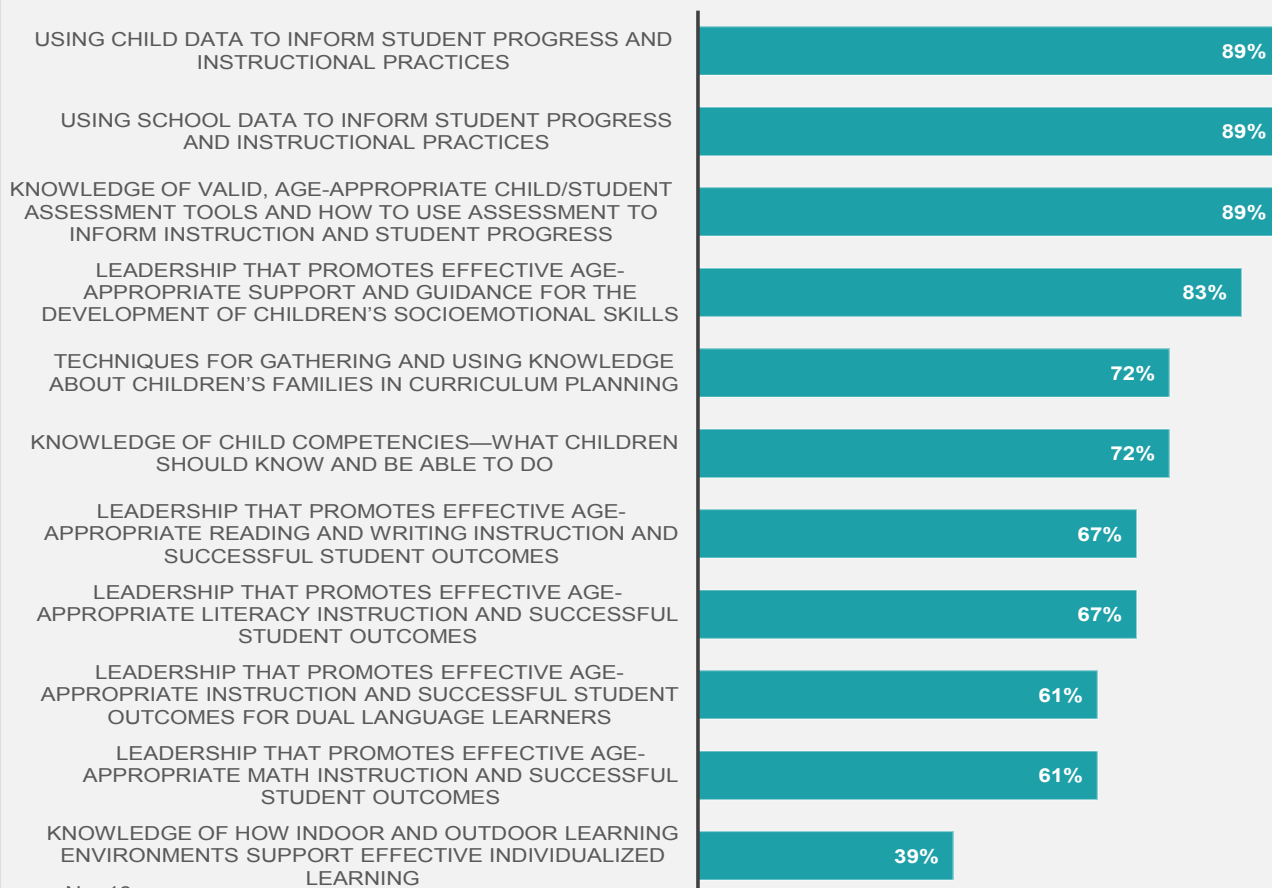
We asked program leads whether principal candidates were required to complete course content on leadership that promotes effective instruction and successful student outcomes, supervision of teachers, and knowledge of teacher competencies. The inclusion of course content to prepare principal candidates to be effective pedagogical leaders varied by topic (see **Figure 4**). Nearly all programs reported requiring the following course content related to curriculum and assessment:

- ◆ Knowledge of valid age-appropriate child/student assessment tools and how to use assessment to inform instruction and student progress;
- ◆ Using school data to inform student progress and instructional practices;
- ◆ Using child data to inform student progress and instructional practices; and
- ◆ Leadership that promotes effective age-appropriate support and guidance for the development of children's socioemotional skills.

However, all other leadership topics were required by less than three-quarters of programs. For example, more than one-third (35 percent) of certification programs did not require course content on “leadership that promotes effective age-appropriate math instruction and successful student outcomes” or “leadership that promotes effective age-appropriate instruction and successful student outcomes for dual language learners.” More than one-quarter of programs (28 percent) did not require course content on “knowledge of child competencies — what children should know and be able to do.”

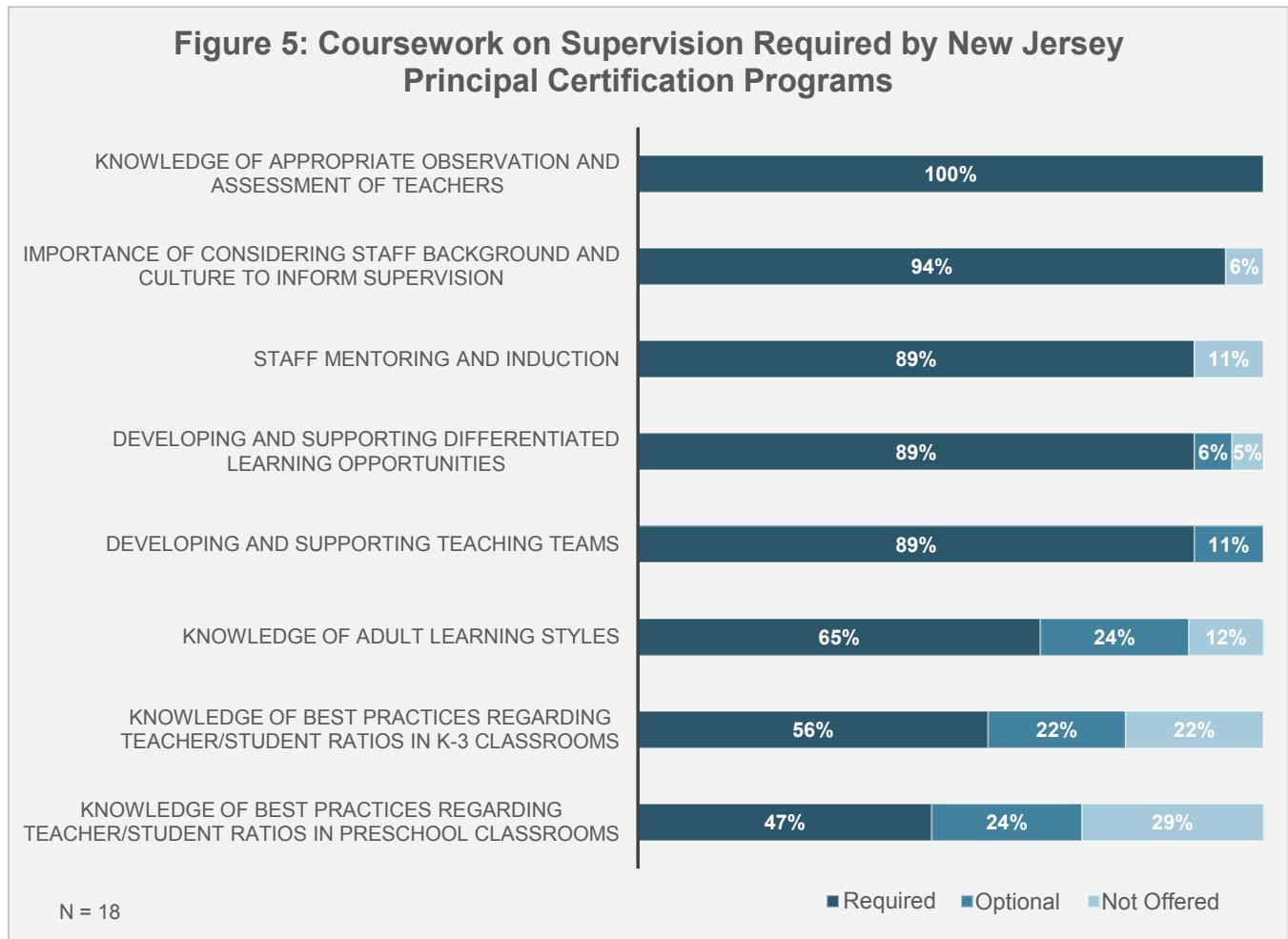
“**More than one-third of certification programs did not require course content on “leadership that promotes effective age-appropriate math instruction and successful student outcomes” or “leadership that promotes effective age-appropriate instruction and successful student outcomes for dual language learners.”**”

