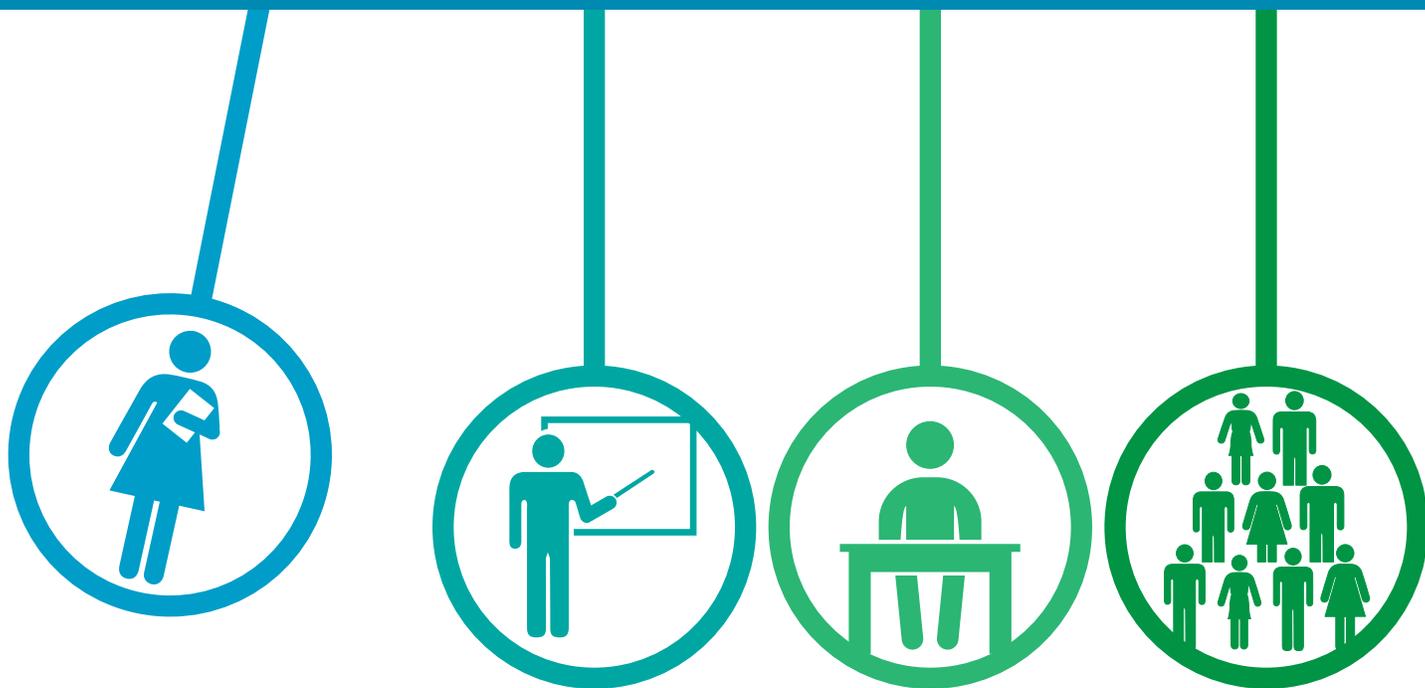


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Principal Professional Development New Opportunities for a Renewed State Focus

By Cortney Rowland



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Principal Professional Development

New Opportunities for a Renewed State Focus



THE ISSUE

Again and again, states and districts have focused on teachers rather than principals when making policy and allotting funds and resources for professional development and support.

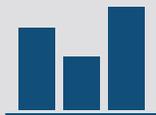
Principals' groups and other educators have long lamented that school leaders are often absent from the policymaking process or included as afterthoughts (Prothero, 2015). But many aspects of learning are influenced by the quality of a school's leader. After all, principals recruit, retain, and support quality teachers, and research shows that quality teachers are the most important element in student success. School leaders influence student learning, the strength of the teachers, and the health of the school environment (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Le Floch et al., 2014; Coelli & Green, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Manna, 2015). And it is the principal who leads and oversees change at the school level.

Principals' continuous improvement and learning is important for student and teacher learning, policy implementation, and cultivating healthy and supportive school communities. But schools in the most challenging environments are the least likely to have effective principals (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010; Beesley & Clark, 2015).

As with teachers, principals tend to become more effective as they gain experience, particularly within the first 3 years (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011; Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009). Yet, we know that many principals leave their positions within the first 3 years. And those who exit low-performing schools often go to leadership positions in schools that have less challenging conditions, such as those with higher achieving students, more resources, and more parent involvement (Beteille et al., 2011; School Leaders Network, 2014). Then, the principal vacancies created at the low-performing schools are often filled by inexperienced school leaders (Beteille et al., 2011; Hull, 2012). The cycle goes on.

