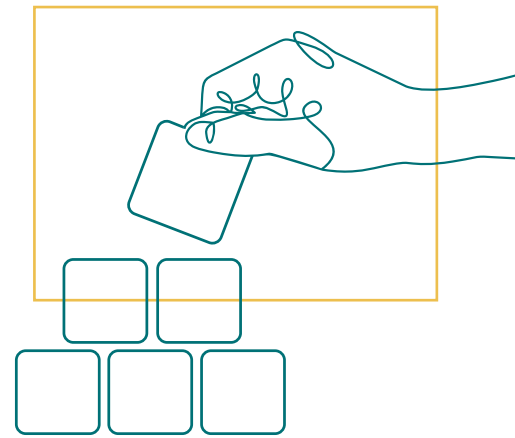




# THE MARYLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:

## CLOSING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP GAP IN MARYLAND



### THE CONTEXT

Maryland’s national reputation as an innovator in early childhood education (ECE) is built on the state’s strong foundation of ECE leaders at the program, regional, and state levels. Yet Maryland is on the precipice of a widening ECE leadership gap as one in four ECE leaders anticipates retiring or leaving the field within five years.<sup>1</sup>

### THE RESPONSE: MECLP

The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP), established in 2018, is a workforce initiative designed to accelerate cross-sector leadership in early childhood. The program consists of a graduate course on ECE leadership offered at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and a community of practice for current and former MECLP Fellows that offers ongoing learning and coaching opportunities.

### MECLP’S IMPACT ON THE ECE LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

An evaluation of MECLP’s first three years (2019–2022), which consisted of 31 Fellows across 3 cohorts<sup>2</sup>, showed that the program effectively promotes the growth of individual ECE leaders while simultaneously contributing to collective leadership development and statewide ECE systems change.

#### FINDING

# 1

### MECLP is growing a new generation of diverse ECE leaders.

Prior research indicates that current ECE leaders—in Maryland<sup>3</sup> and nationally<sup>4</sup>—are predominantly white women approaching retirement age. MECLP brings in diverse voices previously excluded from ECE leadership spaces. Of the Fellows in MECLP’s first three cohorts:



**58%**  
WERE LEADERS  
OF COLOR



**22%**  
IDENTIFIED AS  
MULTILINGUAL



**80%**  
WERE UNDER  
AGE 50

In addition, MECLP builds leadership capacity across a wide range of settings and roles. Fellows include those working directly with children, families, and staff in ECE programs, as well as those in ECE system roles at the regional and state level, such as county early childhood administrators and coordinators.

1. Etter, K., Dahlin, M., & Capizzano, J. (2021). Filling the early childhood leadership gap: *Meeting the challenges and opportunities ahead*. Washington, D.C.: Policy Equity Group.  
2. The timing of the first three cohorts coincided with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, likely influencing lower cohort numbers during these years (Cohort I: 10; Cohort II: 9; Cohort III: 12). Cohort IV (2022-23) had 17 participants and Cohort V (2023-24) enrolled 17 Fellows.  
3. Ibid.  
4. Connors-Tadros, L. & DiCrecchio, N. (2019). *The views of state early childhood education agency staff on their work and their vision for young children: Informing a legacy for young children by 2030*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Early Education Research, Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

