



Learning While Leading

Regional Office of Education #17 Lead Hubs

Project Year 4 Annual Report

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

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SUMMARY AREA I: IMPLEMENTATION – ACTIVITIES, NOTEWORTHY EVENTS, MATCH STATUS

Project Overview and Goals

The Learning While Leading (LWL) Project is designed to prepare educators who already hold a principal license but are not serving in a school leadership role to enter principal and assistant principal positions in schools serving high-need students and in rural locations in Illinois. The incorporation of a partnership among 6 ROEs, located in each service area of the state, is allowing LWL to be designed as a local, regional, and state system for scale and sustainability, including a learning trajectory to build systems of support in schools and districts focused on school improvement. Other key partners with LWL include the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Illinois Association of Illinois Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS), the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS), and Advance Illinois.

LWL activities include:

- Pre-service training and coaching that supports aspiring leaders through a Learning Cycle process, working with teacher teams
- Induction and coaching support as a new principal or assistant principal
- Ongoing, job-embedded professional development in a peer network
- Placement in schools with high-need students or rural schools

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Improved school climate
- Improved student outcomes
- Increased percentage of principals and assistant principals serving a concentration of high-need students
- Improved principal and assistant principal retention rates
- Increased number of well-prepared aspiring leaders in the pipeline for schools with high-need students and rural schools

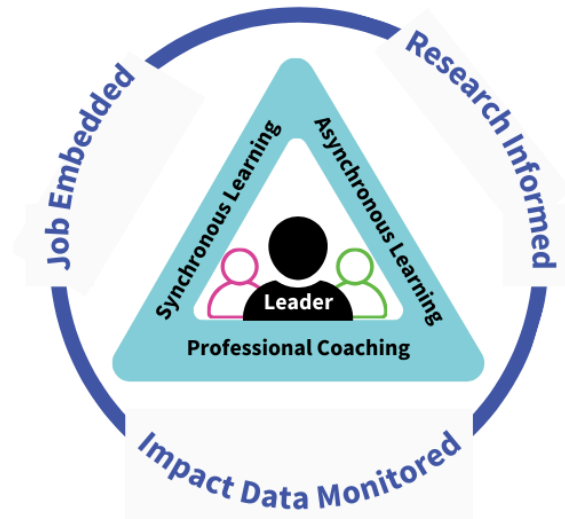
External evaluators at West Ed will explore changes to school culture and the program's impact on student achievement in math and ELA.

Expected Outcomes and Performance Measures

The LWL project successfully launched its Spring 2023 recruitment efforts, aiming to enroll 40 candidates, including at least 51% from rural schools. The project exceeded expectations by enrolling 56 candidates, in addition to seven fee-for-service participants (excluded from performance measures). Recruitment strategies combined statewide promotion, targeted outreach using educator shortage data, and direct communication with 1,800 rural educators with principal licenses identified through state databases. Direct outreach proved particularly effective in overcoming district-level hesitancy related to staffing shortages.

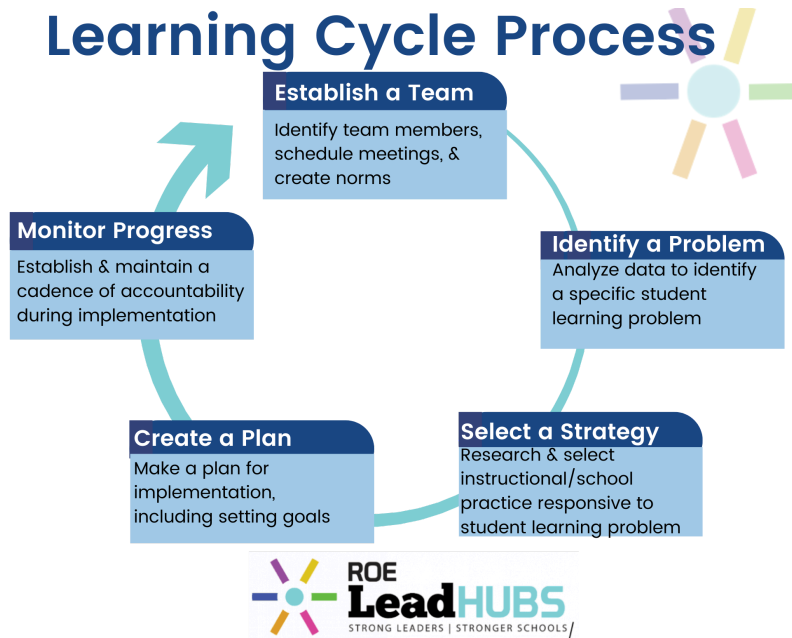
The project strengthened implementation by transitioning the curriculum to an online 70:20:10 professional learning model, integrating asynchronous modules, monthly Zoom-based cohort sessions, and individualized coaching (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: LWL Professional Learning Model



