

The Role of the WELS Early Childhood Ministry Director

by

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Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Science Degree in Education

Graduate Studies

Martin Luther College

New Ulm, MN

March 2018

Signature Page

Date:

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Abstract

Currently, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) operates nearly 400 early childhood ministry (ECM) programs. Through preschools and childcare centers, congregations have expanded ministry opportunities, and God's people have touched the hearts and lives of many children and families with the Gospel message.

The ECMs in the WELS are different in many ways, including, but not limited to, size, age of children, and programs. The vast differences in the way they operate make it difficult to consider them as one entity. Categorizing the ECMs according to certain factors makes sense for many reasons. Because of the many differences in ECMs, it stands to reason that the role of the early childhood (EC) director will also entail many different responsibilities.

This study explores the differences in WELS ECMs and the roles of the EC directors serving at them. Data was collected from current WELS ECM directors and led to five recommendations: (1) determine levels of administrative release time for ECM directors, (2) explore strategies to increase the amount of time directors spend sharing the Gospel, (3) develop a program of congregational awareness, (4) engage supportive mentors or colleagues for ECM directors, (5) conduct further research regarding WELS ECMs and the role of the ECM director.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank my heavenly Father for sending His dear Son to provide me with forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. As I strive to give Him glory, He reminds me in His Word, “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NIV).

I thank my family for their consistent support through the journey of pursuing a Master’s Degree. They sacrificed many hours of time spent together as I worked on classes and the final thesis project. I am most thankful for my patient, loving husband Larry. His support, encouragement, and patience with me is amazing. God has greatly blessed me with his partnership as we daily work together to feed His lambs.

As a synod, we are greatly blessed with the quality of leadership at Martin Luther College. I cannot fully express my appreciation for the professors and support staff that have helped me through classes and research. I especially thank my advisor, Daryl Hanneman, and the other committee members Carla Melendy and John Meyer. Your support, encouragement, constructive criticism, and ministry mindset made this thesis a reality.

Finally, I thank my colleagues and partners in the Gospel. I thank all my fellow teachers for their prayers of support and encouragement. I thank the Commission on Lutheran Schools for helping me send the survey. I thank all the EC directors for their responses to the survey, and for sharing their personal thoughts during the interviews. To God be the glory!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

In the last few decades, enrollment in early childhood centers has increased greatly. Today's society wants and needs child care options and places where young children can grow and develop. Just look around your community and you will most likely find a wealth of different options—free preschool, Head Start, child care centers, Christian preschool, public preschool, developmental kindergarten, and so on. Recently, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has experienced tremendous growth in the early childhood programs it operates. Statistics show that for the 2016-2017 school year, WELS operated 392 early childhood programs with over 10,000 children enrolled (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017). Cindi Holman (2017), director of WELS Early Childhood Ministries states, “Almost every community is looking for preschools and child care centers. This provides an opportunity for congregations to connect with families in their communities that they may not otherwise have a connection with.” The WELS has been blessed with an opportunity to share the Gospel with a large audience of young families who need not only child care but spiritual care as well.

According to statistics, over 500 WELS congregations now support an early childhood ministry (ECM). This amounts to almost 40 percent of all the congregations in the synod (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017). Just as each of those congregations has distinctive features in regard to membership, outreach, financial resources, and leadership styles, so each ECM that a congregation operates is also unique. Some are preschool only, while others offer child care. Some serve children as young as four weeks old and some only serve school age children. A wide variety of care is offered

by the ECMs in our synod, yet all are sharing the gospel message with children and families. Further study of the WELS ECMs may reveal even more differences. While synod ECMs are unique in some fashion, a close examination of their programs may help to categorize their key features and the varying roles of their directors. In addition, it is likely that the different aspects of the centers affect the role of the director.

There can be no argument that an essential aspect of a program's quality is the leader. Just as a principal is responsible for the overall effectiveness of a school, so the early childhood (EC) director is responsible for the effective operation of a preschool or childcare center. In fact, the leadership provided by a center director is one of the highest predictors of an early childhood center's success (Bloom, 2014). Additionally, an EC director of a WELS center or preschool serves in a unique position because of the privilege he or she has to share the gospel with children and families. But what are the responsibilities this person must shoulder? Are the responsibilities basically the same for directors in different early childhood programs? Given the different models of ECMs in the WELS, can we expect the duties of an EC director to be consistent across the board?

Purpose of the Study

An examination of WELS ECMs and the role of the director may answer some of the above questions and prompt discussion as our synod moves forward with its vision for the future of WELS early childhood centers. The goal of this research is to generate categories of WELS ECMs along with the anticipated director responsibilities for each. The expectation that the responsibilities of WELS EC directors are all equal seems improbable. Just as the models themselves should prove to be different, so the duties and responsibilities of the director may vary as well. There are many tasks, privileges,

challenges, and obstacles that each director faces in his or her unique situation. Likely, there are no two situations the same, just as are no two directors with the same gifts and talents. However, in all situations, the EC director of a WELS center has the distinct privilege of sharing the gospel with children and families in a variety of ways. May it never be said that there are so many administrative expectations of the director that he or she is not able to spend the necessary time sharing the Gospel with those who do not know Jesus. With this worthy task in mind, it is important to study WELS ECMs and the role of the director.

Research Questions

It is the intent of this research to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries?
2. What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?

Definition of Terms

Early Childhood—While the commonly accepted definition of early childhood is ages zero to eight, for the purposes of this research, and because of the definition of early childhood in the WELS Early Childhood Ministry Report, early childhood will primarily refer to children who have not yet entered kindergarten. Most of the children in WELS early childhood centers fall between the ages of zero to five years old (WELS Early Childhood Ministries Statistics 2016-17).

Director—Many titles are used interchangeably to label the person in charge of an early childhood center. Program manager, administrator, and director are a few of those titles. The title of director is most often used in WELS ministries, which is how this

researcher will refer to the position in question. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2007) describes an early childhood administrator as one who is responsible for the leadership and management of a center:

The program administrator is the individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating a childcare, preschool, or kindergarten program. The role of the administrator covers both leadership and management functions. Leadership functions relate to the broad plan of helping an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course of action to achieve that vision. Managerial functions relate to the actual orchestration of tasks and the setting up of systems to carry out the organization's mission. (p.1).

Preschool—The term preschool typically refers to a structured time of developmentally appropriate activities for children ages three to five.

Child care—This term refers to care for children who are not in school. It can be care for infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and school age children. Child care can occur in the summer months, during the school year, or year-round. It is also sometimes referred to as extended care for children who need care before and after school.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a great need for quality child care in the United States. Each week, nearly eleven million children under the age of five attend some form of child care (Child Care Aware of America, 2016). School-age children often need care as well, either before school, after school, or on days when school is not in session.

“Children are the next generation and the promise of the future,” stated Beverlee Haar (1997, p. 21). As people of God, we care about each child’s growth and development, and about training children in the truths of God’s Word. Although God in His infinite wisdom has given parents the primary responsibility of teaching and training their children, it is no secret that care for children outside the home has become almost indispensable in today’s society (Haar, 1997).

Models of Child Care Centers

Currently, center-based care accounts for over one third of child care arrangements for children under the age of five in the United States (Child Care Aware of America, 2016). These centers serve children of all ages, social status, demographic regions, ethnic backgrounds, and religious affiliations. Care varies from full-time, to part-time, to drop in. Care may be needed year-round, during the school year only, summer time only, or a mixture of these. Some families also need care support during the evening, overnight, or on weekends. In summary, the

possibility exists for child care centers to offer a wide variety of care to serve the diverse needs of the American culture.

In order to examine the child care options available, and to categorize the models of child care, it may be important to observe certain factors. The following three categories may serve to shed some light on the vast amount of different child care models: 1) ages of children served, 2) amount of care offered, and 3) programs or structure available.

Child's Age

Child care centers typically care for children as young as six weeks through the early teen years. While this wide age range exists, certain categories emerge to meet the needs of children.

Infant and toddler. It may be an understatement to say that infants and toddlers (age zero months to 30 months) require much more physical care than older children. Because of the intense physical needs required in this age group, much more staff is needed, and often required by licensed centers, than in other age groups. In a report on infant and toddler care, six significant components of care for this group were cited as vitally important (Lally, Torres, & Phelps, 1994).

1. Group size (Should be small due to intense needs)
2. Environment (Safe & flexible)
3. Primary Caregiving Assignments (Must have a primary caregiver)
4. Continuity of Care (Children need to bond and trust)

5. Cultural and Familial Continuity (Retain culture and family identity)
6. Meeting the needs of the individual

Infant and toddler care differ greatly from care of older children due to the nature of caring for such dependent children.

Preschool age. Children ages three and four, or sometimes as young as 30 months, are usually categorized as preschoolers. As a child approaches this age, he or she has usually become much more independent. Toilet training alone is an enormous accomplishment that lessens the need for adult care. While the physical needs may decrease at this age, other needs become more important. Some studies suggest that a child's age influences the type of care parents seek for their children. As children get older, parents seek more center-based care possibly because they are more concerned about a child's academic success (Redford, Desrochers, 2017). This appears to be the trend in WELS ECMs. During the 2016-2017 school year, three and four-year-old children accounted for 83% of the enrollment in early childhood programs (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017). While this statistic may be due to many congregations only offering preschool and not child care, it also suggests that parents want structured programming for this age.

While ratio requirements are not as low for preschool to adult as they are for infant and toddler, this age still needs considerably more adult interaction than older children. HighScope, a nationally recognized educational approach, encourages adults to provide "active, participatory learning" (HighScope Educational Research Foundation,

2017). Leaders of children in a preschool classroom can expect to guide learning experiences, intervene when problems arise, assess the learning of children on a daily basis, and take care of a child's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

School age. Finally, children who attend school may also need supervision and care when school is not in session. During the school year, this type of care is often referred to as extended care or wrap-around care. Benefits of extended child care for this age group include keeping children safe and providing them with enough supervision to help them avoid high-risk behaviors (Capizzano, Tout, Adams, 2000). In addition to these important benefits, it may be very convenient for parents to make one drop off and one pick up each day for all the children in their family.

Students enrolled in an extended care program may need only a few minutes of care or a few hours of care each day. They may need care before school begins, after school is over, or both. Morning care can require workers to be in the building early and may also involve some sort of breakfast. After school, some release from a long day of structure and sitting at a desk may be needed. In addition, homework help may be scheduled for children. Because children's ages may vary greatly in the same room, a schedule that suits all children can be a challenge. While the ratio of children to caregiver is much greater, a quality care program for school-age children takes preparation and planning.

Amount of Care Needed

A second consideration regarding the differences between child care centers is the amount of care offered. While statistics show that millions of children are enrolled in child care each week, the amount of child care used by American families varies greatly.

The average hours spent in center-based care by children less than a year old in 2012 was 28 hours (Redford, Desrochers, 2017). This statistic may indicate that some children receive full time care, and some part time. While the average varies a bit by age, statistics also indicate that other early childhood age groups use a similar amount of care. Families need child care centers that offer care on a variety of levels—full time, part time, or even ‘drop in as needed’ care.

Regarding the needs of school age children, a wide range exists also. Students may need only a few minutes of care or a few hours of care each day. They may need care before school begins, after school is over, or both. Some students may need care only a few days a week, and some may need care every day that school is in session.

Child care needs not only vary by amount needed on a weekly basis, but they may also vary with the seasons. Many parents make different arrangements for child care during the summer months, or they can arrange care themselves due to seasonal employment (e.g. teachers). This variance can affect the policies that a child care center establishes, or it can affect the amount and style of care an organization chooses to provide at its center. Certainly, it could influence the responsibilities of the director of the center.

Programs and Structure

The program and structure that is followed by a child care center may or may not be determined solely by the institution operating the center. Laws and rules for child care centers differ greatly by state. Some states, Michigan for example, require that all non-parental care for children be licensed by the state (State of Michigan Department of

Human Services Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing, 2014). State regulations vary greatly in the amount of structure required by child care centers.

One very structured component of child care is the preschool class time. Preschool children need a wide variety of experiences to help them grow and learn, and the preschool classroom is designed to offer this structure. HighScope, a nationally recognized early childhood educational agency, has developed a set of 58 Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs) to specifically address the learning needs of this age (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2015). The preschool classroom is more than a place where children learn the letters of the alphabet, even though this skill is very important. Careful planning is required to address the many learning goals of this age group.

Children enrolled in a preschool setting often come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have had a great deal of social interaction and others had had little or none. Some have parents who address early literacy by reading often to their children, and others have had little exposure to the world of books. It is necessary to address the individual needs of children and their families. The experiences offered in a preschool-age classroom should focus on helping children grow and develop the skills necessary to move to the next academic level. A proper curriculum, Christ-centered environment, and trained staff are necessary to build a quality WELS preschool program.

Summary of Child Care Models

In summary, the care offered by child care centers in the United States is wide-ranging, because of the need to serve the diverse needs of families. Many different child

care models are currently operated by WELS congregations. An examination of the different types of centers may shed light on some similarities between the models and help to categorize the features of child care centers.

WELS is uniquely positioned to reach out to families with the Gospel message by serving their vital child care needs. Examining the different models of WELS child care centers is a critical component in the synod's future ministry plans.

Director Roles in Preschool and Child Care Centers

The position of an early childhood director is difficult to define. Because each center is unique in the community it serves and the culture it supports, each director is posed with different duties, challenges, and opportunities. Certainly, the day to day duties and managerial role of an EC director can be viewed as critically important, but isn't there more to this job title (or call) than that?

While there has been much research conducted on leadership in a public-school setting, unfortunately there is a minimal amount available concerning leadership in the early childhood realm (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004, p. 158). This could be due to the vast differences of care noted in the field of early childhood and child care, or it could possibly be because the demand for early education and child care have only recently intensified significantly. In addition, much of the current research is anecdotal and does not specifically address the leadership realities that EC directors face (Krieg, Smith, & Davis, 2014, p. 74).

Although the research itself is slim, there are many resources available that propose desirable aspects of leadership in the early childhood realm. Since one purpose of this research is to identify the responsibilities that WELS ECM directors carry out, it

makes sense to use *Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors* as a guideline (see Appendix A). There are four major domains included in these standards:

1. Spiritual Leadership
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Administrative Leadership
4. Community Leadership (Martin Luther College, 2014)

An exploration of these four domains may give much insight into the many duties and responsibilities faced by a WELS ECM director.

Spiritual Leadership

It may seem redundant to express the need for WELS ECM directors to attend to the task of sharing the gospel, but it is nevertheless, critical. Haar highlights this important point as she guides us to Psalm 78, “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done” (1997, p. 21). Haar continues to illustrate this God-given directive with a list of passages that emphasize the importance of sharing God’s Word with children and families (1997, p.22):

- Feed my lambs...John 21:15
- Not...one of these little ones should perish...Matthew 18:10,14
- Let the little children come to me...Luke 18:15
- from the lips of children and infants God has ordained praise...Matt. 21:16

The director is responsible for carrying out the mission statement of the ECM and integrating God's Word into every aspect of learning (Olson, 1992, p.121). What a challenge and privilege this mandate is for the early childhood directors in the WELS! How does one prepare for an all-encompassing task such as this?

As early as the 1990s, when many preschools in the WELS were just beginning, consideration of this question was given. In an article directed at leadership in preschools Butzow stated, "a teacher well trained in the Scriptures is better prepared to teach God's Word to children" (1990, p. 33). No less can be said of the director of a preschool or child care center. Leading spiritually requires a spiritual focus. Directors that are trained in and remain faithful to God's Word are necessary for our WELS ECMs!

Not only does the director need to be a faithful student of God's Word, but he or she also needs to keep the Christ-centered vision of the center at the forefront. The director guides the staff, students, families, and congregation toward the main goal of training disciples of Christ. The director also guards the vision of the center and keeps ministry as the primary goal. Included in a code of ethics for WELS ECM directors is this statement, "I will use the ECE program as a focus of Kingdom ministry and an opportunity for evangelism outreach into the community" (Isch, 2002, p. 37). The director needs to be passionate about preserving the ministry vision of the center, so that many other important reasons for operating a child care center do not become the primary goal.

Instructional Leadership

A director of an early childhood center must have a strong knowledge base of the needs of the children served in his or her center. An understanding of the developmental needs of children at different ages is critical. In addition to this basic fact, a director needs to have a wide range of knowledge regarding instruction. In its accreditation statement, NAEYC (2007) lists these knowledge and skill-based core competencies for directors:

1. Historical and philosophical foundations
2. Child growth and development
3. Child observation and assessment
4. Curriculum and instructional methods
5. Children with special needs
6. Family and community relationships
7. Health, safety, and nutrition
8. Individual and group guidance
9. Learning environments
10. Professionalism

It is an understatement to say that an early childhood director must possess numerous skills and a great amount of knowledge in the early childhood field. Add to this the need to understand the unique needs of school-age children, and it is evident that a director of a child care program must be highly trained.

While many ECM directors maintain a presence in the classroom as a teacher, they are also responsible for overseeing the teaching and care in other rooms or classrooms at the center (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics

2016-2017). This important task of the director is difficult to learn in a classroom. One can be aware of the assessment forms and evaluation sheets, but in all reality, being a director that encourages, mentors, and leads by example is almost more of a personality trait than a learned behavior. Bloom states,

“Directors who cultivate and sustain exemplary early care and education organizations do so by carefully tuning in to the needs of people, shaping individual and group expectations of what the center could be doing, and expanding perspectives so that all involved understand the complex nature of the collective work to be done” (2014, p.51).

WELS EC directors have an important mandate to lead the Christ-centered care and instruction at the center in which they serve. When directors take an active role in supporting teachers by discussing teaching strategies, listening to their concerns, and meeting regularly about center issues, the quality of care for children is increased (Mims, Scott-Little, Lower, Cassidy, & Hestenes, 2008, p.230). Regarding centers that employ multiple individuals, the saying goes, ‘There is no I in TEAM.’ The director is like a coach, helping to create a feeling of oneness with the group. Again, Bloom states, “The culture of exemplary early childhood programs is characterized by a climate of trust and openness and a shared belief that achieving group goals transcends individual wishes” (2014, p. 53). Creating a climate of togetherness, with staff focused on the same goals, is the task of a director.

Administrative Leadership

A day in the life of an early childhood director is most likely quite demanding. Experienced directors can attest to the fact that often urgency takes precedence over importance. What then are the important administrative duties of a director? Bloom describes the role of a director in this manner, “Effective center directors are leaders providing vision and inspiration, as well as managers orchestrating the implementation of policies and procedures” (2014, p. 4).

Administrative duties of an early childhood director span a wide range of responsibilities. Again, NAEYC (2007) provides a list of management knowledge and skills that directors should possess. This list can give insight to the many different responsibilities that EC directors face as they carry out their administrative duties:

Management Knowledge and Skills

1. Personal and professional self-awareness
2. Legal and fiscal management
3. Staff management and human relationships
4. Educational programming
5. Program operations and facilities management
6. Family support
7. Marketing and public relationships
8. Leadership and advocacy
9. Oral and written communication
10. Technology

The day to day management of a center is extremely important, but in addition to management functions, an EC director must provide visionary leadership (Bloom, 2014).

In a study of EC directors conducted in the UK, it was concluded that the directors dedicated more time to management functions than leadership and vision (Muijs et al., 2004, p.161). This seems to indicate that there may be a discrepancy between the broad responsibilities of a director and the urgent tasks that overtake his or her time and energy. The challenge of balancing leadership and management is great, and it may differ in each unique early childhood center.

Figure 1 shows the common daily attention a director gave to certain tasks.

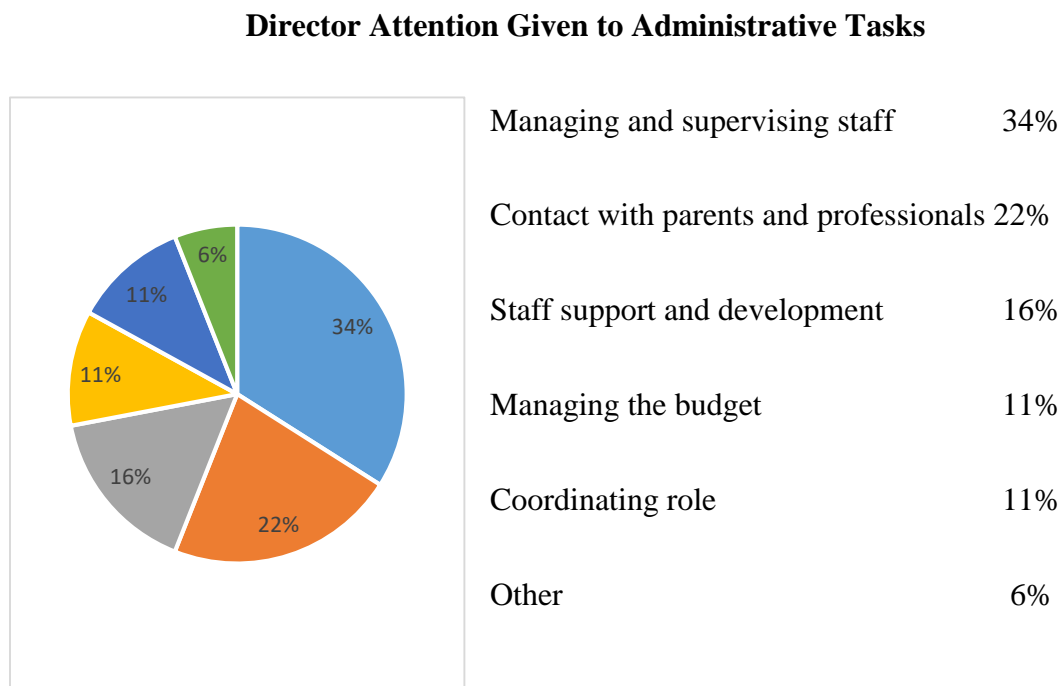


Figure 1

Community Leadership

“Directors of exemplary programs have a broader view of relationships: they view them as the vehicle for establishing a sense of community—both inside and outside the center” (Bloom, 2014, p. 51). A final domain for EC directors to undertake is that of community leadership.

