

# Taking the Lead on Preparing Principals

## Leading Principals

No longer just a managerial position, school principals today also serve as instructional leaders. In this evolving role, principals must support and evaluate educators while cultivating a thriving school culture and climate that promote student learning. [Research](#) has shown that effective principals rank second only to teachers among school-related factors that affect student learning. The role of a school leader has a direct impact on every teacher and student in the building. The most effective principals are responsible for creating and maintaining a schoolwide vision of commitment to high expectations for staff and the success of all students. These expectations shape the ways in which all goals—at the student level through the educator level—are developed, implemented and revised.

Despite the shifting responsibilities and complexities of the role, many of the university programs that train aspiring principals have yet to incorporate these changes into their curricula. Principals already in leadership roles are quite critical of their preparation—about half rating their programs as poor to fair. Another 89% of principals surveyed said their program did not prepare graduates to cope with classroom realities. Further, more than one-third reported their programs did not prepare graduates well.

But changes are afoot. Policymakers and educators are recognizing that strong leadership in schools is a necessity for student and educator growth—it matters.

## Leadership Standards and Preparation

The Council of Chief State School Officers and The National Policy Board for Educational Administration—through a review of empirical research, a multitude of researchers' contributions, and input from over 1,000 school and district leaders—developed the [Professional Standards for Education Leaders](#) (PSEL). Leadership standards establish minimum expectations for what school leaders should know and be able to do. All 50 states and the District of Columbia participated and continue to work on implementing these standards. The 10 standards are:



- Mission, Vision and Core Values
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Community Care and Support for Students
- Professional Capacity for School Personnel
- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Operations and Management
- School Improvement

Using the PSEL standards, universities are able to build curricula to purposely equip aspiring leaders with skills to meet and exceed the standards expected of them.

Because preparing school leaders for the complexity and associated responsibilities of their emerging role is vital to recruiting and retaining principals, The Wallace Foundation embarked on a research project to understand how to better coordinate school leaders' preparation with the requirements of the job. [The Wallace Foundation](#) is a nonprofit organization working nationally to answer important questions that, if solved, could help strengthen practices and policies within a field. Its mission is to "foster improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of arts for everyone."

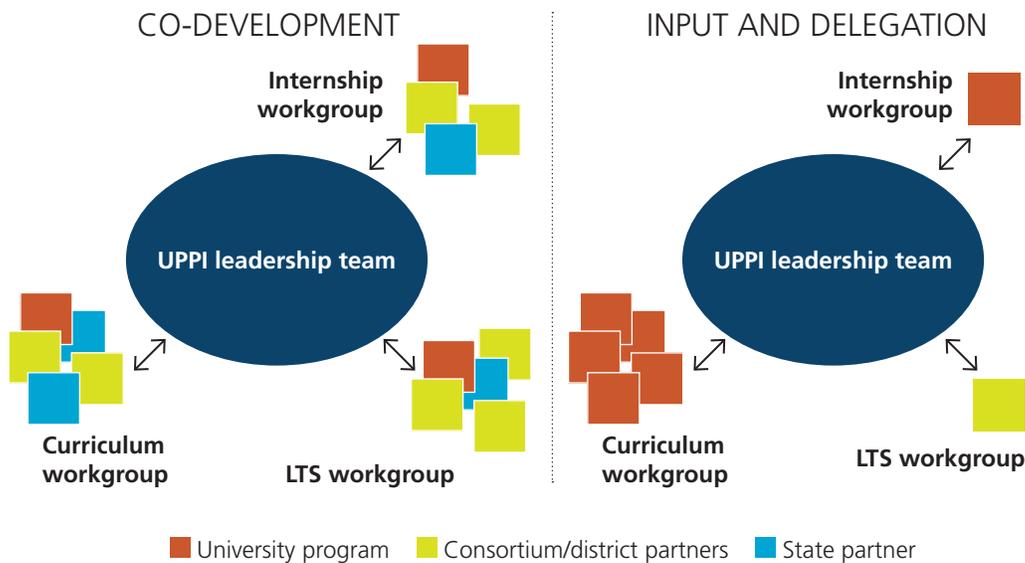
The foundation's research led to the development of its University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI). The initiative delved into the role of universities in preparing effective school principals, with three goals:

- Develop and implement high-quality courses of study and supportive organization conditions in universities' principal preparation programs.
- Strengthen university and school-district collaborations.
- Identify and support redesigns of program accreditation and principal licensure to promote high-quality training statewide.

The UPPI supports seven universities and their district or consortium partners: Albany State University, Florida Atlantic University, North Carolina State University, San Diego State University, University of Connecticut, Virginia State University and Western Kentucky University.

Research from the UPPI implementation describes varying elements that aided or inhibited their success. Florida Atlantic University principal preparation programs and licensure, for example, are required to meet both state regulations and standards. Their implementation was reflective of true collaboration between the university, school districts and the state education agency. Approved principal preparation programs require an alignment with Florida's Principal Leadership Standards, Florida Professional Development Protocol Standards and standards determined by Learning Forward, the only professional association dedicated to educator professional development. Despite the required licensure and standards, universities continue to have autonomy to determine how they will implement and measure those requirements.

## Two Example Models of Collaboration



Source: The Wallace Foundation

UPPI researchers reported the following:

- State partner engagement in the UPPI led to some concrete policy reforms.
- Some states have adopted or considered rule or process changes because of their participation in the initiative.
- The UPPI stimulated other state measures related to educational leadership.
- The UPPI encouraged some states to consider starting elements of the initiative throughout the state.
- The state partners provided strategic advice to the university programs.
- The lack of alignment between university principal preparation programs posed challenges for state engagement in the initiative.

## States and School Leader Standards

Research has demonstrated that by setting clear and obtainable standards, leaders are more likely to build pipelines that will be continuous and prosperous. The PSEL, alongside the UPPI, can provide guidance and resources to states to help ensure schools have effective leaders. States can review current leadership standards in conjunction with the PSEL. State legislators can build, or maintain if already in place, a pipeline of effective school principals. Doing so would require states to create or align their standards, employ principal preparation programs that are state-approved, revamp their licensure process, incorporate evaluation training, and provide professional development for continuous support and growth.

In [“Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy,”](#) author Paul Manna described three sets of considerations for states to act on:



The first is an appraisal of the principal’s current status on the list of state priorities and the rationale for placing the principal higher on the agenda, such as the fact that principals can have a powerful effect on the classroom.

The second is an examination of six policy levers that states can pull:

1. Adopting principal leadership standards into state law and regulation.
2. Recruiting aspiring principals into the profession.
3. Approving and overseeing principal preparation programs.
4. Licensing new and veteran principals.
5. Supporting principals’ growth with professional development.
6. Evaluating principals.

The third is an assessment of four important contextual matters for the state:

1. The web of institutions responsible for education governance and the interaction among them.
2. The diversity of urban, suburban and rural locales.
3. The capacity of the state and local communities to carry out new policies.
4. The mandates already affecting principals.

The culmination of each state's political, educational and financial circumstances enables growth and state needs being met at any and all levels.

All 50 states have adopted school leadership standards in some capacity. These standards provide a framework for understanding the role of a school leader and how best to support his or her growth and development. Below are state examples:

- New York has fully adopted the PSEL, and the UPPI aims to strengthen New York school leaders.
- California has fully adopted the PSEL.
- Arkansas has adopted both the PSEL and the Standards for School Administrators.
- Mississippi has adopted the Missouri Leader Standards.
- The District of Columbia has adopted the Model DC School Leadership Standards.

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