A structured Google-based workbook and data dashboard supported fidelity of implementation, progress monitoring, and completion of Action Research Projects based on the LWL Learning Cycle process (see Figure 2). Training emphasized research-based strategy selection and evidence-informed practice through curated national resources.

Figure 2 Learning Cycle Process



During the Year 4 project period, participants in the LWL research cohort continued into the program's second year. At the same time, a sustainability cohort was recruited to pilot an adapted version of the LWL model designed to support long-term sustainability.

The LWL Project is structured organizationally by an LWL Core Design Team, which meets bi-weekly and is made up of six (all) Lead Hub coordinators, one LWL coach, a leadership consultant, and the LWL professional development specialist. The LWL Core Design Team reviews the content of the LWL sessions as developed by the Core Design Team and LWL staff. Through both structures, the project is embedded in a continuous improvement process through progress monitoring. During Year 4, the LWL Core Design Team developed a series of training sessions for new principal induction (see Attachment 1) in response to feedback indicating the need for a more comprehensive set of supports for future cohorts of principals transitioning from the LWL program. Further work will occur in Year 5 to build out parallel training for assistant principals, recognizing that more of our candidates are transitioning to AP roles first.

During Y4, fidelity of implementation data were collected for the two cohorts, including participant attendance, coach logs, an annual survey of the research group, and a mid-year survey of the sustainability pilot cohort. Findings from this analysis included:

Session Attendance

- Of the research group, 14 (58%) met the 80% threshold by attending 14 of 18 sessions, while 4 participants (72%) attended 13 sessions, 1 short of the threshold.
- For the sustainability pilot group, 17 (49%) met the 80% threshold of attending 8 of 10 sessions, while eight (23%) participants attended 7 (70%) of sessions.
- Missed sessions were typically due to after-school responsibilities, especially athletic coaching or family commitments, that hindered their attendance.
- When comparing attendance at asynchronous sessions to synchronous sessions, both the research group and the sustainability pilot had stronger completion of asynchronous sessions than attendance at synchronous sessions:
 - o 50% of the research group completed asynchronous sessions more quickly than synchronous sessions, while 38% attended more synchronous sessions than asynchronous.
 - o 57% of the sustainability group completed more asynchronous sessions, while 30% attended more synchronous sessions than asynchronous.
- Short-term implication -> None, except to encourage coaches to continue helping participants catch up when they have to miss a session, and to encourage participants to complete asynchronous sessions and attend synchronous sessions as much as possible.
- Long-term implications -> When setting up fee-for-service, work with the main contact to determine the target group's availability and to make time within the school structure and school calendar for staff to participate. This can occur by embedding sessions in existing professional learning structures conducted by the district or school. As LWL training is integrated into the state's Continuous School Improvement Program - required for schools identified as needing additional support - attendance will be a priority. These schools will be expected to allocate staff time to fully engage in the work.

Coach Data

- 96% of the research group received the targeted number of coaching minutes (an average of 60 minutes per month).
- 89% of the sustainability pilot received the targeted number of coaching minutes (an average of 60 minutes per month).