The responsibilities of an EC director do not begin and end at the door of the center. A congregation’s ECM can be a bridge to higher Lutheran education. In the 2016-2017 school year, over half the synod’s ECMs operated in a congregation where a Lutheran Elementary School (LES) existed (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017). At a time when enrollment in WELS LESs is declining, an ECM may prove to revitalize parents’ perspective of Lutheran education. The director plays a key role in encouraging families to continue training their children with a Christ-centered focus.

Another area of focus for WELS ECM directors must be to explore ways to develop authentic relationships with those who need to hear the gospel message (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017). While the director is not the only person responsible for building these relationships, he or she may be the first and most trusted person with whom a new family comes into contact. Statistics show that a person’s connection with a WELS ECM can have a dramatic effect on a person’s spiritual growth. Consider these statistics from the 2015-2016 school year (WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics 2016-2017):

- 297 children were baptized

- 44 adults were baptized
- 274 adults were confirmed
- 605 adults attended a Bible Information Class

Children and parents look to the staff of the center to be knowledgeable and caring. If one of the goals of an early childhood ministry is to reach out to people in the community with the message of the gospel, then developing quality relationships must transpire. A director leads the way for teachers to interact with children and families in a manner that will solidify strong, Christian interaction. The director puts policies in place, models proper attention to problems, communicates frequently, and puts child and family needs at the top of the priority list. Beverlee Haar, an icon of early childhood education in the WELS writes, “Early childhood programs should include family ministry” (1997, p. 22). The nature of working in an early childhood center necessitates involvement with families. Haar also states, “Early childhood programs need to offer families support as they help their children develop during the early years” (1997, p.21). This support works best when the director communicates and develops a strong, loving relationship with each child and family. Research indicates that a key element of effective leadership often involves strong communication with families (Muijs et al., 2004, p. 161). The fact that many directors, especially in WELS ECMs, also teach in addition to their leadership responsibilities, may prove to be a beneficial component to this important mission.

Research indicates that WELS principals recognize the need to spend more time on promoting the school in the community and congregation (Schmill,

2009). If that is the case, it makes sense that the director of a WELS ECM must also place a high priority on community awareness.

Overall, an EC director must possess the necessary social skills that allow him or her to appear approachable, knowledgeable, and helpful. Often, these qualities appear to be at odds with the customary definition of a leader (Krieg, et al., 2014, p. 75). However, if relationships are at the center of an early childhood ministry (and they are), then this is no place for a feeling of superiority or power. The Bible speaks about an appropriate relationship of leadership in this manner:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (NIV 1984, Matthew 20:26-28).

Summary of Director Roles

Research on the role of early childhood directors in the public sector indicates a need for balancing the many duties of the director position (Bloom, 2014, Bloom & Bella, Krieg et al, 2014, Muijs et al., 2004). There is a need, then, to examine WELS EC director duties and responsibilities to determine the scope of leadership and managerial tasks assigned to them. There is also a need to examine those duties and responsibilities against the realities of what EC directors do each day. Identifying the many tasks and responsibilities that an EC director carries out on a daily basis may lead to the formation of new training opportunities that specifically address the role of a WELS EC director. The

director of a WELS ECM has an important job, but even more, a call to minister to children and families.

Surveys and interviews of current WELS EC directors can give more than a glimpse at the unique role WELS EC directors assume each day. Different duties and responsibilities for directors in unique situations may be revealed. Although different categories of centers may determine different responsibilities for directors, one thing remains true. All WELS EC directors have the distinct privilege of sharing the gospel with many children and families. What an opportunity lays before the WELS as the ECMs grow in number and diversity!

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The research findings and the literature reviewed on the topics of child care, preschools, and the role that directors fill provide a basis for this study on WELS ECMs and the role of the director in those ECMs. While some of the literature reviewed comes from a secular standpoint, it is nonetheless useable information from which new research can be generated.

As recent as 2016, the WELS operated 392 early childhood ministries. These ministries vary in size, programs, location, and congregational history. A survey sent to directors of these programs provides information on the different ECMs that exist and the roles that WELS EC directors fill. Information gathered from the surveys includes both quantitative data and qualitative data.

While surveys are an efficient way to gather data from a large group of people spread throughout the country, they are easy to ignore and can be impersonal. To add to the validity of the research, interviews were conducted with directors from different WELS ECMs. The interviews allowed the director to expand upon prearranged questions and gave further insight into the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of the person called to serve as a leader in an early childhood setting. Surveys and interviews were analyzed to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries?

2. What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?

Research Design and Procedures

Survey questions were developed and sent to all WELS EC directors who indicated their role as an ECM director on a data form sent to the Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS). This number totaled 202, however, after a thorough research through the list of ECMs, it was discovered that several of those sites did not operate a preschool program. The number of directors of preschool programs or child care ECMs that were sent the survey was 173. The survey asked specific questions related to size, age of children, programs, and director's opinions (see Appendix C).

Interview questionnaires were also developed and administered over the phone to WELS EC directors serving in different types of early childhood centers (see Appendix D). Information from the surveys and interviews was analyzed, coded, and interpreted to draw some general conclusions regarding the role of director in WELS ECMs (see Appendix E).

Population and Sample

All WELS EC directors who indicated their role as an ECM director on the data form sent to the CLS were given a chance to give input on this important topic. As was previously stated, the directors received a survey via email which they were asked to complete. This survey was sent and received back during November 2017. While just over 200 directors were sent the survey, it was previously noted that the survey was sent to some who indicated their role as an

ECM director, but did not work with a preschool or child care center. Those that work with preschool or child care centers numbered 173.

The number of actual responses received back by the due date was 43 which works out to be a 25% response rate. The breakdown of the five categories of preschool programs that responded is close to the actual percentages of surveys sent:

	<u>Surveys Sent:</u>	<u>Surveys Received:</u>
Preschool Only	26%	25%
Preschool with LES	25%	12%
Preschool with LES & Extended care	24%	35%
Full Time Child Care No LES	12%	12%
Full Time Child Care with LES	13%	16%

Additionally, some WELS early childhood directors were interviewed to gain further insight into the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that WELS EC directors possess. A director from each of the five different categories was interviewed over the phone during the month of January 2018. These directors indicated their willingness to participate in the interview process at the end of the survey they completed.

Instrumentation

The survey was created using Google Docs and was emailed to the participants by the Commission on Lutheran Schools. A follow-up reminder was

sent before the results were compiled and analyzed. The interviews were conducted with five directors, each serving at a center from one of the five categories of ECMs. The same interview questions were asked of each director; however, the participants could share insights as they wished.

Data Analysis Procedures

A great amount of quantitative and qualitative data was gathered from the survey and the interviews. The demographic data was collected and the responses of the directors were cross-tabulated. ECMs were compared by ages served, sizes, and programs. Differences in director responsibilities became evident through this mixed-method research. The data collected revealed some similarities and many differences between the unique ECMs operated by WELS congregations.

Limitations

WELS currently operates almost 400 early childhood ministries, however, only approximately half of the directors at those ministries are listed as ECM directors in the synod data base at CLS. In addition, there were duplicate ECM director entries in the data base, and some entries for ECM directors who were not currently directing a preschool or child care center program. This is not to say that the early childhood ministries at those congregations are not valid ministries, but only to suggest that with the great variety of ECMs in our synod, it is challenging to define exactly what an ECM director is.

Surveys were only sent to those directors indicating their status as an ECM director. As previously stated, some of those do not actually direct a preschool or

child care program. Through a thorough search, it was determined that 173 of the surveys sent went to WELS directors of preschool or child care programs. 43 surveys were completed and returned netting a 25% response rate. While this rate is somewhat low, the percentage of responses from directors at the different types of ECMs is closely in line with the percentages of actual EC directors sent survey at the five different predetermined categories.

Since the researcher is also a WELS EC director, there could be some unintentional bias hidden in the survey and interview questions. To combat bias, the surveys and interviews were peer-reviewed by a colleague serving as a called worker who has previous experience in early childhood education.

Finally, because only WELS EC directors are being surveyed and interviewed, there could also be some bias in the data. Since only the viewpoint of the director will be gathered, this begs the question of whether the data is completely objective.

Summary

Electronic surveys were sent to WELS EC directors to gather data regarding the ECM where they serve and their role as a director. Phone interviews were conducted with EC directors from each of the five predetermined categories of ECMs. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered, analyzed, and organized in a manner that yields credible answers to the research questions.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first is to identify different aspects of WELS ECMs, and to create categories that reflect similarities in the way they operate. The second is to identify the distinctive features of the role of the director in the different categories of WELS ECMs. May God bless the use of this data to the glory of His Kingdom as our synod seeks to reach out with the Gospel message to young children and their families!

A survey was used to collect data from directors of WELS ECMs. The survey was sent as a Google Form to just over 200 directors, and interviews were conducted with five directors serving at these different types of centers:

- Preschool Only
- Preschool Connected to a Lutheran Elementary School (LES)
- Preschool Connected to an LES that offers extended child care
- Full Time Child Care Center with Preschool not connected to an LES
- Full Time Child Care Center with Preschool connected to an LES

Forty-three directors responded to the survey questions, and five personal interviews were conducted with directors from different types of centers. As the data was gathered and analyzed, many distinctive elements of the ECMs and the directors became apparent, but there were also some generalizations that came to light. It is evident that God has blessed our synod with faithful,

dedicated servants who truly desire to share His love and His Word with others. The generalizations from the data collected are as follows:

1. More than 90% of WELS ECMs included in the data gathered are operated by a single congregation.
2. Almost every director who responded has a divine call (97.7%).
3. More than 88% of the directors who responded are called full-time.
4. Most of the directors who responded are synodically certified (83.7%), while an additional seven percent are working toward that goal.
5. Almost all the respondents teach in addition to their administrative duties (97.7%).
6. More than half of the respondents indicate that their ECMs include extra ministry outreach programs geared toward families.

While some generalizations can be made, the data shows that there are still many differences among the ECMs included in the survey responses. A careful examination of the data collected should help shed light on the differences of WELS ECMs and answer the following research questions:

1. What are the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries?
2. What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?

Data Analysis

- 1. What are the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries?**

In taking on the task of defining WELS early childhood ministries (ECMs), it has become apparent that there are many different age levels, sizes, and programs for the early learning centers in our synod. A comparison of the ages levels, sizes, and programs revealed in the five categories used for the survey (Preschool Only, Preschool Connected to a Lutheran Elementary School (LES), Preschool Connected to an LES that offers extended child care, Full Time Child Care Center with Preschool not connected to an LES, and Full Time Child Care Center with Preschool connected to an LES) may reveal some interesting results useful for future planning of WELS ECMs. The first element to consider is the age of children receiving care.

Age of children. The ages of children in the centers which responded to the survey ranged from infant through children in eighth grade. Results of the survey indicated the most distinctive differences between centers which offer care to infants and toddlers and centers which do not. Most early childhood centers that offer care for infant and toddlers are open much longer each day (see Figure 2). These centers typically care for infants and toddlers in addition to other ages of children making them family-friendly places where parents can have one drop off and one pick up per day.

In addition to being open longer hours each day, most full-time child care centers that care for infants and toddlers are open year-round (see Figure 3). Most working parents that seek child care need care all year, not only care during the school year. Centers that are open year-round experience challenges that school-year centers may not such as the need for extra staff so that care-givers can have a vacation, and the possible need for air-conditioning.

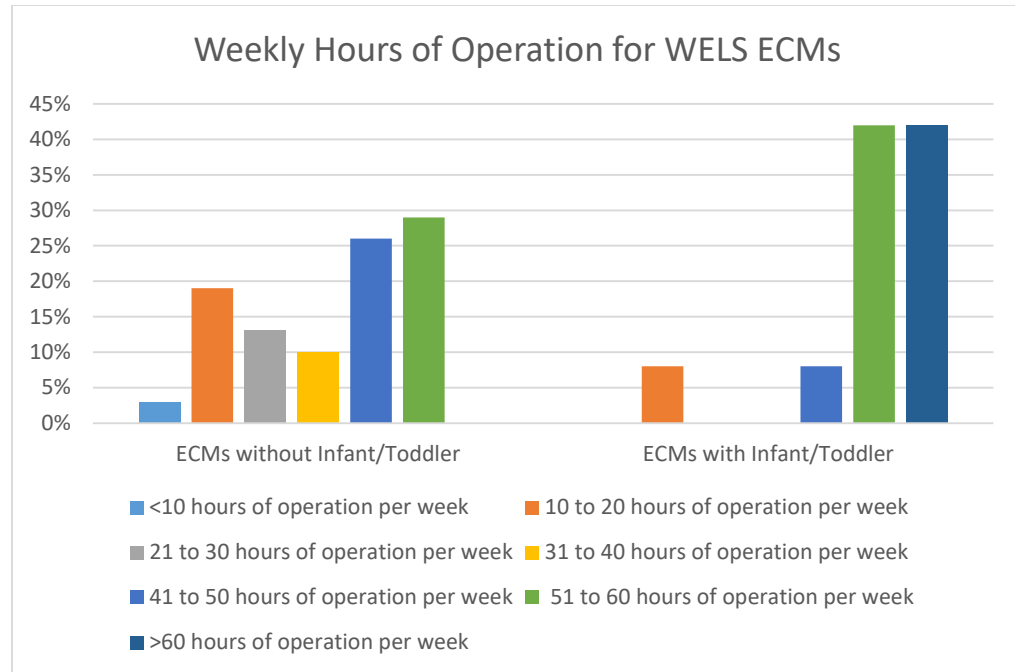


Figure 2

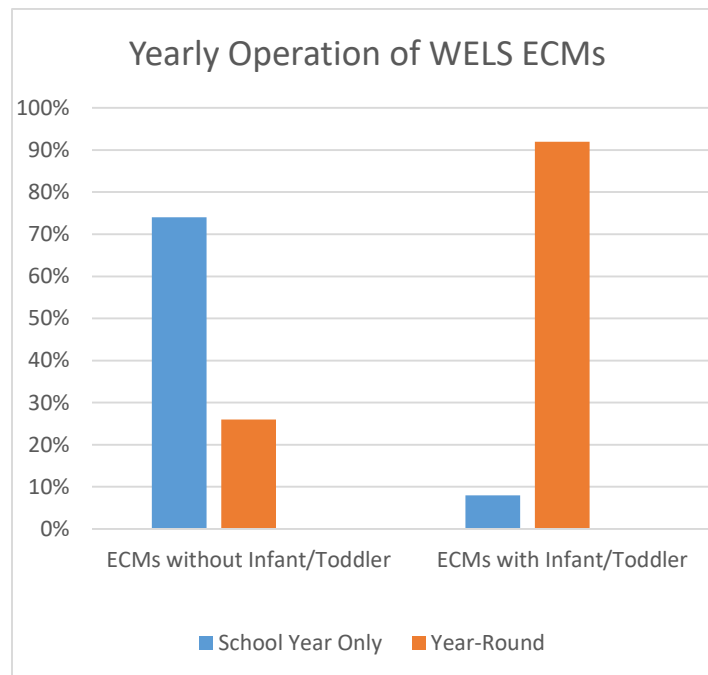


Figure 3

Not surprisingly, the survey results also revealed that the centers offering care for infants and toddlers employed a much larger staff (see Figure 4). In many cases, the licensed ratio of adult to infant is 1:4. This means that these centers must employ many more care-givers than a preschool aged center where the ratio is typically 1:10 or 1:12.

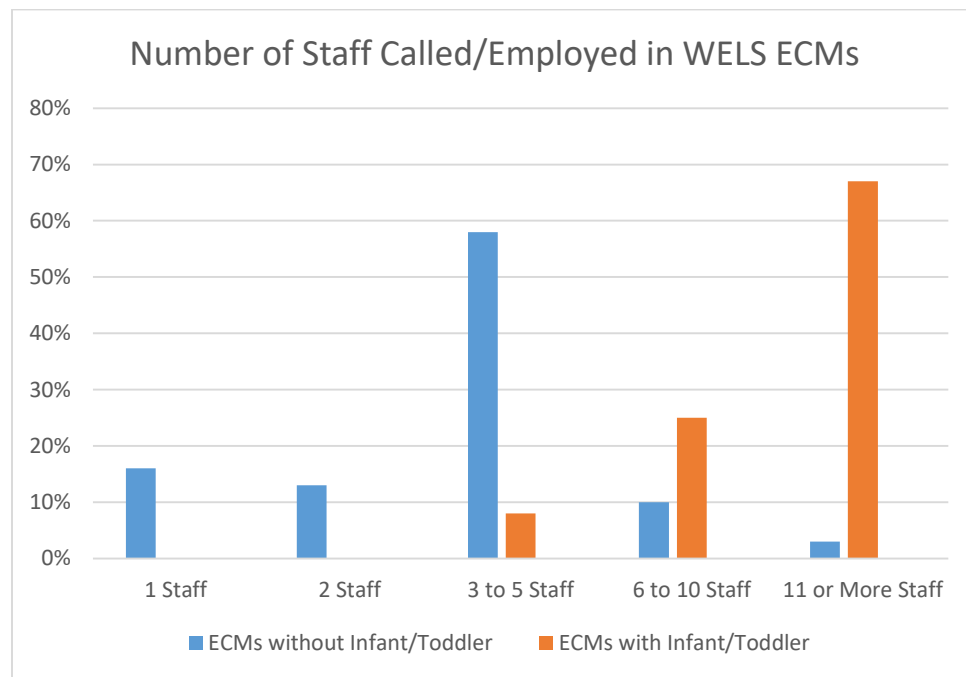


Figure 4

Another trend indicated in the results of the survey is that WELS ECMs offering care for infant and toddlers seem to be larger and care for more families (see Figure 5). This could be because infant and toddler care are in high demand, or it could be that these centers are placed in a more metropolitan area. Data was not collected on the location of these centers.

Size. The next consideration in the difference of centers is the size. Data was gathered from centers that serve ten or fewer families, to centers that serve

more than fifty. These centers were categorized into small (serving one to twenty-five families), medium (serving 26-50 families), and large (serving over 50 families). Regarding the number of hours these WELS ECMs are in operation, some differences were noted (see Figure 6). It seems logical that serving more families means longer hours. However, there is not a major difference between the medium sized centers and the large centers.

