



LEADERSHIP (LEAD) HUBS: A STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION LEADERS

**DR. ALICIA HALLER, DR. MARK HANSEN, AND DR. ERIKA HUNT
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INTRODUCTION

Aligned to the goals of the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) new Office of District and School Leadership and a new strategic planning process occurring at the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), this white paper developed by the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University offers recommendations for a necessary and targeted approach to developing a statewide system of support for educators that ensures all schools in the state are directed by school and district leaders highly-skilled at improving teaching and learning.

Founded on research that demonstrates the impact of effective leadership on school and student outcomes, and the scarce supports that are routinely provided to leaders, **we propose that ISBE and IBHE consider the alignment of agency work around leadership development and support to the structure of 6 Leadership (LEAD) Hubs located in one Regional Office of Education (ROE) in each of the state's 6 service areas.** The purpose of Leadership (LEAD) Hubs is to identify, develop, and/or scale high-quality professional learning, based on local needs, that results in improvements to principal practice. Leadership (LEAD) Hubs are conceptualized similarly to the other topical Hubs ISBE is developing around the state, such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL)/Trauma training hubs located at each of the six ROE regions that are a part of ISBE's new strategic plan.

Operationally, a Leadership (LEAD) Hub would act as a *connector* between those organizations that provide leadership preparation and/or development, and the districts and schools that benefit from the supports provided. Creating a communication line to the LEAD Hubs can assist the state's education agencies with being attuned to the immediate needs of district and school leaders across the state.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Quality school leadership is a key component of any reform effort directed at improving student achievement. Research has established that school and student performance are both positively linked to the effectiveness of the principal.ⁱ ***Schools are facing a leadership crisis rooted in changing nature of the jobⁱⁱ and aging workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ*** Professional demands on principals are swelling.^{iv} Those conditions further exacerbate the challenges faced by high-need and rural schools systems when trying to attract and retain highly-effective principal candidates.^v

Adding to those challenges is ***the legacy in Illinois of the old preparation system that did not adequately focus training on the specific responsibilities of the principal,*** but rather provided training for a *General Administrator /Type 75 certificate* (Type 75) that qualified educators for a multitude of school and district level positions besides the principalship (i.e., athletic director, chair, dean).^{vi} Type 75 certificate programs have largely been ineffective in preparing principals to lead schools, forcing most to informally learn on the

job.^{vii} That system produced great variation in terms of principal performance, spurring changes to preparation requirements. However, the vast majority of the leadership pipeline is made up of those trained in the old programs,^{viii} which suggests the need for high-quality, on-going, job-embedded professional development.^{ix}

Additionally, while researchers, policy makers, and district leaders understand and value the role of the principal, support systems for school leaders have not kept pace with the growing expectations of the position. In fact, districts have *relied too heavily on pre-service programs, limited induction supports, and disconnected single day trainings* to support principals. Those strategies have demonstrated limited degrees of success in meeting principal development needs.^x That hap-hazard approach is in part due to the *pervasive lack of attention provided by policymakers at all levels to supports for the important role of the school leader*.^{xi} An exploration of state policies from across the country indicate most are guilty of ignoring much-needed supports for education leaders, and this is especially egregious because it continues at a time when principals are facing both reduced autonomy and ever-increasing expectations to address challenges - both within and beyond the school walls.^{xii} This pattern has resulted in an increase in principal turnover in recent years^{xiii} and there is a significant price to pay for that turnover. It takes a principal a minimum of five years to demonstrate a significant and sustained impact on school improvement.^{xiv} However, *roughly fifty percent of principals leave the profession by the end of the third year*, and only twenty-five percent remain in a leadership position longer than five years.^{xv} Locally, principals have been listed in the ISBE Supply and Demand Report as a “high-demand” position since at least 2005.^{xvi} The impact of that turnover is felt at the school level, where *67% of Illinois schools averaged two or more principals in a six-year period*.^{xvii}

Unfortunately, like many states, *Illinois currently lacks a coordinated statewide structure* that ensures:

- a robust system of support to address the full learning continuum of school leaders (from the aspiring to retiring phase),
- adequate data collection and analysis to provide clarity in terms of regional leaderships shortages (where, why, and to what extent is the shortage),
- targeted strategies for the equitable distribution of highly effective and qualified leaders for every school in the state, and
- an effective approach for increasing diversity in the leadership pipeline (currently only 22% of principals are persons of color, while the student population in Illinois includes 53% minority students.^{xviii})