- An analysis of the coach logs for the two groups found:
 - o Participants in both groups showed significant growth in confidence and self-efficacy, becoming more assertive and comfortable in their leadership roles.
 - o Both groups celebrated meaningful progress in the Learning Cycle, including successful team formation and the productive use of student data to identify problems of practice.
 - o Time was the most persistent barrier across both groups, with competing school responsibilities and scheduling conflicts limiting full participation.
 - o Leaders in both groups struggled to appropriately scope their learning problems, often starting too broadly or working in roles that did not cleanly map to the Learning Cycle structure.
 - o Research group participants frequently celebrated individual career milestones such as new administrative positions, doctoral completions, and principal interviews.
 - o Sustainability pilot participants more often celebrated team-level and school-wide progress, reflecting their more advanced stage of leadership development.
 - o Sustainability pilot participants more often struggled with the demands of being new to a building or role, particularly first-year principals onboarding into complex school contexts.
- Short-term implication -> Reinforce the importance of completing coaching logs and provide clarification on what should be logged.
- Long term implication -> Focus on supporting coaches to learn and share strategies for increasing the amount of time spent with participants. Future program staff and coaches should consider differentiating coaching based on whether the participant is an aspiring or practicing leader. Practicing leaders, particularly new leaders, may have more complex demands that require different coaching supports.

Survey data

Theme	2025 Annual Emerging Leader Survey <i>Research group n = 24 Annual (March 2025)</i>	Sustainability Pilot Mid-Year Survey <i>Pilot group n = 29 Mid-year (January 2026)</i>
Participant Profile & Motivation		
Cohort & setting	24 respondents • Rural: 58% Non-rural: 42% • All aspiring leaders (e.g., teachers and school-based staff) working toward formal leadership roles	29 respondents • Rural: 38% Non-rural: 62% • Instructional coaches: 14 • Principals/Asst Principals: 10 • Other school leaders: 3

Theme	2025 Annual Emerging Leader Survey <i>Research group n = 24 Annual (March 2025)</i>	Sustainability Pilot Mid-Year Survey <i>Pilot group n = 29 Mid-year (January 2026)</i>
Primary motivation	● 71%: Strengthen current-role skills ● 63%: Advance to AP/Principal ● 46%: Advance to other leadership role Program experiences align with motivations: 96%	● 83%: Strengthen current-role skills ● 31%: Advance to other leadership roles ● 24%: Advance to AP/Principal Program experiences align with motivations: 93%
Learning Cycle progress	● 79% completed a full Learning Cycle ● 88% completed stages 1–4	● 72% have worked in stages 1-5 ● Only 1 respondent is not implementing a Learning Cycle
Coaching		
Overall coaching rating	100% Rated coaching 'just right' ● 1:1 coaching relationship was the top source of satisfaction Coaches credited with career-defining mentorship	90% Rated coaching 'just right' ● 1 respondent said 'too much' ● 1:1 coaching relationship was the top source of satisfaction Coaches credited with professional and personal growth
Professional Learning Formats		
Asynchronous sessions	96% Rated sessions as engaging ● Only 12% found sessions difficult to access and felt the content was insufficient	93% Rated sessions as engaging ● 19% found sessions difficult to access, and 15% felt the content was insufficient
Synchronous sessions	96% Found sessions valuable ● 95%: Session topics met needs ● 96%: Learned new applicable skills ● 91%: Sessions extended professional network	89% Found sessions valuable ● 96%: Session topics met needs ● 85%: Learned new applicable skills ● 81%: Sessions extended professional network

Theme	2025 Annual Emerging Leader Survey <i>Research group n = 24 Annual (March 2025)</i>	Sustainability Pilot Mid-Year Survey <i>Pilot group n = 29 Mid-year (January 2026)</i>
Supervisor & Institutional Support		
Competing district/school priorities	65% Agreed that competing district/school priorities challenged their Learning Cycle focus	63% Agreed that competing district/school priorities challenged their Learning Cycle focus
Leadership Aspirations		
Position applications or plans	63% Applied for at least 1 leadership position - Principal/Asst Principal positions: 20 applied - Other leadership: 7 applied - No applications: 9	Pilot participants asked about future intent to apply for new leadership positions: - Not sure yet: 14 - Will not apply: 6 - Other leadership roles: 5 - Principal/Asst Principal positions: 3