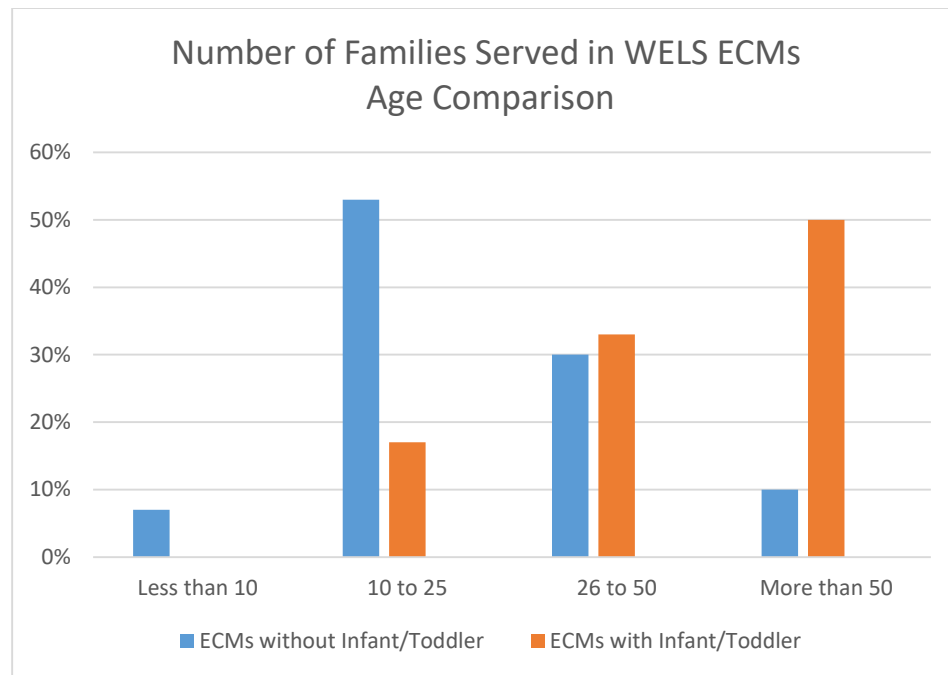


Figure 5

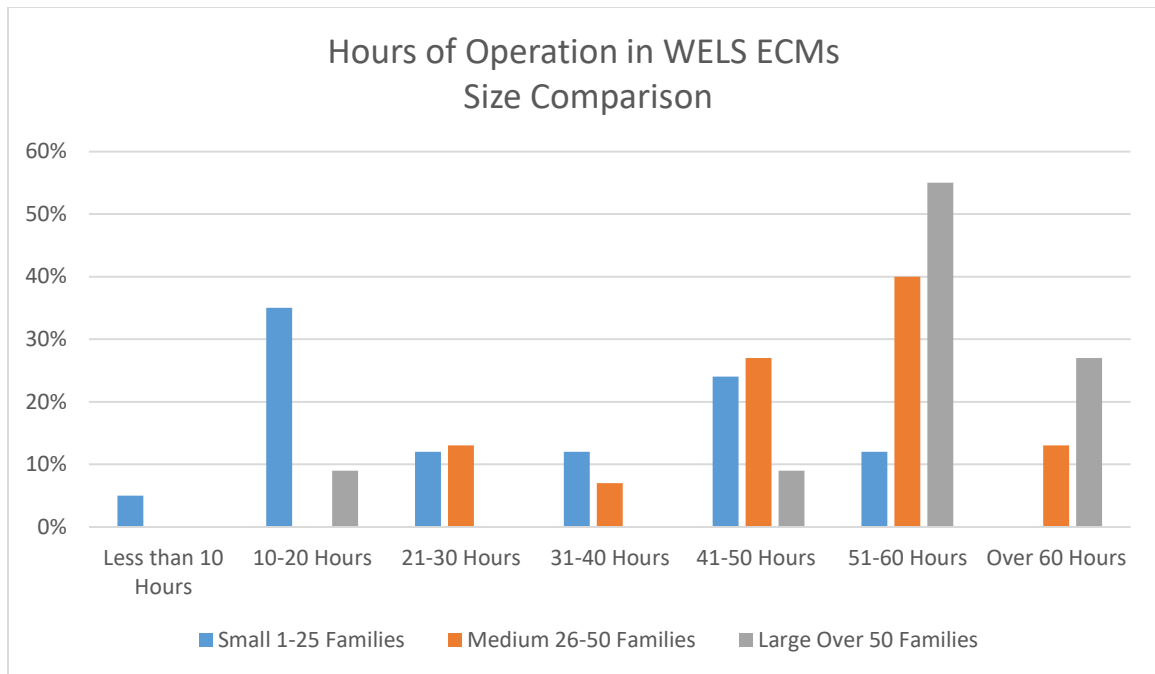


Figure 6

It is worth noting that none of the centers that serve 25 families or fewer offer infant and toddler care. This could be a reason those centers are typically open less hours. Only twenty percent of the medium sized centers reported caring for infant and toddlers; however, 82% of the large centers provide infant and toddler care. It appears that size makes some difference in the number of hours a center operates, but that the age range of care is also a determining factor.

Regarding the year-round operation of centers, a trend does appear to take place in terms of the size of centers (see Figure 7). Data collected shows that the larger the center, the more likely it will be open all year. Again, this could be because a greater number of large centers care for infant and toddlers who need year-round care. The amount of staff available to work year-round hours may also play into the decision to make a center operate year-round.

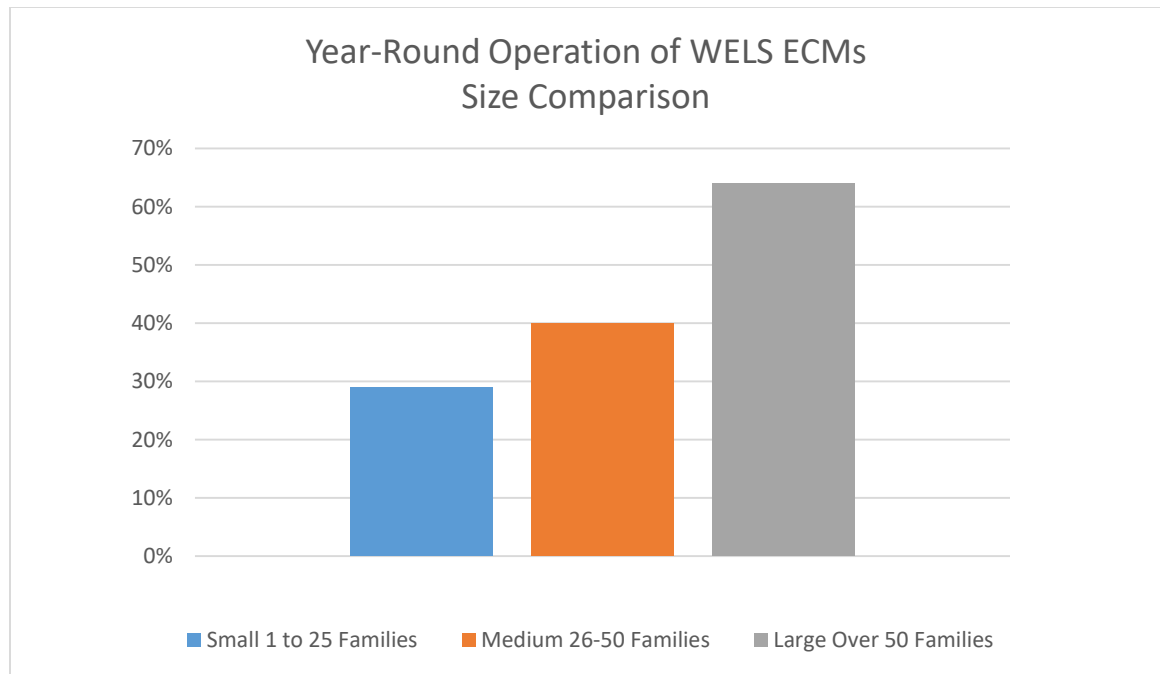


Figure 7

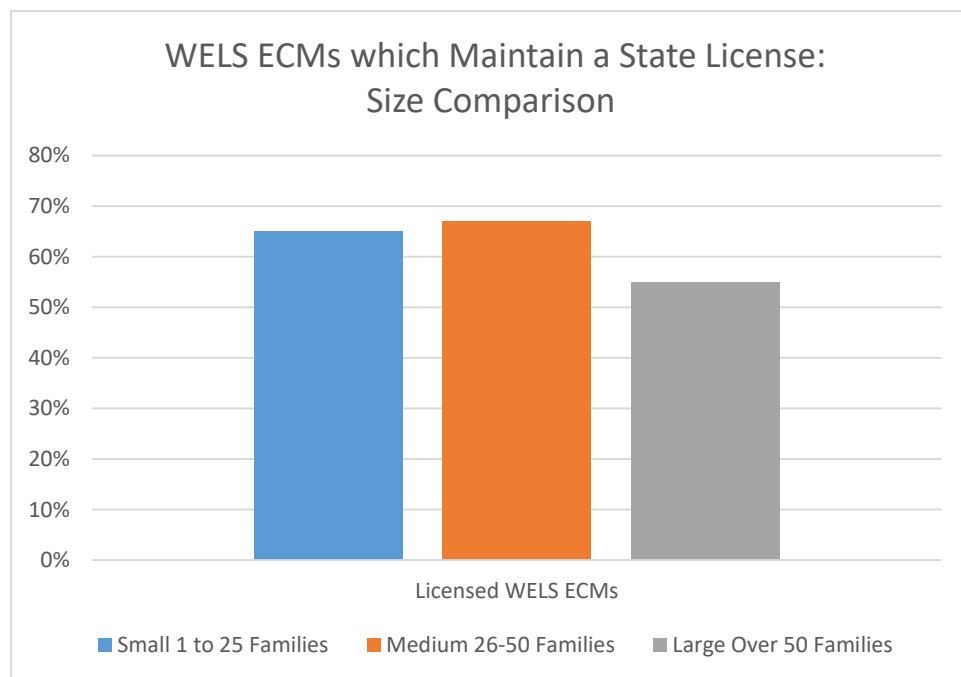


Figure 8

A final consideration is whether the size of a center determines whether it maintains state licensure or not. Data collected from the surveys indicates that the size of a center is not a determining factor in the decision to license a center (see Figure 8). Small centers serving less than 25 families reported a 65% licensed rate, and medium-sized centers serving 26-50 families reported almost the exact same rate of 67%. Large centers serving over 50 families were not far behind with a 55% licensing rate.

Data was not collected on the location of centers or of the level of education or training of the director. Both factors could be a determinant for licensing.

Programs. A final consideration in categorizing WELS ECMs is the type of programming they provide. While all the directors of WELS ECMs surveyed have a preschool as part of their program, some are connected to a WELS Lutheran elementary school (LES), and others are a stand-alone preschool or child care center. It is important to compare these two categories to discover the small and large variations in the operations and ministry at each type of center.

Of the 44 responses collected from the survey, 67% were from ECMs that are connected to an LES, and 37% were from preschools or child care centers located at congregations that do not operate an LES. The data collected reveals that there is little difference between the two categories of centers when it comes to number of families served and total enrollment (see Figures 9 & 10). The trend in both seems to be that there are more WELS ECMs that are serving smaller numbers of families with enrollments under fifty students.

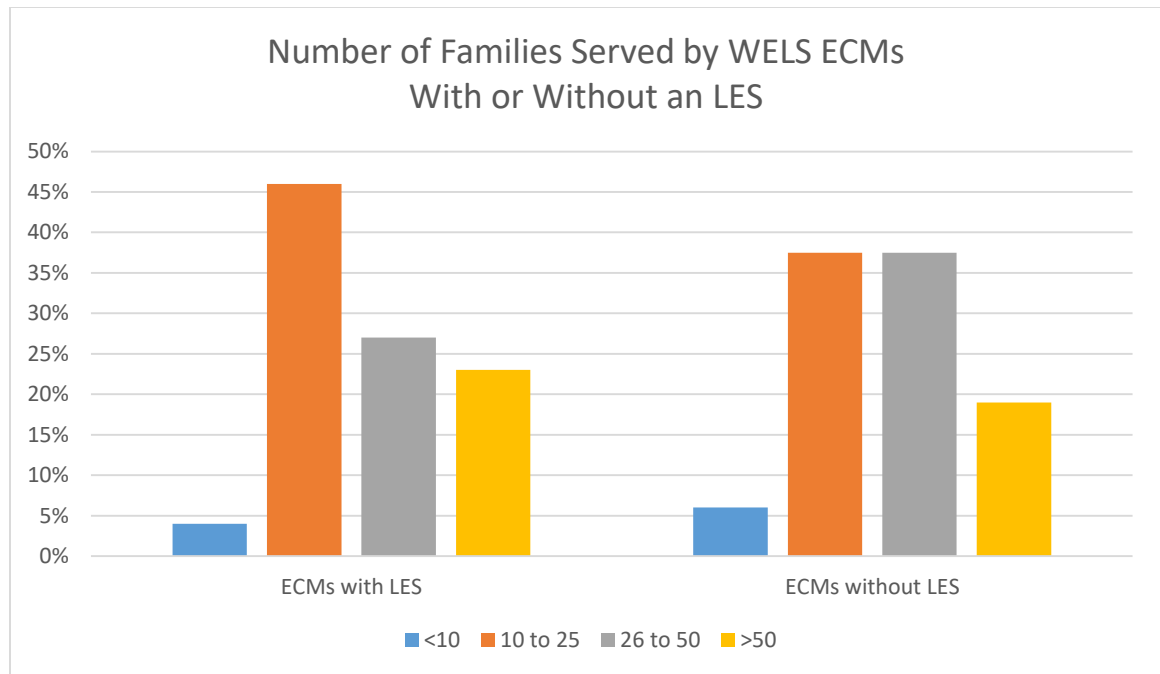


Figure 9

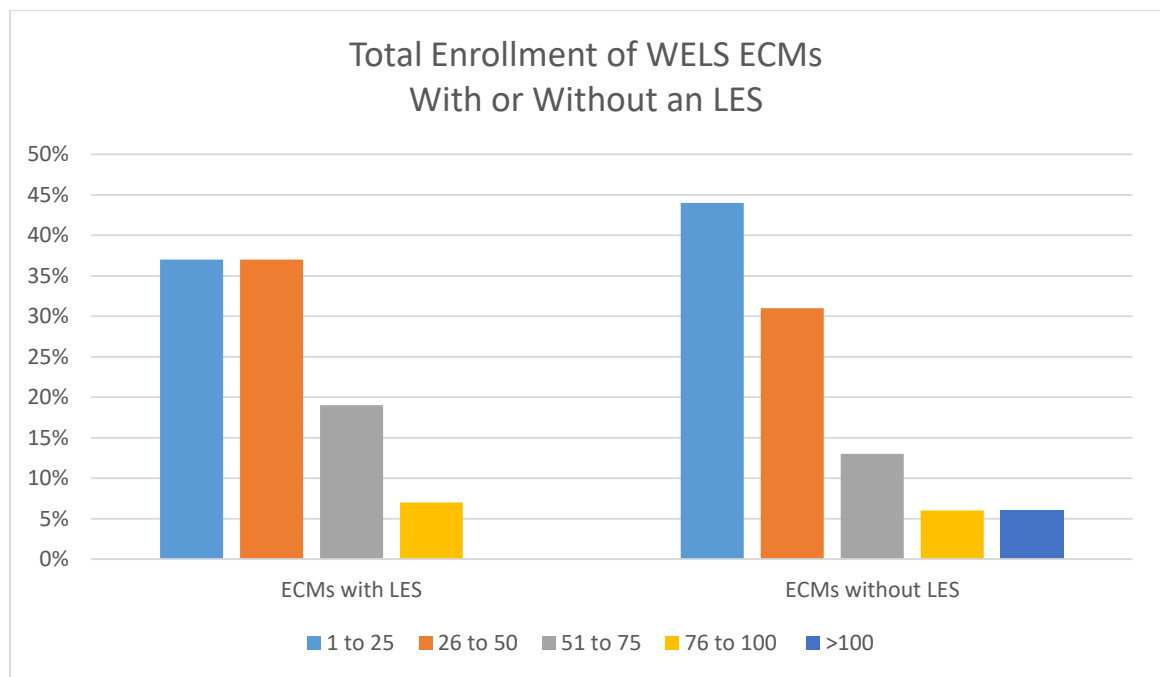


Figure 10

No data was collected on the size of the LES connected to a preschool or child care center, but it may be interesting to find out whether the connection of a preschool to an LES has an impact on the size or growth of an LES. During the interviews, it was very interesting to note that all three directors who serve at centers connected to an LES indicated that they believe the early childhood connection with families has produced more children moving on to the day school and more families interested in church membership (see Appendix E). All three also stated that the LES has grown in numbers over the past few years. Another director from a preschool not connected specifically to an LES stated that the preschool where she serves has been a feeder to the Lutheran elementary schools in the area. While each congregation carries out ministry in a different fashion, it appears likely that the addition of early learning programs to a congregation that operates an LES can provide unique, long-lasting outreach opportunities.

No substantial difference was shown regarding hours of operation between the two categories of those ECMs connected to an LES and those not. Additionally, there was very little difference between the two groups regarding centers being open year-round. Thirty-seven percent of ECMs reportedly connected to an LES operate year-round, while twenty-five percent of ECMs not connected to an LES also operate year-round.

One interesting disparity was revealed in terms of state licensure. The ECMs not connected to an LES reported 100% state licensure, while only 33% of ECMs connected to an LES reported maintaining a state license (see Figure 11).

Again, location may be a factor in this disparity; however, the difference is certainly noteworthy.

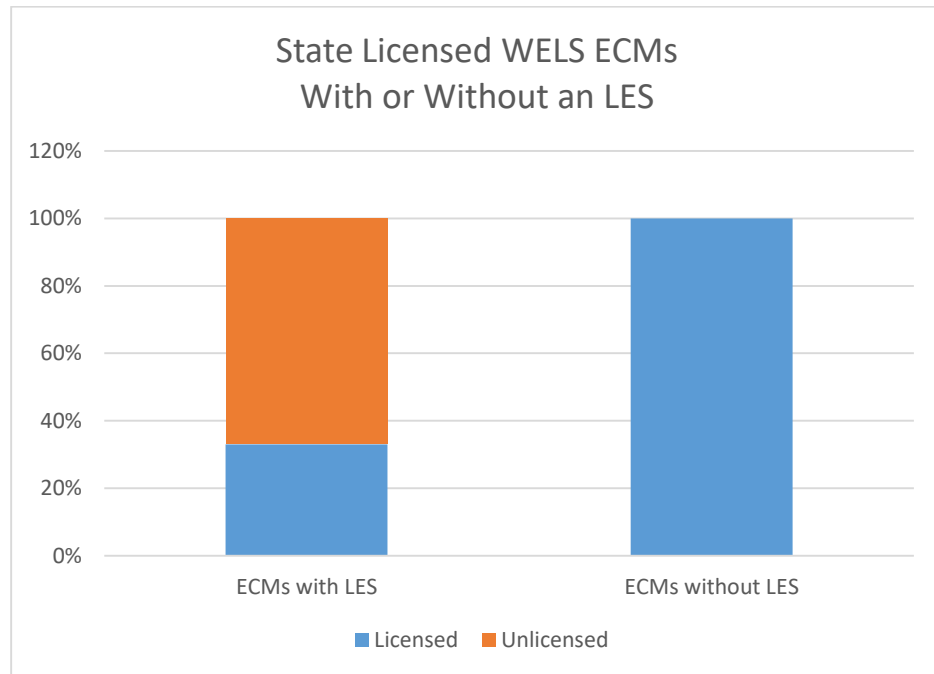


Figure 11

While the quantitative data shows little difference between these two categories, the qualitative data collected from interviews indicates some important findings. Most of those findings will be explored with the second research question, “What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?”

Summary. To summarize this very limited picture of WELS ECMs, it is of utmost importance to realize that every ECM is unique due to many factors. The history of the congregation, its location, the culture of the people served, and the community as a whole play an enormous role in the development and operation of a WELS ECM. Very few of these elements were explored in this research. However, with the research gathered some generalizations can be made.

1. ECM programs that serve families with infant and toddlers tend to have differences in size, staff, and hours of operation.
2. The larger the center, the more likely it is to be open longer and year-round.
3. ECMs connected to an LES have positively impacted the enrollment of the LES.

Regarding creating categories, the data reveals the uniqueness of all ECMs.

Using five categories of preschool only, preschool connected with an LES, preschool connected with an LES that offers extended care, full-time child care center not connected to an LES, and full-time child care center connected to an LES, along with careful consideration of ages served, size, and programs, seems to be a reasonable way to categorize centers. All these are important in determining the answer to the second research question:

2. What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?

A job title does not always explain the duties associated with the position.

The same can be said of the title ‘director’ in a WELS ECM. This position carries with it a multitude of tasks and responsibilities, yet many factors play a part in the actual role of the director at each center.

In the *Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors* four major domains are listed as guidelines for WELS EC directors:

1. Spiritual Leadership
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Administrative Leadership

4. Community Leadership (Martin Luther College, 2014)

The role of the director will be explored using these four domains, and comparisons will be made between the different types of centers mentioned previously. The director position will be examined in each domain regarding center age groups, size, and programs.

Spiritual Leadership. The director of a WELS ECM does more than fulfill the requirements of a job. Most often, the director has a call to serve children and families with the gospel. In response to the survey, 82% of the directors indicated that serving children and families with the means of grace is the most important part of their job. To be sure, serving families with the means of grace can take on many forms, and teaching Bible stories is not the only approach. There are many forms of communication that happen between a director and parents that can contain encouragement and references to scripture. When asked to rank the tasks to which each director devotes the most time, however, only 30% stated that they devote the most time to sharing the gospel message with children and families. This does not mean that these directors are neglecting the thing they feel is most important, but it may mean that many other tasks need attention during the day. The discrepancy between the importance of sharing the gospel and the time devoted to it, seems noteworthy.

The categories of centers were cross-tabulated to reveal director responses in different areas. The first category of ECM age levels reveals a somewhat substantial difference in responses between directors at centers with infant and toddlers, and at ones with only preschool age and older (see Figure 12). Only

seventeen percent of the directors at centers with infant and toddlers indicated that they devote the most time to the spiritual care of children and families, while 42% of directors at ECMs that serve preschool age and older indicated this.