**Figure 4: Coursework on Leadership to Inform Curriculum and Assessment Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



## Supervision

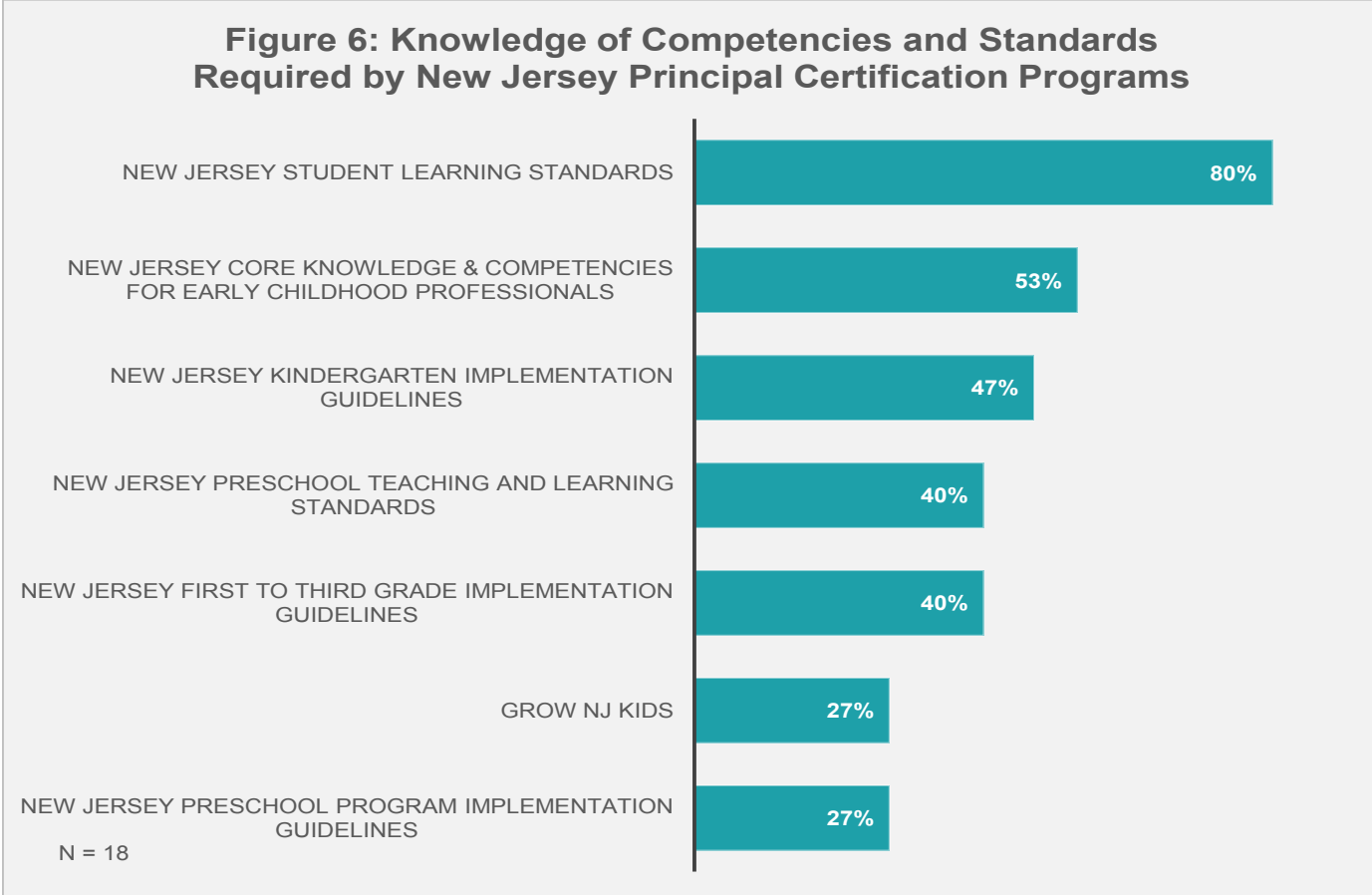
Certification programs reported requiring most of the course content topics related to supervision. Five of the eight topics examined in the survey — “knowledge of appropriate observation/assessment of teachers,” “importance of considering staff background and culture to inform supervision,” “staff mentoring and induction,” “developing and supporting differentiated learning opportunities for teaching staff,” and “developing and supporting teaching teams” — were required by 89 percent or more of programs. A smaller percentage of programs (65 percent) reported requiring principal candidates to complete course content related to “knowledge of adult learning styles.” Notably, even fewer programs reported requiring course content on knowledge of teacher/student ratios in K-3 (56 percent) or preschool classrooms (47 percent; see **Figure 5**).



## Competencies and Standards

Principal certification programs reported whether they required principal candidates to learn about various competencies and standards implemented in New Jersey that address what children and educators should know and be able to do. Knowledge of different competencies and standards was not consistently required by certification programs, and certification programs were more likely to require candidates to learn about learning standards for children than knowledge and competencies for educators of young children (see **Figure 6**). More than three-quarters (80 percent) of programs required principal candidates to learn about the New

Jersey Student Learning Standards, which primarily focus on children in grades K-12. In contrast, knowledge of New Jersey Core Knowledge & Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals was required by 53 percent of certification programs, and knowledge of all other standards listed in the *Principal Inventory* was required by fewer than one-half of certification programs.