Imagine if the cycle did not go on and principals received targeted, meaningful, and ongoing professional development in those first critical years of service—and beyond. What might be the influence of their growing experience and expertise, year after year, on the school climate, teaching force, and instructional quality in their schools and, thereby, on their students' learning?

There has never been a more perfect time to spotlight principals and their professional learning. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers new opportunities for districts and states to reconsider the way they develop and support school principals (ESSA, 2015). In addition, the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)¹ provide a set of foundational principles of what school leaders should know and be able to do that states and districts can look to as a framework to guide their own school leadership policy and practice. The PSEL standards, released in October 2015, updated the previous set of school leadership standards (i.e., the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium [ISLLC]), which had not been updated since 2008, and represent the latest evidence about how and in what ways effective leadership contributes to teaching and learning.



THE RESEARCH

Research about the importance of school leaders for teaching and learning is compelling. But for principals to be effective and continue to grow, they need access to ongoing, high-quality professional learning (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NAESP] and National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2013; Sorenson, 2005). And we know that today's principals have too few opportunities to hone their craft and focus on improving key practices for teaching and learning.

Research is still emerging (particularly research with strong methodological techniques) on how principals influence teaching and learning. However, collectively, studies discussed in this brief point to the important role of school principals.



THE OPTIONS

Policymakers should rethink ways to develop and support their school principals through research-based, on-the-job training—aligned to what they need to do their jobs every day. This brief offers two entry point options for states to consider—the new PSEL standards and the principal training opportunities in ESSA.

The PSEL standards emphasize what principals need to know to build effective staffs and advance student learning. ESSA provides numerous, specific opportunities for states and districts to use Title funds to support principals' ongoing training and development.

¹ <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/ProfessionalStandardsforEducationalLeaders2015forNPBEAFINAL.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, most states and districts have focused professional development on teachers rather than principals. After all, the research on the importance of teachers has been stronger and emerged earlier, starting with the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future 1996 seminal report [*What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*](#). Also, there are more teachers than principals. And teachers are the ones directly in front of students every day.

However, evidence suggests that principals can play an important role in reaching our national goals of high achievement for all students. School leaders are powerful levers for change—when given the right training and support. But most of our nation's school principals do not have access to professional learning that reflects what is happening in schools today (e.g., changing demographics, large-scale reform initiatives, changing technology, evolving instructional strategies) and what we know are effective practices (Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; School Leaders Network, 2014).

States, districts, researchers, and policymakers can no longer afford to push principals' professional development to the bottom of the priority list.

Improving principal professional development is going to require a new way of thinking, prioritizing, and budgeting—at the state *and* local levels. For example, professional learning for school staff tends to be a small part of school districts' budgets. And when funds are ample, districts overwhelmingly support teachers' professional development (Manna, 2015).

But there are avenues for improving principal professional development. Some states and districts are already doing this work, and there is research that illustrates what can be done to enhance on-the-job principal professional development.

This brief describes:

- ▶ The need for *more and better* principal professional development to improve principal effectiveness, decrease principal turnover, and more equitably distribute successful principals across all schools.
- ▶ The research on the importance of principals and how professional development can improve principals' effectiveness.
- ▶ Options and examples for leveraging current policies to revisit and refocus efforts concerning principal professional development.

The policy, research, and practice stars are aligning right now, and states that want to improve teaching and learning have a unique opportunity to refocus their efforts on developing and supporting their school principals.



THE ISSUE

Look behind all successful schools—ones that rapidly improve student learning or are consistently high achieving—and you will probably find principals who hold high expectations for all students, support rigorous curriculum and instruction, foster a positive and caring culture, recruit and retain effective staff, and engage parents and community resources to meet the needs of young people. These same principals are often working long hours just to keep up with the paperwork, e-mails, meetings, teacher evaluations, parent calls, fire drills, school and community events, and dozens of interruptions that school leaders face every day.

These multiple responsibilities have led to a growing notion among principals and potential principals that the job is “impossible.” In the [2013 MetLife survey report](#), 75% of principals reported that the job had become too complex (MetLife, Inc., 2013).

So, on the one hand, research suggests that a core set of principal leadership practices, from human capital management to agenda setting to coaching and instructional leadership, can influence teaching and learning in schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2010).

On the other hand, research also indicates that few principals actually engage in these practices in their day-to-day work, spending minimal time on instructional leadership activities, coaching, and teacher evaluation and support (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009; May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012; Grissom et al., 2013). Rather, principals tend to spend the bulk of their time on administrative activities (e.g., student discipline and compliance requirements), budgets and staff, and internal and external relations, such as fundraising and working with staff and students (Horng et al., 2009).

A [2012 report in Learning Forward's JSD](#) discusses five key practices of effective principals (Mendels, 2012):

- ▶ Shape a vision of academic success for all students
- ▶ Create a hospitable climate
- ▶ Cultivate leadership in others
- ▶ Improve instruction
- ▶ Manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement

The Wallace Foundation website hosts a series of videos that illustrate these key practices in action. [School Leadership in Action: Principal Practices](#) follows 10 principals from four metropolitan areas through their workdays showing the various ways they improve teaching and learning in their classrooms.