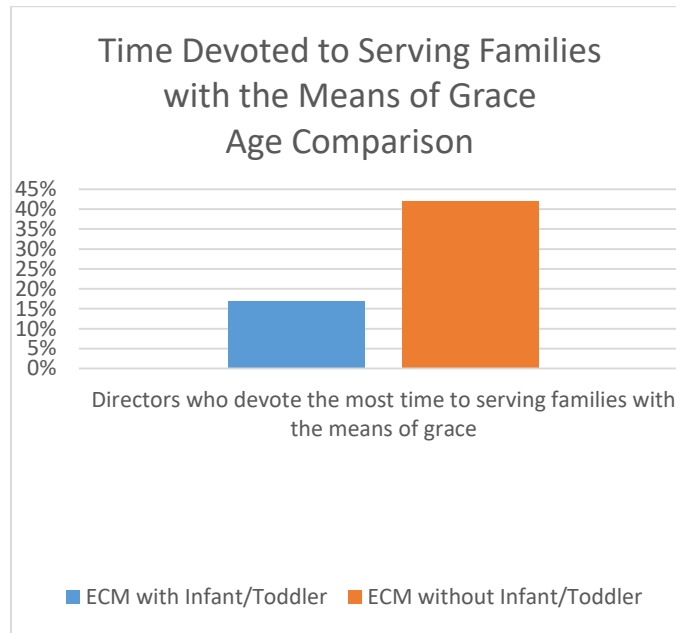


Figure 12

The second category explored was the size of the center. The data revealed in Figure 13 vividly shows a trend that the larger the center, the less time the director devotes to serving children and families with the gospel. It is notable that of the large ECMs whose directors responded to the survey, only nine percent feel they can devote the most time to serving children and families with the gospel.

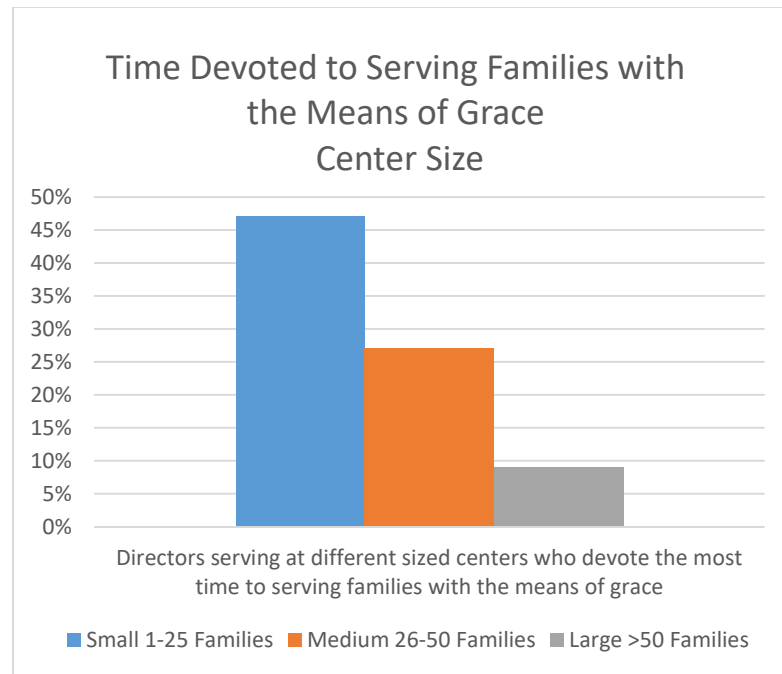


Figure 13

Finally, the category of ECMs with or without an LES connected to them was explored. A small difference is reported in this category. Forty-one percent of those connected to an LES reported devoting the most time to serving families with the means of grace, while the ECMs not connected to an LES reported 25% (see Figure 14).

While management tasks are very important, especially in a large ECM or one that has many small children and a large staff to oversee, it is imperative that directors are given the time needed to share the Gospel. The director is the guide and the example to the other staff, and the one parents look to as the expert in education. The management of a center must never take precedence over the ministry. If busy directors find themselves too busy to counsel with parents, share

Jesus songs with little ones, and communicate the Gospel in a variety of ways, then a refocus of the mission may be in order.

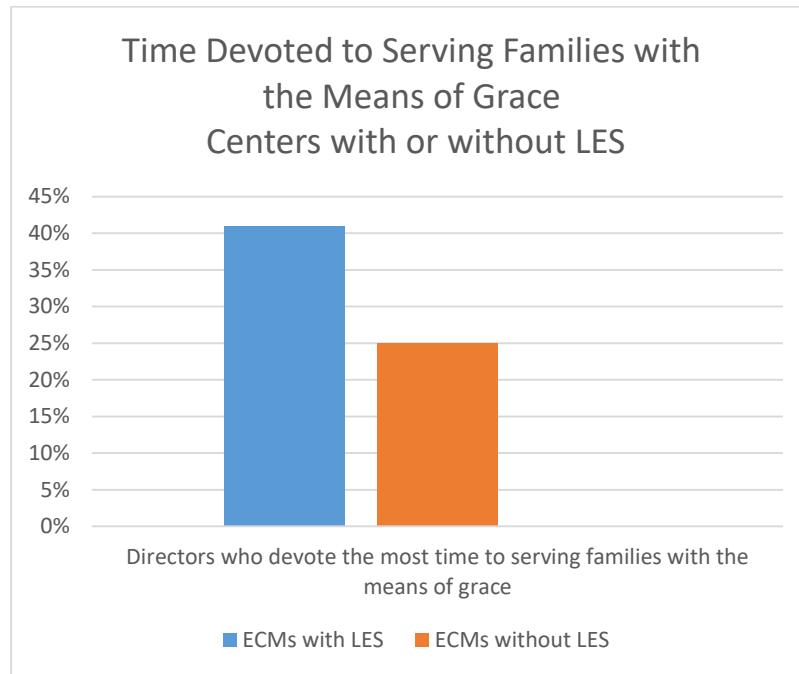


Figure 14

While the quantitative data reveals the limited amount of time that ECM directors devote to serving children and families with the gospel, the qualitative data offers a much more positive picture. When the interview question “Please describe ways that your center keeps Christ as the focus of your programming” was asked, all the directors interviewed responded with comments indicating that everything done at the ECM all day long includes a focus on Christ. Some mentioned Bible stories, and some mentioned discipline. Others mentioned prayer, and some talked about the Pastor being involved in chapel services with the children and parents. One director did comment that while the focus is on

Christ each day, the challenge of employing WELS staff members creates problems in this area (see Appendix E).

WELS is blessed with many dedicated early childhood directors who truly have ministry at the heart of their service. Here is a comment from one of the surveys:

I love being part of the first school experience for our parents. It is rewarding to watch both the children and the parents mature in their faith and independence. What a joy and a privilege it is to see a family respond to the Gospel truths that their children are sharing at home!

Instructional Leadership. Directors at WELS ECMs have a most important task in guiding instruction with a Christ-centered focus. While some directors plan instruction only for their own classroom, others face the challenge of guiding a program with other teachers and staff. The domain of instructional leadership encompasses a wide variety of duties, from understanding the developmental needs of the young child, to coaching and mentoring young teachers and newly hired staff (*Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors, 2014*).

Most of the directors surveyed teach in addition to their call to serve as director. In fact, 97.7% of the directors surveyed indicated that they either teach or provide direct care in addition to their administrative duties. Directors who are also teachers are well- trained in understanding the developmental needs of young children. The WELS is blessed to have such trained directors.

In addition to the formal training that directors receive, there are other resources available to ensure that the programs are serving the developmental and instructional needs of the children. One such resource is a state license. Centers licensed by a state must hold to standards that support the developmental needs and safety of the children enrolled. A total of 63.6% of the directors responding to the survey indicated that their center maintains a state license.

There is very little difference between the sizes of centers when it comes to maintaining a center license (see Figure 8). The range is minimal, from 55% to 67% for all three categories. There is also virtually no difference between the centers with infant and toddler care and those without, both reporting 58% of centers maintaining a state license. There is, however, a substantial difference between WELS ECMs that stand alone, and those connected to an LES. Thirty-three percent of directors at ECMs connected to an LES reported serving at a center licensed by the state, while 100% of directors serving at ECMs not connected to an LES reported their centers hold a state license (see figure 15).

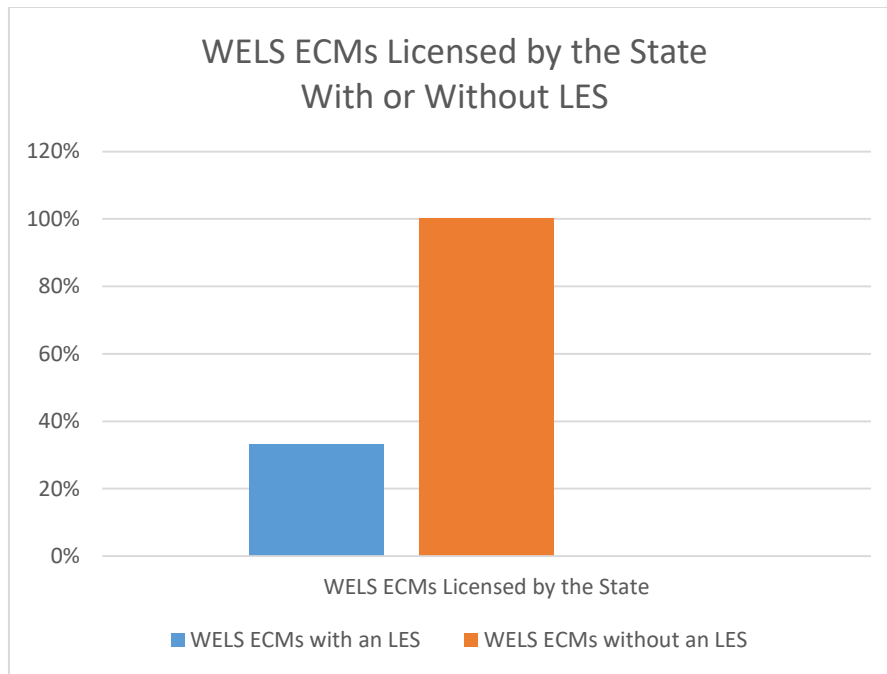


Figure 15

There could be many reasons there is such a wide discrepancy in this category, or it could be that the small sample size does not complete the big picture. As stated previously, some states mandate state licensure, while others do not. No data was collected on the location of the ECMs. It may be interesting to study this trend further to find other causes for the large difference in this category. Regardless of the reason a center maintains a state license, it should be noted that a large amount of paperwork and documentation can be expected when a center maintains a state license. There are more rules and regulations for centers that are state licensed, so there is more time-consuming work for the director.

Another important resource available for directors to assure the ECM is providing a developmentally appropriate learning environment is achieving accreditation from a nationally recognized organization. Fewer than ten percent of

the directors responding to the survey indicated their center has achieved accreditation status. This begs the question of whether the directors at WELS ECMs are too busy to work through an accreditation process, or whether it seems unnecessary.

While a small percentage of WELS ECMs are nationally accredited, a larger number of directors work with state or local agencies, or educational associations to improve the quality of instruction at their center.

State or local agencies can provide many benefits and resources to an independent early childhood center such as resource libraries, professional development opportunities, and marketing strategies. Forty-three percent of WELS ECM directors responding to the survey indicated that they work with such an agency.

An examination of the different categories of WELS ECMs reveals that there is little difference in the size of ECMs using a local or state agency. Twenty-nine percent of directors at small ECMs make use of this service, while 47% of directors at medium-size and 36% of directors at large centers use the resource (see Figure 16).

Additionally, there was little difference between directors at ECMs that serve infant and toddlers, and those that do not. Fifty percent of directors at ECMs serving infant and toddlers reported using local or state agencies to enhance the instructional quality at the center, while 39% of directors at centers serving only preschool age and older reported the same (see figure 17).

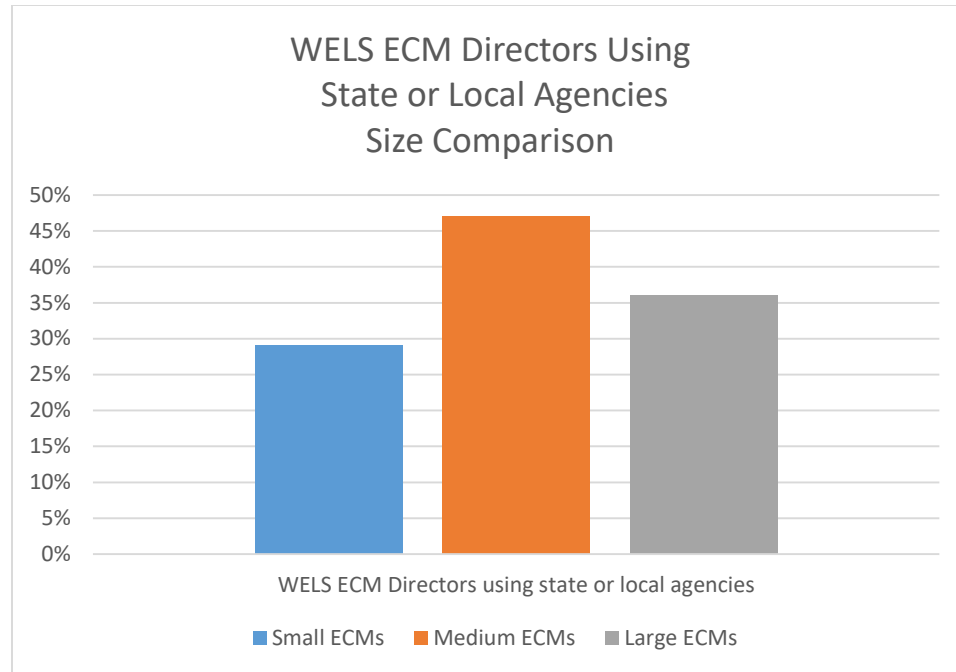


Figure 16

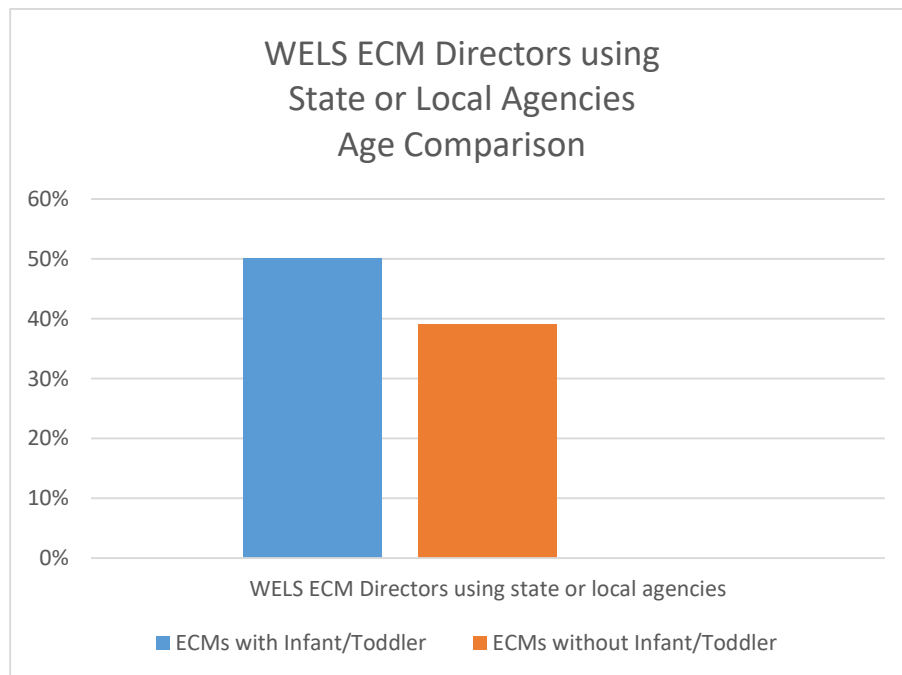


Figure 17

There is, however, a larger gap between WELS ECMs connected to an LES and those not connected to one. Again, this comparison shows the largest difference in the domain of instruction. While only 30% of directors serving at ECMs connected to an LES reported using state or local agencies, 63% of directors at ECMs not connected to an LES reported using them (see Figure 18).

Working with state or local agencies can certainly benefit an ECM. It also adds another layer of work for the director. Meetings, documentation, and updating the ECM program to meet the expectations of the agency, are all additional tasks and responsibilities placed on the director. A director must weigh the needs of the ECM, the time he or she has available to work with the agency, and the community in which the ECM is located when making the decision to work with these agencies.

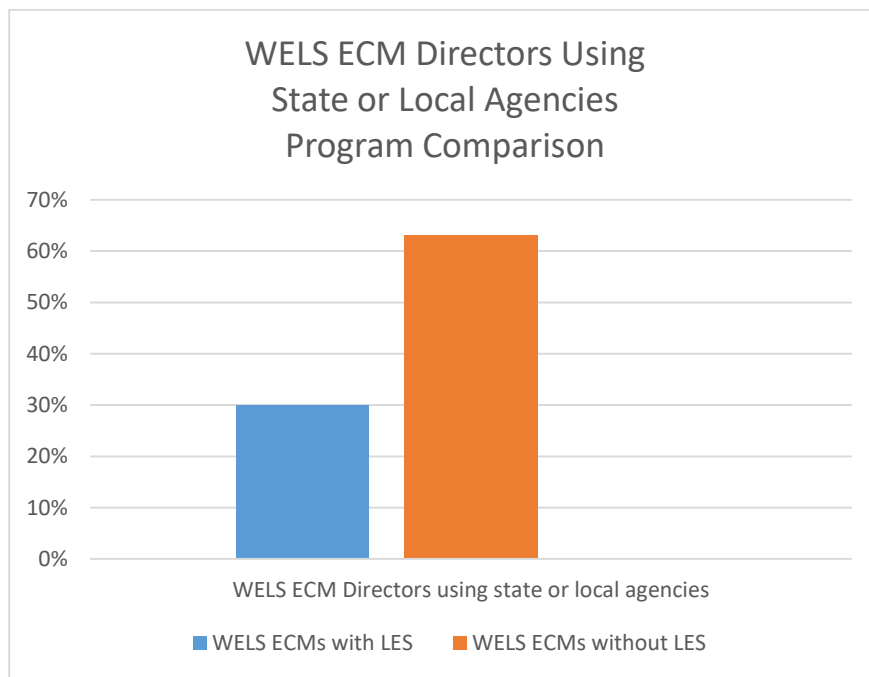


Figure 18

The final piece to explore in the instructional domain is the professional growth of the director. A director needs to stay current on instructional methods and current research. It is certainly important that those who are in charge of the educational program at a WELS ECM stay informed about current research and trends in education.

There are many ways to grow professionally. One way is to further one's schooling and seek a higher degree. Another is to attend workshops and conferences. Taking time to read educational literature on a regular basis is another option. Still another is membership in an educational association, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For the sake of brevity in the survey, only the last option was surveyed.

The first comparison of directors making use of membership in a recognized educational association is that of directors serving at different sized ECMs. Directors serving at small ECMs reported a 41% rate of membership in an educational association, while directors at medium-size ECMs reported a 60% rate of membership. The directors at large centers reported the lowest rate of membership at only eighteen percent (see Figure 19). As stated previously, there are many avenues to professional development, but the low rate of membership of directors serving at large ECMs may follow a trend that indicates a time struggle for these directors.

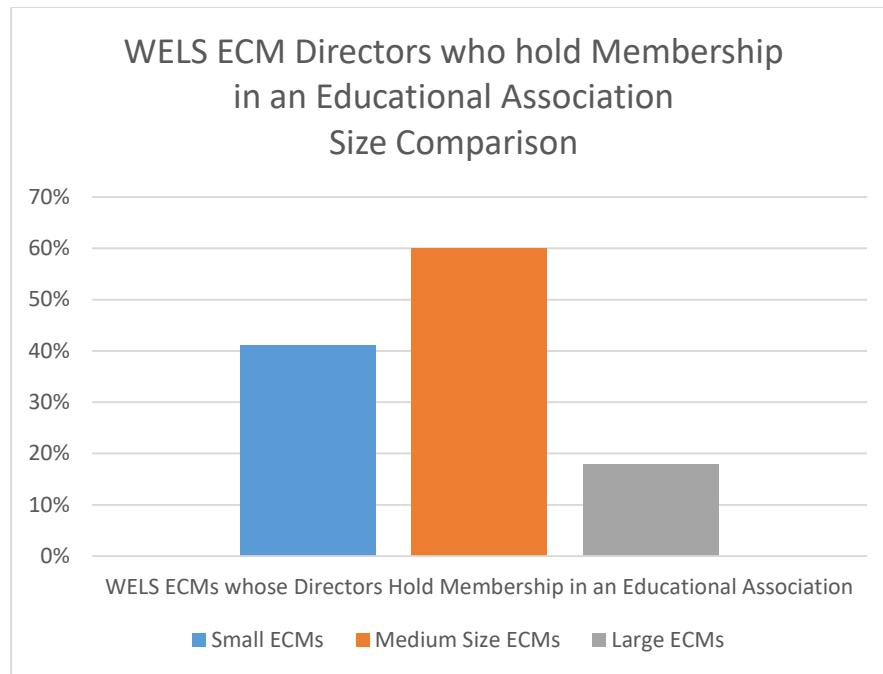


Figure 19

The next comparison of directors holding membership in an educational association is the age group served. WELS ECM directors at centers that care for infant and toddlers report a 33.5% membership in an educational association, while those at centers not serving infant and toddlers report a 48% membership rate (see Figure 20). This does not appear to be a major difference when considering the small sample size of directors that responded to the survey.