- **Coaching is the program's core strength.** Both cohorts consistently identified 1:1 coaching as the most valuable element of LWL, by a wide margin. 100% of emerging leaders and 90% of pilot participants rated coaching as 'just right.' This finding holds across two very different participant groups, indicating that coaching is valued regardless of participants' leadership continuum position (aspiring or practicing).
- **Professional learning formats are working.** Both cohorts rate asynchronous and synchronous sessions highly, and both affirm that session topics meet their professional learning needs. The formats tested during the grant period appear transferable.
- **Competing institutional priorities are a persistent structural challenge.** 65% of the research group and 63% of sustainability pilot participants agreed that district or school demands made it difficult for them to focus on Learning Cycles. This near-identical finding across two very different participant groups signals a systemic constraint that any sustainability model must account. This finding has led to the development of the District Office Transformation Project, which coaches district office teams to restructure the central office to better support teaching and learning in schools.

Implications for Sustainability After the Grant

- **The coaching model is the non-negotiable core.** Any post-grant sustainability plan must preserve the quality and frequency of coaching. If cost constraints require tradeoffs, they should come from elsewhere in the model before touching coaching.

- **The pilot is demonstrating the model’s transferability.** The sustainability pilot is serving a broader, more heterogeneous population, including sitting principals, coaches, and other practicing leaders. Early indicators show strong satisfaction among these different groups. This suggests LWL’s core model can be adapted beyond its original emerging leader target without losing effectiveness.
- **Differentiated pathways may be needed.** The two cohorts have different profiles, different motivations, and different relationships to the Learning Cycle. A one-size-fits-all program design will serve some participants well and others poorly. A sustainable model may require flexible entry points and pacing options to remain relevant across career stages.

Performance outcomes

Performance outcomes have demonstrated strong career advancement to date. Ten participants secured principal positions (one out of state), eight became assistant principals, and one advanced to a dean/athletic director role. Advancement was evident across both pilot and research cohorts, including rural and high-need schools. Overall, the project met or exceeded recruitment targets, maintained strong implementation fidelity, and, among the research group, demonstrated measurable leadership advancement aligned with project goals. One note: we are not tracking the career advancement of the sustainability pilot because some are already practicing leaders. Instead, the purpose of the sustainability pilot is to test the LWL model for building leadership capacity across the leadership continuum (from aspiring to practicing) as we modified it to align with the state’s new continuous school improvement framework. Early data from the sustainability pilot shows high satisfaction with the model and strong coaching and session attendance.

Table 1
Implementation Sites for December 16, 2024-December 15, 2025

Site Name	State	City	Grade level served	# of students served	# high need students served	Years served	Type (Research or Sustainability Pilot)
Pittsfield South Elementary	IL	Pittsfield	PreK-2	339	197	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Griggsville-Perry Middle School	IL	Perry	5-8	91	37	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Unity Middle School	IL	Mendon	5-8	200	106	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Winchester Elementary School	IL	Winchester	PreK-8	399	188	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Franklin CUSD #1	IL	Franklin	PreK-1 2	279	89	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Colonel George Iles Elementary School	IL	Quincy	K-5	529	365	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Early Childhood & Family Center	IL	Quincy	PreK-K	465	358	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Quincy Junior High	IL	Quincy	6-8	1285	758	PY2-PY3	Research

School						PY3-PY4	
Normal Community West High School	IL	Normal	9-12	1513	560	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Olympia North Elementary School	IL	Danvers	PreK-5	278	111	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Clinton Elementary School	IL	Clinton	2-5	504	272	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Benjamin Elementary School	IL	Bloomington	K-5	599	66	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Shiloh Elementary School	IL	Hume	BT3-8	246	128	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Germantown Hills School District #69	IL	Germantown Hills	K-8	800	144	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Lakeview Junior High School	IL	Downers Grove	6-8	335	60	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
*Lake Park High School	IL	Roselle	9-12	2466	419	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Indian Trail Junior High School	IL	Addison	6-8	1114	802	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Lake Park Elementary School	IL	Addison	K-5	288	242	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Giant City School	IL	Carbondale	PreK-8	214	81	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Ewing-Northern CCSD #115	IL	Ewing	PreK-8	230	120	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Carterville Junior High School	IL	Carterville	7-8	342	154	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Putnam County High School	IL	Granville	9-12	235	96	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Chester Grade School	IL	Chester	PreK-8	628	371	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
*Wirth/Parks Middle School	IL	Cahokia	6-8	564	461	PY2-PY3 PY3-PY4	Research
Stratton Academy of the Arts	IL	Champaign	K-5	451	343	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Twillman Elementary School	MO	St. Louis	PreK-5	247	247	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Tri-Valley CUSD #3	IL	Downs	PreK-12	1064	128	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Lincoln Elementary	IL	Clinton	PreK-1	181	87	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Ridgeview Elementary School	IL	Colfax	PreK-5	243	129	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Pinckneyville Middle School	IL	Pinckneyville	5-8	228	98	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Vienna High School	IL	Vienna	9-12	369	199	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Pleasant Hill Elementary/High School	IL	Pleasant Hill	BT3-12	347	226	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Liberty Elementary /High School	IL	Liberty	PreK-1 2	582	169	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot