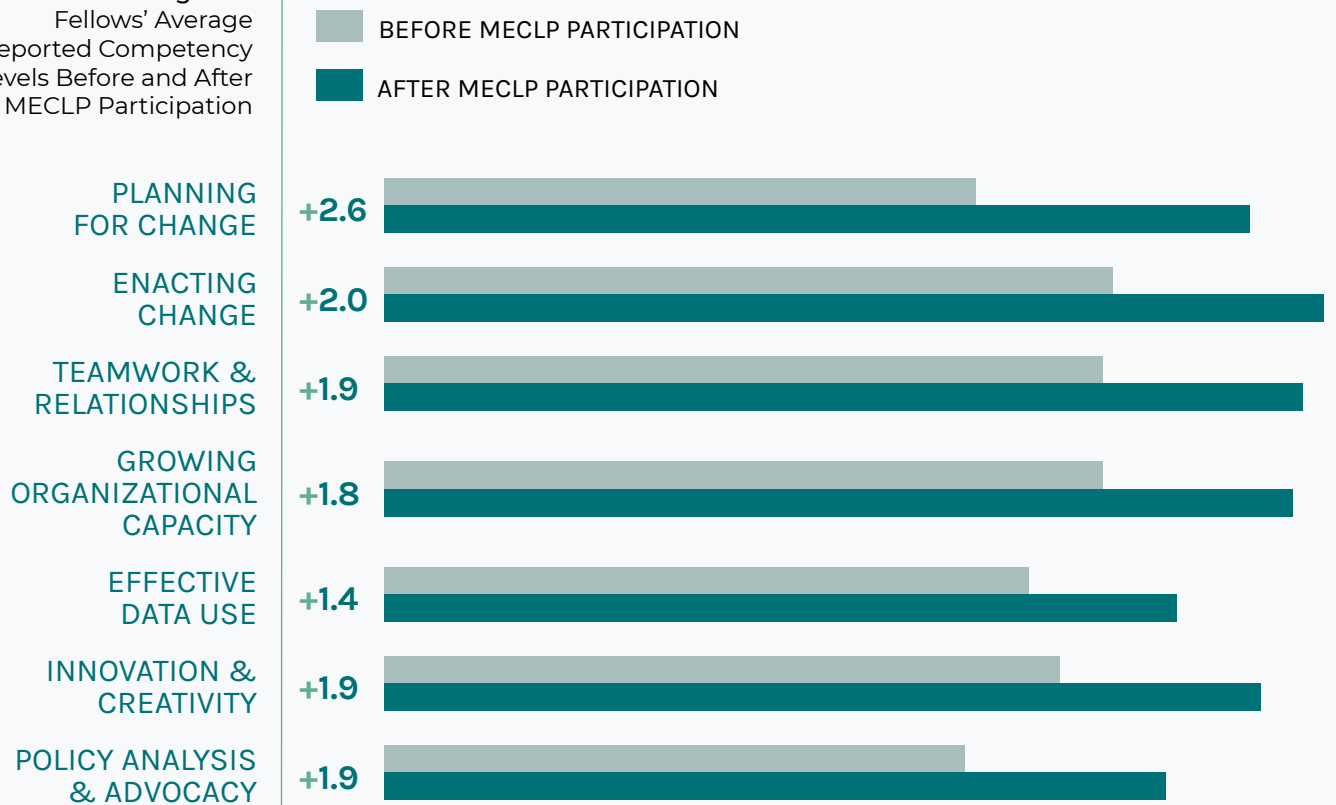
FINDING  
2

MECLP cultivates more competent and confident ECE leaders.

MECLP Fellows reported statistically significant gains in competency levels as a result of their participation in the program (see Figure 1). Notably, although all Fellows demonstrated growth, those who rated themselves lower on competencies entering the program showed the greatest gains.

GROWTH IN COMPETENCIES

Figure 1.  
Fellows' Average  
Reported Competency  
Levels Before and After  
MECLP Participation



MECLP helped Fellows “find their voice,” have greater confidence to engage in difficult conversations, assume higher positions, act as a leader, and more effectively advocate for themselves and the early childhood field.

“MECLP provided me with more confidence and belief that my professional experiences can provide a voice for change. It has convinced me that it is worth it to continue to advocate for the ECE field. I believe it has given me more confidence to pursue higher-level positions.”

“MECLP contributed to my promotion shortly after the cohort. I was promoted from regional director for 6-8 programs to operations director for 26 programs and a more strategic role.”

## FINDING

# 3

## MECLP creates leadership networks that break through silos within the ECE system.

MECLP creates interconnections across Maryland's diverse and often siloed ECE ecosystem. Fellows commonly reported the benefits of sharing, learning, and networking within a community of diverse peers. Most Fellows reported that because of MECLP, their professional networks had grown in terms of:



RESOURCE SHARING



PEER SUPPORT



PEER COACHING

Many MECLP Fellows reported that they “pay it forward” by using what they learned to support leadership development within their organizations and with other members of the ECE workforce.



*MECLP has helped me develop the leadership skills to facilitate Birth to 5 supports beyond the public school system ... I feel I am an advocate for all Birth to 5 programs, not just the public school system.”*

## FINDING

# 4

## MECLP moves ECE leaders to action.

MECLP Fellows described numerous ways they are putting their enhanced leadership skills into action including:

- making changes to their programs,
- facilitating webinars, presenting at conferences, speaking on podcasts
- participating on local boards,
- pursuing local and statewide leadership roles, and
- advocating at the state and federal level.

*“MECLP allowed me to take what I felt so strongly about and turn it into action.”*



MECLP Fellows also reported a shift in their identities as leaders, now seeing themselves as more active change agents in the areas of:



ECE PROGRAM QUALITY



ECE WORKFORCE



ECE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS

## CONCLUSION

Leadership development is critical to the future of Maryland's ECE system. MECLP is well positioned to serve as the state's ECE leadership hub as it continues to support the development of the next generation of diverse, effective ECE leaders and their collective impact across the ECE system.

*“I believe it is important to stay the course as you continue to seek to build early childhood leaders. MECLP provides resources and opportunities for many that would not be available if this program did not exist.”*