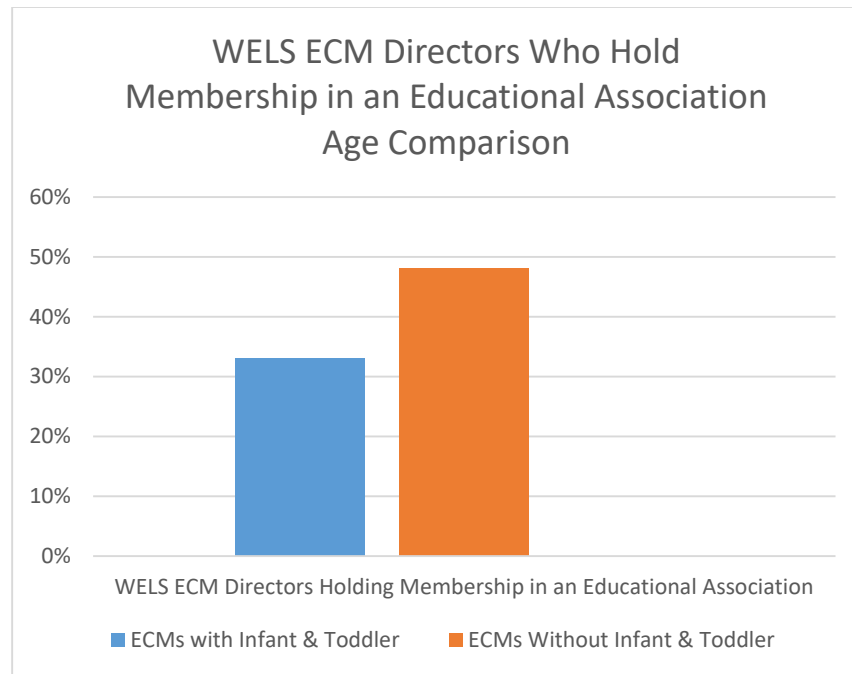


Figure 20

The final comparison to make with relation to membership in an educational association is that of ECMs connected to an LES and ECMs which operate alone. Again, little difference was reported with the group connected to an LES reporting 48% membership, and the group not connected to an LES reporting 38% membership (see Figure 21).

A question in the survey asked directors to rank the top three tasks to which they devote the most time. Educational Programming was one of the choices, along with sharing the means of grace with children and families, and a host of administrative duties. Overall, educational programming did not receive a higher priority status than many of the other administrative tasks, but was chosen as one of many tasks to which directors attend (see Figure 22).

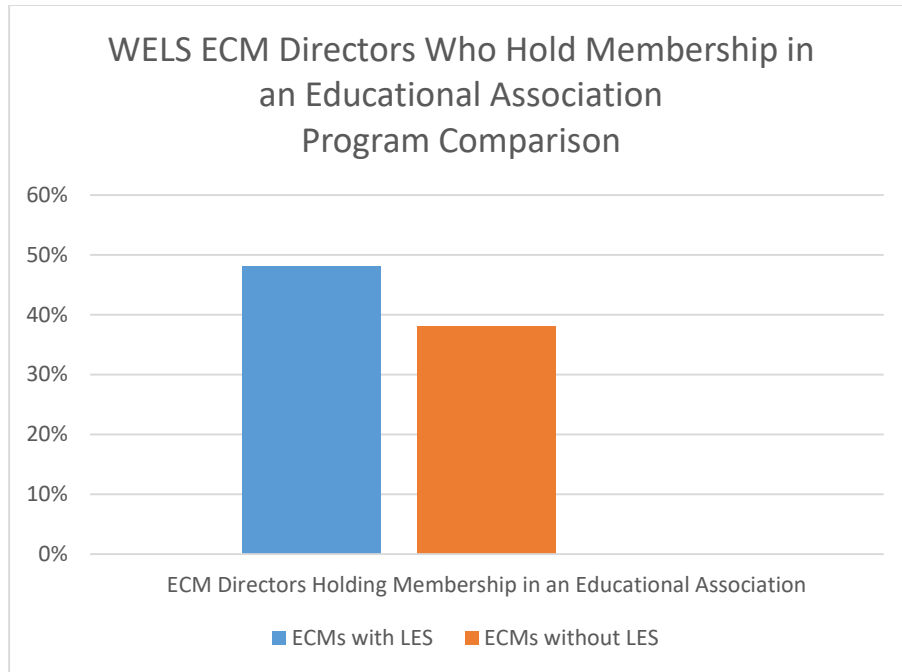


Figure 21

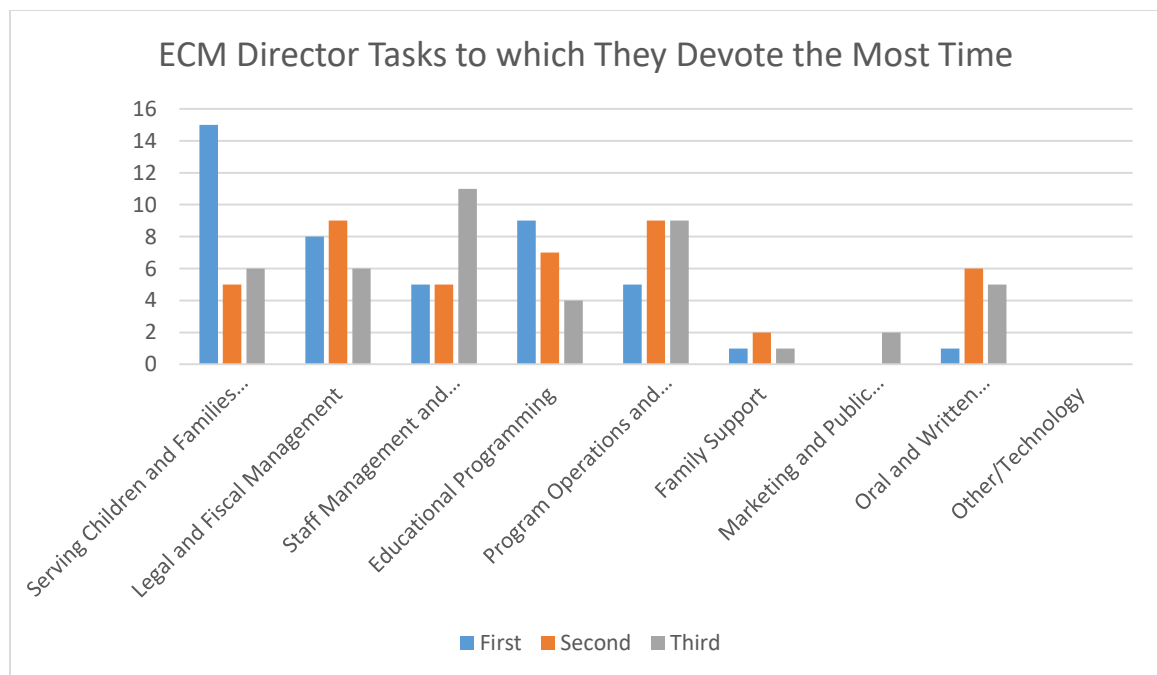


Figure 22

To summarize, it appears that while WELS ECM directors are concerned about instructional leadership, the educational programming component of their call does not receive a higher time priority than other tasks. It is interesting to note that ECM directors at centers not connected to an LES report a much higher rate of state licensure and use of state and local agencies. It is apparent that ECM directors at large centers may have less time to devote to duties that are not required.

Administrative. The administrative domain encompasses a wide variety of responsibilities. Using a portion of a list taken from NAEYC (2007), and including the joyful task of sharing the Gospel message, directors were surveyed and asked how much time they devote weekly to these responsibilities:

- Serving children and families with the Gospel message
- Legal and fiscal management
- Staff management and human relationships
- Educational programming
- Program operations and facilities management
- Family support
- Marketing and public relationships
- Oral and written communication
- Technology

Figure twenty-two displays the results of this question. It is important to note that most directors of WELS ECMs fulfill these tasks in addition to a daily

teaching or care-giver role. With the wide variety of ages, sizes of centers, and programs in operation at each ECM, each director faces different challenges, including how to divide his or her time on a weekly basis.

Forty-three directors surveyed responded to the question, “In an average week, how many hours do you devote to administrative tasks (not including planning or prepping for a class)?” While the largest percentage of directors reported spending five to ten hours per week on administrative tasks, a substantial number of the full-time child care centers reported spending over twenty hours per week on administration (see Figure 23).

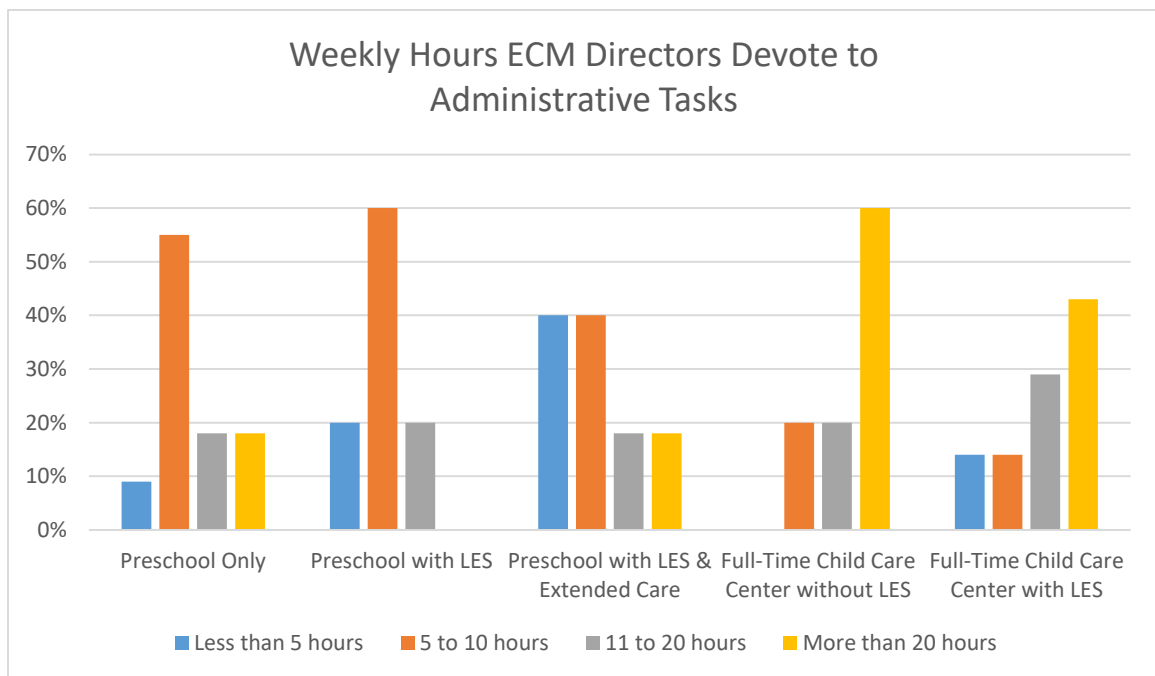


Figure 23

It is interesting to note the answers to this same question when separating the categories of centers by ages served, size of center, and programs. It appears very clear that directors at centers serving infant and toddlers devote more time to

administrative duties than those not serving the youngest children (see Figure 24).

This stands to reason when one considers the previous data that showed that ECMs serving families with infants and toddlers are open longer (see Figure 2), employ more staff (see Figure 4), and serve more families (see Figure 5).

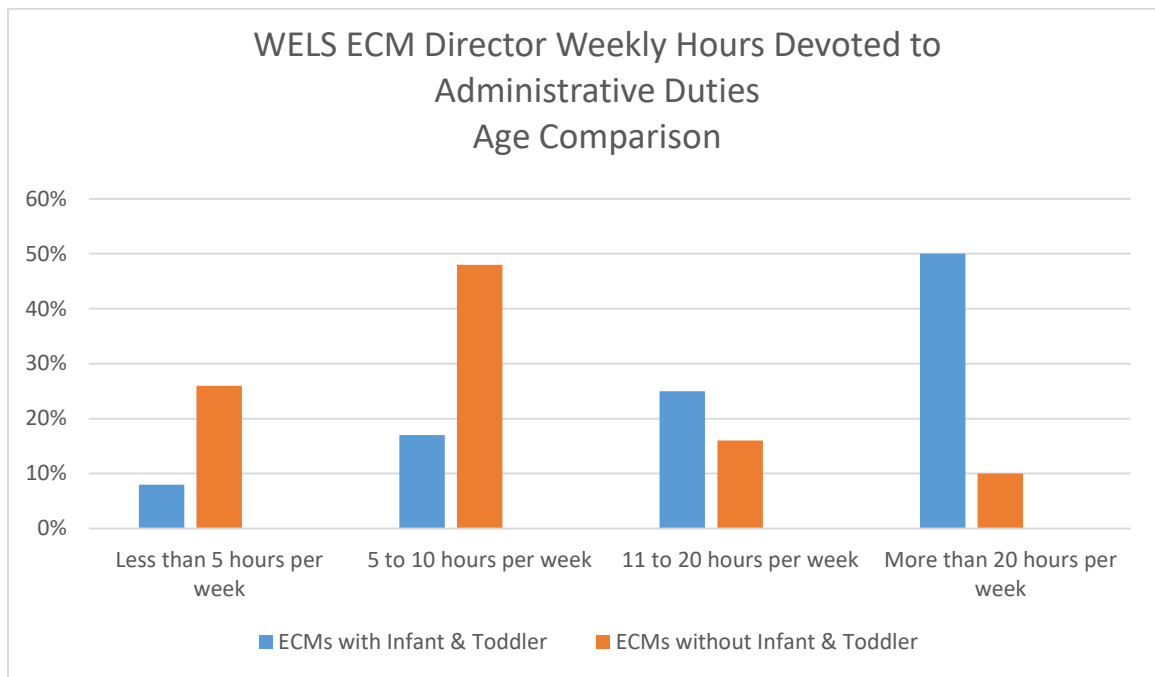


Figure 24

Regarding the size of a center, there appears to be an obvious correlation between the size of the center and the administrative hours fulfilled by the director (see Figure 25). Sixty-four percent of directors at large ECMs serving over 50 families report spending over twenty hours per week at administrative tasks. This too, is not surprising since more families mean more forms to fill out, more emails to answer, a larger facility to manage, a more complicated budget with which to work, etc.

A final comparison of administrative hours can be made by looking at the program offered at the site of the center. Programs connected to an LES tend to have directors devoting less time to administrative duties than programs not connected to an LES, although the difference is minimal. There may be many factors that play into the small difference that is indicated, including the number of called workers at the congregation, or the size of the ECMs not connected to an LES.

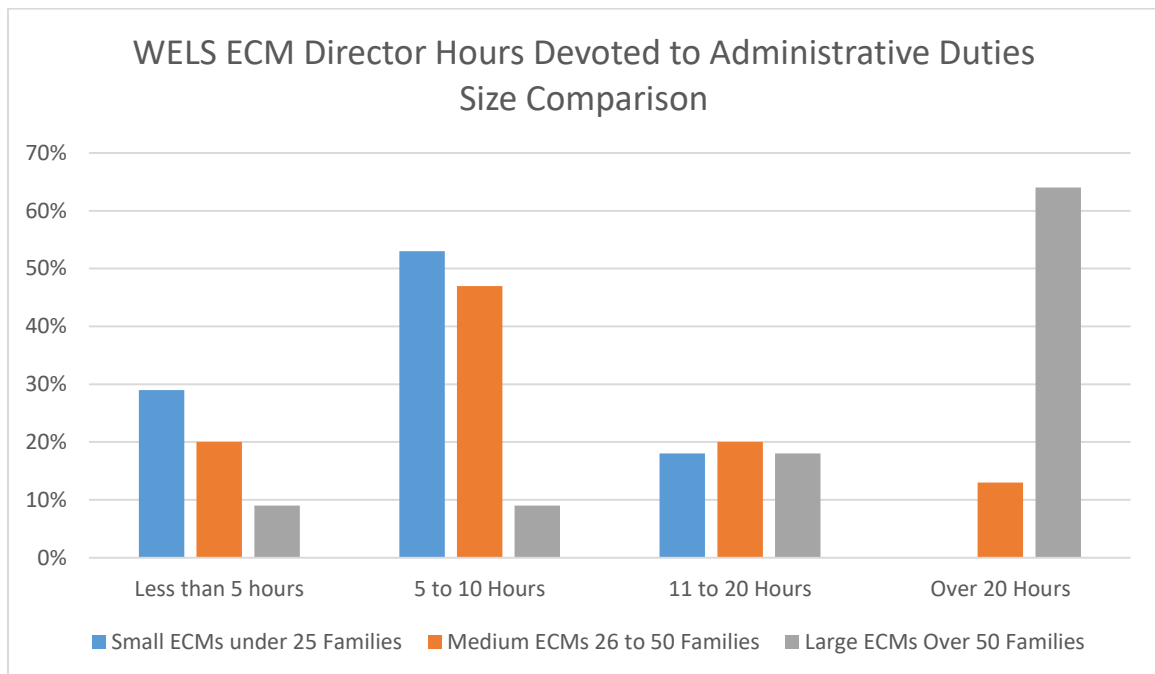


Figure 25

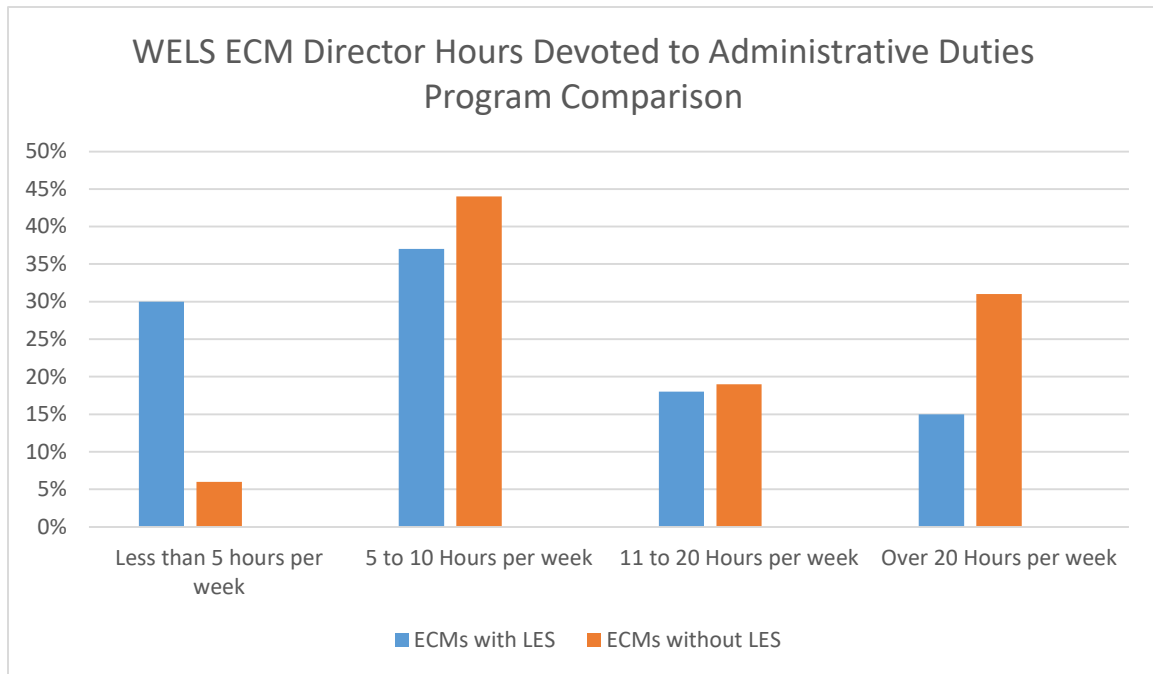


Figure 26

Using the data collected, it appears that ECM directors at large centers and centers that serve infants and toddlers devote more time to administrative tasks than those serving at the opposite types of centers.

