



## Preparing High-Quality School Leaders

By Sara Vitaska

*School leaders are key to student success.*

Research confirms that high-quality leadership (principals and superintendents) is key to education reform and student achievement. A 2004 Wallace Foundation study, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, found leadership to be second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning, especially in high-need schools.

Leadership standards lay the foundation for principal preparation programs, licensure, evaluation, and ongoing professional development and support. Preparation starts with recruitment and selection and pre-service training, and continues with licensing, mentoring and ongoing professional development and support once the leader is on the job.

*More than 40 states have adopted school leader standards.*

More than 40 states have adopted standards for school leaders that were established by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Traditional administrator preparation programs nationwide are detached from today's school environment, however. A national survey by Public Agenda found that 80 percent of superintendents and 69 percent of principals think that leadership training in graduate schools of education does not address the realities of today's school districts.

*State and district financing are critical to preparation programs.*

Intense scrutiny from policymakers, teachers, administrators and others has encouraged states to reassess their administrator preparation programs. Several colleges and universities are redesigning their administrator preparation programs to reflect statewide leadership standards, incorporate effective leadership practices and real-world problems, emphasize instructional rather than administrative leadership, integrate theory and practice, provide authentic school-based experiences, and create partnerships between universities and school districts. Some states, large urban districts and national organizations have created their own training programs.

A recent Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report highlights four core areas that legislators may consider in redesigning programs: University and district partnerships for principal preparation; emphasis on knowledge and skills for improving schools and raising student achievement; well-planned and supported field experiences; and evaluation of participants' competence and

### Key Elements of Professional Development Programs

- Recruitment and selection of school leaders are a high priority.
- Professional standards focus on instructional leadership and school improvement.
- Strong partnerships among states, districts and universities are important.
- Integrating coursework with internships and field experiences is critical.
- Significant resources, especially human resources, are required.

**Source:** Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Executive Summary*, 2007.

the program's effectiveness. A 2007 Stanford Education Leadership Institute report notes two primary implications for policymakers: State and district policies can shape the design, quality and results of preparation programs, and state and district financing policies are critical to program success.

**State Action** In light of recent research, more states are beginning to examine how they prepare school leaders. Several legislatures acted to help prepare and support high-quality school leaders during the 2007 legislative session.

**Leadership Standards.** Iowa developed statewide standards for administrators and developed training programs and evaluation criteria based on the standards. North Carolina requires the State Board of Education to adopt new standards for school administrator programs.

**Improving Preparation Programs.** Illinois created a task force to recommend steps to improve school leadership preparation. Virginia established an education roundtable to improve and sustain good education leadership. Washington established a public-private partnership to develop, test and establish the Washington State Leadership Academy.

**Licensure.** The state's power to license principals is an effective way to ensure that schools have high-quality leaders. New Mexico requested a study of alternative pathways to licensure. Oklahoma added building-level leadership skills into the education administration curriculum and established certification requirements for superintendents.

**Ongoing Professional Development.** At least half the states have adopted mentoring and induction programs for beginning administrators. Missouri, Oregon and Pennsylvania created or modified such programs. Iowa established the Administrator Quality Program, which includes mentoring, evaluation and professional development to directly support best practices for leadership.

## Resources

Darling-Hammond, Linda, et al. *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Executive Summary*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007.

Fry, Betty, Kathy O'Neill, and Gene Bottoms. *Schools Can't Wait: Accelerating the Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs*. Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Education Board, 2007.

Leithwood, Kenneth, et al. *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Center for Applied Research and Education Improvement and Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2004.

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### Strengthening Leadership Preparation: What State Legislatures Can Do

- Help craft school leader development policies by working with state boards of education, superintendents, local school boards, and school leaders.
- Identify state needs and establish direction, remove policy barriers, and pass legislation that supports leader development.
- Consider creating statewide standards for education leaders.
- Help redesign preparation programs that include specific recruitment and selection criteria.
- Create partnerships between universities and school districts to support pre-service programs and ongoing professional development.
- Consider providing funding for professional development to foster ongoing learning for principals and district leaders.

*Several states passed legislation in 2007 to support school leaders.*

*Missouri, Oregon and Pennsylvania created or modified mentoring programs.*

The Wallace Foundation  
www.wallacefoundation.org

Southern Regional Education Board  
www.sreb.org