

Building a School Principal Pipeline: Lessons from the Field



BY SARA SHELTON AND MENDIE WELU

LEADERSHIP MATTERS – A LOT

Effective school principals are key to improving schools and raising student achievement. In fact, principals are second only to teachers among school-related influences on student learning. Nearly 60 percent of a student's performance is attributable to teacher and principal effectiveness, with principals accounting for about a quarter of a school's total impact on a student's academic success. There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by an outstanding principal.

A GOOD INVESTMENT

While teachers have a direct impact on students in their classroom, principals affect all students in the school. A good principal is the single most important determinant of whether a school can attract and keep the high-quality

teachers necessary to provide students consecutive years of excellent teaching. The combination of effective teachers and strong principals—not one or the other—will improve student academic performance. Targeted investments in good principals can be a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning because principals ensure that excellent teaching and learning spread beyond single classrooms.

They also play a critical role in implementing school-wide reform efforts.

THE LEGISLATIVE ROLE

State legislators can help ensure that every school is led by an effective principal.

Lawmakers can establish a cohesive state-wide policy framework to recruit and select, prepare, license, support and evaluate good school principals. Depending on the state's needs and context, lawmakers have a number of options to build strong school principal pipelines.

LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR

In August 2013, NCSL, with generous support from The Wallace Foundation, convened 24 legislators and legislative staff from 16 states to meet with researchers, practitioners and experts in the field to learn about the state legislative role in building a school principal pipeline. The half-day seminar was grounded in research, highlighted state policy levers and featured lessons from high performing school districts. This policy brief is a summary of that seminar and is meant to inform state policymakers as they take on this challenging work.

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STATE POLICY APPROACHES

State legislators can play a significant role in building a pipeline of effective school principals. States can develop a policy framework that supports principals throughout their career, including 1) setting standards, 2) preparation program design and approval, 3) licensure, 4) professional development and 5) evaluation and ongoing support. These also can be linked to compensation, promotion and dismissal.

PRINCIPAL STANDARDS

Setting high standards for principals is the foundation upon which to design principal preparation programs and approval, licensure, mentoring, professional development and evaluation and ongoing support. States can set standards that delineate what principals need to know and be able to do. At least 47 states report using principal effectiveness standards.

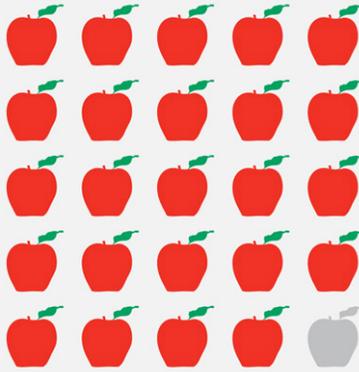
STATE LEGISLATIVE EXAMPLES

Iowa S.F. 277 (2007) establishes the administrator quality program to develop statewide leadership standards for school administrators that include knowledge and skills criteria. The standards serve as a basis for accreditation of higher education preparation programs, mentoring and induction programs, professional development and evaluation.

Oregon S.B. 290 (2011) directs the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, to develop and adopt state-

GREAT LEADERS ATTRACT AND RETAIN GREAT TEACHERS

A high-quality principal will hire, develop and support talented teachers...



...and 24 out of 25 teachers say that the number one factor in whether or not they stay at a school is their principal.

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Source: New Leaders, Leadership Matters, 2011.

wide core teaching standards to improve student academic growth and learning. Standards must help school districts determine the effectiveness of teachers and administrators, make human resource decisions and improve professional development and classroom and administrative practices. Core teaching standards must be research-based; developed separately

for teachers and administrators; able to be customized for each school district; and included and used in all evaluations in the school district. They also must include multiple measures of student formative and summative proficiency and progress, including performance data of students, schools and school districts.

PREPARATION PROGRAM DESIGN AND APPROVAL

University-based principal preparation programs, where the vast majority of principals are trained, have long been under intense scrutiny for inadequately preparing principals to meet on-the-job demands. But, researchers have determined what high-quality training, before and on the job, should look like. States have a great deal of authority over principal preparation. States set the program approval process and specify the program design elements in order for principal preparation programs to earn state approval. States are also sunseting current preparation programs and requiring them to redesign their programs to meet rigorous standards and requirements and reapply for state approval.

