



FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAM

Regional Office of Education #17 Lead Hubs

2025-2026 Annual Evaluation Report

ROE#17

Regional Office of Education #17
DeWitt • Livingston • Logan • McLean

Prepared by: Lisa Hood, Ph.D.

Introduction

This report presents evaluation findings from the ROE Lead Hubs' New Principal Recruitment Program, funded by the Illinois State Board of Education. Known as the Future Leaders Advocacy Program (Future Leaders), this initiative is led by ROE 17 through a three-year grant (FY2024–2027). The Future Leaders Program is designed to recruit and support aspiring school leaders who are committed to serving in Illinois schools. Its overarching goal is to strengthen the state's leadership pipeline by preparing a new generation of highly effective principals equipped to improve outcomes for Illinois' rapidly growing and increasingly diverse student population.

Statewide ROE Lead Hubs: Advancing Equitable, High-Impact Leadership Development Across Illinois

To strengthen the leadership pipeline and accelerate school improvement statewide, partnering Illinois' Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) have launched a coordinated, statewide leadership support system. At the heart of this effort are six strategically established ROE Leadership (Lead) Hubs - located in ROEs 1, 17, 19, 21, 28, and 50. Each Hub is staffed by a dedicated Lead Coordinator who serves as a regional anchor for delivering **high-impact, wrap-around support to school and district leaders across the entire leadership pipeline - from aspiring and emerging leaders to veteran administrators**. This continuum-based model is intentionally designed to address critical challenges in leadership succession and retention by building capacity early, supporting growth over time, and preventing burnout or stagnation later in the career. By investing in leaders at every stage, the **Hubs help districts cultivate a strong talent bench, reduce turnover, and ensure that schools are led by individuals prepared to drive sustained improvement in teaching and learning**.

More than just technical assistance centers, the Lead Hubs are designed to build sustainable, systemwide leadership capacity. **By fostering cultures of inquiry, collaboration, and continuous improvement, the Hubs empower teams of educators - including teachers, principals, and district leaders - to lead instructional transformation together**. This model recognizes that lasting change in schools requires distributed leadership and shared accountability for student success.

Importantly, the Hubs operate with the mission to ensure that **leadership development opportunities are not limited by geography or district capacity**. The Lead Hubs placement ensures that rural, under-resourced, and geographically dispersed districts gain access to leadership development opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. **The Hubs also serve as regional connectors, extending their services and expertise to nearby ROEs and districts that lack the capacity to build their own leadership infrastructure**. This networked approach ensures scalable, cost-effective impact across the state.

Backed by federal, state, and philanthropic investment, the ROE Lead Hubs represent a statewide commitment to transforming school leadership. Funding partners include the U.S. Department of Education (SEED and EIR programs), the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the CME Group Foundation, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

The Future Leaders Advocacy Program (Future Leaders) is a key initiative of the ROE Lead Hubs, designed to strengthen Illinois' leadership pipeline by identifying, developing, and placing high-potential, diverse school leaders in the state's highest-need schools. Aligned with the Illinois State Board of Education's strategic priorities, the Future Leaders provides aspiring principals with **individualized, wrap-around support that complements and enhances their principal preparation programs**. In its first cohort, the program supported 29 candidates. The second cohort includes 30 aspiring principals receiving targeted support coordinated by Future Leaders staff based in ROE #17. This regionally responsive model is tailored not only to each candidate's leadership development needs but also to the specific staffing and capacity needs of the school districts served by the ROE Lead Hubs. In addition to deepening candidates' instructional leadership skills, the **Future Leaders Program helps them build essential job-seeking competencies, ensuring they are well-prepared to secure and succeed in principal roles**.

Unlike traditional professional learning programs that offer a one-size-fits-all approach, the ROE Lead Hubs' programs focus on **differentiated, needs-based development. They provide ongoing, job-embedded coaching and customized professional learning to help principal candidates grow as instructional leaders and systems thinkers**. This wraparound support ensures that each candidate receives the targeted guidance they need to succeed, not just during licensure but also in navigating the complex realities of school leadership.