### Administration of Pre-K Programs in Public Schools

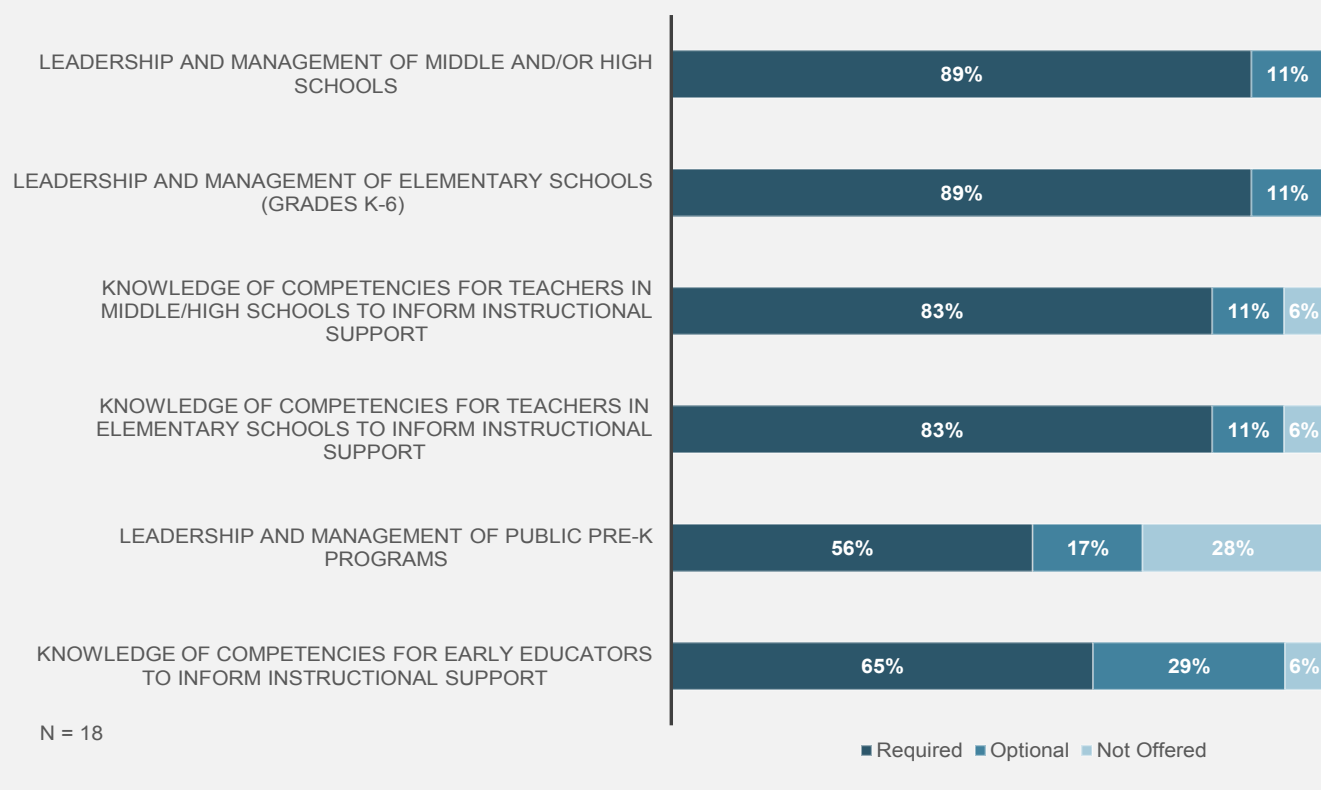
Historically, pre-K and K-12 education have been regarded as separate components of the educational system with different funding and regulations for programs, practitioners, and leaders (Lieberman, 2017; Whitebook, 2014; Whitebook & McLean, 2017). However, reflecting the changing scope of public education, principals of schools with pre-K classrooms require specific knowledge of management, laws, and policies governing children younger than five.

### Leadership and Management

While most certification programs reported that principal candidates were required to complete course content on leadership and management (89 percent) or competencies to guide instructional support for teachers in middle and/or high schools (83 percent), fewer programs required this coursework focused on younger children. Slightly more than one-half of programs (56 percent) required course content on leadership and management of public pre-K programs, and only 65 percent of programs required coursework related to knowledge of competencies for early educators. Coursework on leadership and management or competencies for early educators was more likely to be optional rather than required (see **Figure 7**).



**Figure 7: Coursework on Leadership and Management Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



## Law, Policy, and Finance

Program leads were asked whether principal candidates were required to complete course content related to education law, policy, and finance. Nearly all certification programs reported requiring the following course content related to law, policy, and finance focused on the education of K-12 children, including:

- ◆ Current laws and policies governing public elementary and secondary education in the state;
- ◆ Knowledge of federal, state, and local methods of financing public K-12 education;
- ◆ Current laws and policies related to special education services for K-12 students in the U.S. and the state;
- ◆ Policies, history, and the foundation of public elementary and secondary education in the U.S.; and
- ◆ History of Title IX<sup>5</sup> and its implementation in pre-K-12 education.

“Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote *each* student’s academic success and well-being.” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 17)

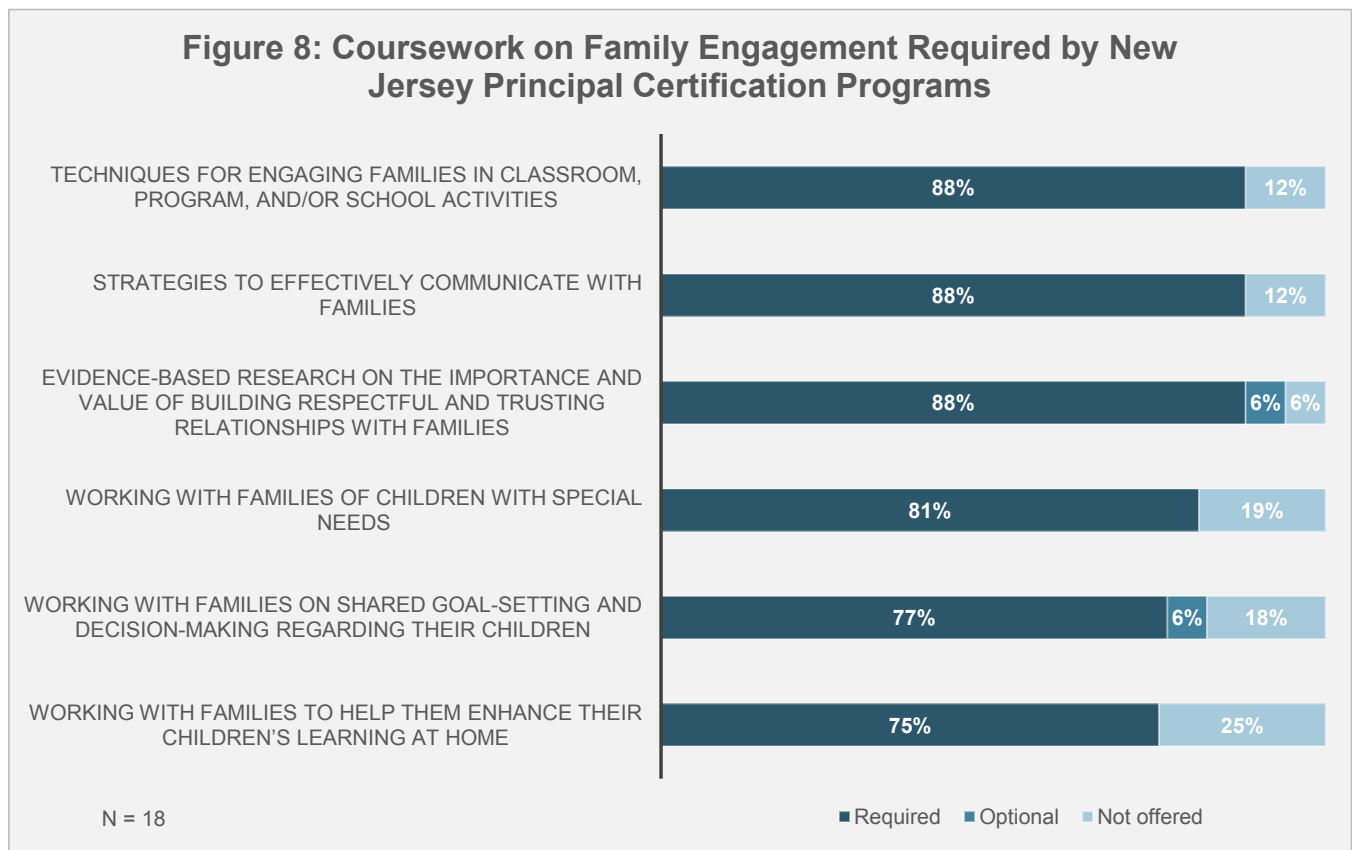
<sup>5</sup> Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law that states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title IX requires educational institutions to implement and enforce policies, practices, and programs that provide equal educational opportunities and that do not discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender (United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016).