As of 2011–12, there were nearly 100,000 public school principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) across the country trying to manage the relentless administrative, budgeting, and relationship demands of the job while working to implement reforms, cultivate positive school cultures, recruit and retain a high-quality teaching staff, and be instructional leaders.

How does a principal learn to do all that?

Not very well.

There is growing concern that too few principals receive high-quality, targeted *preservice* training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; The Wallace Foundation, 2016). And school principals desperately need more and better *on-the-job* professional development and support to meet today’s demands, particularly for quality teaching and improved student learning.

PRINCIPAL FACTS

A good principal is the single most important determinant of whether a school can attract and keep high-quality teachers (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Burkhauser, 2016; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; TNTF, 2012).

The main reason for teachers’ decisions about whether to stay in a school is the quality of administrative support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Boyd et al., 2009; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Scholastic, 2010).

On average, half of principals leave their schools after only **3 years** (School Leaders Network, 2014). Yet, we know that a principal should be in place about **5 to 7 years** to have a beneficial impact on a school (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

The impact of principal turnover is felt more at the most challenging schools—and, in these schools, a new principal is more likely to have fewer years of experience and be less effective than a new principal at a less challenging school (Hull, 2012).

Fewer high-quality principals serve in disadvantaged schools (Loeb et al., 2010; Beesley & Clark, 2015) than in less challenging schools.

District administrators often neglect principals’ development once principals are on the job, especially after the first 2 years (School Leaders Network, 2014). And principals who do not receive professional development are 1.4 times more likely to leave their schools than leaders who did receive training (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). That kind of school leadership “churn” is costly for school districts, not only monetarily but also in terms of a school leader’s potential sustained impact on teaching and learning (School Leaders Network, 2014).

School leadership is significantly under-resourced. Only 31% of districts report spending any of their Title II dollars on principal professional development (New Leaders, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). In districts that do use Title II funds for professional development, they typically spend less than 5% of those funds on principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). Most districts use the bulk of their Title II, Part A funds for teacher professional development and class-size reduction (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). And, for the most part, state education agencies do not track the use of Title II funds to see whether they are adequately serving principals' needs (Coggshall, 2015; Manna, 2015). There is also little empirical evidence that the way Title II, Part A funds are used, for teachers or for principals, is effective (Chait & Miller, 2009; Coggshall, 2015). This all falls "far short of what principals need to meet the increased demands placed on them as the organizational and instructional leaders of their schools" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2014).

Principals still tend to participate in professional development designed for teachers rather than for their specific needs. And when they do participate in principal-focused professional development, it is largely centered on the "what" of district reform, such as what is expected for district teacher evaluation policies, and not on the "how" of leading change (George W. Bush Institute, 2016a; School Leaders Network, 2014). For example, according to a 2013 principals' survey on implementation of the Common Core State Standards, although many principals had attended professional development sessions focused on the new standards and associated curriculum, instruction, and assessment needs, they also reported that "professional learning experiences are not specifically tailored to leadership tasks and therefore do not provide guidance about *how* to bring about the needed instructional and assessment changes in their buildings to obtain the desired results" (Clifford & Mason, 2013, p. 11).

What Quality Professional Development Can Look Like and How It Can Be Supported

States that fail to support school principals with quality on-the-job professional development are missing an opportunity. We are not talking about instituting a once-a-year training or over-the-summer training. If states want to better realize the potential impact of school leadership on teaching and learning, evidence points to investing in opportunities for principals' *continuous* training and development, and the time to reflect on and refine principals' practice (Coggshall, 2015).

Consider what has taken place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and South Lane, Oregon, where principals have regularly engaged in "instructional rounds" (von Frank, 2011), in which school leaders identify a problem of practice specific to student learning and then

work with a network of administrators and educators across the district to determine the root causes of the problem through observation, analysis, and dialogue. Working as a group, they come up with strategies to address the issue (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). The network meets regularly to debrief and discuss strategies and next steps, and to refine each principal's own thinking and practice.

A principal in South Lane, Oregon, said, "Rounds have deepened the understanding of how our individual work at each building is moving our district toward our collective goals...This connects the dots" (von Frank, 2011, p. 2).

In Oakland, California, the district created a districtwide team of dedicated coaches who worked side by side with principals to set goals, analyze data, develop action plans, and measure progress toward their goals. Along the way, district coaches communicated often with the principals, built trust, and ensured confidentiality in the work and the principal-coach relationship (Aguilar, Goldwasser, & Tank-Crestetto, 2011).