The current system of support for educational leaders in Illinois cannot, as currently constituted, reliably distribute improvement throughout the state by ensuring that all Illinois students attend schools that are well organized and effectively led. Illinois is fortunate to have a significant number of high-quality preparation and development providers, each with its own area of expertise and services provided (e.g. professional associations, university programs, trainers, coaches, consultants, etc.). However, what is lacking is a statewide system to ensure a cohesive approach that addresses the learning continuum, and one that supports scaling of effective supports so that the needs of leaders in all areas of the state are met. So long as Illinois’ school and district leaders continue to rely on the disconnected services provided by a wide variety of organizations, it is unlikely that our leaders will receive the type of supports necessary to increase their ability to positively impact student outcomes. Research has established that the most effective way to increase a school leader’s knowledge so that they fundamentally change adult practice is through cohesive, job-embedded, on-going skill development.^{xix}

We recognize that some highly effective leaders find ways to develop these skills themselves. However, there is no guarantee that will happen in every instance, nor that it is an effective or efficient approach. Further, it is common for well-resourced and/or larger districts to maintain positions dedicated specifically to supporting school improvement efforts, or to outsource that work to professional development organizations that provide services to either a group of principals or to principals with their teachers. But that approach of *merely providing topical and episodic group training, which is most common, has largely been determined to be ineffective*.^{xx} In order for leaders to become skilled in high-leverage practices, such as establishing effective systems of distributed leadership in schools,^{xxi} they require support from their districts in the form of ongoing, job-embedded, context specific supports and strategies.^{xxii}

A STRONG RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Over the last decade a growing body of research has demonstrated the influence principals can have as “powerful multipliers of effective teaching and leadership practices in schools.”^{xxxiii} While it has been widely accepted that instructional quality is the single most important school-based factor leading to student achievement,^{xxxiv} scaling high-quality instruction schoolwide does not happen without the leadership of an effective principal.^{xxxv} Over the past two decades, researchers have increasingly focused on the importance of the principal role and have concluded that principals have a significant impact on student learning - independent of the other factors affecting achievement.^{xxxvi} In fact, ***principals’ influence accounts for about one-quarter of school-level variation in student achievement,^{xxxvii} and the principal’s impact is greatest in schools with the greatest needs.***^{xxxviii} In fact, a recent meta-analysis revealed that increasing school leadership effectiveness by one standard deviation could lead to a ten-percentile point gain in student achievement.^{xxxix} That ***represents is a massive return on investment because the principal can act as a multiplier by creating conditions to scale effective instructional and leadership practice school-wide.***^{xxx}

Research has established that principals’ knowledge, skills, and actions have a profound impact on: 1) recruitment, development, and retention of effective teachers; 2) equitable allocation of resources; 3) collaborative working conditions; 4) school climate and culture; and 5) the continuous improvement process.^{xxxxi} However, none of that happens by accident.^{xxxii} Principals can be change agents in schools and their leadership is the single most determinant factor in teacher retention, and that influence is even greater when it comes to retaining diverse teachers.^{xxxiii} Additionally, turnover of *teachers* is not the only area of concern when it comes to negative impacts on schools and students. ***Districts pay a steep price with principal attrition, as hiring and onboarding a new principal costs a district on average \$75,000, and student achievement has been shown to decrease in the year following a principal departure.***^{xxxiv}

The crisis brought on by COVID-19 has only exacerbated the problem of educator turnover. Data from a recent study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, found that ***roughly 50% of principals responded that they are considering leaving their positions.***^{xxxv} Therefore, it is crucial that the state develop comprehensive strategies to stem the tide of leader turnover. Research suggests there are steps that can be taken to reduce principal turnover. For example, District leaders who promote principal self-efficacy with school improvement work also have positive effects on school conditions and student learning.^{xxxvi} District leaders contribute most to school leaders’ sense of efficacy by: 1) ensuring that school leaders and teachers have access to effective professional development aimed at strengthening their capacities to achieve shared and aligned goals, and 2) making significant investments in the development of instructional leadership.^{xxxvii}