Certification programs were less likely to require similar course content focused on young children. Less than three-quarters of program leads reported required coursework on the following:

- ◆ Policies, history, and foundation of public early childhood education in the U.S;
- ◆ Current laws and policies governing private pre-K programs in the state;
- ◆ Current laws and policies related to special education services for children birth to before kindergarten in the U.S. and the state; and
- ◆ Knowledge of federal, state, and local methods of financing public pre-K/early childhood education (e.g., Abbott preschool, Head Start).

## Family Engagement

The establishment of community and family partnerships is essential to incorporating children’s culture and family values in school instruction and curriculum and extending children’s learning at home (Brinnel & Pollitt, 2016; IOM & NRC, 2015; Lowenberg, 2016). While most certification programs reported requiring multiple course topics related to working with families to enhance children’s learning, no topic listed in the *Principal Inventory* was required by all programs (see **Figure 8**). One-quarter of programs did not offer coursework on “working with families to help them enhance their children’s learning at home,” and nearly one-fifth did not offer coursework on “working with families of children with special needs” or “working with families on sharing goal-setting and decision-making regarding their children.”



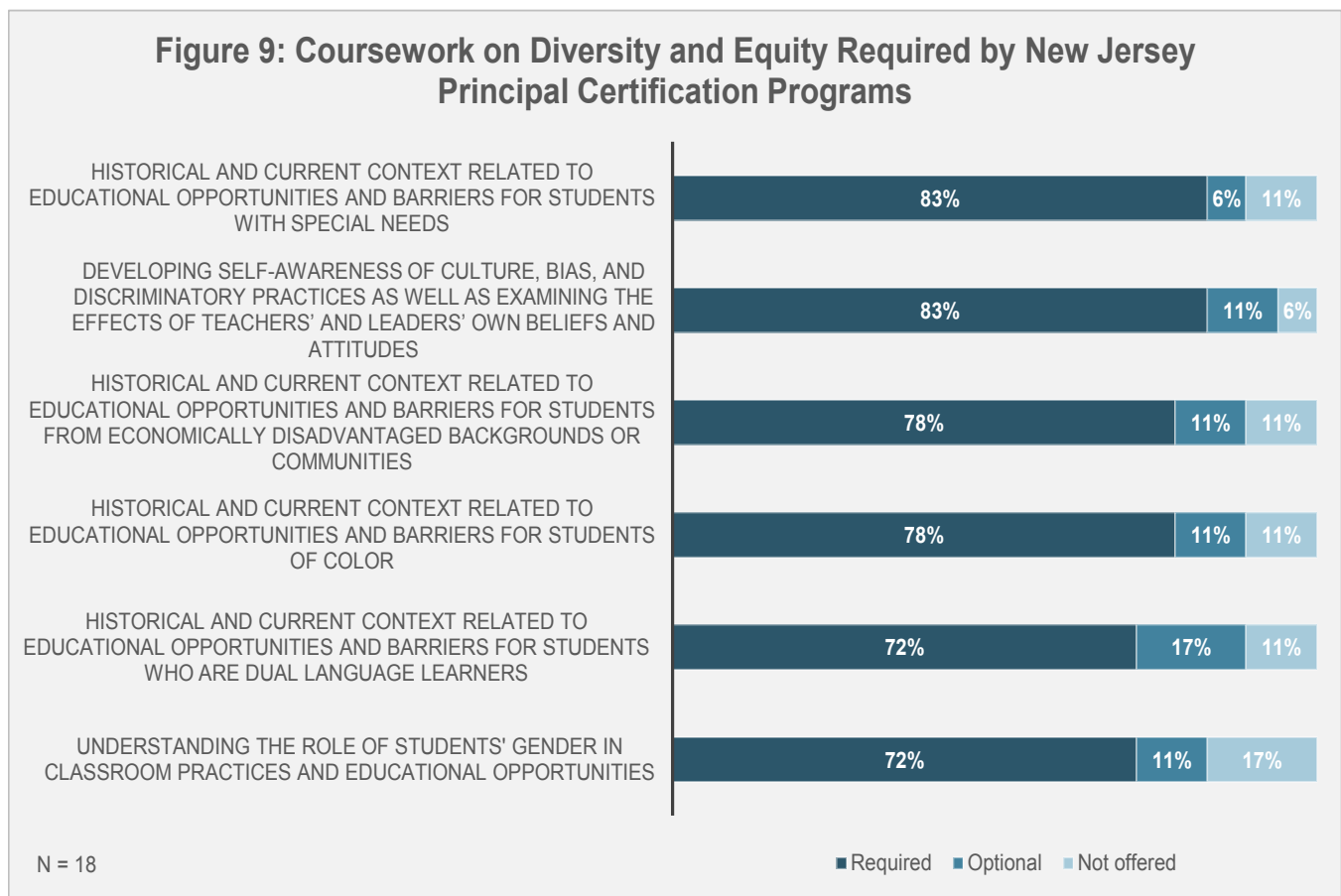
## Diversity and Equity

In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration released “Professional Standards for Educational Leaders,” (formerly the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium [ISLLC] Standards), a framework for policy on educational leadership (NPBEA, 2015). Underscoring the importance of diversity and equity on student academic success and well-being, the framework includes “Equity and Cultural Responsiveness,” stating the following:

*“Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.”* (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11)

The *Principal Inventory* sought to identify required course offerings on topics related to diversity and equity. The two most often required topics reported by program leads were: “historical and current context related to educational opportunities and barriers for students with special needs” (83 percent) and “developing self-awareness of culture, bias, and discriminatory practices as well as examining the effects of teachers’ and leaders’ own beliefs and attitudes” (83 percent; see **Figure 9**). Coursework on “historical and current context related to educational opportunities and barriers for students who are dual language learners” and “understanding the role of students’ gender in classroom practices and educational opportunities” were reported as “optional” or “not offered” by more than one-quarter of programs.

**Figure 9: Coursework on Diversity and Equity Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



## Age-Group Focus and Alignment

Creating an integrated pre-K-3 early care and education system has emerged as a major concern for policymakers and stakeholders interested in coordinated and comprehensive high-quality education for young children (IOM & NRC, 2015). This objective requires that principals — particularly those working in schools with pre-K-3 classrooms — understand the unique developmental needs of children in this age range as well as effective and appropriate pedagogical approaches to teaching young children.

### Age-Group Focus

This study intentionally sought to examine differences among principal certification programs in preparing candidates to work with children of different ages. Specifically, for the topic areas related to human development and leadership to inform curriculum and assessment, program leads were asked to indicate whether required topics included a specific age or grade focus. When human development topics were required, most certification programs reported no specific age-group or grade-level focus. When a specific age-group was required, programs consistently reported that these were focused on children of kindergarten age or older, rather than on children prior to kindergarten. For example, the topic “understanding the importance of approaches to learning” was required by nearly all programs (93 percent; see **Figure 3**). However, 70 percent of these programs did not require a specific age or grade level. The programs that did have such a requirement were focused on children in kindergarten or higher grades, rather than children age four or younger.