Setting up coordinated, high-quality, individualized professional learning requires local *and* state support in the form of policies, structures, funding, and high-quality, transparent information on effective principal professional development design. Professional development has largely been considered a district- and school-level endeavor; however, that has often resulted in poor quality professional development for principals (Rowland, 2015a). Manna (2015) suggests that states would be wise to study their current priorities and better allocate resources, information, and models to give principals more access to high-quality professional development.

A THOUGHT ABOUT THE STATE'S ROLE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR PRINCIPALS

In 2011, Learning Forward, a professional association focused on educator professional development, launched an initiative to work with one demonstration state (Kentucky) and six "critical friend" states (Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Utah, and Washington) to consider ways to create model state systems for professional learning. Here is how Learning Forward's project [explained the need for the initiative](#):

"As it stands now, too few states use their regulatory and policy-making authorities to advance powerful visions and goals for professional learning; have comprehensive professional learning plans and infrastructures to address current priorities; have a coherent strategy for managing and leveraging the variety of external assistance providers operating in the state; nor can account for the impact of resources and time allocated toward professional learning. Most states continue to support isolated professional learning programs that lead to fragmentation of efforts and impact."

The infrastructure for professional development in a state “may influence the extent to which offerings are short-term, ad hoc, and disjointed or coherent and sustained; the extent to which learning is more decontextualized or there are field-based opportunities for training; the extent to which principals are likely to learn entirely different content or to share a common knowledge base; and the extent to which programs that are promising have long-term support and can become institutionalized” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 14).

Let us look more closely at what the research says about the importance of principals as well as the research on how we can better support our nation’s school leaders through effective and ongoing professional learning.



THE RESEARCH

Research shows that principals can play an important role in school improvement (Herman et al., 2008; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Le Floch et al., 2014). Strong school leadership is associated with higher levels of student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Coelli & Green, 2012; Louis et al., 2010), particularly in schools with the greatest needs (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Branch et al., 2013). Furthermore, principals can be “multipliers”—effective principals who work as instructional leaders can impact everyone in the school, from teachers to students (Branch et al., 2013; Manna, 2015; Rowland, 2015a). For example, an effective principal can have a positive impact on recruiting and retaining an effective teaching staff who can take on school leadership roles and expand their reach as instructional teams to improve learning for all students.

The current opportunities and resources available in states and districts for ongoing principal development are not adequate to staff all schools with leaders who can effectively impact teaching and learning. Shifting more support from teachers to those who influence many teachers and students can be a strategic use of dollars, with the potential of broad impact on teaching and learning (New Leaders, 2016; Rowland, 2015a).

Making One Size Fit All

Traditional professional development for principals typically involves workshop-style meetings where one-size-fits-all content is delivered to administrators who rarely receive critical feedback (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Professional development offerings for principals often:

- ▶ Are misaligned between program content and candidate needs.
- ▶ Fail to link professional learning with school or district mission and needs.

- ▶ Do not leverage job-embedded learning opportunities—such as applying new skills, learning in real situations, or working with a coach or team—to focus on a specific issue or problem of practice at the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Also, even though some states and districts have well-developed support systems for their new principals (usually orientations geared to the rules and ways of their new schools), once they are on the job for a while, many principals are flying by the seat of their pants.

Tailoring Learning

There is still a lot to learn about the ways in which principal professional development can be designed and implemented to have an impact on student performance, school climate, teacher collaboration, or staff retention (Peterson & Kelley, 2002; Huff, Preston, & Goldring, 2013; George W. Bush Institute, 2016b).

However, a handful of studies and reports over the past several years provides some insight. For example, a 2010 study (Grissom & Harrington, 2010) found that principals who were mentored and coached were more successful at their job than principals who received other types of professional development.

Recent reports by the RAND Corporation (Herman et al., 2016a; Herman et al., 2016b) and the George W. Bush Institute (2016b) suggest some principal professional development programs and initiatives that have shown a positive impact on student outcomes and staff turnover.

For example, the National Institute for School Leadership's (NISL's) Executive Development Program, a yearlong program that gives educators in-person and virtual training (e.g., simulations, case studies, school evaluations) on a research-based curriculum, has had a positive impact on student outcomes (Herman et al., 2016a; Herman et al., 2016b; Nunnery, Ross, & Yen, 2010; Nunnery, Ross, Chappell, Pribesh, & Hoag Carhart, 2011).

McREL's Balanced Leadership program, which includes learning modules and workshops on key leadership responsibilities (e.g., culture, order, communication), has been shown to have a positive impact on turnover (Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller, & Goddard, 2014).

The RAND and George W. Bush Institute reports also suggest a range of promising principal development practices, such as learning communities, high-quality internships and mentoring, using evaluation results to drive personalized learning, and ongoing coaching and collaboration (Herman et al., 2016b; George W. Bush Institute, 2016b).