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the pressing need for a comprehensive statewide system of support for school and district leaders, ***ISBE and IBHE need not create a whole new layer of bureaucracy or support fractured strategies between the two agencies.*** Rather, the task is better viewed as harnessing the collective talent and resources currently available and being intentional about ensuring cohesive and equitable supports throughout the state. Fortunately, a system charged with supporting districts already exists in Illinois: Regional Offices of Education (ROEs). As defined in state statute, ROEs are “intermediate agencies between the Illinois State Board of Education and local school districts.” ROEs were established for the express purpose of promoting fidelity with ISBE directives and providing districts and schools with necessary professional development and support services that meet their specific needs. ***ROEs are uniquely structured to house Leadership (LEAD) Hubs and provide organizational supports for initiatives developed at the Illinois State Board of Education because that vital work directly align to the ROEs’ mission. LEAD Hubs housed at ROEs can also aid IBHE and higher education institutions with meeting the leadership demands across the state and especially in areas of higher education deserts.***



Through two federal leadership grants, LEAD Hubs have been established in 6 ROEs across the state representing the six ROE Service Areas (see map above¹). These six ROEs, acting as Leadership (LEAD) Hubs, are influencing student outcomes by ensuring that all school districts in the state have access to highly competent school leaders capable of improving instructional quality. There is no doubt that Leadership (LEAD) Hubs are requiring an increased workload for the ROEs, but through federal funding, these six ROEs have been appropriately staffed and efforts are occurring to build sustainable financial structures to support their work after funding ends. The Illinois School Code already grants ROEs both the responsibility and the requisite authority to meet this charge. Illinois' thirty-five ROEs are organized into six (6) Service Areas as shown in the map.

Leadership (LEAD) Hubs are meant to harness the collective knowledge and expertise of all area ROEs, professional associations, professional development organizations, preparation programs, etc. and deploy them toward the common goal of increasing leader effectiveness. LEAD Hubs represent a collective effort, at both the state and area level, to increase understanding and respond to the needs of area districts and schools. To reiterate, operationally a LEAD Hub would act as a *connector, or unifying structure*, between those organizations that provide leadership preparation and/or development, and the districts and schools that benefit from those supports. A Hub is *not* a switch that redirects efforts, nor is it a wall that blocks access; rather it is a *networked improvement community* focused on the common goal, which will ultimately ensure all students have access to a high-quality education.

LEAD Hubs ensure that they are providing a comprehensive system of supports for district and school leaders through their use of a Regional Advisory Committee to guide and direct the work. Regional Advisory Committees, like the one set up at DuPage Regional Office of Education, include representation from area universities, local education organizations (IPA, IASA, IEA, IFT, etc.), area districts, and other key stakeholders groups representing diversity and spanning the P-20 education system.

Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub is responsible for:

1. providing a point of access for high quality supports and services for district and school leadership (they will not serve a gatekeeper, but rather act as a repository where area districts and schools can gain information and/or access a variety of providers);
2. providing supports to other ROEs in the service area to share expertise, training, tools and resources necessary to improve leadership capacity in all schools/districts, both directly (through

¹ Gold stars indicate where LEAD ROEs are located consisting of: ROE #28, ROE #19, ROE #1, ROE #17, ROE #50, ROE #21

- training, collaboration and joint work) and indirectly (by supporting access to experts and providers and assisting providers with understanding local needs and priorities);
3. reciprocally learning from all LEAD Hubs ROEs in order to build local capacity to support a wide variety of leadership needs;
 4. monitoring and continuously seeking to improve the impact and distribution of effective leader, and
 5. collaborating with preparation programs to facilitate access to a variety of placement sites, and in the development a robust pipeline of high-potential school and district leaders to meet all vacancy demands.

CSEP proposes that ISBE's new Office of District and School Leadership² consider ways that the 6 Leadership (LEAD) Hub can help serve as partners and connectors to the field for strategies enacted. Similarly, CSEP proposes that IBHE partner with ISBE's Office of District and School Leadership to identify ways to strategically address educator shortages occurring across the state, but especially in areas of "higher education deserts" identified in the 2020 IARSS Educator Shortage Survey Report³.