Another consideration regarding administrative time is the question related to whether or not ECM directors are content with the amount of administrative time they are currently using. This topic received the most comments when directors were asked to respond to this statement in the survey: “Please feel free to make any comments regarding your role as a director of a WELS ECM.” These comments are from directors of stand-alone preschools, preschools connected to an LES with extended care, and full-time child care centers not connected to an LES:

1. I believe congregations need a better understanding of what happens in ECMs, especially those which are state licensed. The states laws are in place for a reason and are not optional. The congregation I serve seems to think some of the rules are optional. I also feel the expectations for a director in some congregations are unreasonable. Mine seems to think I can do it all--have twenty students, keep up licensure, assess the students and manage the facility with only one other staff all while staying in the ratio of 10:1. We have no substitutes if we are sick. We are expected to run a summer program, so there is no time to reenergize. I'm quite frankly worn out.
2. It's a big role! Not many people in the church understand it. Especially when it comes to all of the licensing rules and regulations that we need to follow. It's hard to maintain the joy of teaching with the amount of admin work that needs to be done.
3. I am the only called worker, serving as Director, Administrator, and teacher. I have an aide in mornings only when state adult-to-student ratios require.
4. It is hard to find enough time and balance teaching full time, with admin duties and family time. Low pay/benefits for ECE teachers/directors
5. There is so much more I should be doing as a director, but as I am also the four-year-old teacher with no admin time. It is very difficult to get to many of those wonderful tasks that a director should be doing.

6. I love being part of the first school experience for our parents. It is rewarding to watch both the children and the parents mature in their faith and independence. What a joy and a privilege it is to see a family respond to the Gospel truths that their children are sharing at home!

I enjoy the teaching aspect of my position and would miss it if I was an administrator only. This does however have an impact on the amount of time I can spend on administrative tasks. I do constantly feel that I am playing "catch-up" and working late hours or staying all day on the weekends to feel prepared. I would love to give more time to our lead teacher - who is paid hourly and support our teacher aides more fully. I believe that our lead teachers should be Called to their position - this is not the case yet. We run a summer program for ages three to twelve and it is always a challenge to find suitable workers who love kids and are mature enough to develop relationships with parents and who are able to discipline in a loving, biblical way.

There really is no "rest" time in our yearly schedule. We stay open for school breaks and need to have staff available to cover those hours. I have been advocating for higher starting wages - it has taken six years for that to be taken seriously - not without some trepidation from the leadership. I do feel that the leadership supports our program, but doesn't really understand the scope of the work and importance of keeping seasoned workers (who may warrant a higher starting pay).

All of that being said, the Lord continues to bless us with dedicated workers and refreshes me with maybe not more hours in the day to get things done, but with glimpses of children's faith, friendships with staff, and the love of the families we serve. I pray daily that he will continue to give me the desire and perseverance to stay the course and feed his little lambs with his precious word every day.

7. It is not supported with enough time devoted to administration. I have to fit time in while children are napping/playing to get administrative work done.
8. I would be more satisfied but we are understaffed so I went from being just the director back to director and preschool teacher. We are going to try to get another called worker this year. I am also currently training a secretary to help alleviate some of my director roles while I go back into the classroom more again.

Needless to say, the administration of WELS ECMs is a very big responsibility. ECM directors who desire to do their best at the responsibilities of their call, out of love for their Lord, are challenged by the many duties and important tasks set before them each day. While some of the comments reveal a level of dissatisfaction from WELS ECM directors regarding administrative duties, the overall picture may not be quite as bad. Over 35% of the directors responding to the survey indicated that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of administrative time they devote to the ECM (see

Figure 27). While another 22.7% was neutral about the topic, the significance of over 40% being dissatisfied is somewhat troubling.

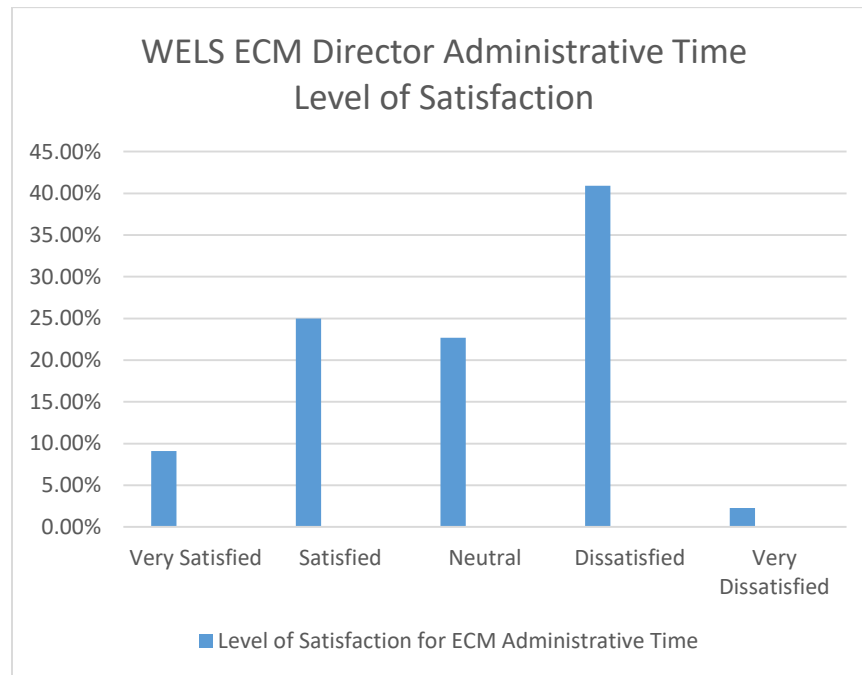


Figure 27

A cross-tabulation of ECM age levels, sizes, and programs may give some clarity to a specific category of ECM directors facing a bigger challenge than others.

When considering the age level served at a center, directors reported little difference in the level of satisfaction regarding administrative time (see Figure 28). No clear trend appears even though directors serving infants and toddlers have a slightly higher level of satisfaction than those not serving the youngest of children.

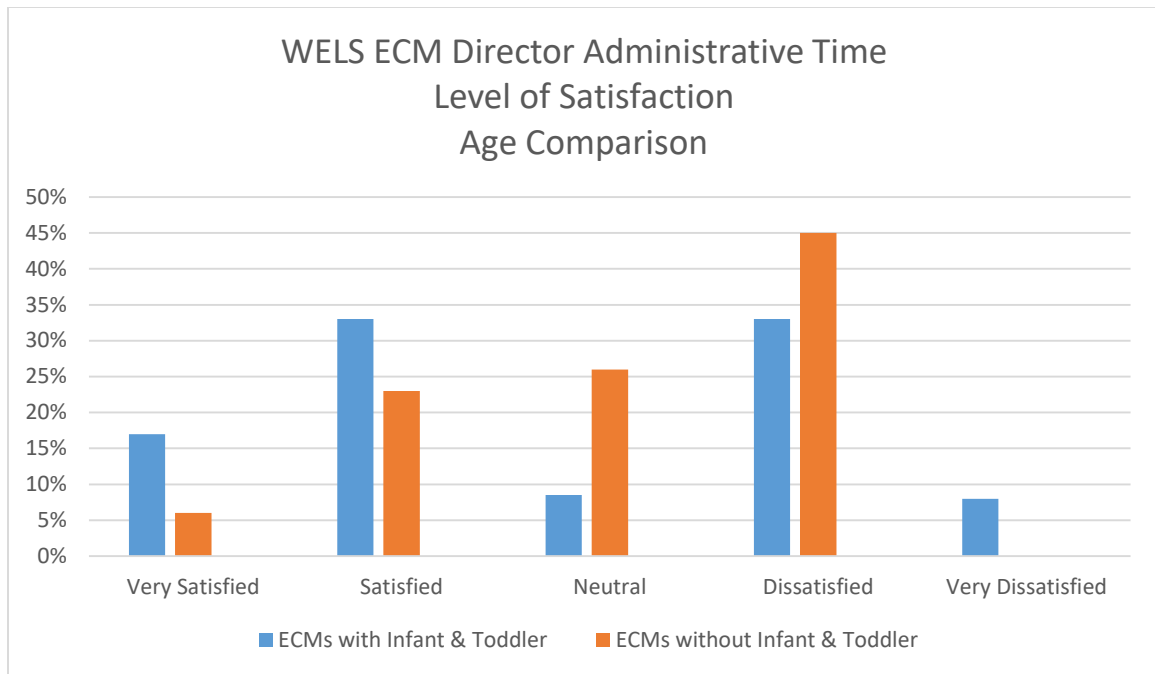


Figure 28

When comparing sizes of a center, no clear trend also appears regarding director administrative time (see Figure 29). A few more directors are dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend on administrative tasks, however, there is very little difference between the groups.

A final comparison can be made between centers that are connected to an LES and those that stand alone. Again, there is no major difference between directors of ECMs connected to an LES and those not connected regarding administrative time satisfaction (see Figure 30). While the data shows a bit more dissatisfaction at centers connected to an LES, it does not appear great enough to make a conclusion.

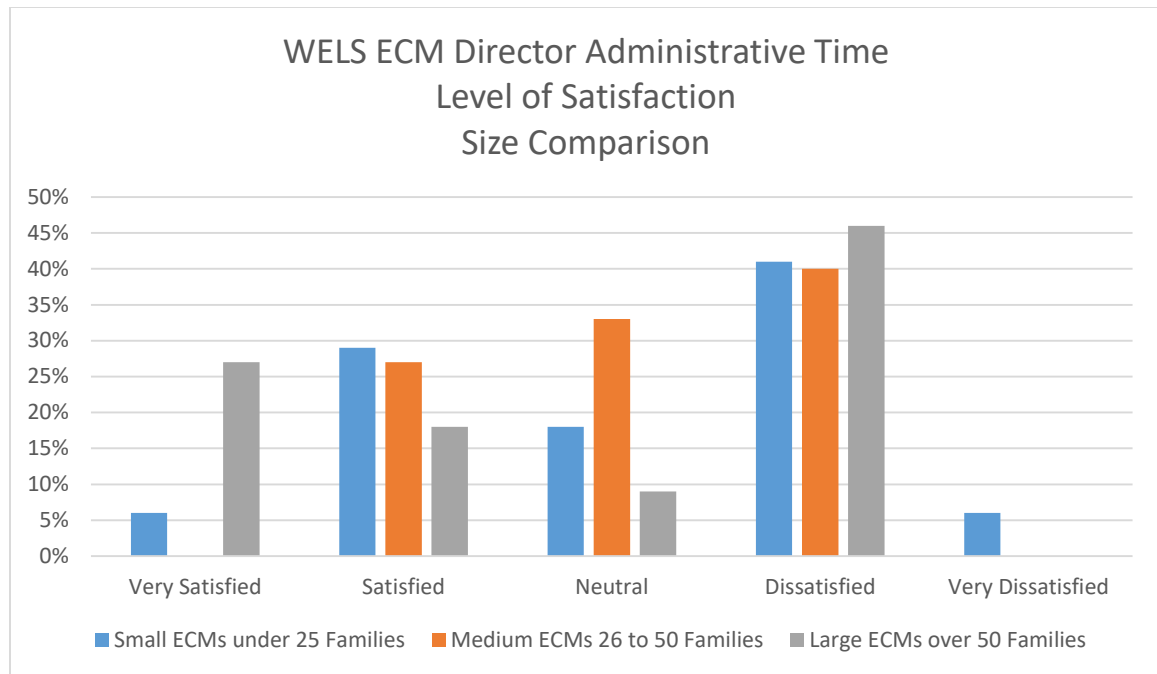


Figure 29

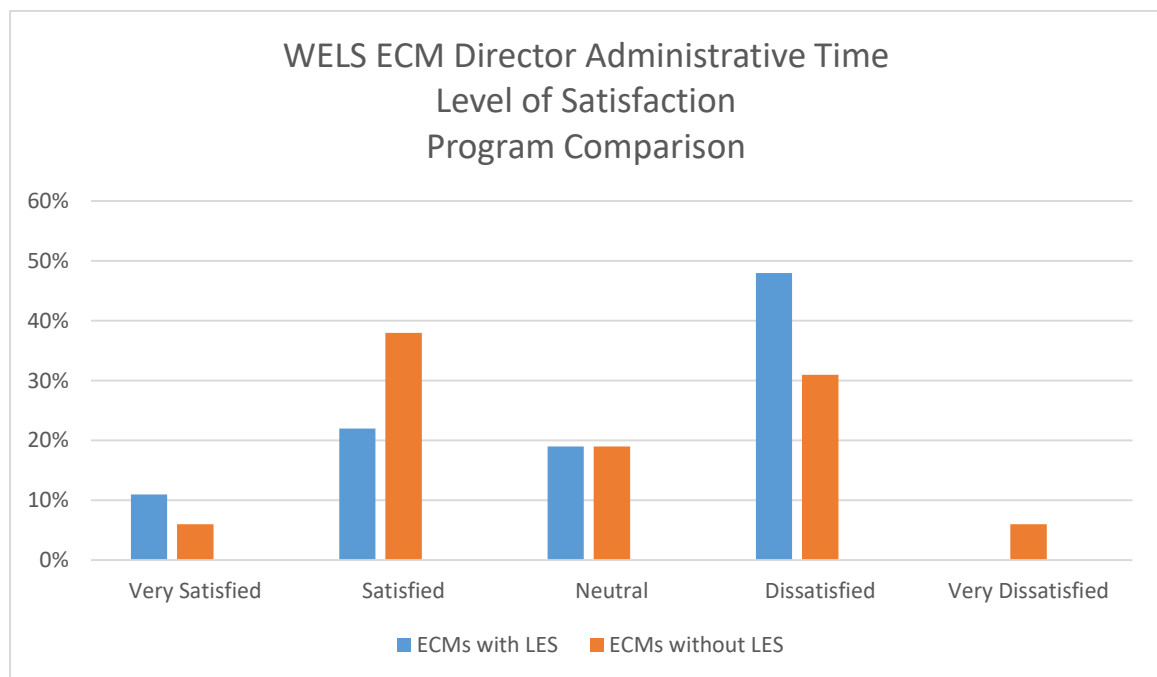


Figure 30

Regarding administrative time satisfaction, other factors may make a greater impact on the situation faced by a director of an ECM. It is possible that centers which maintain a state license have much more paperwork than other centers. It is also possible that directors serving at centers located in areas of the country where family needs are great, must make time for connecting with families in personal ways instead of just sending an email or writing a note. Because of the unique ministry at each ECM, it may be very challenging to generalize how much administrative time is necessary. However, a snapshot comparing the number of hours a director can devote to administrative duties, along with the level of satisfaction, may provide a little more clarity (see Figure 31). As the amount of administrative time increases, the dissatisfaction basically decreases. In fact, 56% of directors reporting administrative time of more than twenty hours per week recorded being satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of administrative time they receive. More research on the level of administrative time necessary for directors at WELS ECMs is greatly needed. While some generalizations can be made in this area, there are many unique situations at ECMs that may require more or less administrative time being made available.

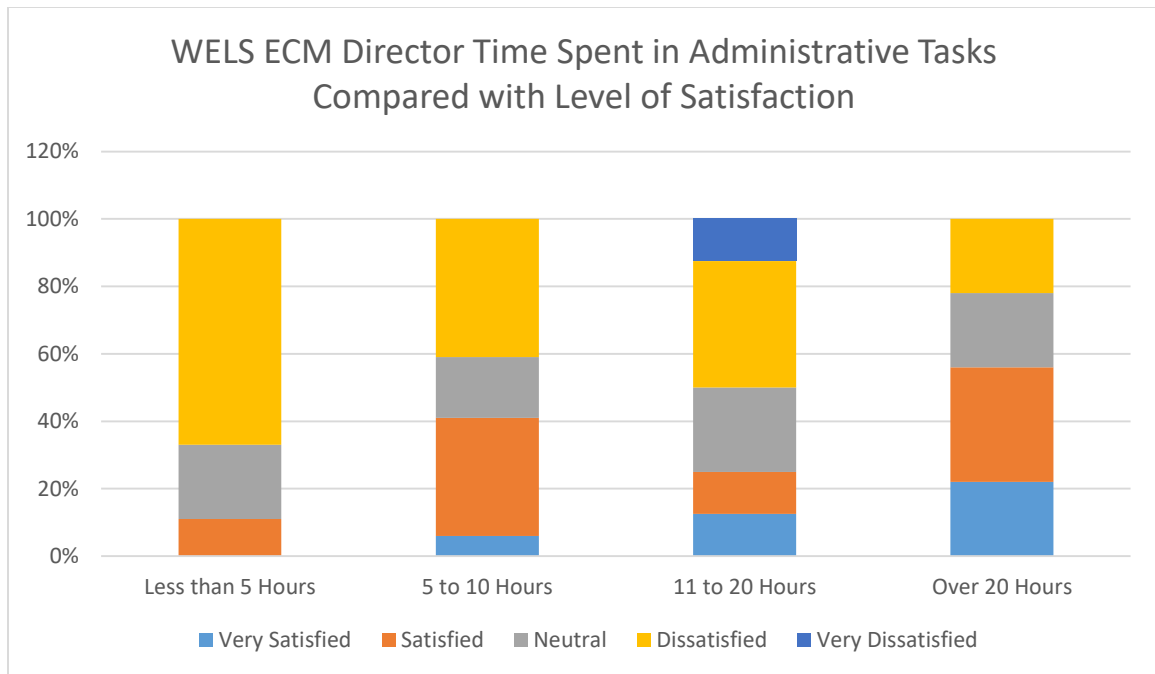


Figure 31

To summarize the administrative domain, it must be said that the responsibilities a director of a WELS ECM are great. The comments made by the directors regarding the administrative role must be considered. While directors need to have enough administrative time to fulfill their responsibilities, they also need to feel the support of the leadership and members of a congregation. In an interview with a director who serves as the only called worker at a WELS ECM, this concerning statement was made:

1. I feel like an island, although I'm pretty new (came in 2016). The congregation is supportive of the school, but they don't know how to help me without me asking. I feel like I need to teach them how to support. The monetary support is there, but not the emotional or physical support we need.

Two other directors mirrored the same thoughts during the interviews when they expressed the following sentiments:

2. They support me a lot financially, and the classroom too. I have a good preschool budget and if I need anything I feel like I get it. I don't feel a lot of emotional or social support. They support the preschool, but they don't ask me if I need anything. I don't feel super welcome where I'm at. The congregation doesn't really care about me as a person.
3. The financial support is nice. They pay my entire housing and full medical. I would say there is no other support. I am an island—a sad and lonely island. I have no sounding board and am really lonely.

The level of support does seem to change when ECMs are connected to an LES. The last two comments relate a different feeling, although even with more called workers surrounding the director of an ECM, the level of support could still increase.

4. The Board of Ed is very supportive, and the principal checks in. He leaves the running of it up to me. People in general offer help if we need it.
We're good!
5. I have a wonderful school board who has my back. I have great fix it guys!
We are in Northern Wisconsin so they work hard in winter. The school staff is supportive and knows this is important to the overall ministry.
There is very good support from my staff even though they are not members. Many people want to see us grow. Sometimes I feel that since I'm the only called EC person, I feel a little alone.

The concern of the lack of support for ECM directors is troubling. Awareness of the many responsibilities faced by all ECM directors is important at the congregational level. Additionally, ECM directors at centers not connected to an LES, or especially in areas without a large WELS presence, need peer and collegial support.

Community Leadership. WELS ECM directors have a call to serve the families in the congregation and the community. Setting aside the many physical tasks that need to be done, a director must also focus attention on building relationships. WELS ECM directors must place importance on the leadership attributes that will help build relationships and guide the ECM toward the goal of the ministry.

Directors were surveyed on the importance of these leadership attributes:

- Being a student of God's Word—active in worship and Bible study
- Being patient, warm, and kind
- Being a visionary leader—having a vision for the ECM where you serve
- Possessing a good working relationship with staff
- Being responsive to the needs of families
- Staying current on research and new developments in early childhood
- Mentoring and guiding staff
- Being a good listener
- Connecting with the community

Results reveal that WELS ECM directors feel that the most important way they can fulfill the community leadership role is to be a student of God’s Word (see Figure 32). How blessed the WELS ECMs are when directors consider the “one thing needful” as most important in building relationships!

While many of the attributes chosen as important are those which all directors should possess, it is important to note that ECM directors serving at medium-sized or large centers were most of the directors that chose “possessing a good working relationship with staff.” This is an important trait that cannot always be taught, but is more of a personality trait. Directors who can cultivate a workplace where each team member is valued and appreciated, are well positioned to serve at large centers or ECMs with a large staff.