Some of the research gap on the effectiveness of principal professional development will be filled by a Mathematica study in which AIR is a partner. The study aims to determine whether a specific principal professional development program has the potential to positively influence principal practices, school climate and educator behaviors, teacher effectiveness and retention, and ultimately student achievement. This randomized controlled trial is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and runs through 2019.

It is clear that good principal professional development involves coaching and mentoring (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2014). The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Coaching often happens over a specific period and focuses on a targeted set of skills (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). Coaches are able to ask strategic, focused questions at critical moments that help principals grow in their roles as school leaders (von Frank, 2012).

Mentoring often refers to specific guidance and support for new principals during the initiation phase. Most states require some form of mentoring for new principals, but the range in application and quality is vast (Mitgang, 2007). This variation is problematic given research that suggests new principals tend to leave their positions within the first 3 years, likely before their ability to be effective has even emerged.

The research base about the *effectiveness* of principal professional development is still emerging, yet, at the same time, there are several assertions about what high-quality principal professional development *should look like*. Two examples follow:

- ▶ In an unpublished report, [New Leaders](#), a national nonprofit that trains school leaders and conducts research and policy analysis on school leadership issues, suggests that effective professional development for school leaders has five characteristics:
 - Focuses on continuous opportunities for practice
 - Offers principals high-quality feedback on their actions and practice on a regular basis
 - Uses research-based content
 - Occurs within a community or network of other learners, either in person or virtually
 - Is tailored to teach what each principal needs to know at that specific point in his or her career
- ▶ Experts at the [School Leaders Network](#) (2014) encourage districts and states to:
 - Invest in leadership development beyond recruiting and placing principals
 - Engage principals in peer networks where principals can learn from other principals the art and practice of leading schools
 - Provide one-to-one coaching support to principals beyond the first 2 years

The field is awash in case studies, examples, and policy reports describing effective professional development for teachers. But there are few illustrations available that focus on how to develop and implement the kind of principal professional development described above.

NEW DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

ESSA updates the definition of professional development to ensure personalized, ongoing, job-embedded activities that are:

- ▶ Available to all school staff, including paraprofessionals
- ▶ Part of broader school improvement plans
- ▶ Collaborative and data driven
- ▶ Developed with educator input
- ▶ Regularly evaluated (ASCD, 2015)

The country needs more research on principal professional development as well as case studies that illustrate this work in various contexts. Research and case studies should be based on current experiences of principals and their needs and the range of settings that principals work in, and should provide lessons learned for principal professional development content and mechanisms for delivering that content.

The shortage of information and rigorous research on principal professional development should not leave states paralyzed. They can move forward on what the early evidence and best practice in adult learning suggest, and evaluate approaches for continuous improvement. Some states, such as those discussed in the next section, have already focused on professional learning for principals, and can serve as examples for others seeking to retool their school improvement efforts. After all, a better school leader is an important lever of school improvement.

So, where do we go from here?



THE OPTIONS

Combined with research about the importance of school principals, two recent national efforts—Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—provide a politically powerful vision and platform for states to revisit and refocus on principal professional development.

Option 1: Use the New PSEL as a Lever to Refocus Principal Professional Development

In October 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) released new standards for school leaders—the PSEL. Compared with previous standards (the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium [ISLLC]), the new standards put more emphasis on principals' responsibilities to promote rigorous instruction, build

individual teacher and leader capacity, foster a collaborative work environment, ensure the development of equitable and culturally responsive schools, and engage families and communities (Rowland, 2015b; Prociw & Eberle, 2016).

PSEL 2015–10 STANDARDS

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

According to The Bush Institute’s 2013 report, *Operating in the Dark*, most states have either adopted or adapted the 2008 ISLLC standards as a reference point for their own state standards. Some states and districts infused the 2008 standards with more advanced school leadership thinking—focused on concepts such as “principals as instructional leaders and human capital managers.” Other states may consider updating their standards given the new material in the 2015 PSEL (Rowland, 2015b). These new standards suggest that professional learning for principals should focus on factors including:

- ▶ Equity, inclusiveness, and social justice
- ▶ Supporting and empowering teachers, and cultivating leadership among staff
- ▶ Integrating the school with the community

Strong principals must have opportunities throughout their careers to be trained, developed, and supported in consistent ways that reflect modern, evidence-based standards. Principal professional development tends to be highly variable and often depends on where the principal works (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). One source of this inconsistency is a lack of common standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Districts and states might well consider convening stakeholder groups that focus on the alignment of current standards to the PSEL and, more importantly, how their school leadership standards drive systems for recruiting, retaining, and developing principals. States could mandate that districts provide focused and effective training and skill-building opportunities for principals, particularly those skills proven to affect teacher and student outcomes, and aligned with the state’s school leadership standards (Rowland, 2015a).