Currently serving leaders in 375 schools, the Lead Hubs are advancing three key ISBE goals:

- Increase the number of diverse school leadership candidates in Illinois
- Ensure that school leaders reflect the communities they serve
- Prepare and place effective principals in districts with critical shortages

The Future Leaders Program is more than a recruitment effort - it's a pipeline of opportunity, focused on both equity and excellence. Through strong partnerships with districts and deep investment in candidate success, the ROE Lead Hubs are not only preparing new principals - they are shaping the future of school leadership in Illinois.

Future Leaders Program

Recruitment

Future Leaders project staff worked with four university partners to identify potential candidates. The university program faculty had primary responsibility for recruiting candidates for this program. Faculty used their existing partnerships with local school districts to recruit aspiring principals into the program. Using a rubric (see Table 1) to determine eligibility, faculty used the following criteria to accept aspiring leaders into this program:

- Hold an Illinois Professional Educator License (PEL),
- Employed as a diverse educator in an Illinois school,
- State a commitment to become a school leader (e.g., principal or assistant principal) upon completing the principal preparation program,
- Work in a district or area of the state in which there is a diversity gap between school leaders and the student population,
- Are accepted into one of the Lead Hubs Future Leaders university partner principal preparation programs,
- Complete all principal preparation program requirements and
- Submit data to Future Leaders program evaluator as requested for continuous program improvement and to submit evaluation reports required by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Table 1. Future Leaders applicant screening tool

Key Areas	Meets	Does Not Meet
Includes traits or qualifications of under-representative area in school leadership in the state (e.g., race, linguistic, gender)		
Indicates intent to pursue a leadership position in the near future		
Demonstrates past experiences in leading school-based or community teams		
Works in a district or area of the state with a representation gap between the administration and student population		
Works in a hard-to-staff grade span area (e.g., middle or high school) or hard-to-staff district/area of the state		
Has built their instructional or disciplinary pedagogy enough to be able to build a strong teaching and learning foundation school-wide		
Does not hold an existing administrative certification or is not currently enrolled in a principal preparation endorsement program		

Description of Candidates

The Future Leaders cohort serves 30 diverse candidates across the state (see the breakdown in Table 2 below).

Table 2. Gender, Race, and Urbancity of Future Leaders Candidates

Gender	Total #	Race	Total #	Urbancity	Total #
Male	9 (30%)	Black	12 (40%)	Urban	16 (53%)
Female	21 (70%)	Hispanic	7 (23%)	Suburban	13 (43%)
		Middle Eastern	4 (13%)	Rural	1 (3%)
		Asian	1 (3%)		
		South Asian	1 (3%)		
		Multi-Race	5 (17%)		

University Partners

Of the 31 approved principal preparation programs in the state, four were represented in the Lead Hub Future Leaders Program. The majority of candidates were enrolled in North Central College (NCC). Candidates were not restricted to enrolling in programs within their region. Only McKendree University enrolled candidates who work in districts located in southern Illinois. The other three programs enrolled a greater variety of candidates. For example, NCC enrolled the most varied group of candidates, including four who work in Chicago Public Schools, one in McLean County Unit #5 in Central Illinois, one in East St. Louis #189, and ten across suburban Chicago. Table 3 lists the Future Leaders partner universities and the number of Future Leaders candidates.

Table 3. University Future Leaders Partners and Enrollment Numbers

University	# of Candidates	University	# of Candidates
Illinois State University Central Illinois	3	McKendree University Southern Illinois	5
North Central College Suburban Chicago	17	University of Illinois at Chicago - Chicago	5

Evaluation Questions and Methodology

The Future Leaders evaluator used these evaluation questions to guide the study:

1. Are the Future Leaders staff providing the support to Future Leaders candidates as intended (e.g., financial assistance, training, and networking)?
2. How engaged and satisfied are Future Leaders candidates with the support they received?
3. Are candidates progressing through the preparation program on track?
 - a. What supports do the candidates need to stay on track toward program completion?
4. How did the Future Leaders Program affect candidates':
 - a. Graduation rates
 - b. Licensure exam pass rates:
 - i. Number of individuals who passed exams 195 and 196,
 - ii. Pass rates as a group and compared to statewide exam participant cohorts, and

c. Application for and securing of new leadership positions?