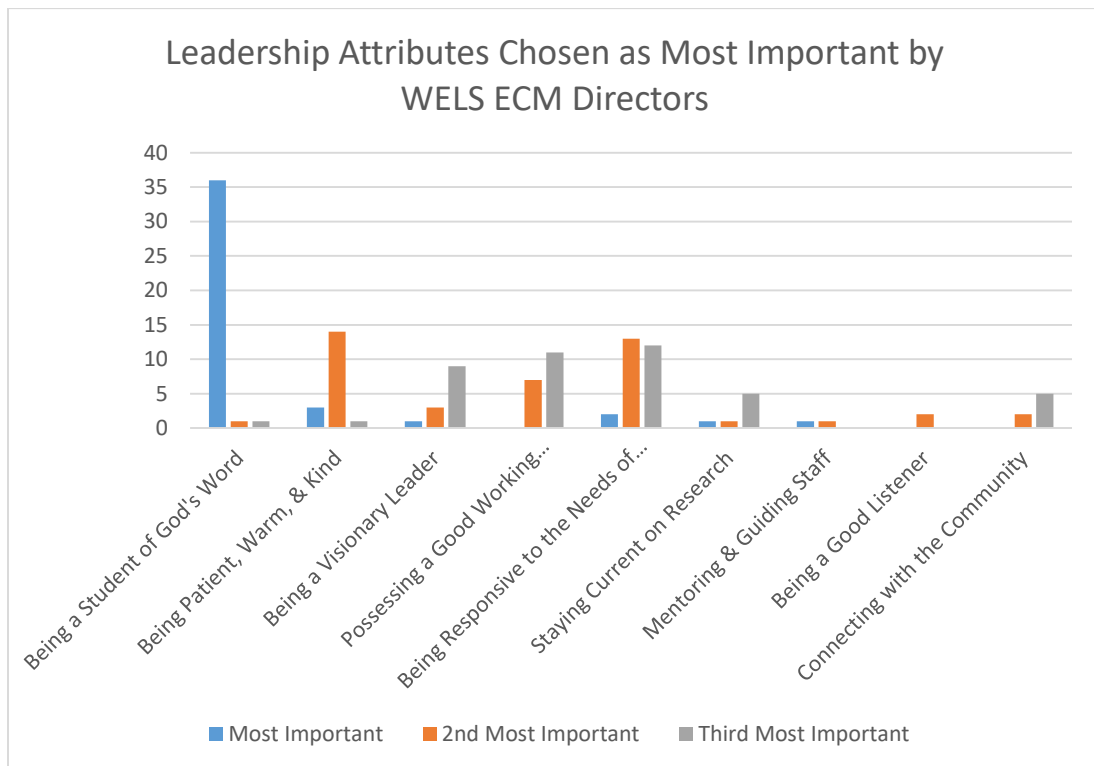


Figure 32

While it is likely very true that directors need to possess all these attributes, and that all are very important, the reality is that sin has ruined perfection. Directors, although very dedicated, are not perfect. WELS ECM directors know this to be true and can turn to their Heavenly Father for mercy and grace in times of trouble. Although God's forgiveness abounds, this also means that directors are not always satisfied with the level of leadership they are able to exhibit (see Figure 33). While it is challenging to know the best manner in which to serve, WELS ECM directors have a heart for ministry and strive to build relationships and bond with families for the sake of the Gospel.

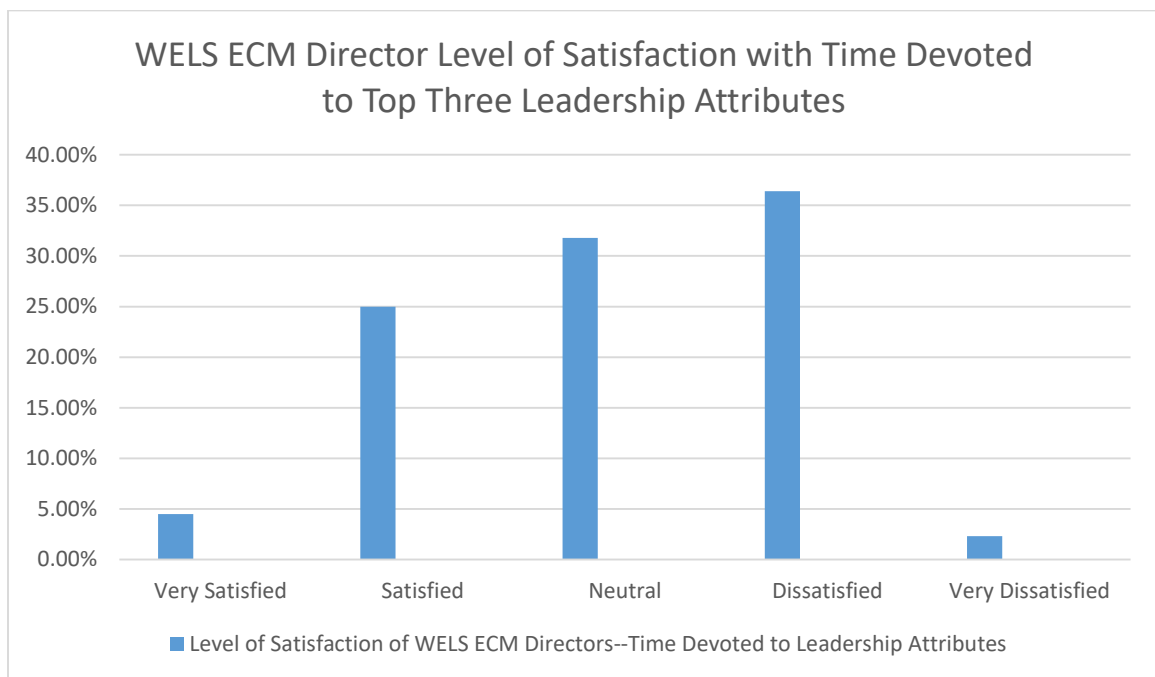


Figure 33

During the interviews, many statements were made regarding the building of community in an early learning environment. Here are the statements from the five interviewees, all of whom serve in different types of ECMs:

1. Congregation—I play and sing in church. Four times per year we host early childhood family events with congregation people invited. We ask congregation people to help me with it. We invite the church boards and leaders to come.

Community-We are a small town so we march in the parade, and host a trunk or treat with hundreds of people that come. We just finished a building project and we are inviting the community to an open house. We advertise in the small-town shopper.

2. I try to get to baby fairs. I participate in the county early childhood committee. We put out yard signs and anniversary celebration signs.

My visibility in the church is helped by me being a member, being on boards, in choir, and being in church. The kids sing by way of a video.

3. Congregation—They get a monthly newsletter and our stuff is in the bulletin.

Community—We have a big electronic sign that tells the community our happenings. We have a soccer camp that gets lots of participation, and host a trunk or treat with about 300 kids. At our Christmas program members offered to help with cookies. We're in Great Start to Quality. I try to go to other grade schools and get people to know me and go to their churches at least once a month.

4. Congregation—We sing in church and have a Christmas service. Our church is across the street. I used to do more pictures, but now we

have some church functions here to show the school. We just expanded.

Community—We have a sign board. We used to do flyers, but now we're full. It's mostly word of mouth, that's how we get most people.

5. I'm unsure about the church since it's in a separate building. The kids go to chapel. There is artwork in the hallway and fellowship hall. The church newsletter is emailed, but we don't participate. That is uncomfortable. In the community, we have three buildings that look the same as all the other buildings in the area. There is no address on the outside. I ordered a banner but people in congregation were not happy about the banner. You don't know from the street that we are here. We do have signs now that say "Preschool, Now Enrolling." And we have another sign with the preschool and phone number. We are on a busy road and busy intersection. We have a web presence. I do Facebook and Facebook boosts. There is a community newsletter online and we always have something in there. The church events are advertised in there also as two separate ads.

It is clear from these statements that directors in WELS ECMs are concerned about creating and establishing relationships within and outside the congregation. Although the 'Marketing and Public Relations' administrative duty (see Figure 22), and the time spent at 'Connecting with the Community' (see Figure 32) received extremely low ratings on the survey, WELS ECM directors are serving congregations and communities in a variety of ways. Question number nine in the survey asked directors to

respond with a list of structured family activities or ministry events that they coordinate. In addition to structured preschool, there were many activities listed that create a culture of togetherness and build relationships. Some of the dozens of responses include hosting a Ministry seminar, Parents' club, Movie night, Open houses, Thanksgiving lunch for families, Christmas parties, VBS, Winter/spring/summer Bible camp opportunities, Outdoor Learning Center Nights, Christmas and Easter for kids, Mom's Bible Study, Mornings with Mommy Program, Fun activities days in the summer, Jesus and Me, Mornings with Mommy, Tunes and Twirls (toddler movement class one day a week), Story time, Play Zone program, Power hour, and Parents Night Out. Often, these activities create times when directors, pastors, and other ECM staff can connect with parents and families on a personal level. Some of the activities also provide an avenue for church members to connect with the ECM staff and families.

To summarize the domain of community, it appears that directors from all types of ECMs need the necessary skills to build relationships. Currently, ECM directors are finding those ways to build relationships and share the love of Jesus. There is no specific leadership attribute that can be pinpointed as the key to directors' ability to work with the congregation and community in a positive way. The key to building relationships is the director's response to God's love for him or her.

Summary of Results

God has blessed congregations, families, children, and called workers through WELS ECMs in many ways. ECMs have proven to be ways to connect adults and children with their Savior, along with providing for the needs of families. They are places where children can grow and learn in a Christ-centered environment, places where called

workers and staff can encourage each other with the Word, and places where families can feel the love that comes from God through the words and actions of the staff.

WELS ECMs take on many forms, each providing unique services, and each with their own challenges. Categories created through this research are Preschool Only, Preschool Connected with an LES, Preschool Connected with an LES that offers Extended Care, Full-Time Child Care Centers with Preschool Not Connected to an LES, and Full-Time Child Care Centers with Preschool Connected to an LES. Special consideration needs to be given to ECMs that serve the infant and toddler age due to the many differences this age creates regarding staff, operational hours of the ECM, and duties of the director. Additional consideration should also be given to the size of the ECM because of the amount of administrative work that needs to happen with the increased number of children and families. Finally, it is important to remember the positive impact WELS ECMs are having on Lutheran elementary schools.

Regarding the role of director at different types of ECMs, there is much to be said. WELS ECM directors have a challenging, yet rewarding call. They share the Gospel message daily with children and families, work with state regulations, maintain budgets and record payments, work with families, plan developmentally appropriate curriculum, communicate with the congregation, community, and families, and often are responsible for a host of other duties.

The answer to the research question, “What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?” is not a simple one. Directors need to possess all the skills and be prepared to complete all the tasks outlined in the *Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors* (2014). In reference to the leadership attributes (see Figure 32), one

director related an interesting observation when she stated, “I also feel in #27 all of those attributes are important - almost impossible to rate them. A good director needs to possess all of those traits.” This leads to the conclusion that the director responsibilities at WELS ECMs differ more in the amount of responsibilities than in the type of responsibilities.

While directors at all ECMs have similar responsibilities, they may need to prioritize their time and tasks differently due to the size, ages, and programs offered at the ECM in which they serve. In addition, congregations must be aware of the expectations they have of the director. Directors at large ECMs, or those that are open long hours throughout the year, may need additional support staff.

Through the survey and interviews, directors shared some interesting observations. These observations and feelings need to be considered as WELS ECMs continue to grow in number and size. ECM directors are a valuable resource for families, congregations, and the synod at large. Support and encouragement for ECM directors is necessary to maintain the blessings offered at WELS ECMs.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Two important topics were explored in this research study. The study focused on different types of WELS ECMs, and the role of an EC director in each type. Five categories of WELS ECMs were determined, along with special consideration for the ages served, size, and program at each center. The role of the director was examined with these unique features in mind. While some similarities were discovered, there were also many different challenges and opportunities that lay before WELS ECM directors. Challenges of time, priorities, and support were especially noted. The blessings of sharing the Gospel message with children and families was very evident.

Summary of the Results

While all WELS ECMs are unique in some form, they can be categorized in this fashion:

- Preschool Only
- Preschool Connected to an LES
- Preschool Connected to an LES with Extended Care
- Full-Time Child Care Centers Not Connected to an LES
- Full-Time Child Care Centers Connected to an LES

Along with these categories, attention must be given to the ages served at the centers, the sizes of the centers, and the programs offered at the center, namely whether there is an LES at the site. These conditions make a difference in

the manner in which an ECM operates, and it follows that the amount of responsibilities of the director at each center will likely differ.

The ECM director position was explored using the four domains from *Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors* (Martin Luther College, 2014). The four domains reviewed were 1) Spiritual Leadership, 2) Instructional Leadership, 3) Administrative Leadership, and 4) Community Leadership.

Spiritual Leadership. Overall, directors at WELS ECMs reported a strong desire to share the Gospel message with children and families. Although the desire remains strong, some directors also reported challenges in this area. Directors at large ECMs, and those serving very young children showed the greatest challenge in making what is a top priority, a daily reality.

Instructional Leadership. Most WELS ECM directors are actively teaching (97.7%). Directors who also serve as teachers are more likely to understand educational programming and curriculum development. Little difference was noted between the categories of centers regarding the instructional domain, however, it was noted that directors from large centers have a slightly lower rate of using state or local agencies and participating in an educational association. Another important point to note is that directors at ECMs with multiple rooms must coordinate the learning environment in all the rooms, not only their own classroom. Finally, of the directors responding to the survey, 100% at ECMs not connected to an LES maintain a state license.

Administrative Leadership. WELS ECM directors have many responsibilities. An examination of the survey concludes that directors at large ECMs and those that serve very young children appear to need more administrative time than other centers. Directors are more satisfied with their performance when time is available for them to complete the tasks given. Additional comments reveal that some ECM directors feel isolated and need more support. This is especially true of ECM directors at centers not connected to an LES.

Community Leadership. No important difference was reported between the different types of centers in the domain of community leadership. Most ECM directors surveyed reported active participation in developing relationships in the congregation and community. Many directors are finding creative paths to sharing the Gospel with children and families while engaging the congregation and involving the community.

Conclusions

The results of the survey and the interviews, in addition to educational research, were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries?
2. What EC director responsibilities are needed for each model?

Using the WELS Early Childhood Ministry Statistics (2016-2017), along with educational research, five categories of WELS ECMs were identified. They are Preschool Only, Preschool Connected to an LES, Preschool Connected to an LES with Extended

Care, Full-Time Child Care Center Not Connected to an LES, and Full-Time Child Care Center Connected to an LES. These five categories also differ by age ranges, size, and programs. The most significant differences were noted with ECMs that serve infant and toddler children vs. those that give care to preschool age and above, and ECMs that serve large numbers of families (over 50).

Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered for the five categories of ECMs by sending a Google Form Survey to all WELS ECM directors, and by conducting phone interviews with directors from each of the five categories. Much data was gathered from the surveys and interviews, providing valuable feedback from the directors. Some generalities regarding the role of an ECM director can be determined from the large amount of data gathered:

1. WELS ECM directors from all categories of centers place a high priority on sharing the Gospel message with children and families.
2. Directors at small centers report devoting the most time to sharing the Gospel with children and families. Directors at large centers and centers serving infants and toddlers report spending the least amount of time devoted to sharing the Gospel.
3. ECMs not connected to an LES report a higher state licensing rate and use of state and local agencies. ECMs where state licenses are mandated or maintained need to make allowances for the increased administration time that maintaining a license necessitates.
4. While directors at large ECMs and those serving infants and toddlers devote the most time to administrative tasks, there is a fair amount of dissatisfaction

with the amount of time available for administrative tasks from directors at all types of centers.

5. The more time a director has for administrative tasks, the more likely he or she is to be satisfied.
6. ECM directors from a variety of center types report frustration with the expectations of the call, the lack of knowledge congregations have concerning those expectations, and the lack of support staff at the center.
7. Some ECM directors serving at stand-alone preschools or child care centers not connected to an LES report feeling isolated and alone and strongly desire more support.
8. WELS ECM directors from all types of centers find creative ways to create community. There is no important difference between the types of centers regarding community leadership.

WELS ECM directors serve in many unique situations; however, it is apparent that there is a great need for more administrative time and more physical and emotional support for many directors. Congregations must find ways to support the efforts of their own ECM and the directors serving at them. WELS ECMs and the directors are uniquely positioned to share the Gospel message with many! Support and encouragement must be given to those serving in this vital ministry.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed in response to the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this research:

- 1) Determine levels of administrative release time for ECM directors based on the type of ECM, the ages of children served, and size of the center.
- 2) Explore strategies to increase the amount of time spent with families sharing the Gospel for those directors of large, busy ECMs.
- 3) Develop a program of congregational awareness that consists of reasonable expectations for ECM director's calls.
- 4) Engage supportive mentors or colleagues who are easily approachable and available to combat the isolation and loneliness felt by ECM directors.
- 5) Conduct further research regarding WELS ECMs and the role of the ECM director.

Determine levels of Administrative Release Time. The data included in this research clearly revealed that not all ECMs are the same. Not only are there different sizes of ECMs, but different ages served, different communities, and different programs that change the amount of administrative duties for which a director is responsible. In order to provide adequate administrative release time (ART), it may be necessary to create guidelines for appropriate administrative time. These guidelines need to take the previously mentioned categories into consideration, along with the expectations of the calling body.

Research shows that the more administrative time an ECM director has, the more satisfied he or she is with their performance. If the opposite is also true, that the less ART a director has, the less satisfied he or she is, we may be setting up ECM directors for burn out.

Since 97.7% of the directors surveyed indicated that they teach in addition to serving as administrator, it is necessary to provide administrative time for these teacher/directors each week. It should not be expected that administrative tasks can be completed during naptime due to the many other important tasks that often take place at this time, such as quieting and comforting children, cleaning up from lunch or snack, and preparing for after-nap activities. ECM directors, especially those new to the ministry, must have enough time to complete the administrative tasks that are expected.

Explore Strategies to Increase the Amount of Time Busy Directors Can Spend Sharing the Gospel Message. It's the age-old problem of urgency vs. importance. Directors of large centers or centers serving very young children are busy with many important tasks each day. Specific strategies that these directors can employ to share the Gospel are needed. It is too easy to allow management to replace ministry.

Small changes can make a big difference. Whether it is the use of technology, or making a specific time in the daily schedule, busy directors must find ways to share the Gospel. It is after all, the reason the ECM exists.

Further research may be necessary to determine specific reasons behind the low level of time devoted to sharing the Gospel with children and families.

Develop a Program of Congregational Awareness. Leaders and members of congregations that operate a WELS ECM must have a ministry mindset for the ECM. Although it may seem like a good idea to start a preschool or child care center to fill the desks in schools and pews in churches, a plan must be made for reaching out to families with the saving message of the Gospel. Gospel motivated reasons, along with reasonable

expectations for the called workers and staff of an ECM, must be clearly articulated to a congregation that may have more of a business mindset than a ministry mindset.

A document or presentation based on proper Gospel motivation could alleviate possible misconceptions regarding the purpose of an ECM and the responsibilities of the director.

Engage Supportive Mentors or Colleagues. Some ECM directors feel isolated and alone. The challenging task of ECM director becomes even more difficult when directors feel unsupported. While the WELS has a wonderful mentor program in place for new teachers and directors, there seems to be a need for continued mentoring or support for ECM directors. Creating ways for directors to support each other seems to be one possible answer. Conferences specifically for directors could focus attention on the special responsibilities and challenges of a director. In addition, ECM directors need to have a safe place to share concerns and problems in a God-pleasing manner.

Conduct Further Research. While some interesting data was gathered through this research, it appears that there may be many more questions to answer regarding the differences in WELS ECMs and the EC directors' roles. It may be important to research topics such as accreditation and licensure of ECMs. It may also be necessary to further research the work load of ECM directors, and explore the amount of support they receive.

Through further research, the blessings that ECMs offer can be revealed. Congregations can be encouraged to invest in this ministry and to support the dedicated directors and teachers at their ECMs. Problems can be identified, and solutions can be explored. Research is a valuable tool that can be beneficial to the ECMs in our synod, to

the teachers and directors serving at our ECMs, and to the congregations operating and supporting the ECMs.

Concluding Remarks

This research study was conducted to help categorize WELS ECMs and to outline the responsibilities of directors at different types of ECMs. Through research, surveys, and interviews, it is clear that God has richly blessed many children and families through WELS ECMs. It is also clear that directors in WELS ECMs have a heart for ministry, and strongly desire to share the message of the Gospel through daily interaction and the many additional activities they provide.

The future of WELS ECMs is bright due to the great need for quality child care and preschool in our country. Continued training and support for ECM directors is necessary, as is a careful examination of the responsibilities asked of the directors.

Finally, we ask the Lord's blessings on the ECMs and directors of our synod as we strive to give glory to God through this vital ministry. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6, NIV 1984).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors

Standards for WELS Early Childhood Directors

The purpose of these standards is to guide the development and implementation of the training of WELS Early Childhood Directors. There are four major domains: (I) Spiritual Leadership, (II) Instructional Leadership, (III) Administrative Leadership, and (IV) Community Leadership. Major themes across all domains are the establishment of a Christ-centered vision for the child care center, the use of high quality developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood, and the focus on a whole child approach to learning. In practice these standards should nurture the spiritual, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of the child, develop the spiritual and professional growth of the staff, and provide the necessary support for families to ensure the whole child development of their children.

