

POLICY ISSUE BRIEF: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Issue at a Glance

In this age of increased accountability, research has taught us that school leaders are crucial to improving instruction and raising student achievement. In fact, in a landmark study, “How Leadership Influences Student Learning,” the Wallace Foundation found that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in school-related impacts on student learning. A teacher, however, affects only a single classroom. A principal influences student learning schoolwide. Research links principal effectiveness to student achievement, better student attendance, and less exclusionary discipline. It also links principal effectiveness to lower teacher turnover and higher teacher satisfaction.

A 2021 update, “How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research,” found that principals have large effects on student learning, comparable even to the effects of individual teachers. It also reaffirmed earlier findings that leadership is crucial. Four key behaviors for leadership were identified:

- **Engaging with teachers on instruction.** Effective leaders observe classrooms and provide teachers with useful feedback, among other practices.
- **Creating a productive school climate.** Strategies include building respectful relationships and supporting teacher leadership.
- **Forging collaboration.** High-quality principals provide teachers with time to discuss how to better support students and improve instruction.
- **Managing resources and personnel well.** Effective leaders are skilled managers of a school’s facilities, budget, and safety. They know how to hire, place, and keep good teachers. They also manage their own time to focus on instruction.

While effective school leaders focus their work on the core issues of teaching and learning and school improvement, many school districts face a severe shortage of educational leaders due to many factors, including retirement and choosing to leave the profession due to job pressures and lack of incentives. Additionally, many potential leaders in the educator pipeline are choosing not to apply for openings, thus creating a shallow applicant pool. Therefore, recommendations which build or strengthen the capacity of aspiring and practicing leaders to lead high-performing schools can be leveraged to support leadership development.

National Principals Association Position

- National Principals Association has more than 50 years of experience in leadership assessment and development and has integrated the best research and best practice on leadership development into workshops, training, and resources. Successful schools require leaders who can perform at optimum levels and who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet complex challenges.
- In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), of which National Principals Association is a part, and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) developed the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), formerly known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. These foundational principles for school leaders are designed to serve as a set of national guidelines that states can use as a model for developing or updating their own standards. PSEL provides guidance and insights about the traits, functions of work, and responsibilities of school leaders.
- Aligned to the PSEL standards, the NPBEA also developed the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards. NELP provides greater specificity around performance expectations for beginning-level building and district leaders. These standards will be used to review educational leadership programs through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) advanced program review process.
- State and federal policymakers should fully fund existing programs designed to provide increased professional development for current and aspiring school leaders and explore the creation of new programs that will strengthen the principal pipeline and reduce educator shortages.

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

- Fully fund Title II, Part A, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which districts and schools rely on to invest in principal residencies, job-embedded and cohort-based professional learning, and mentorship opportunities for aspiring principals.
- Increase Title II, Part A for leadership development in school safety training, trauma-informed school development, special education and learning disabilities, educational technology and artificial intelligence.
- Restore funding for the School Leadership Recruitment and Support Program in Title II, Part B, of ESSA, to no less than \$30 million per year for the recruitment, training, and development of effective principals.
- Support legislation to improve accountability for teacher and principal preparation programs.
- Expand the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants in Title II of the Higher Education Act to include residency programs for principals.
- Enact legislation to provide grant funding to state education agencies and local education agencies to create principal induction and mentorship programs.
- Move to reauthorize the Higher Education Act every five years as Congress originally intended.
- Remove higher education financial barriers by increasing federal financial aid through Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Opportunity Grants, student loan reimbursement programs such as loan forgiveness and expansion for school leaders; advocate for the passage of The Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's

Workforce Act, bipartisan legislation which would expand qualified expenses under 529 savings plans to include postsecondary training and credentialing.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

- Adopt the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and align principal evaluation and support systems to the standards.
- Fund sustained leadership development to improve teaching that results in increased student achievement, including legislation funding local education agencies to create principal induction and mentorship programs.
- Tie leadership development programs to the attainment of national, state, and local standards and student achievement.
- Tie leadership development to meaningful assessment of leadership capacity including knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Diagnosing a leader's strengths and improvement needs is required for meaningful professional development that results in changed behavior.
- Provide principals with multiple opportunities to undertake the study of pedagogy and to refine their leadership and management skills directly tied to improving teaching and learning.
- Fund the creation of new assistant principal mentoring programs and other pathways to school leadership.
- Remove age and seniority barriers to state licensure eligibility.
- Align graduate level programs and courses with state and school district professional development programs.
- Remove higher education financial barriers by increasing state financial aid programs including loan forgiveness and tax incentives for school leader pipeline programs, training and credentialing.

Recommendations for Districts Leaders

- Allocate district funds annually for leadership development for every principal and assistant principal.
- Allocate districts funds for training prospective principals and examine and implement "grow your own principal" programs, specifically those that provide assistant principal mentorship programs that can place them on a path to the principalship.
- Provide professional development activities that help beginning principals create professional learning communities in their schools.
- Provide district funding and opportunities to engage principals and assistant principals in ongoing, sustained, job-embedded leadership development that focuses on knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will improve a principal's or assistant principal's ability to lead and manage middle level and high schools in an optimal fashion.
- Provide training to enable beginning principals to involve parents, especially parents with limited English proficiency and immigrant children, in their child's education.
- Provide training on how to understand and use data and assessments to improve and personalize classroom practice and student learning.

- Provide beginning principals training in implementing schoolwide adolescent literacy and mathematics initiatives.
- Develop and implement initiatives to promote retention of highly qualified principals, particularly within elementary, middle level, and high schools with a high percentage of low-achieving students, including programs that provide:
 - Principal mentoring from exemplary principals or superintendents.
 - Induction and support for principals during their first three years of employment as principals.
 - Structural support and guidance to support students with learning disabilities.
 - Incentives, including financial incentives, to principals who have a record of improving the academic achievement of all students, but particularly students from economically disadvantaged families, students from racial and ethnic minority groups, and students with disabilities.

Recommendations for School Leaders

- Increase advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure funding and policy decisions meet the needs of their communities, schools, and professional growth as leaders.
- Increase advocacy for professional development and in critical areas such as school safety training, trauma-informed school development, special education and learning disabilities, educational technology and artificial intelligence.
- Provide assistant principals and other emerging leaders with increased responsibilities and professional development that will adequately prepare them to lead schools.
- Participate in evidence-based mentoring and residency programs.
- Complete federal, state, and district staffing surveys to provide policymakers with a better understanding of current job demands and opportunities for improvement.