Brown County Elementary School	IL	Mount Sterling	PreK-4	264	132	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Payson Seymour Jr./Sr. High School	IL	Payson	7-12	210	101	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Gower West Elementary School	IL	Willowbrook	PreK-4	521	52	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Gower Middle	IL	Burr Ridge	5-8	407	53	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Concord Elementary	IL	Darien	PreK-4	447	98	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Jefferson Middle	IL	Villa Park	6-8	360	216	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
St. Edward Catholic	IL	Chillicothe	PreK-8	356	89	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Harold B. Dawson Middle School	IL	Peoria	5-8	318	293	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Deer Creek-Mackinaw CUSD 701	IL	Mackinaw	PreK-12	930	260	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
New Central Elementary School	IL	Havana	K-4	279	156	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
St. Joseph School	IL	Pekin	K-8	273	153	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
*Benton Grade	IL	Benton	PreK-8	987	636	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Johnston City High	IL	Johnston City	9-12	326	163	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Lincoln Elementary	IL	Marion	K-5	484	324	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
*Marion High	IL	Marion	9-12	1051	504	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Chiddix Jr High	IL	Normal	6-8	657	233	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Evans Jr High	IL	Bloomington	6-8	742	219	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
*Kingsley Jr High	IL	Normal	6-8	685	270	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Parkside Jr High	IL	Normal	6-8	588	260	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Normal Community High School	IL	Normal	9-12	2021	671	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Normal Community West High School	IL	Normal	9-12	1513	561	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Towanda Elementary School	IL	Towanda	K-5	182	20	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Elmwood Jr/Sr High School	IL	Elmwood	7-12	296	78	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Downers Grove North High School	IL	Downers Grove	9-12	2047	204	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Glenbard North High School	IL	Carol Stream	9-12	2043	879	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Southwest Elementary School	IL	Geneseo	K-5	355	135	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Kewanee High	IL	Kewanee	9-12	579	347	PY4-PY5	Sustainability Pilot
Total Number of Students Served by Project =				36,576			

* Represents multiple participants who work at the same school

Key Challenges and Solutions

Session Participation

Session participation has been a persistent challenge throughout the grant, driven largely by structural and contextual factors rather than a lack of motivation. Across both the Sustainability Pilot and Treatment Group, time has consistently been the most significant barrier. Participants often serve in demanding, multifaceted roles. In addition, personal and family circumstances, as well as after-school commitments, have further disrupted participation for a meaningful number of individuals.

These challenges have been significantly exacerbated by the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing shortage of teachers and administrators. Schools continue to operate under strained staffing conditions, requiring educators to take on expanded roles, cover classes, and manage daily operational gaps. This has reduced the time and flexibility available for professional learning, made consistent session attendance more difficult, and reduced the time to meet with their coaches.

Throughout the grant, we have addressed these challenges by developing asynchronous training modules that participants can complete on their own time and by allowing coaches to provide individualized catch-up support when sessions are missed. However, this follow-up support is not always consistently documented in coaches' logs. We also found that district offices were often presenting barriers rather than supports that would allow schools to create the time, structure, and conditions for professional learning activities like LWL. In response, we designed the District Transformation Program (see Attachment 2), which has been launched across the state, particularly targeting districts with LWL candidates working in or will seek administrative positions.