Domain I: Spiritual Leadership

STANDARD ONE: An effective Lutheran early childhood director is a person of faith.

- a. Understands and follows doctrines of the Bible
- b. Accepts the Bible as the absolute truth in matters of faith and life
- c. Models faith both personally and professionally
- d. Displays Christ-like love for all
- e. Is a spiritual leader to faculty, staff, students, families, and, if applicable, within the associated congregation
- f. Acts with integrity, fairness, and ethics

STANDARD TWO: An effective Lutheran early childhood director establishes a clear, Christ-centered vision for an environment that supports the whole child, families, and staff.

- a. Collaboratively develops and implements a shared vision and mission
- b. Articulates, implements, and guards the vision
- c. Creates and implements plans to achieve goals
- d. Promotes continuous and sustainable improvement
- e. Monitors and evaluates progress and revises plans
Collects and uses data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promotes organizational learning

Domain II: Instructional Leadership

STANDARD THREE: An effective Lutheran early childhood director knows how to teach young children.

- a. Understands and utilizes the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod (WELS) Teaching Standards

- b. Understands the developmental needs of children ages 0-8
- c. Has command of a variety of learning theories and instructional methods
- d. Employs positive interactions that enhance young children's development
- e. Plans and organizes systematic instruction to meet students' diverse needs and accomplish learning outcomes
- f. Uses a variety of assessment strategies that are developmentally appropriate

STANDARD FOUR: An effective Lutheran early childhood director fosters a culture of student spiritual growth and development of the whole child.

- a. Creates a climate in which all reflect Christ's love and strive for excellence in using his gifts
- b. Develops, monitors, and sustains a high-quality, Christ-centered educational program together with the faculty
- c. Encourages quality adult-child interactions throughout the day
- d. Advocates for and fosters affirmation, respect, and inclusion of a diverse student body
- e. Promotes the use of developmentally appropriate strategies and materials that support teaching and learning

STANDARD FIVE: An effective Lutheran early childhood director enables, supports, and coaches teachers and staff to faithfully serve God's people through the growth and use of their gifts.

- a. Builds teacher, staff, and volunteer capacity to carry out a Christ-centered vision and curricular goals through planned programs of collaborative, sustained, and job-embedded professional development
- b. Guides the development of beginning teachers
- c. Uses formative supervision to guide teacher, staff, and volunteer performance toward improved student growth
- d. Communicates teacher and staff performance through summative evaluations
- e. Works collaboratively with teachers, staff, and volunteers to design comprehensive professional growth plans that align with state and/or local requirements
- f. Develops, models, and maintains a shared Christian culture of trust, collaboration, reflection, and professionalism for student growth

Domain III: Administrative Leadership

STANDARD SIX: An effective Lutheran early childhood director wisely manages the school facilities and resources for a safe, efficient, organized, and effective learning environment.

- a. Organizes the environment to support quality instruction and student growth

- b. Monitors building operations, upholding state and/or local regulations
- c. Obtains, allocates, aligns, and efficiently utilizes human, fiscal, and technological resources
- d. Promotes and protects the welfare and safety of students and staff
- e. Uses distributive leadership strategies that recognize and utilize the many gifts God gives to his church
- f. Supervises all business operations as defined by the congregation's governing board
- g. Supports and works closely with the congregation's governing board

Domain IV: Community Leadership

STANDARD SEVEN: An effective Lutheran early childhood director engages the school, congregation, synod, and local community.

- a. Builds and sustains Christ-centered relationships with students, families, caregivers, congregation, and community
- b. Engages families and the local congregation in early childhood ministry decision making as appropriate
- c. Collects and analyzes data and information to understand and to respond to the needs of the early childhood ministry's environment
- d. Utilizes community, state, national, and synodical resources to carry out the early childhood ministry's mission
- e. Promotes the early childhood ministry among school families and within the congregation and community
- f. Builds a connection between the ECM and the LES when one exists in the congregation
- g. Promotes understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources
- h. Works cooperatively with synod agencies
- i. Participates in district and synodical responsibilities

STANDARD EIGHT: An effective Lutheran early childhood director understands both the local and broader context in which the school exists.

- a. Serves as an advocate for children, families, and caregivers
- b. Seeks to build awareness of synodical, community, state, and national early childhood organizations and resources
- c. Acts to influence congregational, synodical, local, state, and national decisions affecting student learning in Lutheran education
- d. Assesses, analyzes, and anticipates emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies for the early childhood ministry

Appendix B: Survey Home Screen Request

Good morning,

Here is a draft of what the initial email notice would look like. Lynn if you approve, I can get it sent out later today.

Sarah Krause

Promotions Project Specialist

WELS Lutheran Schools

From: WELS - Commission on Lutheran Schools

[<mailto:LutheranSchools=wels.net@mail359.bms6.bmsend.com>] **On Behalf Of** WELS - Commission on Lutheran Schools

Sent: Monday, November 13, 2017 7:57 AM

To: Sarah Krause <Sarah.Krause@wels.net>

Subject: Early Childhood Ministry Research Participation



MLC - Master's Research Participation

Dear Fellow Servants in Christ's Kingdom,

I am currently conducting research on the different models of WELS Early Childhood Ministries and the role of the EC Director in each model. The research and the results from the research will be used to fulfill requirements for my thesis as I finish a Master's Degree from MLC. Hopefully, the results of the research will also be a useful tool for those planning for the future of WELS ECMs. In a few days, you should receive an e-mail with a link to a survey titled "WELS Early Childhood Ministries Survey." Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and submit the form. Your participation is crucial to the research process since you are on the front lines of early childhood ministry each day; however, you are under no obligation to complete the survey. This survey has been approved by the Institutional Review Board.


Thank you, and may God continue to bless you and the service you provide for His Kingdom,

Lynn Sellnow

[View this email in your browser](#)

You are receiving this email because of your relationship with WELS - Commission on Lutheran Schools. Please [reconfirm](#) your interest in receiving emails from us. If you do not wish to receive any more emails, you can [unsubscribe here](#).

This message was sent to sarah.krause@wels.net by LutheranSchools@wels.net
Commission on Lutheran Schools WELS Center for Mission and Ministry N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Drive Waukesha, WI 53188

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★ **This is a Test Email only.**

This message was sent for the sole purpose of testing a draft message.

Appendix C: Survey Questions

Survey Questions

1. Please identify the type of center in which you currently serve as director.

- a. Preschool Only
 - b. Preschool connected to a WELS day school
 - c. Preschool connected to a WELS day school that offers extended care
 - d. Full time child care facility with preschool—no day school
 - e. Full time child care facility with preschool and day school
 - f. Other—Please specify
-

2. How many families do you serve at your center?

<10 10-25 26-50 >50

3. How many hours per week is your center or preschool in operation?

<10 10-20 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60
>60

4. What is the total enrollment at your early childhood center?

1-25 26-50 51-75 76-100 100+

5. What percentage of children are infant/toddler age?

0% 1-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-99% 100%

6. What percentage of children are preschool age?

0% 1-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-99% 100%

7. What percentage of children are school age (K-8)?

0% 1-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-99% 100%

8. Does your center operate year-round? If no, please explain.

9. Please list any structured programming or family ministry events available through your center. (e.g. preschool, tot time group, parenting group, etc.)

10. 10. Which option best describes the curriculum at your center?

_____HighScope _____Creative Curriculum _____Montessori
 _____Locally Created _____A Mixture of Published and Locally
 Created

11. Is your center licensed by the state?

_____Yes _____No

12. Does your center maintain accreditation status with a nationally recognized association?

_____Yes _____No

13. Does your center work with any state or local agency to achieve better standards and become more visible in your community?

_____Yes _____No

14. How many WELS congregations operate your center?

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____More than 3

15. How many teachers and staff does your center employ (including yourself)?

_____1 _____2 _____3-5 _____6-10 _____11+

16. Is your position called?

_____Yes _____No

17. Is your call full-time or part-time? If part-time, please indicate percentage.

_____Full-Time _____Part-Time _____%

18. Do you possess WELS synod certification?

_____Yes _____No _____Working Toward It

19. Do you currently teach or provide care in addition to your administrative duties?

_____Yes _____No

20. If yes, how many hours per week do you teach or serve as a care-giver?

Less than 10 10-20 20-30 More than 30

21. Are you a member of any educational association (i.e. NAEYC)?

_____Yes _____No

22. In an average week, how many hours do you devote to administrative tasks (not including planning or prepping for a class)?

Less than 5 5-10 10-15 15-20 More than 20

23. How satisfied are you with the amount of time you spend at administrative tasks?

Very satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very
dissatisfied

24. How satisfied are you with the pay you receive for the expectations of your call?

Very satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very
dissatisfied

25. Please rank the top 3 managerial tasks you may perform in order of importance in your position (1 being most important).

_____ Serving children and families with the means of grace

_____ Legal (including state license requirements) and fiscal
management

_____ Staff management and human relationships

_____ Educational programming

_____ Program operations and facilities management

_____ Family support

_____ Marketing and public relationships

_____ Oral and written communication

_____ Technology

_____ Other (please specify)

26. Please mark the top 3 management tasks to which you devote the most time.

_____ Serving children and families with the means of grace

_____ Legal (including state license requirements) and fiscal management

_____ Staff management and human relationships

_____ Educational programming

_____ Program operations and facilities management

_____ Family support

_____Marketing and public relationships

_____Oral and written communication

_____Technology

_____Other (please specify)

27. Please rank the top 3 leadership attributes that are important to you—1
being most important.

_____Being a student of God's Word—active in worship and Bible study

_____Being patient, warm, and kind

_____Being a visionary leader—having a vision for the ECM where you
serve

_____Possessing a good working relationship with staff

_____Being responsive to the needs of families

_____Staying current on research and new developments in early
childhood

_____Mentoring and guiding staff

_____Being a good listener

_____Connecting with the community

28. How satisfied are you with the amount of time you can devote to the top 3
attributes you marked?

Very Satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

29. Please feel free to make any comments regarding your role as the director
of a WELS ECM.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to these important questions. I pray that God will bless the ministry at your early childhood center, and that His kingdom will grow through your gospel-motivated ministry!

If you would like to receive the results of this survey after the research has been finished, please list your email here.

_____ Yes, I would like to receive results.

Name _____ Email _____

If you are willing to participate in a short interview via phone or face to face, please list your name and email address below. Interviews will be conducted at the researcher's discretion. Thank you!

_____ Yes, I will participate in an interview.

Name _____ Email _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions**Interview Questions**

1. Please give a brief history of your ECM and describe the impact it has had on the congregation's ministry.
2. Please describe ways that your center keeps Christ as the focus of your programming (Spiritual Domain).
3. What is your role in monitoring the instruction in all the classrooms at your center? (Instructional Domain)
4. Please describe a typical day at your center with a focus on your responsibilities. (Administrative Domain)
5. Please describe ways that your center stays visible in your congregation and in your community. (Community Domain)
6. What type of support do you receive as the director of the ECM at your congregation? Are you satisfied with the support you receive?
7. How can the WELS further support and encourage its EC directors?

Appendix E: Director Qualitative Data From Interview Responses

Interviews with ECM Directors

January 2018

1. Please give a brief history of your ECM and describe the impact it has had on the congregation's ministry.

a. It has been in operation as a 4K for more than ten years and 3K less than ten. I think it has brought more children into the school and has revitalized the school. The school has a better reputation now in the community. Seven years ago there were 24 children in the school and now enrollment is 63.

b. We are eleven years old. We started with a portable classroom, then two years later also moved into the school. Infants and toddlers are still in the portable. We started because we were dying and now the school is growing. Having the school on the same grounds is a huge blessing. The school was down to 50 (from over 100) and now up to about 75, and we have gotten new members. This area is interesting because we are a small city and the people used to not use public school, but now they do. Now the director is a member of this congregation and that is helping people to understand and appreciate this ministry.

c. We opened in 2001 and originally there was a grade school. The grade school combined with another school in 2006 and it closed in 2008. The preschool stayed open and it is the only WELS preschool in the area where there are a lot of other WELS grade schools. It started with one teacher, but now we're up to a possible 44 students and two teachers. It has grown. It's a good stepping stone and it has gotten some families interested in church membership. But we're not sure that will last. Not a lot of people are interested in church membership.

d. I came in 2010 it was licensed for two and a half to twelve-year-olds. We've been at capacity in K3 and K4 with 30 kids a day. We've had kids go on to our school. It has brought some parents closer to their Savior. It's feeding the kindergarten and we have longer and more opportunities to witness to them.

e. I've only been here one and a half years, but the ECM has been here 21 years. It's multiage with one classroom for three, four, and five-year-olds. When it started that was not considered odd in our area (we live in a very affluent area), but now people want only one age in one room. Nannies really baby them here. There is no independence here. We do a lot of social and self-help skills. They know all the cognitive things.

Unfortunately, there is a very little amount of people coming into the church, but the church leaders are okay with it. Many children aren't even baptized. There has to be some work by others. There's not much

evangelism. At the last two Christmases the preschool took cookies and sang carols to people in the community, but nothing else.

2. Please describe ways that your center keeps Christ as the focus of your programming (Spiritual Domain).

a. Everything, we do. We use HighScope and its so flexible we can have Christ as the center of everything we do. We start and end. When Christ is at the center of your own heart it's very easy to keep Him the center of everything you do. Early childhood events and everything we do is about bringing in new people to Him.

b. Most of our staff are not members of our church. We do Bible stories with the preschool this year and next year we plan to hire a WELS teacher. Other Catholic lead teachers teach the infant and toddler. It's hard to afford more than one called worker. Very few people can work for the pay we give them.

c. We do this with the little things we do—pray, Bible story time every day, chapel once a week with pastor. Sometimes parents join us. We discipline with law and gospel. We model Christ's love.

d. Our entire day is focused on Christ. Our discipline is law and gospel, and our teachers are MLC trained. We start with a Bible story. Our pastor comes in once a week. We do one story a week. We try to send home things with Bible story. We sing in church two times a year. It's in every subject.

e. That is something people ask us. People ask us about the Holy Spirit. I talk about God all the time, I direct people toward prayer, and I ask, “Is this God pleasing?” I do feel like we have Christ at the center on a daily basis. The kids go to church once a week for chapel with pastor. We teach Bible stories and use Bible story props.

3. What is your role in monitoring the instruction in all the classrooms at your center? (Instructional Domain)

a. We only have two teachers that are early childhood and I plan all the instruction for both.

b. My role is to make sure the instruction is getting done. My staff knows that I might pop in at any given time. My role is to supervise.

c. My role is to pick the curriculum, and every week I pick the KDI and make sure we are following that. We talk together each day to make sure we’re on the same page. I check in on the other classroom at least once a week and we have informal and formal observations.

d. We have two classrooms. I talk with my K3 teacher and I don’t feel that I have to check up on her because she was trained at MLC. We talk about curriculum and special needs. We talk about what she does to get them ready for 4K. I am the 4K teacher. The principal assesses me and I assess the other teacher and aides once a year.

e. We have one room I’m all it.

4. Please describe a typical day at your center with a focus on your responsibilities. (Administrative Domain)

a. I arrive around 7:00 am and I take fifteen minutes to talk to aides.

7:15 is a staff meeting. I teach school till 11:00 am and then work with the 5k for an hour alone. I help with noon lunch and typically do administrative work till 5:00 or 6:00 every evening. I am the teacher and there is one other teacher and a teacher's aide.

b. My day starts at 7:00 and goes until 6:00. There is a lot of office work and leg work. I do scheduling and financial stuff. I only do administrative things. We do lots and lots of texting each day. We work year-round, except for Christmas.

c. I get there about 6:30 and start running around for prep for the classroom. Then I work on the newsletter. Doors open at 8:00, and then I teach in the morning. I teach in the afternoon till about 3:30, clean up, and reset materials. I usually have some meetings then, and am usually gone between 4:30 and 5:00.

d. The center operates from 7:00-6:00. I'm here around 6:45 and have before school children come in. We don't have a lot of kids (8-10) until 7:45. Some public-school kids use our morning and after care. Preschool starts at 8:30 and goes until 11:30 I'm the teacher. We do lunch together with about five to ten kids. Some kids just stay for lunch. Sometimes I'm in the office or sometimes I provide care. About

1:00 I get in my office. Sometimes I'm working in aftercare until about 2:45-3:15. I work every other Wednesday doing the aftercare. I will work more next week because we're losing a caregiver. I'm usually in my office till 5:00.

e. The center opens at 6:30 and I open. There are six kids in early. They are the core full day group. Preschool starts at 9:00 and that's when I get another staff member in the building. The secretary usually comes in at 8:30. I teach preschool in the morning. We go outside. There is no administrative time. From 2:45-3:00 I return emails. I'm here until 4:00. Friday I leave at 1:00. I don't feel supported. I do all my director work on the weekend and I do all my lesson plans on the weekend.

5. Please describe ways that your center stays visible in your congregation and in your community. (Community Domain)

a. Congregation—I play and sing in church. Four times per year we host early childhood family events with congregation people invited. We ask congregation people to help me with it. We invite the church boards and leaders to come.

Community-We are a small town so we march in the parade, and host a trunk or treat with hundreds of people that come. We just finished a building project and we are inviting the community to an open house. We advertise in the small-town shopper.

b. I try to get to baby fairs. I participate in the county early childhood committee. We put out yard signs and anniversary celebration signs.

My visibility in the church is helped by me being a member, being on boards, in choir, and being in church. The kids sing by way of a video.

c. Congregation—They get a monthly newsletter and our stuff is in the bulletin. Community—We have a big electronic sign that tells the community our happenings. We have a soccer camp that gets lots of participation, and host a trunk or treat with about 300 kids. At our Christmas program members offered to help with cookies. We're in Great Start to Quality. I try to go to other grade schools and get people to know me and go to their churches at least once a month.

d. Congregation—We sing in church and have a Christmas service. Our church is across the street. I used to do more pictures, but now we have some church functions here to show the school. We just expanded.

Community—We have a sign board. We used to do flyers, but now we're full. It's mostly word of mouth, that's how we get most people.

e. I'm unsure about the church since it's in a separate building. The kids go to chapel. There is artwork in the hallway and fellowship hall. The church newsletter is emailed, but we don't participate. That is uncomfortable. In the community, we have three buildings that look the same as all the other buildings in the area. There is no address on

the outside. I ordered a banner but people in congregation were not happy about the banner. You don't know from the street that we are here. We do have signs now that say "Preschool, Now Enrolling." And we have another sign with the preschool and phone number. We are on a busy road and busy intersection. We have a web presence. I do Facebook and Facebook boosts. There is a community newsletter online and we always have something in there. The church events are advertised in there also as two separate ads.

6. What type of support do you receive as the director of the ECM at your congregation? Are you satisfied with the support you receive?

a. I feel like an island, although I'm pretty new (came in 2016). The congregation is supportive of the school, but they don't know how to help me without me asking. I feel like I need to teach them how to support. The monetary support is there, but not the emotional, physical support we need.

b. I have a wonderful school board who has my back. I have great fix it guys! We are in Northern Wisconsin so they work hard in winter. The school staff is supportive and knows this is important to the overall ministry. I have very good support from my staff even though they are not members. Many people want to see us grow. Sometimes I feel that since I'm the only called EC person, I feel a little alone.

c. They support me a lot financially, and the classroom too. I have a good preschool budget and if I need anything I feel like I get it. I don't feel a lot of emotional or social support. They support the preschool, but they don't ask me if I need anything. The mentor program we have has not been ideal. She doesn't contact me.

d. The Board of Ed is very supportive, and the principal checks in. He leaves the running of it up to me. People in general offer help if we need it. We're good!

e. The financial support is nice. They pay my entire housing and full medical. I would say there is no other support. I am an island, a sad and lonely island. I have no sounding board and am really lonely. The child care here supports the church payroll.

7. How can the WELS further support and encourage its EC directors?

a. I'm not sure how to answer. There are some good things happening. We had someone planning activities and meetings for EC directors. That is not happening now, but it needs to, at least once a month. It would be encouraging.

b. We need more things at conferences to encourage us to come, like more training that would apply to being a director. We need to know how to teach people about our faith. The school counselor doesn't even talk to me. Who do I call when we have a problem? Many of us

are not school teachers, there is a difference. How about grads from MLC going out “student directing?”

c. The mentor was not encouraging. I wish people would get it. You can’t really teach the congregation how to support. It may go back to the pastor. I don’t feel super welcome where I’m at. The congregation doesn’t really care about me as a person.

d. I know they have a lot more classes now than when I went there. I wasn’t trained as a director. It’s hard to do classes because I don’t have time. I’d rather give my best to the kids.

e. ECM devotion is nice. I think a lot of people down here feel very far removed from the mother ship. I have my previous old school as my resource, but what if I didn’t? It’s rough. I don’t think people understand what goes into this work. I know other women in this district ready to hang it up right now. They feel like they are unloved and not supported.