

IL-LEAP (Illinois Leadership Apprenticeship Pathway) SEED FY 2026 Grant Application			
Lead Applicant: Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP), ISU		Project Period: October 1, 2026 – September 30, 2029 (36 months)	
Co-Directors: Dr. Lisa Hood & Dr. Erika Hunt, CSEP/ISU		Application Deadline: June 1, 2026 (May 22—ISU Internal Deadline)	
Partner LEAs: Individual district partners, including CPS		Residents Served: ~80 across IL	
Partner LPPs: ISU, McKendree, North Central, UIC, National Louis		Non-Federal Match: ~33% match	

OVERVIEW

IL-LEAP is a three-year initiative led by CSEP at Illinois State University to address a persistent gap in the preparation of effective school principals for Illinois' highest-need communities. The project creates a rigorous earn-and-learn apprenticeship model in which candidates serve as full-time assistant principals in high-need schools while completing competency-based on-the-job learning (OJL) and related instruction leading to principal licensure and a master's degree — and ultimately, formal designation as a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Registered Apprenticeship.

PROGRAM DESIGN

IL-LEAP unfolds in two strategic phases:

- Years 1–2: Collaborative residency redesign across five partner Principal Preparation Programs, aligning programs with DOL Registered Apprenticeship competency standards (RAPIDS 3055CB, Pathways Alliance 2025). Apprentices are placed in full-time APs (or AP role-alike positions) in partner schools, completing a minimum of 2,000 on-the-job hours and 144 related instruction hours, supported by trained principal mentors and embedded leadership coaches.
- Year 3: Formal state sanctioning of the redesigned program as an Illinois Registered Apprenticeship in collaboration with ISBE, IBHE, and DCEO — creating a durable, statewide pathway for principal development that outlasts the grant period. Developing a Lead Teacher Apprenticeship model will also be a byproduct of this work, which aims to create apprenticeships across the school leader pathway.

Concurrently, CSEP will implement the District Office Transformation Project in partner LEAs - aligning central office functions to actively support organizational leadership development, ensuring that district systems sustain effective principals once hired.

FEDERAL PRIORITIES ADDRESSED

- Absolute Priority 2 — Supporting Effective Principals (Promising Evidence): Builds on prior RAND quasi-experimental evaluation of New Leaders Aspiring Program model, demonstrating significant advantages of immersive full-time residency.
- Absolute Priority 3 — Promoting Evidence-Based Literacy: Integrates science-of-reading literacy leadership as a core assessed domain in IL-LEAP curricula.
- Competitive Priority 1 — Returning Education to the States: Partnership with ISBE and DCEO for scaling apprenticeship
- Competitive Preference 2 — Advancing AI in Education: Embeds responsible AI literacy (DOL AI Literacy Framework) throughout apprenticeship and mentor training.
- Competitive Preference 3 — Career Pathways & Registered Apprenticeship: Structured pathway toward a formal DOL Registered Apprenticeship designation, eliminating financial barriers to principalship, and developing wage-incremental systems from teacher to AP to principal.

EVALUATION & EVIDENCE

An independent external evaluator (IWERC) will conduct a rigorous quasi-experimental design (QED) study using a comparative interrupted time series (CITS) design, comparing IL-LEAP residents against a propensity-score-matched comparison group. The evaluation is designed to produce WWC-eligible evidence of program effectiveness across certification rates, job placement, leadership practice, and student literacy and math outcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE & EXPECTED IMPACT

- ~80 candidates prepared as principals for Illinois' highest-need schools.
- First formally state-sanctioned Registered Apprenticeship pathway for Illinois principals, providing a sustainable post-grant funding model that can be scaled up to other principal preparation programs.
- WWC-eligible evidence contributing to the national knowledge base on effective principal preparation.
- Transformed district office systems in participating LEAs, sustaining principal development beyond the grant period.
- Open-access curriculum and statewide dissemination symposium to enable replication across Illinois and nationally.
- Lessons learned will inform the broader ecosystem by clarifying teacher leader roles within distributed leadership models.