To evaluate the Lead Hubs Future Leaders Program, the evaluator collected and analyzed the following data sources:

- Analysis of program documents: descriptions of monthly training session topics, descriptions of summer workshop sessions, etc.,
- Surveys: a mid-year and end-of-year survey of Future Leaders candidates to capture feedback on their satisfaction with the program, leadership job-seeking intentions, and input regarding improvements to the program
 - Mid-Year Survey was administered in February 2025: 73% response rate (n=22)
 - Annual Survey was administered in April 2026: 63% response rate (n=19)
- Extant state data: data collected by the Illinois State Board of Education on Future Leaders candidate licensure status, licensure exam scores and pass rates, Teacher Performance Evaluation training pass rate, and number of candidates securing new leadership positions.

The survey data were analyzed to calculate descriptive statistics. Open-ended responses were analyzed to identify themes. Licensure exam data were analyzed to determine average scores and pass rates, and to determine principal endorsement credential rates. The following two sections present the results of these data analyses.

Description of Program Supports

The Lead Hubs Future Leaders Program provides participating educators with various forms of support, including financial assistance to cover tuition and licensure fees. Future Leaders candidates also had regular opportunities to network with their peers and leadership experts through monthly training sessions and one-on-one consultations with Future Leaders staff.

Tuition Financial Support

- University Partners & Tuition Support: The candidates' tuition and fees paid from the FY25 and FY26 grants totaled \$482,343
 - In the first year, the project paid \$250,269 in tuition and fees.
 - In the second year, the project paid \$232,075.

Using data from FY26 mid-year and annual surveys, program staff identified the following implementation priorities for FY 26 listed below:

- Continued monthly 1-hour training sessions with additional support resources
- Provided more support for improving candidates' career advancement skills, including the requirement that each Future Leader candidate participate in a one-on-one mock interview with Dr. Gegi Ra-El from ROE #50
- Increased networking and peer collaboration opportunities
- Supported candidates through licensure training and teaching evaluation training

- Strengthened communication and partnerships with the participating university program faculty to increase their participation in Future Leaders sessions and activities

The following sections present the implementation data for these priorities.

Monthly Training Sessions

- During the program year, candidates were offered support through monthly networking sessions featuring practicing school leaders and experts who led topical conversations. These included:
 - In year 1, eight 1-hour monthly Zoom meetings
 - In year 2, nine 1-hour monthly Zoom meetings

Table 4 lists the session dates and topics. The FY26 topics were developed in response to the topics identified by Future Leaders candidates in the FY25 annual survey. In this survey, candidates expressed interest in a wide range of leadership topics, prompting staff to explore new ways to meet these varied needs of program staff. These topics included:

- Navigating difficult conversations and conflict
- Leadership role expectations
- Balancing leadership responsibilities and personal well-being
- Family and community engagement
- Technical/specialized topics (e.g., budgets)
- Interview preparation

Table 4. Training Session Topics

Date	Topic
FY25 Sessions	
September 26, 2024	Orientation
November 7, 2024	Learner Mindset vs Growth Mindset
December 5, 2024	Guest Speaker, Dr. Elizabeth Alvarez: Strategic Career Planning
January 9, 2025	Guest Speaker, Dr. Zipporah Hightower: School Improvement Planning
February 6, 2025	Courageous Conversations
March 6, 2025	Elevating All Voices
April 3, 2025	Interactive Community Builder: Two Truths and a Lie
May 1, 2025	Guest Speaker, Dr. Tony Sanders, ISBE State Superintendent and Community Builder: Read One, Write One
FY26 Sessions	
September 3, 2025	Exercising My Self-Awareness
October 1, 2025	Guest Speaker, Dr. Lionel Allen: Who Am I? Building My Racial Autobiography
November 5, 2025	Guest Speaker, Dr. Lionel Allen: Finding the Right Job: Resume and Cover Letter Writing
December 3, 2025	Future Leaders Advocacy Program Practitioner Panel (Moderated by Dr. Gegi Ra-El)