Aligning with Statewide Continuous School Improvement Strategy

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) new statewide continuous school improvement strategy (see <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Improvement-Plan.aspx>) created both a challenge and an opportunity for the Lead Hubs' LWL Program. Illinois operates a statewide system of continuous school improvement led by ISBE that supports districts and schools through coordinated technical assistance, professional learning, and improvement planning. The system is funded primarily through federal ESSA Title I school improvement funds and related state and federal grants. Regional Offices of Education participate by serving as regional partners that deliver training, coaching, and implementation support to districts engaged in improvement efforts. Aligning the LWL model with ISBE's framework enables ROE Lead Hubs to secure federal flow-through funding as a sustainability strategy for serving schools and districts. This came with adaptations to the LWL model, and the Sustainability Pilot launched during Year 4 of the LWL Project enabled us to implement them.

The state's structured framework for needs assessment, root-cause analysis, evidence-based strategy selection, and ongoing progress monitoring required us to ensure that LWL's Learning Cycle model, coaching systems, and data tools were tightly aligned with ISBE's expectations. This shift increased the need for stronger documentation, clearer integration with district School

Improvement Plans, and more explicit connections between LWL activities and statewide improvement language. At the same time, the new strategy elevated the importance of distributed leadership, data literacy, and collaborative inquiry - core competencies already embedded in the LWL model - positioning the program as a timely and relevant support for schools navigating the new requirements.

We addressed this dual challenge and opportunity through the LWL Sustainability Pilots. The pilots strengthened regional capacity by shifting greater ownership of facilitation, coaching, and data tracking to the Lead Hubs while maintaining fidelity to the Learning Cycle process. Asynchronous modules were sequenced to mirror the state's improvement framework (problem identification, strategy selection using credible resources, action planning, and progress monitoring), and synchronous sessions were redesigned to help participants directly apply their Learning Cycles to their local school improvement priorities. Coaches were further developed to support formal monthly coaching conversations grounded in data and implementation evidence, ensuring alignment with ISBE's expectations for continuous monitoring and reflection. Through these sustainability efforts, LWL not only aligned with the new statewide strategy but also embedded itself more deeply within district improvement structures, strengthening both program relevance and long-term viability.

The SPARK (Schools Pursuing Achievement, Results, and Knowledge) Collaborative, led by the Lead Hub at ROE 21, is a strong example of an LWL Sustainability Pilot that embeds the LWL framework directly into regional school improvement efforts. Designed to align with ISBE's Continuous School Improvement Model, SPARK brought LWL constructs to school principals and their Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs), ensuring that leadership development was not isolated to individuals but integrated into building-level decision-making structures. The inaugural cohort demonstrated significant regional demand and engagement, with 125 principals and ILT members registering and 115 attending the first session. Several schools expanded their teams after Session 1, reflecting strong momentum and perceived value. Participation required principals to attend alongside their ILTs to ensure alignment between leadership authority and instructional change efforts. Note: The SPARK Collaborative was launched in December 2025, and its data will be reported in the LWL Final Report.

The SPARK initiative delivered four in-person sessions aligned with the LWL learning cycle: team development and root-cause analysis; selecting evidence-based strategies and adult learning plans; establishing progress-monitoring systems; and a follow-up to sustain implementation. This design translated the ISBE/LWL framework into actionable, team-based school improvement practices. As a sustainability pilot, SPARK showed that Lead Hubs can lead facilitation, coaching, and logistics while maintaining fidelity to LWL principles. LWL funding was used to remove district cost barriers and support coaching, venues, materials, travel, and working sessions, but this will be embedded into the ROE support system once grant funding ends. SPARK demonstrated how LWL can be scaled regionally, aligned to state priorities, and embedded in leadership teams to ensure long-term sustainability beyond the original grant.