### Alignment Across Pre-K-3

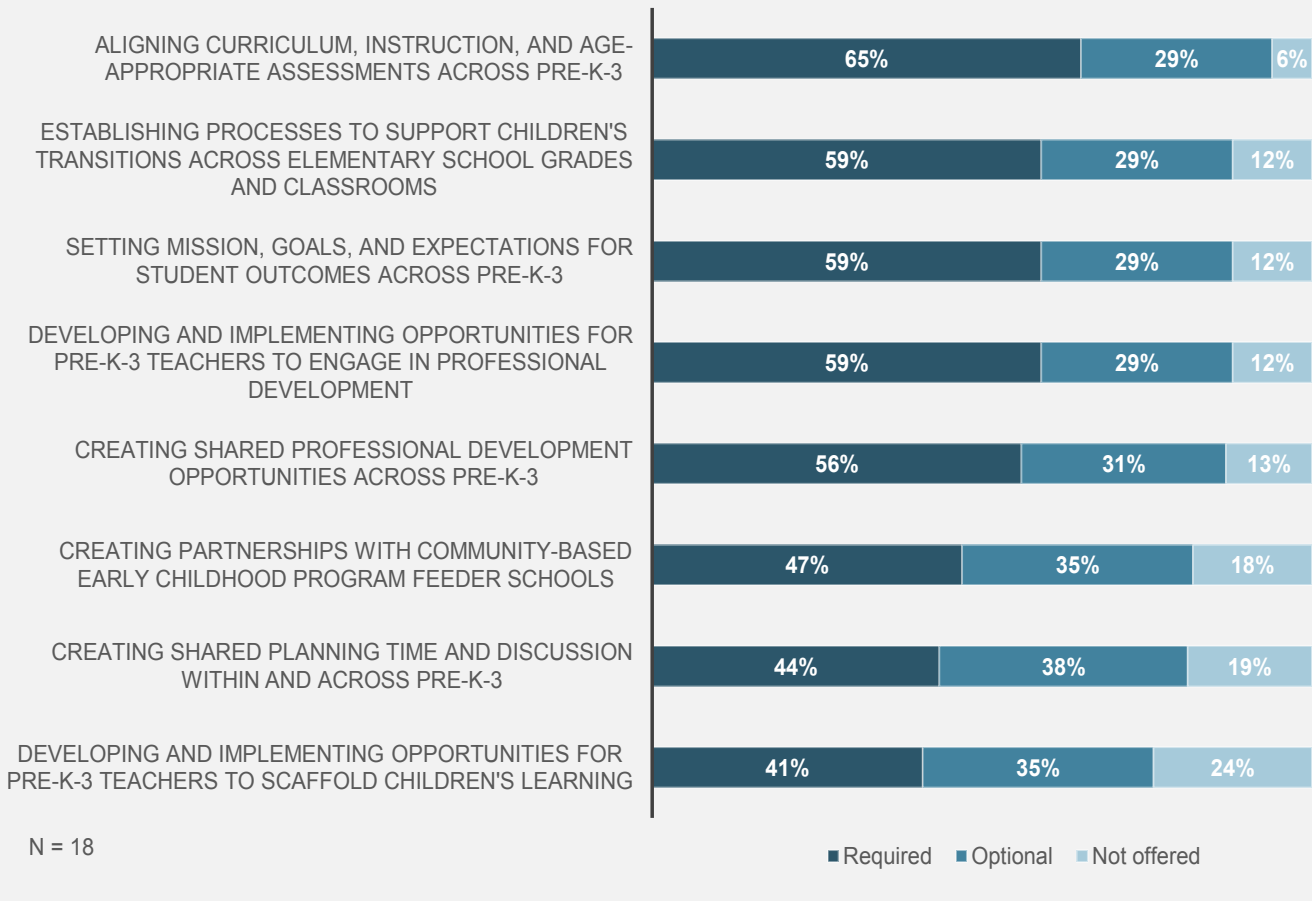
Although research supports an integrated educational system that encompasses all children from preschool to third grade (IOM & NRC, 2015; NAESP, 2014), a sizeable minority of principal certification programs in New Jersey did not require course content on transitions, alignment, and professional supports for teachers across the educational continuum. None of the topic areas we asked about were required by more than two-thirds of programs in the sample (see **Figure 10**).

Course content required by at least one-half of programs included:

- ◆ Aligning curriculum, instruction, and age-appropriate assessments across pre-K-3 classrooms;
- ◆ Establishing processes to support children’s transition across elementary school grades and classrooms;
- ◆ Setting mission, goals, and expectations for student outcomes across pre-K-3 classrooms;
- ◆ Developing and implementing opportunities for pre-K-3 teachers engaged in professional development focused on what children should know; and
- ◆ Creating shared professional development opportunities across pre-K-3.

Across all topics related to pre-K-3 alignment, approximately one-third of certification programs reported that topics were optional, rather than required to attain certification (see **Figure 10**).

**Figure 10: Coursework on Pre-K-3 Alignment Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



### 3 FINDING THREE: INTERNSHIPS Characteristics and Supervision

*Although all candidates earning a principal certification in New Jersey are required to complete a 300-hour internship, there is little consistency as to criteria for site selection and supervision of candidates in their internship.*

There is widespread agreement that principal candidates benefit from internship experiences in a variety of settings (e.g., elementary, middle, high school) that include hands-on, real-life experiences (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Jiang, Patterson, Chandler, & Chan, 2009; Lieberman, 2017). Overseeing an elementary school requires different knowledge and skills than leading a middle or high school, and young children learn differently than older students. Clinical experiences working in schools with pre-K-3 classrooms as well as different child populations

(e.g., children with disabilities, dual language learners) provide principal candidates with invaluable opportunities to gain skills necessary to run pre-K-3 programs in public elementary schools (Lieberman, 2017).

### What we asked about internships:

The state of New Jersey requires principal certification applicants to complete a 300-hour internship. Program leads were asked to indicate whether the internship required experience hours over and above what the state required. They were also asked a series of questions pertaining to the internship, including: age-group focus; who supervises the internship; and criteria to select the internship site.

## Characteristics of Internships

We asked program leads whether the principal certification program required candidates to complete internship hours over and above the 300 hours required by the state. One-third of programs (35 percent) required additional internship hours (additional hours ranged from 50 to 300).

Principal candidates seem to have considerable latitude in the type of school in which to complete their internship (see **Figure 11**). Nearly three-quarters of programs (72 percent) reported that principal candidates select their own internship site, and almost universally, candidates complete their internship at the school where they are currently employed. Only one-third of programs reported that principal candidates are required to complete an internship in a school that matched their intended placement (e.g., if a student plans to apply for positions as a high school principal, they must complete some portion of their internship in a high school building). More than one-quarter of programs (29 percent) reported a lack of access to quality schools with pre-K classrooms for internships as a challenge.