Three States Work to Improve School Leadership Standards

West Virginia

In 2016, the West Virginia Department of Education completed an alignment of its requirements for principals—the [West Virginia Standards of Professional Practice for School Principals \(PPSP\)](#)—with the PSEL to determine where there might be gaps. After developing a crosswalk of the two sets of leadership standards, the department convened a group of principals, superintendents, and other stakeholders to make recommendations for revising West Virginia’s current expectations for principals, so that they better align with the PSEL.

The state’s school leadership policy was posted for public comment and included the stakeholder recommendations. Following public comment, the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) considered proposed revisions to the school leadership policy—the [West Virginia Board of Education Policy 5800](#).

In addition, West Virginia held eight leadership seminars during the summer of 2016 to gather additional public comment on the policy and the proposed revised standards. Each session focused on the revised leadership standards, how they drive instructional leadership, and how to present an overview of the school leadership changes in ESSA. The recommendations are to be incorporated into expectations for leadership preparation programs and will be used to explore possible revisions to the state’s principal evaluation system.

Missouri

In early 2015, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education began to have discussions about how it could improve school leadership across the state. The department was aware that the quality of leadership varied tremendously across the state.

In July 2015, the department submitted its [plan to ensure equitable access to excellent educators](#), and it was clear that the state needed to invest in growing school leaders. It had a few policies in place focused on school leaders (e.g., 10 hours of mentoring for new principals and a leadership academy), but none of the policies was producing the kind of high-quality results at scale that the state needed.

The department put together a commission focused on ensuring that every public school in Missouri had an effective leader who could impact teaching and learning. The first task for the commission was to decide on a common set of skills and competencies for all principals in Missouri. Leadership standards tied to ISLLC 2008 were in place, but these standards did not reflect the latest research about what principals should know and be able to do—and they were not being applied consistently throughout the state’s principal pipeline.

Through extensive research and dialogue, the commission decided on five domains, such as *recognizing and developing excellent instruction*, and 32 competencies, such as *clarifying mission, vision, and core values*, as well as a progression of learning, from preparation to transformational leadership, for all principals in the state.

By the end of 2015, the PSEL were released and the commission had to quickly make sure its domains and competencies matched the standards and functions outlined in the PSEL. They did. This year, the state began principal training using its new framework.

Iowa

In 2013, the Iowa Governor's Office and the General Assembly established the Council on Educator Development (CED) to study Iowa's current educator evaluation systems and make recommendations by November 2016 for new statewide teacher and administrator evaluation systems. As part of the process, the CED was required to review the criteria used to define state and nationally accepted teaching and leadership standards.

Simultaneously, the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) was implementing a multiyear plan to expand the scope of professional development for education leaders beyond evaluator training to all skills, knowledge, and dispositions that effective leaders need to improve classroom instruction and student learning. To guide the work, IDE requested assistance from the Midwest Comprehensive Center (MWCC) to collaboratively conduct an alignment study between the Iowa Standards for School Leaders and ISLLC 2008. After drafts of the initial alignment study were presented to the CED, the council requested additional studies, which included integrating the PSEL. As a companion to the alignment studies, IDE and MWCC developed an annotated bibliography summarizing recent research on educational leadership in 15 topic areas, from leader evaluation and effectiveness to leading meaningful engagement of families and communities.

In the spring of 2017, IDE and the School Administrators of Iowa will convene a group of principals, superintendents, and other stakeholders to review the considerations from the alignment studies and the bibliography and make recommendations for revising the current leadership standards that will go to the state board for approval. In 2017, IDE also plans to collect focus group and survey data on current leadership development offerings, needs, preferences, and practices of Iowa school and district leaders. It will use data from this needs assessment, the findings from the standards alignment studies, and the educational leadership research summary to craft a leadership development framework structured within the Iowa Professional Development Model (Iowa Department of Education, 2009).

ALIGNING LEADERSHIP STANDARDS TO THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: A TOOLKIT AND CROSSWALK

Is your state considering a transition to PSEL? Developed through a partnership with the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders and Council of Chief State School Officers, state education agencies, leadership preparation programs, and other organizations can use a new toolkit and crosswalk to complete a step-by-step process for aligning their current leadership standards to PSEL. The toolkit and crosswalk can help answer critical questions, such as:

- ▶ How do the new PSEL standards differ from the standards currently in use?
- ▶ Do the new standards contain expectations for school leaders that are not in the leadership standards currently used?
- ▶ Are there areas represented in the current leadership standards that no longer need to be included?

The toolkit and crosswalk follow a defined, systematic process known as "standards alignment" to compare one set of standards—in this case, the PSEL—with one or more other sets of standards.

Option 2: Leverage Opportunities in ESSA to Support Principal Professional Development

Nestled within the more than 1,000 pages of ESSA² is language that gives states new flexibility to use state and district resources to support school principals, primarily in Titles I and II. This was addressed in a letter written to then Education Secretary John King by New Leaders in May 2016.³

Title I focuses on improving low-performing schools and closing achievement gaps. States and districts are required to develop, implement, and monitor Title I plans that include evidence-based strategies and approaches for how they will improve these schools, more equitably distribute effective teachers and leaders, and close achievement gaps. Given the role that principals can play in school improvement, states and districts would be wise to direct some of their Title I funding to support school leaders, particularly their professional learning in school improvement planning and process management.