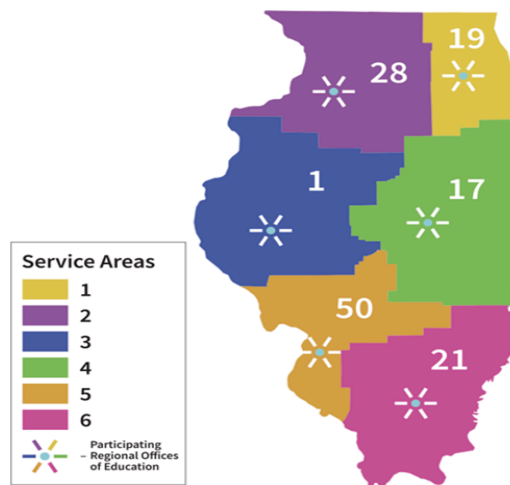
Sustaining the Work - Contributions to Policy and Practice

The Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), located across Illinois' 39 regions and grouped into six Professional Service Areas, serve as key connectors between the Illinois State Board of

Education (ISBE) and local school districts. Through ROE Lead Hubs, each area is building regional capacity for continuous school improvement by embedding the LWL framework into local leadership development (see Figure 3). As part of the LWL Sustainability Pilot, Lead Hubs have aligned their work with the state's System of Continuous School Improvement. This ensures that school leaders in rural, suburban, and urban communities all have access to consistent, high-quality support focused on collaboration, data-informed decision-making, and strong instructional leadership.

At the state level, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) helps coordinate and align this work across all ROEs. As the professional organization for regional superintendents, IARSS supports collaboration, shared learning, and consistency across regions. Through regular meetings, communication, and shared progress monitoring, IARSS ensures that Lead Hub efforts align with ISBE priorities while still meeting local needs. This helps maintain consistent expectations for professional learning, coaching, and school improvement across all six service areas. Because ROEs are led by locally elected superintendents, this system allows for both statewide and regionally responsive improvement efforts. Figure 1 shows the locations of the Lead Hubs, including ROE #17, which serves as the statewide Coordination Hub for the LWL program.

Figure 3
Lead Hub Service Areas



Building Leadership Capacity Systems

District Transformation Program

Sustained school improvement requires strong support from district central offices. In Year 3 of the LWL initiative, a District Transformation Design Team was formed to develop a central-office model. The ROE Lead Hub District Transformation Program, based on research by Meredith Honig and Lydia Rainey, was launched to address a key challenge: many principals struggled to apply new leadership practices because district systems were not set up to support continuous improvement. The District Transformation Program helps district leadership teams

examine and redesign central office structures so they better support teaching and learning, shifting from a compliance focus to a service-oriented approach.

The program was piloted in 2024–2025 with five districts and expanded in 2025–2026 to eleven districts across Illinois. Through structured sessions and coaching, district teams review key systems - such as teaching and learning supports, principal supervision, staffing, operations, and leadership structures - to identify gaps and create multi-year improvement plans. Ongoing coaching and planning tools help teams track progress and make lasting changes. As the program grows, it is generating valuable insights into how central office redesign can better support principals and sustain school improvement. Year 5 funding will support another nine districts as we develop a plan to sustain the model through a fee-for-service model.

Leadership Pathways

Just as school improvement depends on strong district support, it also depends on strong teacher leadership. While LWL initially focused on developing principals and assistant principals, the Sustainability Pilots demonstrated that ROE Lead Hubs can also strengthen teacher leadership capacity. Teacher leaders who participated in LWL training are now better equipped to partner with school leaders, support instructional improvement, lead collaborative work, and contribute to schoolwide success. The LWL sustainability pilot also revealed that some individuals with a principal endorsement prefer to gain experience in teacher leadership roles before moving into assistant principal or principal positions.

Building on this work, we are exploring a Lead Teacher apprenticeship program as the next step to sustain and expand the leadership pipeline component of the LWL grant. The grant has shown that many educators are interested in leadership, but need clearer, more structured ways to grow while staying in the classroom. This apprenticeship model would formalize the teacher leader role by combining on-the-job learning, coaching, and aligned professional development - based on the proven 70:20:10 LWL approach. It would also create a clear pathway for teachers to move into advanced leadership roles. To move this forward, Year 5 funding will support a partnership with ConnectED Workforce to build our capacity to pursue sponsorship for the Lead Teacher and Principal apprenticeships. The LWL program showed that success depends not just on the curriculum, but also on strong system-level support and clear, step-by-step pathways into leadership.