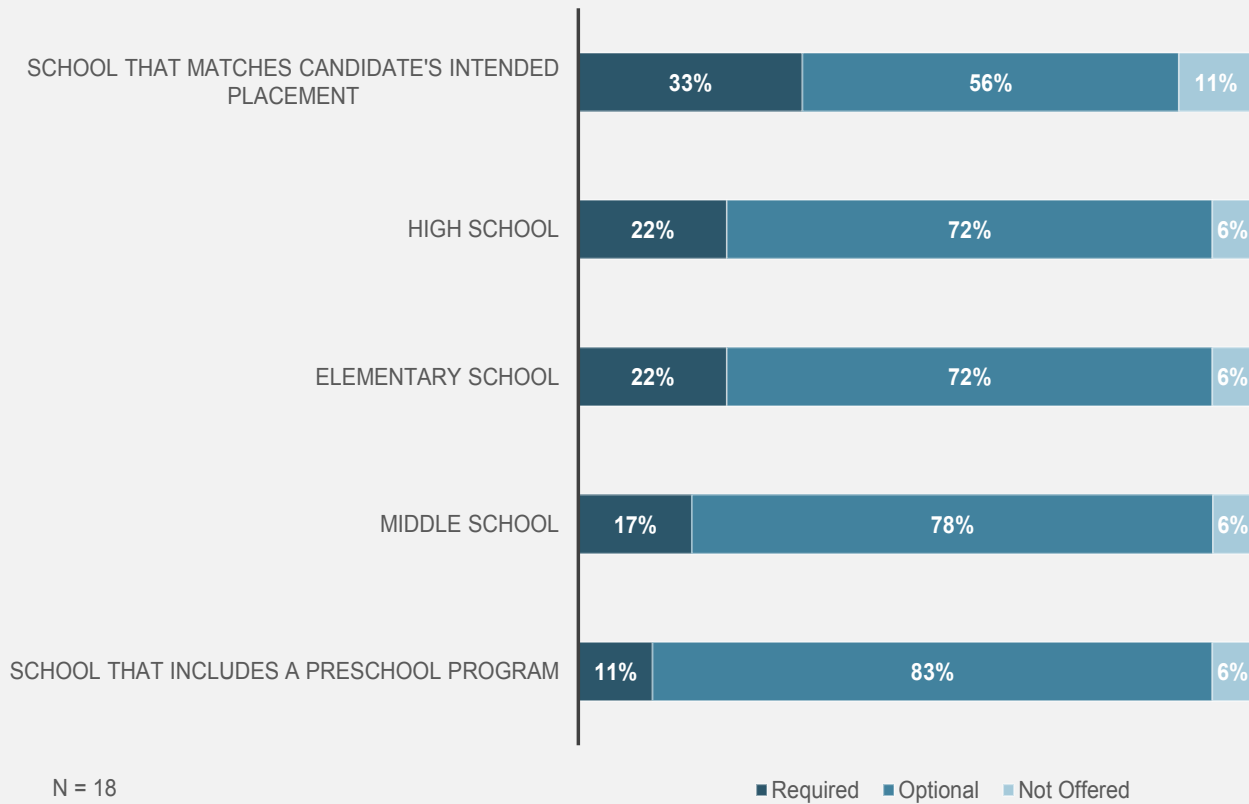
Forty percent of programs reported that various criteria are used to select an internship site, including:

- ◆ Children with disabilities served at site (29 percent);
- ◆ Age of children served at the site (23 percent); and
- ◆ Demographic background of children served at the site (23 percent).

## Supervision of Internships

The role of an on-site mentor — even more so than supervision by faculty members — is cited as critical to the effectiveness and success of an internship experience (Jiang et al., 2009). Fifty percent of program leads reported supervision by both an on-site educational professional and a faculty member, while another 22 percent reported that principal candidates were supervised solely by an on-site educational professional. Principal candidates enrolled in the other programs in the sample were supervised by a faculty member and/or someone other than an on-site professional.

**Figure 11: Internship Setting(s) Required by New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



**4 FINDING FOUR: PROGRAM CHALLENGES**  
 Preparing Principal Candidates to Work in Schools with Pre-K Classrooms

*New Jersey principal certification programs experience a range of challenges, most often citing insufficient course content on programs for children prior to kindergarten and a lack of program standards to guide course content related to the administration of pre-K programs/classrooms.*

**What we asked about program challenges:**

- Program leads were asked about three general categories of challenges to preparing principal candidates to work in schools with pre-K classrooms. These challenges were related to:
- What children and teachers should know and able to do;
  - Integration and alignment of pre-K-3; and
  - Working with diverse populations of students.

## Challenges Related to Faculty Member Expertise on What Children and Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do

Two challenges were identified by more than two out of five principal certification programs: “insufficient course content focused on programs for children prior to kindergarten” (47 percent); and a “lack of program standards to guide course content related to administration of pre-K programs/classrooms” (41 percent; see **Figure 12**). Almost one-third of programs (29 percent) reported a “need for additional faculty expertise in developmentally appropriate curriculum” and “pre-K child competencies.”

Certification programs identified a need for additional faculty members with expertise on what teachers should know and be able to do, including a need for additional faculty expertise in how to support, supervise, and mentor K-3 (38 percent) and preschool and early childhood education teachers (35 percent), and “additional faculty expertise on age-appropriate standards and competencies for educators working with children prior to kindergarten” (35 percent; see **Figure 12**).

## Challenges Related to Integration and Alignment of Pre-K-3

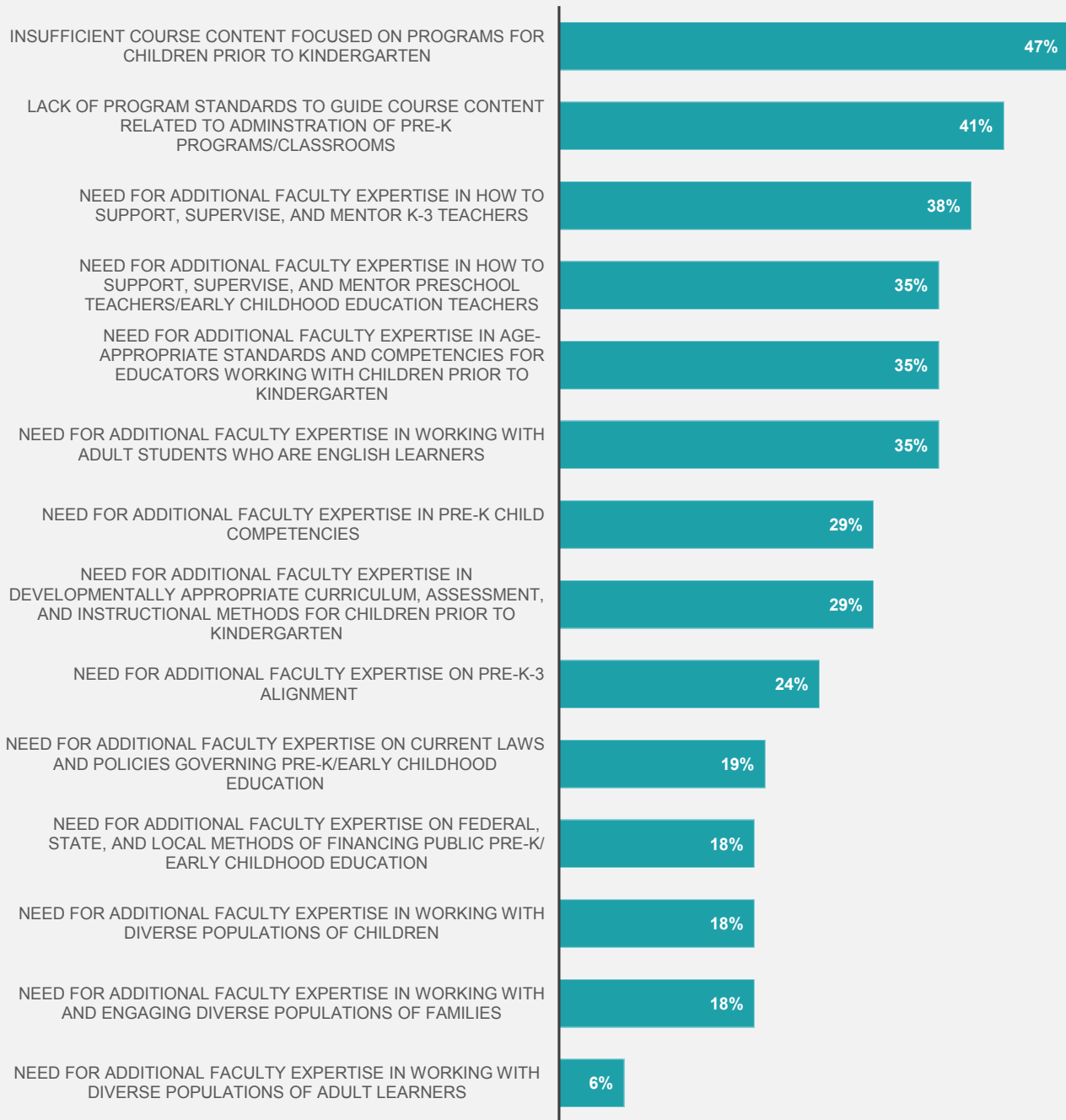
Despite the lack of course offerings in this area among programs in the sample, only one-quarter (24 percent) identified a “need for additional faculty members with expertise on pre-K-3 alignment,” and less than one-fifth identified a “need for faculty expertise on current laws and policies governing pre-K/early childhood education” (19 percent) or “federal, state, and local methods of financing public pre-K/early childhood education” (18 percent; see **Figure 12**).