The Leadership (LEAD) Hubs serve as a valuable mechanism for serving the real-time needs of districts and school leaders by the nature of the structure of their work. For example,

1. Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub convenes a Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) three (3) times annually to guide their work. The RAC will include a wide group of stakeholders, such as representatives from professional associations, higher education, professional development organizations, research organizations, teachers' unions, district superintendents, human resource directors, parent organizations, early childhood and advocacy groups, etc.
2. Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub conducts a review of current research and a needs assessment annually to identify the preparatory and professional development needs of district and school leaders in their service area. They will apply research, and explore performance data, survey data, coaching logs, educator pipeline data, and analyze both aggregate and disaggregated trend data.
3. Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub hosts twice monthly meetings of core staff to coordinate/plan, implement, and evaluate their capacity-building work as it applies to the districts and schools in their service area.
4. Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub completes an annual service area report on progress to date that will be used to inform continuous improvement, both locally and statewide through collaboration with the ISBE Office of Leadership.
5. Each Leadership (LEAD) Hub participate in regular meetings and trainings with the 6 other Leadership (LEAD) Hubs to share successes, emerging best practices, additional areas of needs, develop plans, and provide information on projects underway.

Lastly, the work of the Leadership (LEAD) Hubs should be aligned to the statewide priorities that emerge from the ISBE Office of District and School Leadership⁴. Given the statutory establishment of the ROEs serving as a liaison between districts and the ISBE, we envision the Office of District and School Leadership as being responsible for collaborating with Leadership (LEAD) Hubs and others in the collection and dissemination of statewide data that can inform more targeted state and local investments that will yield greater impact on school improvements and the state's efforts to ensure a robust pipeline of effective leaders for all districts and schools in the Illinois. The Office of District and School Leadership should also collaborate with representatives from a wide variety of stakeholder groups to sets statewide direction and ensure cohesive alignment to other state and local policies and initiatives. The goal is to maximize resources and efforts to the greatest extent possible in order to increase the collective impact that previously disconnected efforts have

² In addition to Leadership (LEAD) Hubs serving as a high leverage variable for district and school improvement, it is important to note that four have already been piloted through a grant from the US Dept. of Education. These regional Leadership (LEAD) Hubs can serve as a model for other topical Hub models within the ROE structure.

³ The IARSS 2020 Educator Shortage Survey results will be available mid-December on the IARSS web site: <https://iarss.org/>

⁴ We also encourage any leadership initiatives in which IBHE may embark to also align with the work of the LEAD Hubs and ISBE Office of District and School Leadership to create seamless alignment of support across the state for district and school leaders (and higher education institutions that prepare them).

produced. We strongly believe that collaboration and coordination are the keys to success, and that with the combined efforts of the ISBE Office of District and School Leadership, higher education strategies supported by IBHE, and Leadership (LEAD) Hubs that connect the work to local stakeholders, will prove to be a powerful force for positive change.

CONCLUSION

Illinois has been a national leader in innovation when it comes to school and district leader preparation and development. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done to address the working conditions and supports needed by principals and district leaders, and now is not a time to rest on our laurels. Attention is needed to support the development needs of leaders across the continuum. Leadership (LEAD) Hubs are an effective and efficient mechanism for the state to honor local control while at the same time providing a collaborative statewide infrastructure aimed at ensuring equitable access to well-trained school and district leaders capable of transforming Illinois schools.

SOURCES

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- ^{iv} Grissom & Loeb, 2013, Leithwood et al., 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Rousmaniere 2007
- ^v Howley & Pendarvis, 2002; Natkin, 2003; Provasnik, 2007; Rosborg, 2013.
- ^{vi} Baron & Haller, 2014; Illinois School Leader Taskforce Report, 2008.
- ^{vii} Illinois Commission on School Leader Preparation 2006
- ^{viii} ISBE, 2018
- ^{ix} Learning Forward, 2011
- ^x Illinois School Leader Taskforce, 2008, Davis et al. 2005; Levine 2005; Hess & Kelly 2005
- ^{xi} Manna, 2015
- ^{xii} Ibid
- ^{xiii} Beckett, Lorna O., 2018; Clifford & Change, 2016; Hayes, M. S., 2020; Palmer, Watch, & Gibson, 2017
- ^{xiv} Wallace Foundation, 2013
- ^{xv} Ibid
- ^{xvi} ISBE, 2005
- ^{xvii} IPA, 2020
- ^{xviii} ISBE, 2019
- ^{xix} Learning Forward, 2011
- ^{xx} Marzano, 2010
- ^{xxi} Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009)
- ^{xxii} Louis, Leithwood, et al, 2010;
- ^{xxiii} Manna, 2015, p 7
- ^{xxiv} Darling-Hammond, 2000
- ^{xxv} Bryke, et al., 2010, Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Leithwood, et al. 2004; Waters, et al. 2003; Witziers, et al. 2003
- ^{xxvi} Fuller, 2014
- ^{xxvii} Leithwood et al. 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty 2003
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