	● Emily Sacket, First Year Principal, Alternative Education Center, ROE #50 ● Isoke Wilson-Pridgen, Assistant Principal, Normal West High School ● Gustavo O. Cotto, Principal, West Junior High School, District #118 ● Krish Mohip, Superintendent, Proviso Township High School District #209
January 8, 2026	Preparing for the Principal Certification Exams
February 5, 2026	Preparing for the Job Search (By Role and Regions)
March 5, 2026	Budgets and Financing
April 2, 2026	Culture and Climate
May 7, 2026	Reflection and Celebration

In both years, Future Leaders staff offered optional 30-minute pre- and post-session community spaces. These times provided an optional, structured networking opportunity for candidates to share personal and professional concerns related to the session's content and offer support to their fellow candidates. Attendance at these additional sessions became sporadic, so the optional support time was provided as needed rather than continuously throughout the year.

In addition to the session on the job search, program staff member, Dr. Gegi Ra-El conducted mock interviews with Future Leaders candidates. Dr. Ra-El has been a leader in various roles at the school and district level and is now the Assistant Superintendent at ROE 50. Using her expertise, Dr. Ra-El conducted mock interviews with 15 (50%) Future Leaders, recorded them, and provided extensive feedback they could use to improve their interview skills for their current and future leadership job searches.

In the following sections, the report presents the survey results about the Future Leaders candidates' engagement and satisfaction with the leadership support they received over the two years of their participation.

Program Satisfaction and Outcomes

Program Engagement and Satisfaction

Engagement in Program Activities

At each monthly training session, Future Leaders staff track candidate attendance. On average, candidates had a 75% attendance rate across all nine sessions, which is slightly lower than the first-year average of 80%. Table 5 lists the attendance numbers for SY2025-26 monthly sessions.

Table 5. Attendance

Session Attendance	Total Number (FY25)	Total Number (FY26)
Missed 0 sessions	6 (20%)	3 (10%)
Missed 1 session	10 (33%)	15 (50%)
Missed 2 sessions	10 (10%)	3 (10%)
Missed more than 2 sessions	4 (13%)	9 (30%)

Each year, program staff administered a mid-year survey that asked Future Leaders candidates to rate their level of engagement in monthly training sessions. In these surveys, candidates were asked about their attendance and reasons for missing sessions. The reason for asking this question was to inform the program's continuous improvement efforts. Of those who missed sessions, they gave the following reasons, listed in Table 6:

Table 6. Reasons for Absence

Reasons for Absence	Total Number (FY25)	Total Number (FY26)
Illness/medical procedures	4	1
Forgot about the session/error in calendar	2	3
Personal/family responsibilities	1	1
Work Conflict	1	5
Conflict with Preparation Program Class	1	0

Over the course of the two-year program, Future Leader candidates remained engaged in monthly networking sessions. There was a drop in attendance between the first and second years. The second-year survey showed an increase in the number of participants who missed sessions due to work conflicts and scheduling errors. In the middle of the program year, staff had to change the date and time of the regular monthly sessions, which may have contributed to increased absences in the last five months of the program.

Program Satisfaction

In the annual surveys, Future Leaders candidates were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with a list of Future Leaders components. 100% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the program components. Table 7 presents the average ratings on a scale of 1 - Very Dissatisfied to 4 - Very Satisfied.

Table 7. Average Ratings of Satisfaction with Future Leaders Components.

Future Leaders Components	Average Rating (FY25)	Average Rating (FY26)
Program responsiveness to my needs	3.67	3.95
Quality of the speakers	3.63	N/A
Amount of time in our monthly sessions	3.56	3.58
Relevance of the discussion topics	3.52	3.89
Usefulness of optional pre-/post-session community time	3.48	3.53
Quality and relevance of the tools and resources shared with us	3.41	3.78
Opportunities for networking with peers	3.26	3.68

On the annual survey, candidates expressed their high satisfaction with the program with the following quotes:

In FY25, candidates expressed their satisfaction with program support:

- “I love the support, safe space to connect and learn from leaders and from each other.”
- “I appreciate the opportunity to learn and grow as an individual and professional, as well. Truly, I can see that I am thriving thanks to you all.”