In addition, states are allowing alternative providers—or non-university-based principal programs like school districts, states and non-profits—to prepare principals. In many cases, states are holding them to the same requirements as traditional preparation programs. At least 31 states and Washington, D.C., allow non-university-based programs to prepare principals.

QUALITY STANDARDS

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, a set of national standards for educational leaders adopted in 1996 and revised in 2008, organize the functions that help define strong school leadership under six standards that represent the broad, high-priority themes that school leaders must address to promote student success. The six standards call for:

- Setting a widely shared vision for learning;
- Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
- Requiring enduring, effective management of the organization, operation and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment;
- Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources;
- Acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner; and
- Understanding, responding to and influencing the political, social, legal and cultural contexts.



STATE LEGISLATIVE EXAMPLES

Illinois S.B. 226 (2010) requires that all institutions of higher education and not-for-profit entities approved to offer principal preparation programs must, among other things, meet the new standards and requirements and any rules adopted by the State Board of Education and prepare candidates to meet approved standards for principal skills, knowledge and responsibilities. These skills and responsibilities include a focus on instruction and student learning that must be used for principal professional development, mentoring and evaluation. In addition, any principal preparation program offered by a not-for-profit entity also must be approved by the Board of Higher Education.

Washington S.B. 6696 (2010) requires review and revision of teacher and administrator preparation program approval standards and accepts proposals for new programs that could include community and technical colleges or non-higher education providers. All approved program providers must adhere to the same standards and comply with the same requirements as traditional programs.

LICENSURE

States serve as gatekeepers regulating entry into principalship and setting the qualifications for school principals.

This can include initial licensure and licensure renewal, which states can base on demonstrating effectiveness in supporting high-quality teachers and improving student outcomes, rather than years of teaching and degrees. Every state requires principals to obtain a license. At least 30 states have a provisional licensure phase that enables aspiring principals to earn a job before securing a more permanent license. Only six states report requiring principals to demonstrate effectiveness to renew their license.

States also can expand alternative routes to certification to attract high-performing non-educators such as business people and former military personnel.

STATE LEGISLATIVE EXAMPLES

Delaware S.B. 260 (2000) establishes a system of licensure, certification, evaluation and professional development that seeks to improve the quality of classroom

instruction for children in the state. It establishes a professional standards board to propose rules and regulation in pre-service training, licensure, certification, recruitment, evaluation and professional development. It also creates a three-tiered licensure system to provide an initial license for new educators, a continuing license for experienced educators and an advanced license for distinguished educators.

Illinois S.B. 226 (2010) discontinues the general administrative endorsement. Instead, it creates a new P-12 principal endorsement that emphasizes the unique preparation necessary to become the instructional leader of a school and allows for expanded alternative certification programs for administrators.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Leadership training does not end when principals are licensed and hired. It continues with mentoring new principals and targeted ongoing professional development that can be aligned to standards, preparation, licensure and evaluation to promote career-long growth that is responsive to

the evolving needs of schools and districts. States can ensure principals receive continuous high-quality support on-the-job. At least half the states and many districts have mentoring programs to support new principals during their first few years on-the-job.

STATE LEGISLATIVE EXAMPLES

Iowa H.F. 2792 (2006) creates a beginning administrator mentoring and induction program. It requires the State Department of Education, in collaboration with other educational partners, to develop a model mentoring and induction program for all beginning administrators. Each school board must establish mentoring programs and provide for one year of programming. In 2007, Iowa S.F. 277 created the administrator quality program to provide mentoring and induction, professional development and evaluation of administrators against the Iowa standards for school administrators.

Oregon H.B. 3619a (2011) establishes the Career Preparation and Development Task Force to develop a proposal for a seamless system of professional development for teachers and administrators that begins with career preparation and continues throughout employment.

