

# A Critical Intersection: Administrative and Pedagogical Leadership

BY JILL BELLA

Over the past few months the McCormick Center has been engaging you in a discussion about the concept of [whole leadership](#). We've [introduced the idea](#) of leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership as overarching domains. I'd like to focus on how two of those overarching domains intersect in a way that is critical for sustained quality.

Our working definition of **administrative leadership** describes successful administrative leaders as being able to establish systems that protect and sustain essential operational functions. Operational leadership (accomplished through activities such as hiring and supporting staff, overseeing budgets, and maintaining a positive workplace climate) and strategic leadership (involving guiding the direction of the organization with the future in mind) are important aspects.

The working definition of **pedagogical leadership** includes supporting teaching and learning by establishing organizational norms of continuous quality improvement and influencing children's learning by fostering family engagement, ensuring fidelity to the organization's curricular philosophy, using data to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning program, and meeting standards established to optimize learning environments.

**Let's consider how administrative and pedagogical leadership are connected** by looking at an example related to the common practice of engaging families.

A few months ago, I visited a program where the director expressed frustration because families were not participating in events or engaged in their child's learning process. Several weeks later, I visited another program where the opposite was the case; families were extremely involved in program events. They were also aware of what the children were learning in the classroom and were embedding the learning into their home life. This was evidenced through photos and documentation that was displayed in the classrooms. When I asked the director of the first program, with little family involvement, what she was doing to support family partnerships her response had been short. She stated they continually sent out flyers about events and posted numerous reminders on bulletin boards. For me, this response demonstrated a disconnect between administrative and pedagogical practices.

**When I asked the director of the second program, with considerable family involvement, how she supported family partnerships she provided a description that included the following actions:**

- The initial contact with the families includes sharing the value of family engagement

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- On the tour of the center the director points out photos of families engaged in classroom and program events
- The director introduces the new family to any family members who are volunteering in the classroom that day
- Families receive a link to the program's website with family testimonials and a video clip highlighting family engagement
- Families are shown classroom lesson plans which include space for linkages to family life
- Families are given a family handbook which outlines how families are considered partners and provides examples of how this is demonstrated
- Each family receives a home visit which includes completing an intake form that is designed to really understand the uniqueness of each family and bridge home life with the program
- At the end of a child's first week there is a "touch base" phone call to find out how the transition is going and if anything needs to be done to better acclimate the child to the program
- When classroom staff meet to plan the lesson for the week there is a standing agenda item for updates about families
- Each child has a notebook in their cubby that travels back and forth between home and program so families and teachers are kept informed with the daily happenings in the child's life
- Family conferences happen at least twice a year and are used to provide a thorough explanation of children's learning and development with ideas for how families can support learning and development during daily routines at home

**For me, the above examples demonstrate administrative leadership that supports family engagement.**

In short, the director and staff are intentional about building family partnerships and this is established by the development of operational systems that encourage and promote family engagement.

In addition, this director shared the following:

- Supervisors of the teachers include family partnerships as a criterion they address during supervision meetings
- Recently the staff all read the book *From Parents to Partners* and some staff are in the midst of an optional week-long "book club" discussion over lunch
- Since enhancing family partnerships is one of the program's goals this year, several new responsibilities focusing on this are now included in each job description, and several related criteria are now included in the performance appraisal forms for staff
- Several books on family engagement were purchased at the beginning of the year and teachers are encouraged to attend trainings related to this topic
- When staff check out any of the new books on family engagement or attend a training focused on family partnerships this is followed up on in conversations with the supervisor
- There is an expectation that the teacher will implement a practice he or she learned from a reading or training and discuss the impact with the supervisor and/or colleagues
- Staff who attend training have a form to complete afterward that includes a space to capture insights learned and methods for implementation
- Once staff have an opportunity to practice, reflect, implement, and tweak what they learn during a training they are encouraged to present the new practice as well as lessons learned at a meeting with their colleagues

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I believe the above examples demonstrate how supervisors in this program are demonstrating pedagogical leadership and have established methods to support this practice.

**For me, administrative and pedagogical leadership are dependent on one another.** If there are policies and practices in place to help ensure family engagement is occurring (administrative leadership), but if teachers are not supported in building on and following through with these practices (pedagogical leadership), then successful family engagement is less likely to occur.

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