AIR noted in a recent brief, *Want to Improve Low-Performing Schools? Focus on the Adults* (LeFloch, Garcia, & Barbour, 2016, p. 8): “Adopt a purposeful approach to professional learning. Too often, the lowest performing schools have an ad hoc, unfocused approach to professional learning for teachers and principals. State policymakers should require the school improvement plans include professional learning plans that provide teacher and principal training and collaboration at the district, school, and individual levels, with an emphasis on what takes place in the classroom. These plans should also feature provisions for working with struggling teachers and principals to help them improve, or when these efforts fail, a commitment to remove those who are harming student learning.”

Title II’s purpose is essentially the same in ESSA as it was in No Child Left Behind (NCLB): preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality teachers, principals, and other school leaders. And for

² <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s1177enr/pdf/BILLS-114s1177enr.pdf>

³ <http://newleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016-05-25-New-Leaders-ESSA-Non-Reg-Letter-for-ED-FINAL.pdf>

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND EQUITY

States also might consider the way in which the use of Title dollars can support the goals outlined in their plans to ensure equitable access of effective educators.

Many states identified school leadership, particularly professional development for principals, as a strategy for enhancing equitable access (Chambers, 2016). For example, one of the key strategies outlined in Missouri’s equitable access plan is the development and support of effective leaders, particularly in high-need areas.

Also, the U.S. Department of Education’s nonregulatory Title II guidance suggests that states, in collaboration with LEAs, should demonstrate that school leaders are a part of that work *“to help ensure the purposes of Title II, Part A are met, an SEA may require an LEA to describe how it will provide students from low-income families and minority students with greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders in its local Title II, Part A application.”*

U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, p. 21

the most part, much of the authorized use of funds for principals and other school leaders has always existed in federal policy—just not as explicitly. For example, section 2101(c)(4)(B)(ii)(II) of ESSA now says that states may use their Title II funds to develop and provide “training to principals, other school leaders, coaches, mentors, and evaluators on how to accurately differentiate performance, provide useful and timely feedback, and use evaluation results to inform decision-making about professional development, improvement strategies, and personnel decisions...” (ESSA, 2015). Furthermore, guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on the use of Title II, Part A funds states “...we strongly encourage each SEA to devote a significant portion of its State activities funds to improving school leadership...” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, p. 16).

This overall shift in ESSA's focus on the role of school leaders may well force a cultural and perceptual sea change in the important role of principals, leading to policy and program changes similar to those that began a decade ago for teachers. That can only happen *if states take advantage of these policy and resource opportunities*.

Using Title Funds in ESSA to Support Principal Professional Development

ESSA offers plenty of opportunities to focus on professional development of school leaders—and use Title funds to do it. For example, beginning with fiscal year (FY) 2017, section 1003 of ESSA requires states to reserve a portion of their Title I allocations for subgrants to eligible local education agencies (LEAs) for school improvement activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). What better activity for school improvement than making good principals great?

Title II, Part A provides a significant window for states to reconsider their roles in developing, implementing, and supporting principal professional learning.⁴ Most notably, ESSA differentiates professional learning for principals from that of teachers and permits states to “set aside” up to 3% of Title II, Part A funds to develop better systems of support and a pipeline of prepared principals (Pollitt, 2016). These funds would be reserved from the 95% that would otherwise be subgranted to LEAs.

Regardless of whether states opt to use that 3% set-aside of their Title II funds, there are many ways to use Title II funds to strengthen principals' professional development, including:

- ▶ Induction and mentoring programs for new principals
- ▶ Assistance for LEAs as they revise, develop, and implement high-quality professional development programs and frameworks

⁴ There also are several competitive opportunities that can support school leaders in Title II, Part B of ESSA, including the [Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program](#), the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Program, and the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP).

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING FUNDS ON STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES THAT ARE “EVIDENCE-BASED”

NCLB did little to show districts how to identify research-based elements or practices they could use to support and develop school principals (Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016). But under ESSA, states and districts must provide evidence as to why they think their plans will work.

LEAs are required to include interventions that demonstrate strong, moderate, or promising levels of evidence in their action plans for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement of schools; and there is evidence-based research showing that improving school leadership is an effective strategy for improving school performance and developing teacher practice.

[Guidance](#) released by the U.S. Department of Education suggests that states and districts should work to use the most rigorous evidence available but also discuss how the evidence-based strategy or program will likely work in a specific context and with specific students and school types. The guidance also calls for states, districts, and schools to use research as part of an ongoing cycle of improving their own practice.