EVALUATION AND ONGOING SUPPORT

Principal evaluation holds great promise for improving principals by building their capacity, holding them accountable for teacher effectiveness and student progress and ensuring they have an overall positive impact on students and schools. States can make certain that principal evaluations are designed with direct involvement of principals and other stakeholders; are guided by quality leadership standards; are rigorous, fair and equitable; are educational and provide useful, valuable and trustworthy data; provide actionable feedback to improve performance; and are connected to a broader human capital management system. These human capital systems can shape hiring, inform the design of professional development programs, improve working conditions, develop incentives and guide other human resource processes that support principals.

STATE LEGISLATIVE EXAMPLES

Maine H.P. 1376 (2012) requires school districts to develop an evaluation system that meets new standards and is done in collaboration with teachers, principals, administrators, school board members, parents and the public. The performance evaluation and professional growth system will be a pilot program in

WHAT DO EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS DO?

- Shape a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards.
- Create a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- Cultivate leadership in others so that teachers and other staff assume their part in realizing the school vision.
- Improve instruction so teachers can teach at their best and students can learn at their utmost.
- Manage people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

Source: The Wallace Foundation, The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning, 2012.

FEATURES OF QUALITY PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Targeted Recruitment and Selection. Identify candidates with leadership potential.

Strong Partnerships. Create authentic partnerships among states, districts and universities to ensure effective recruitment and selection; co-design relevant coursework, field experiences and internships; and provide continuous on-the-job support for new principals.

Challenging, Coherent Curriculum. Set curriculum that links theory and practice and integrates coursework focused on instructional leadership and the ability to change school culture and improve teacher effectiveness. Curriculum should be aligned to state and professional standards for school leaders. Faculty should be knowledgeable and competent.

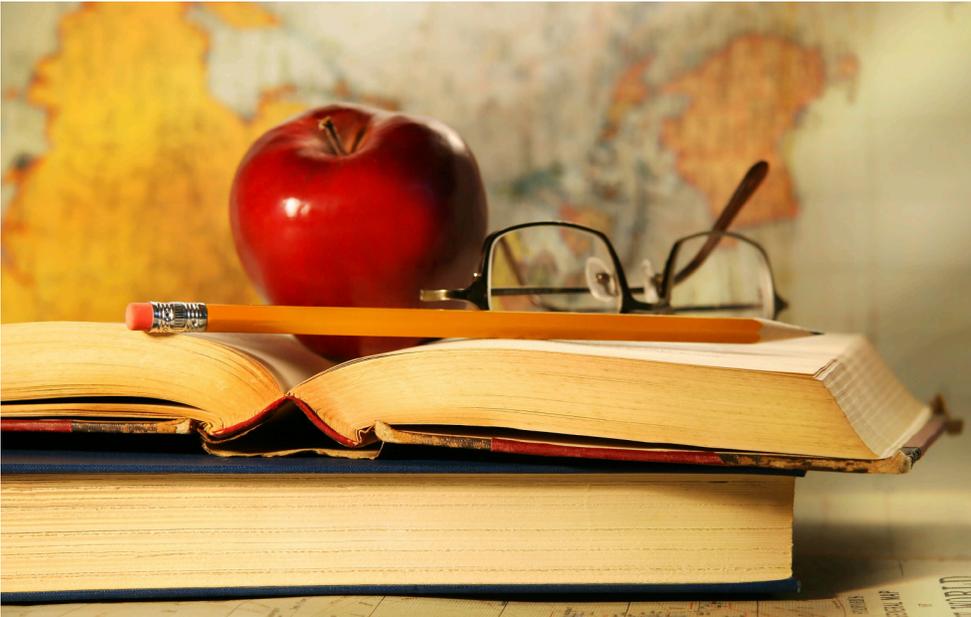
Active Instruction. Require instruction that emphasizes problem-based learning, field-based projects, professional reflection, budget exercises, hiring and effective data use. Such instruction engages university professors and practitioners who are knowledgeable in their subject areas.