## Challenges Related to Preparing Principal Candidates to Work with Diverse Populations

Among program leads, slightly more than one-third (35 percent) reported a “need for additional faculty members with expertise in working with adult students who are English-language learners,” but only six percent identified a “need for faculty members with expertise in working with diverse populations of adult learners.” Less than one-fifth of certification programs identified a “need for additional faculty members with expertise in working with diverse populations of children” (18 percent) or “working with and engaging diverse populations of families” (18 percent; see **Figure 12**).



**Figure 12: Challenges Facing New Jersey Principal Certification Programs**



N = 18

Percentage of Programs

# 3 Discussion and Recommendations

All children deserve early learning experiences that stir their imagination and expand the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in life. Facilitating such experiences for all children requires teachers and school leaders with deep knowledge about best practices for supporting children's learning and creating high-quality early care and education environments (IOM & NRC, 2015). With the expansion of state-funded pre-K, principals are increasingly charged with leading the delivery of effective pre-K in public school settings. This task requires a shift from the traditional notion that public education begins at kindergarten and an understanding that children prior to kindergarten have unique developmental and learning needs. Such a reconceptualization presents both opportunities and challenges for programs charged with preparing effective school leaders and for policymakers and stakeholders designing and implementing principal certification standards and professional development and support for current school leaders.

Candidates in New Jersey's principal certification programs are required to complete course content on a variety of topics; however, results from the present study indicate that they receive limited exposure to content related to children younger than five, scant training in the supervision and support of early care and education teachers, and few strategies to integrate and align instruction across pre-K-3 classrooms. In addition, principal candidates likely to become elementary school principals have little opportunity to participate in internship experiences in pre-K-3 settings. Below, we outline an approach to reconceptualizing and strengthening preparation and support for principal candidates and current school leaders. An education system that is fully prepared to support the well-being of both young children and the adults who educate them requires coordinated efforts on multiple fronts, including policymakers, advocates, institutions of higher education, and current and future school leaders.

## 1. Review and align current principal certification to encompass early learning

To obtain P-12 certification, New Jersey principals must have a master's degree, five years of educational experience, 30 graduate credit hours in an approved certification program, and a 300-hour-long internship experience in educational leadership (Lieberman, 2017; State of New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.b.). However, as in most states, New Jersey's P-12 certification is not grade specific and does not require ECE-specific education or experience for certification, even for principal candidates who anticipate working in an elementary school with preschool classrooms (Brown et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2017).

## To strengthen state standards and competencies for the next cohort of principals:

- ◆ Support efforts of the New Jersey Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement (DECE) to align current P-12 principal certification to encompass early learning;
- ◆ Draw upon existing knowledge culled by experts in the field (e.g., Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; IOM & NRC, 2015; Mead, 2011; NAESP, 2014) to inform and guide a review of New Jersey's P-12 principal certification requirements and ongoing learning for current principals. New Jersey can look to other states like Illinois, which has added pre-K to their licensure and requires all principal certification programs to incorporate early learning to their curricula;
- ◆ Engage a diverse group of policymakers and other stakeholders that represent the pre-K-12 continuum and certification programs to generate a new framework for addressing a more comprehensive preparation system that includes early childhood content and experience as part of New Jersey's P-12 principal certification requirements; and
- ◆ Restructure principal certification to include a pre-K-3 specialization for leaders working in elementary schools, which incorporates content knowledge and best practices specifically focused on pre-K-3.

## 2. Strengthen program content and equity across the age span required for candidates in principal certification programs

Principal certification programs vary widely in required course content and are more likely to focus on older children (older elementary, middle, or high school) or have no specific age-group focus. Lack of course content, particularly that focused on teacher competencies, assessment of young children, math pedagogy, and working with dual language learners, leaves future principals unprepared to lead elementary schools with pre-K-3 classrooms, and leaves teachers without supervision of and guidance on their classroom practice. Dedicated resources are needed to align course content with research evidence on leadership preparation and to equalize required content focused on children across the pre-K-3 continuum.

### To strengthen course content:

- ◆ Provide resources, support, and encouragement for faculty and administrators of principal certification programs, the New Jersey Department of Education, and other experts in the field, to develop and expand principal certification program course content to include content knowledge and best practices focused on pre-K-3. Support is especially critical to engage the many adjunct and part-time faculty who are often not included in program-level decisions yet comprise the majority of faculty working in principal certification programs. Content areas should include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Child development and learning of children pre-K-3, across multiple domains and including approaches to learning;
  - Pedagogy focused on educating children pre-K-3, particularly around early mathematics;
  - Course content related to supporting dual language learners, children with special needs, and diverse groups of children and families with respect to culture, ethnicity, gender, and class;
  - Leadership and management of public pre-K programs;
  - Knowledge and competencies for early educators;
  - Early childhood policy; and
  - Integration and alignment across the pre-K-3 spectrum; and
- ◆ Address the professional development needs for higher education faculty to expand their expertise in age-appropriate curriculum (specifically around math), assessment of children younger than grade three, supervision of teachers, and leadership and management of pre-K-3 settings.

### **To strengthen internship experiences, develop opportunities for internships:**

- ◆ Focused on children from pre-K through third grade;
- ◆ In schools with a pre-K program; and
- ◆ Supervised by educational professionals experienced in leading pre-K-3 classrooms.

### **3. Strengthen ongoing professional development for current principals**

For principals, as with teachers, opportunities for continuous learning and professional development are essential to good practice. The findings of this report call for professional development opportunities that: (1) address the learning needs of principals currently working in schools with pre-K classrooms who were not exposed in their certification programs to topics raised in this report; and (2) build upon pre-K-3 knowledge obtained in principal certification programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). New Jersey's PREK-3rd Grade Leadership Training Series,<sup>6</sup> designed for elementary school principals, and the New Jersey Early Childhood Academy<sup>7</sup> for school district leaders (Brown et al., 2014) should be required and made easily accessible to principals throughout the state. Such programs provide opportunities for principals to engage with experts in the field and to hone their skills related to overseeing schools with pre-K-3 classrooms.

### **To strengthen the education and expertise of current principals:**

- ◆ Make opportunities for specialized professional development available in districts across the state. This training should focus on both the theoretical foundations of child development and effective pedagogical leadership practices and should be required for principals and leaders of elementary schools with pre-K-3 programs;
- ◆ Create additional learning communities so principals and school leaders can — on an ongoing basis — discuss, learn, implement, and reflect on strategies to:
  - Integrate and align preschool learning environments with the instruction of older children and develop shared professional learning opportunities for teaching staff both within and across grades;
  - Develop and utilize developmentally appropriate assessment systems to inform and individualize instruction for children pre-K-3; and
  - Review current research on the importance of the inclusion of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to inform curriculum and instruction for children pre-K-3; and
- ◆ Incorporate pre-K-3 competencies and standards in existing evaluations of principals working in public elementary schools with pre-K programs.