For more information about studies on professional development by evidence criteria level, see the RAND Corporation’s recent reports, [School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Volume I, A Review of the Evidence Base, Initial Findings](#) and [School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review, Updated and Expanded](#), as well as the George W. Bush Institute and AIR’s [Principal Talent Management According to the Evidence: A Review of the Literature](#).

- ▶ Revised school leadership standards, developed with stakeholder engagement
- ▶ Teacher, principal, or other school-leader academies
- ▶ Improved data systems and research about what works in principal professional development
- ▶ Improved principal preparation programs and supports for school leaders, aligned with the specific needs of each state

States could use their Title II funds to analyze the amount (e.g., Where and when do principals receive professional development across the state?) and quality (e.g., Does it reflect the new definition of professional development in ESSA?) of professional development under way for principals at all stages of their careers. Then, they could leverage what is working and fill the gaps where there are weaknesses.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

In December 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released [Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards](#) that spelled out a clear, practical definition of what those who supervise principals should know and be able to do to build the capacities of school principals.

States and districts will need to hold principal supervisors to higher standards and expectations. They will also need to consider adopting principal supervisor standards and focusing some Title II dollars on supporting principal supervisors as key resources in the ongoing development of school leaders.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s nonregulatory Title II guidance, principal supervisors “who actively mentor and support principals” are themselves “responsible for the school’s daily instructional leadership and managerial operations” and therefore are considered “school leaders” for purposes of the law, which may suggest these funds can be used for principal supervisors (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 17).

Alternatively, states might consider altering the guidelines for the use of LEA Title II funds or more closely monitor how the funds are being used for principal professional development. Florida, for example, conducts frequent program reviews of district-level professional development programs to ensure that the programs are achieving specified outcomes (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Finally, states might consider, as a part of their comprehensive plans, blending Title I and Title II funds to strategically support school leadership.

When it comes to using Title II funds for principal professional learning, states do not need to start from scratch. Following are examples of ways in which states have focused on the development and support of principals *that align with the needs and context of their states*.⁵

Kentucky focused on a *state-level* system of professional development and support for principals—propelled in part by the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core) and a comprehensive state education bill passed in 2009 (SB 1). The state has been implementing an elaborate structure of regional leadership networks to build capacity among school leaders and share tools and resources. The state primarily used Title II funds and legislative dollars to support this work (Berry, Daughtrey, Darling-Hammond, & Cook, 2012). In addition, the state asked the Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA) to help principals implement the Common Core. And in June 2013, the state board of education adopted new regulations that require each administrator’s professional learning to be related to his or her responsibilities (Kentucky Board of Education, 2013).

⁵ These examples have not been vetted for impact or effectiveness; they are simply examples to illustrate the range of investment and potential uses of state funds for school leader professional development and support.

Tennessee has been developing and implementing school leadership academies for years through the [Tennessee Academy for School Leaders \(TASL\)](#) and the [Governor’s Academy for School Leadership \(GASL\)](#).

TASL is operated and supported by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and provides standards-based professional learning for principals, assistant principals, and instructional supervisors. TASL is mandated by law, and Tennessee uses state funds each year to run the academies. Furthermore, TASL is closely tied to school-leader certification. For example, to advance along the principal certification pathway, administrators must complete TASL induction (for new administrators) or advanced training (for experienced administrators) as well as a variety of other professional learning requirements.

Through GASL’s 1-year fellowships, a small cohort (20–25) of assistant principals receives extensive training, coaching, and practice-based internships. The program is a partnership among the governor’s office, TDOE, Vanderbilt University, and several Tennessee school districts. GASL is not mandated by law, but the governor has funded it each year to cover program costs, including stipends. There are no tuition costs, as it is a professional learning program and not a degree program at Vanderbilt.

Tennessee has been driving principal coaching as well. In 2011, TDOE hired eight coaches with related experience to work with a targeted set of schools to improve the validity and reliability of teacher observations. Coaches accompanied principals on teacher observations, compared notes on ratings, supported teacher-evaluator post-observation meetings, and provided feedback to principals on the process (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b).

Massachusetts used Race to the Top funds to provide statewide training for principals and other administrators. In partnership with the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL), Massachusetts started a dozen 24-month professional development cohorts in 2011, with a special emphasis on administrators who work at high-need schools (Reform Support Network, 2012). Students in schools with leaders who completed this training had improved outcomes (Nunnery et al., 2010; Nunnery et al., 2011). For states that do not have Race to the Top funds—or where those funds are no longer available—strategic application of Title II dollars could support this kind of targeted principal training for high-need schools and districts.

States must take a more active role in training and developing school principals (and supporting LEAs in this work), so they have the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to impact teaching and learning in the ways we know that effective principals do.

Years of research about the importance of principals, recently passed school leadership standards, and federal legislation that gives states more opportunities for stronger principal support—the pieces are in place. Now is the time for states to stand behind their school principals.

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