In FY26, candidates said that the sessions preparing them for the certification exams and the ones grounded in leadership values and stories were the most impactful. The following are exemplary quotes:

- “The session we had this year covering the 195 and 196 test and then the one where we talked about who we are and what leadership means to us. These helped me a lot! The test [sessions] helped reduce my anxiety and I felt relieved being able to connect with my peers and their identities.
- “There was a session with a principal speaking about being “fit” for a position, and how he walked away from a lucrative position because his values just weren't aligned with his district. I'm in a moment now where I'm being intentional and cautious. There are many things to consider in making the decision to go from teaching to leading.”

Building Leadership Efficacy

Building on this question of satisfaction, candidates were asked in the annual survey about how the program is building their leadership efficacy. Candidates indicated their level of agreement with three statements about their progress in developing their leadership skills. Table 8 presents the average ratings on a scale of 1—Strongly Disagree to 4—Strongly Agree.

Table 8. Candidate’s Leadership Efficacy

Statements	Average Rating (FY25)	Average Rating (FY26)
I feel more confident in my leadership abilities.	3.74	3.63
I feel equipped to address difficult conversations in my workplace.	3.30	3.42
I’ve applied something from the program in my school/workplace.	3.56	3.78

In summary, Future Leaders participants reported exceptionally high satisfaction with the program's core components. According to the annual survey, 100% of candidates agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the program, with the highest-rated aspects including responsiveness to candidate needs (3.95 out of 4), relevance of the discussion topics (3.89), and the quality and relevance of the tools and resources shared with participants (3.78). While all components received strong ratings, opportunities for the amount of time in monthly sessions (3.58) and the usefulness of the optional pre-/post-session community time (3.53) scored the lowest. In past surveys and comments from Future Leaders candidates, several expressed a need for more time to network with fellow candidates and staff. However, finding the additional time was difficult due to conflicting schedules among preparation program classes, and work and family responsibilities. Candidates praised the program as a supportive, growth-oriented space, describing it as a "space to support one another and further our leadership journey" and noting that the topics and encouragement were evident and meaningful.

Beyond satisfaction, candidates also reported notable gains in leadership efficacy. Nearly all respondents (95%) reported feeling more confident in their leadership abilities, and 89% felt better equipped to handle difficult conversations in the workplace. Open-ended responses further highlighted how they felt most supported by the program.

Theme 1: Exam preparation reduced anxiety and built confidence that they can pass

This was the most frequently mentioned source of support, and Future Leaders candidates said it provided relief from their anxiety, not just content mastery.

- "I liked the sessions on taking the exams because that helped better prepare me and calm my nerves."
- "Most admin[istrator] positions won't even interview you if you haven't passed the 195 and 196, and my program did not fully prepare me for that test. I studied on my own in order to pass on the first try."

Theme 2: Guest speakers and practicing leaders offered real-world credibility

Future Leaders valued hearing directly from practicing superintendents and principals who served as guest speakers and on panels. They appreciated the realism and honesty about the day-to-day realities and expectations of being a leader.

- "I really enjoyed the sessions with the speakers who gave us tips about real-world scenarios and the hard facts about leadership and what it really entails."
- "There was a session with a principal speaking about being 'fit' for a position, and how he walked away from a lucrative position because his values just weren't aligned with his district. I'm in a moment now where I'm being intentional and cautious."

Theme 3: Identity and self-worth

Future Leaders described this program as benefiting their personal transformations.

- "What resonated with me was understanding my self-worth and how I fit in within certain roles/communities."
- "I love the sessions with Dr. Allen. We don't have to accept the first position offered. We can determine our leadership worth."

Theme 4: Practical, role-specific skill building in sessions and other support

Future Leaders singled out sessions and supports that were concrete and action-oriented rather than abstract discussions.