<sup>6</sup> Developed in 2009 by the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE), New Jersey Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NJASCE), and Advocates for Children in New Jersey (ACNJ), and funded by the Foundation for Child Development, the Pre-K-3rd Grade Leadership Training Series was designed for administrators with preschool responsibilities. For four days, over a five month period, more than 200 elementary school administrators participated in activities focused on pre-K-3 including leader, teacher, and program quality, standards and child assessments, transitions, infrastructure, and family and community engagement (Brown et al., 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education and the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) of The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University, the New Jersey Early Childhood Academy (ECA) focuses on preschool expansion, teacher evaluation, Common Core State Standards, professional learning communities, and use of classroom data. As of 2014, more than 400 school administrators from select school districts have participated in the three-year program. Funding is currently provided by the school district (Brown et al., 2014).

## 4. Regularly collect data on elementary school leaders

Current, reliable, and valid data are needed to guide educational policy and practice and to identify professional development needs of principals, particularly those working in public elementary schools. In addition, systemic changes require efforts on multiple fronts. Because school leaders often begin their careers in education as teachers and also may go on to other administrative positions (e.g., Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Superintendent), it is crucial to understand the preparation, training, and professional development needs of educators at all levels.

### **To guide policy and practice:**

- ◆ Collect data on current elementary school principals biennially. This information should include, but not be limited to, their:
  - Educational background;
  - Professional experience;
  - Professional development needs related to leadership across the pre-K-3 continuum;
  - Challenges to working in schools with pre-K-3 classrooms; and
  - Retention;
- ◆ Collect data on higher education degree programs designed to prepare teachers to work in pre-K-3 classrooms; and
- ◆ Collect data on principal certification programs.

### **To guide stakeholders and policymakers to design professional development and other education and training programs:**

- ◆ Collect data from principals participating in professional development and technical assistance programs, including:
  - Whether training was informative and relevant to principals overseeing schools with pre-K-3 classrooms;
  - How principals plan to use the information gained from the training program; and
  - The impact of professional development training on professional practice.

# 4 Concluding Thoughts

During the 2015-2016 school year, more than 30,000 children in New Jersey began their entry into public school in a pre-K public elementary school classroom (Barnett et al., 2017). For New Jersey's school leaders, the expansion of a publicly funded pre-K-3 system requires a shift in how incoming school leaders are prepared and in their continued professional learning. This review of the current state of principal certification and competencies and a recent snapshot of how New Jersey prepares teachers of young children (Kipnis, Whitebook, Austin, & Sakai, 2013) provides the state with the opportunity to effect change throughout the educational system that benefits all children and the teachers and leaders who educate them.

There are many opportunities to update and strengthen principal leadership, including guidance and resources. For example, under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law in 2015, states can allocate part of their Title II funds (an estimated \$2.3 billion<sup>8</sup>) to reexamine professional learning of principals — including principal certification programs — and thus respond to the changing educational and demographic landscape. The flexibility in Title II funding allowed by ESSA provides states with the opportunity to review and update the education, certification, and professional development training in line with current research on pre-K-3 education.

For almost two decades, New Jersey has led the nation in providing publicly funded pre-K, creating a model for strengthening teacher preparation, and supporting the ongoing professional development of the early care and education workforce. The state is once again poised to emerge as a leader on principal preparation and ongoing learning as well. With efforts to ensure a comprehensive preparation system for future and current principals, New Jersey can drive the change needed to embrace the pre-K-3 continuum and foster a culture that values early learning to ensure that all children in New Jersey have access to high-quality early learning experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2017, President Trump proposed budget cuts that would eliminate Title II funds. At the time this report was printed, these budget cuts had not gone into effect.

# Appendix

## A-1 Institutions Offering Principal Certification Programs in New Jersey<sup>9</sup>

Caldwell University

CamdenPLUS

Centenary University

College of Saint Elizabeth

Fairleigh Dickinson University

Felician College

Georgian Court University

Kean University

Monmouth University

Montclair State University

New Jersey City University

New Leaders

NJ Excel

Rider University

Rowan University

Rutgers University – Camden

Rutgers University – New Brunswick Graduate School of Education

Saint Peter's University

Seton Hall University

Stockton University

The College of New Jersey

Thomas Edison State University

William Paterson University

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<sup>9</sup> Three programs were identified for this study that are not housed in a college or university. Two of these programs (CamdenPLUS and New Leaders) are local implementations of principal preparation programs offered by national non-profit organizations; the third (NJ EXCEL) is a program offered by the Foundation for Educational Administration (FEA), the professional development division of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA).

## A-2 Methodology

### Sampling Design

In the summer of 2016, the New Jersey Department of Education provided CSCCE with a list of colleges, universities, and professional development organizations offering a principal certification program. For each program identified, CSCCE conducted an extensive Internet search to identify:

- ◆ Whether the institution offered principal certification;
- ◆ The department in which the certification was housed; and
- ◆ Contact information for the program dean, chair, or coordinator, referred to in this report as “program lead.”

A letter from the New Jersey Department of Education was then emailed to each contact, introducing CSCCE and describing the purpose of the survey and its importance to the education community. We then attempted to contact, via telephone, the program lead to verify the information gathered through our Internet searches. Institutions that did not offer a principal certification program were excluded from the sample.

### New Jersey’s Population of Principal Certification Programs

Through this process, we identified public and private institutions of higher education in New Jersey and professional development organizations operating independently from the higher education system. **Appendix A-1** displays the institutions.

Twenty-three institutions in New Jersey were identified as offering a principal certification program, including 10 public universities, 10 private colleges/universities, and three professional development organizations.

### Sample Development and Response Rate

During a telephone call with program leads, CSCCE identified the appropriate person to respond to the *Principal Inventory*. A total of 23 program surveys were emailed to program leads. The final sample consisted of 18 principal certification programs. The response rate was 78 percent.

### *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory: Principal Certification Programs*

Using an online survey tool completed by each certification program lead, the *Principal Inventory* collected information on program structure, content and age-group focus, internship experiences, and challenges faced by the program. The *Principal Inventory* included closed-ended questions focused on the following topics:

- ◆ Program structure: The format (e.g., online, traditional/on-campus); paths (stand-alone certification or within a master’s degree program); number of principal candidates registered and number who had successfully completed the principal certification program; and number of faculty members.
- ◆ Program course content: Respondents were asked to indicate whether topics within the following categories were required in order for principal candidates to complete the certification program:
  - Human Development;
  - Leadership to Inform Curriculum and Instruction;
  - Supervision;



- Leadership and Management;
  - Law, Policy, and Finance;
  - Diversity and Equity;
  - Families and Community; and
  - Alignment.
- ◆ Internship experience: Program leads were asked whether the program required internship experience hours over and above what the state of New Jersey requires; whether principal candidates were required to complete their internship within a school that serves a particular age group; whether specific criteria were used to select the internship site; and who typically supervised principal candidates.
  - ◆ Challenges facing the principal certification program.

## Data Collection

The *Principal Inventory* was emailed to program leads using Qualtrics, an online survey software program. The survey was open for respondents for approximately three months during winter 2016-spring 2017. Program leads received up to six reminder emails during the data collection period.

## Data Analysis

Using SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 24*), we computed frequencies for all questions. Data are aggregated across all certification programs.

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