Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Leading by Exemplar:
Teacher Credentials and Selection

This brief focuses on the instructional models of five exemplary Head Start programs from the *Leading by Exemplar* research project. Below you'll find details on the teacher credential requirements and the selection process used by each program. You'll see that each of these programs does something different and maintains a degree of flexibility while using data from previous hiring and selection efforts to inform the questions they ask, the processes they use, and the requirements they look for in candidates. NHSA shares this brief in order to share the findings of the *Leading by Exemplar* work and to support high-quality practice in the Head Start field.

**Applicants with associates degrees can still be strong candidates.**

At Acelero’s New Jersey sites, all lead teachers are required to have a BA and a pre-K-3rd state teaching certification because they’re subject to the state pre-k regulations. At their Pennsylvania locations though, only 25% of lead teachers have a BA. Acelero based this decision on data that revealed that experience, competency, and openness to receiving coaching are all factors that can make for a strong candidate even without a BA degree.

**Lack of teaching experience isn’t necessarily a negative.**

CAP Tulsa doesn’t hold lack of teaching experience against candidates. In fact, they found it might even be easier to train candidates in their program methods and culture if teachers come in with little previous experience and an openness to learning. CAP Tulsa also found that the behavioral assessment they used when interviewing and hiring teachers was not correlated with teachers’ success, so they adjusted their interview process and now ask more open-ended, behavior-based questions to learn more about a candidate’s skills and abilities.

**An in-classroom component of the hiring process can identify potential for successfully implementing a program’s specific approach.**

Educare Miami-Dade uses a rigorous hiring and selection process that is tailored to the specific position that each candidate is applying for and they do not rely solely on qualifications, but also the teacher’s ability to implement the school’s approach. The final step in their hiring process is a two-day in-classroom interview, including observation, teaching, and receiving and implementing feedback.

**Hiring pools can reduce the amount of time it takes to fill an open position.**

As part of the public school system, Fairfax County is able to leverage district resources for teacher recruitment, hiring, professional development, and compensation. Fairfax County maintains an ongoing pool of candidates that have already been vetted so that they are able to fill open positions more quickly. Fairfax County also uses panel interviews and a performance task in their hiring process. The panel interview prioritizes understanding the candidate’s ability to work with children who are from high-need backgrounds and their empathy for families who have experienced traumatic events.

**Programs can hire strong candidates without a BA and support them in achieving this credential.**

Utah Community Action’s hiring process also includes initial screening, a performance task, and an in-person interview. They don’t require BA degrees for candidates depending on their previous experience, success on the performance task, and their fulfillment of other hiring criteria. 85% of lead teachers have a BA, but they are striving for 100%. To reach this goal, they offer individualized credential attainment based on the individual’s needs and background. Some prospective teachers receive tuition support or access to on-site community college courses through a local partnership.

---

**Key Takeaway**

Even within the bounds of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, programs can maintain a degree of flexibility in identifying and hiring staff members that are the best fit for an available role. The hiring and selection processes should be data-informed and revisited regularly to ensure success.