- "The ones that were specific, like preparing for the interview process as well as when we had speakers."
- "The sessions that stood out the most were the guest principals sharing their experiences and wisdom as we prepare for leadership as principals. I also love the mock interview with Dr. GiGi. What a great experience."

These reflections suggest that the Future Leaders Program not only delivered content but also fostered deep professional growth that Future Leaders candidates find helpful in identifying their leadership identity and worth, and in building confidence in their skills and knowledge as they advance along their school leadership path.

The next section presents findings on the outcomes of Future Leaders candidates' progress through their principal preparation program.

Candidates' Progression through the Preparation Programs

Coursework Completion

During SY2024-25, Future Leaders candidates completed the second year of their principal preparation program. Future Leaders staff collect progress reports from the four partner preparation programs. After one year, all candidates completed the course requirements and all achieved "A's" in their coursework. In the second year, all but three candidates have completed the coursework required by their preparation program. Three candidates at ISU will complete their coursework in the Fall 2026 semester.

Teacher Evaluation Training

Of the future leader candidates, 29 (97%) completed the teacher evaluation training. Only one candidate has not yet completed the training due to health issues.

Principal Certification Exam Pass Rate & Principal Licensure

Data from IWAS (as of July 6, 2026) showed the following:

Principal Licensure Exam Pass Rates

- 24 (80%) of Future Leaders passed the 195 exam
- 18 (60%) passed the 196 exam

These pass rates may be lower than the reality due to a lag between when the candidate completed the exam and when the results are reported in ISBE's IWAS system. Many of the candidates took their certification exams in June 2026 and had not yet received their scores when this report was released.

Principal Endorsement Attainment

- 23 (77%) Future Leaders have pending principal endorsement status
- 5 (17%) have attained the principal endorsement
- 2 (7%) do not have a pending principal endorsement

Placement in School Leader Positions

To date, four future leader candidates have earned new school leader positions: one as a principal, three as assistant principals, and one as an instructional coach. We anticipate that many others will begin applying for and earning new positions within the next few years.

Future Leaders candidates made strong academic progress during the 2025–26 school year, with 90% of participants successfully completing the requirements to complete their principal preparation program. We anticipate that, as the certification exam data is uploaded into IWAS, the pass rates will rise. These findings highlight the program's academic success and suggest areas for improvement, including additional support with certification exam scheduling and fees, as well as more job-search and placement assistance.

Comparison Against the Standards

ISBE has a set of New Principal Recruitment Program (NPRP) Standards. The evaluator compared the evaluation data against these standards to determine whether each standard was met, partially met, or not met. Table 10 presents these results.

Table 10. Comparison of Future Leaders Implementation Data Against NPRP Standards.

ISBE NPRP Standard	Met or Not Met by Future Leaders
Standard 1. Serving Diverse and Under-Represented Candidates	Met: 100% of Future Leaders candidates are racially diverse.
Standard 2. Candidate Recruitment and Enrollment	Met: Future Leaders staff partnered with 4 universities to recruit 30 diverse educators and placed them in principal preparation programs; all 30 received tuition assistance.
Standard 3. Principal Recruitment Program Supports	Met: Future Leaders provided multiple regularly scheduled professional learning opportunities to support candidates, including monthly training sessions, workshops, and guest speakers.

Standard 4. Candidate Job Placement in Principal or Assistant Principal Positions	Partially Met: 4 participants have been placed in Assistant Principal or Principal Positions. Others are applying or will apply in the coming years.
Standard 5. Partnership with Principal Preparation Programs	Met: Future Leaders staff regularly contact preparation program faculty to monitor candidates' progress. Faculty from two of the programs regularly attended monthly training sessions with the candidates.
Standard 6. Partnership with School Districts	Met: The Future Leaders Program has a signed MOU with one school district (CHSD 230), which has a diverse student body, particularly Arab-Muslim students, and is partnering with the Future Leaders Program as a grow-your-own strategy to build its bench of diverse leaders who mirror the student body. In addition to CHSD 230, principal prep faculty reached out to partnering school districts to recruit and select candidates for the program.
Standard 7. Continuous Improvement	Met: Program evaluator collected data throughout the program year and shared that data with Future Leaders staff. Future Leaders staff meet weekly to review data and plan monthly sessions and candidate support. Candidate engagement, satisfaction, and emerging candidate needs are continuously collected and deliberated to make program improvements.