Quality Internships and School-based Residency Programs. Offer well-designed and supervised internships or school-based residencies that provide real opportunities for aspiring principals to experience leadership firsthand.

Social and Professional Support. Provide cohort structures and formalized mentoring and advising by expert principals.

Candidate and Program Assessment. Use assessments that are linked to standards, program mission and objectives for program and candidate improvement.

Source: NCSL, Preparing a Pipeline of Effective Principals: A Legislative Approach, 2012.



THE WALLACE FOUNDATION PRINCIPAL PIPELINE INITIATIVE

Wallace has launched and financed a six-year, \$75 million initiative to establish strong principal “pipelines”— local systems ensuring that a large corps of school leaders is properly trained, hired, evaluated and supported on the job. The six grantees include Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.; Denver, Colo.; Gwinnett County, Ga.; Hillsborough County, Fla.; Prince Georges County, Md.; and New York City. The districts will also participate in a major Wallace-funded independent evaluation to see whether pipelines make a difference in student achievement and offer lessons learned to the field.

school year 2014-2015 and will be implemented statewide in 2015-2016. The law requires implementation procedures that include:

- Regular evaluation of educators by one or more trained evaluators. The frequency of evaluations may vary, depending on the effectiveness at which the educator is performing, but observations of professional practice, formative feedback and continuous improvement conversations must occur throughout the year.
- Ongoing training to ensure principals and evaluators understand the system and have the knowledge and skills needed to participate in a meaningful way.
- A peer review component to the evaluation and professional growth system and opportunities for principals to share, learn and continually improve their practice.
- Formation of a steering committee composed of teachers, administrators and others that regularly reviews and refines the performance evaluation and professional growth system to ensure that it is aligned with school goals and priorities.

Washington S.B. 5895 (2012) requires that principal candidates demonstrate knowledge of evaluation research and the state’s evaluation requirements, use of student growth data and multiple measures of performance and have practiced teacher evaluation skills in order to obtain initial licensure. Beginning

Sept. 1, 2016, the Professional Educator Standard Board must incorporate evaluation training as a requirement for continued licensure.

DISTRICT-DRIVEN REFORM

School districts also play an important role in building a pipeline of effective principals. They greatly influence how principals are trained, hired, mentored, developed and evaluated on the job. A growing number of large districts are focusing their efforts on building a large corps of well-qualified candidates for the principalship and supporting principals once they are on the job.

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT: GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Gwinnett County School District in metro Atlanta has developed a “consumers’ guide” to help would-be principal candidates choose preparation programs. This comprehensive guide is intended to drive change and reform in university-based principal preparation programs by featuring only those programs the district feels share a commitment to preparing world-class leadership. Each of these programs has agreed to provide enrollees with strong internships and site experiences and to offer a curriculum reflective of district needs. The user-friendly guide helps potential candidates wade through the many preparation programs by outlining the basics of each program, including application requirements, costs and coursework.

This enables would-be principal candidates to select a program that best matches their interests and needs. The district is sending a clear message to universities to improve their programs and respond to district needs.

Building a quality principal pipeline that aligns with their needs is important to Gwinnett County and so is the fair assessment of its principals. Gwinnett's "Results-Based Evaluation System" ties 70 percent of the score for schools and their principals to student achievement. This is rounded out by three other factors: initiatives to improve student achievement (which includes a principal's prowess in data-driven decision making and staff development); consumer satisfaction; and school management. Rather than being punitive, Gwinnett focuses on finding weaknesses and identifying areas for improvement so that principals can be more effective. In addition, the evaluation process rewards excellence by giving top performing schools a cash incentive that principals can spend on their schools as they wish. Gwinnett County is developing a principal pipeline

that is supplying its schools with the kind of leadership necessary to positively affect its students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Building and sustaining a strong school principal pipeline will require a sustained commitment from state legislators, state education leaders, school districts and other key stakeholders. State and district leaders will have to collaborate on the best strategies for recruitment and selection, preparation, licensure, professional development and evaluation and ongoing support of their principals. The role of the principal has evolved, and so too should the systems and policies that support them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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