Summary of the Findings and Looking Forward

Future Leaders is a signature initiative of the Illinois Regional Offices of Education (ROE) Lead Hubs, funded by the Illinois State Board of Education and housed in ROE 17. Future Leaders continues to build a statewide, equity-driven leadership pipeline by recruiting, developing, and supporting racially diverse and high-potential aspiring principals, especially in under-resourced and high-need schools.

Over the program's two years, it served 30 racially diverse candidates across Illinois in partnership with four principal preparation programs: North Central College, Illinois State University, the University of Illinois Chicago, and McKendree University. All candidates received financial support for tuition and licensure exams, as well as wrap-around development through monthly leadership seminars, and one-on-one career advising.

Key Impact Highlights:

- 100% of Future Leaders candidates identify as racially diverse; 70% are female; 53% serve in urban schools.
- 100% of candidates report satisfaction with the program's quality and responsiveness.
- Candidates showed strong leadership growth, with 95% reporting increased confidence and feeling equipped to engage in difficult leadership conversations.
- Program themes emphasized growth in leadership identity, growth in skills and confidence in leadership practices, and career readiness, aligned directly with ISBE's New Principal Recruitment Program (NPRP) standards.
- All candidates from three of the partner programs successfully completed the coursework required for their endorsement. Three candidates from ISU will finish their coursework in the Fall 2026 semester.
- Five future leader candidates have received new school leadership positions: one principalship, three assistant principal positions, and one instructional coach position.

The program partially met or met all seven ISBE standards, with strong partnerships formed across universities, ongoing monitoring for continuous improvement, and a structured evaluation process.

The findings from this evaluation suggest that the original three-year funding structure of the New Principal Recruitment Program was well aligned with the developmental timeline required for aspiring school leaders. Evaluation evidence indicates that candidates benefited from sustained support across three distinct phases: completion of a principal endorsement program, transition into the administrative job market, and early entry into school leadership positions.

The Future Leaders program provided both financial assistance and professional support, reducing barriers to principal preparation. Tuition assistance expanded access for diverse candidates who might not otherwise have been able to complete an endorsement program, while coaching, networking opportunities, and leadership development activities enhanced participants' confidence and preparedness for administrative roles. Throughout the endorsement program, candidates focused on completing rigorous academic and clinical requirements before shifting their attention to career advancement.

The evaluation found that the planned third year of support would have served a critical and distinct purpose. Rather than focusing primarily on coursework, Year Three was designed to support candidates as they secured administrative positions and navigated the transition into school leadership through individualized coaching, interview preparation, networking opportunities, and continued professional learning. At the time funding ended, tuition assistance had also been allocated for candidates completing remaining program requirements, including 17 candidates enrolled in summer capstone experiences and three candidates who required an additional semester to complete Illinois State University's 2½-year principal preparation program.

During the FY27 budget process, however, the Illinois General Assembly did not appropriate funding for the New Principal Recruitment Program. As a result, funding ended before the planned three-year program model was completed. Candidates who remained enrolled in coursework, including those already participating in summer capstone experiences after institutional withdrawal deadlines had passed, became responsible for covering the remaining tuition costs. The funding interruption also eliminated the planned transition supports that were intended to assist participants in obtaining and succeeding in their first administrative positions.

Feedback from Future Leaders participants reflected disappointment not only in the loss of tuition assistance but also in the discontinuation of the coaching and professional support that had become integral components of the program. In response to the funding lapse, ROE #17 committed to providing continued support through existing organizational resources. Future Leaders participants were invited to attend professional learning sessions at no cost during the fall, and Dr. Gegi Ra-El agreed to continue providing mock interview coaching on a voluntary basis. While these efforts demonstrate a commitment to participant success, they represent locally supported mitigation strategies rather than components of the originally funded program model.