Learning While Leading
Section A: Performance Objective Information and Related Performance Measures

GPRA MEASURES

GPRA Measure 1

1.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
The number of students targeted annually by your project and the number you have actually served.	GPRA	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		25,000			36,576		

Explanation of Progress: The number of students is larger than predicted because in PY4, we provided program supports for the treatment group Dec 16, 2024 through May 2025. In June 2025, we recruited a group of aspiring and practicing leaders to serve as a pilot group to test the program for sustainability.

GPRA Measure 2

2.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
The number of high-need students targeted annually by your project and the number you have actually served.	GPRA	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		20,000			14,918		

Explanation of Progress: We used the Illinois State Board of Education’s (ISBE) student indicator of Low-Income Students as our definition for high-need students. According to ISBE, low-income students are: “those who receive or live in households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families benefits; are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture income guidelines to receive free or reduced-price meals.” On the Illinois School Report Card, each school’s report card includes the percentage of students who meet this definition. We can calculate the number of students from that percentage, which is then used to calculate the number of high-need students served by our project. Our actual number is lower than predicted because candidates from rural schools were targeted in our Research Group and Sustainability Pilot (launched in June 2025). Many of these schools have a lower number of students than our urban/suburban schools, which leads to lower total high-needs numbers.

GPRA Measure 3

3.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Conduct an ongoing, well-designed, and independent evaluation that will provide evidence of their effectiveness at improving student outcomes in multiple contexts.	GPRA	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		1			1		

Explanation of Progress: The external evaluation team at WestEd has finalized the design of the independent, quasi-experimental study of the project’s impact on student outcomes and is currently collecting baseline and descriptive data on participants and their schools.

GPRA Measure 4

4.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Implement an evaluation that provides information on the project's key practices and approach to facilitate replication or testing in other locations.	GPRA	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		1			1		

Explanation of Progress: The external evaluation team at WestEd has finalized the design of the independent, quasi-experimental study of the project’s impact on student outcomes, and is currently collecting baseline and descriptive data on participants and their schools. They are currently beginning the impact study now that a number of research group participants have taken leadership positions. If the analysis is underpowered due to LWL participant placement rates in Illinois schools, then WestEd will pursue an alternative impact analysis, which has been approved as a contingency plan by Abt.

GPRA Measure 5

5.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Implement an evaluation that provides information on the cost-effectiveness of the key practices to identify potential obstacles and success factors to scaling.	GPRA	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		1			1		

Explanation of Progress: This study has been ongoing throughout the project to identify the most effective program components and to determine how to continue offering these LWL program supports in a cost-effective manner. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requires schools to implement a continuous school improvement model using a statewide framework. LWL project staff and partners have aligned the LWL model with the statewide framework, allowing districts and schools to sustain the work through state funding.

GPRA Measure 6

6.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
The cost per student actually served by the grant.	GPRA	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		\$126			\$24.58		

Explanation of Progress: This dollar number was arrived at by using the following formula:

Total of federal, non-federal, and other costs expended in reporting year 1 MINUS the evaluation costs expended in reporting year 2

$$\frac{\$899,157.90}{36,576 \text{ students}} \quad (\text{DIVIDED BY})$$

PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Project Objective 1: Aspiring Leader Objectives

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Aspiring school leaders will be selected from a rigorous recruitment and selection process in the project.

1.1.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will be selected for participation in LWL through a rigorous process involving input from the ROE and district partners.	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
		40			59		110%

1.1.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Participants will be working in qualifying rural schools.	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				51%	35	35/59	59%

1.1.3. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Participants will serve schools with concentrations of high needs students.	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				80%	34	34/59	58%

Explanation of Progress: Measure 1.1.1. Interest in this program was strong and we exceeded our target by an additional 19 participants. As demonstrated in **Measure 1.1.2**, LWL meets the 51% rural participation requirement, and over half of its schools serve high-need schools.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: Aspiring school leaders will be provided with an evidence-based professional development program (including individual and/or group training/peer networks, and one-on-one coaching support).

1.2.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will participate in coaching on average at least 60 minutes per month over	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%

the one-year pre-service training period. (Years 2-3)				90%	53	53/59	90%
1.2.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will engage with at least 80% of the training modules/sessions during the pre-service training period (Years 2-3).	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				90%	30	30/59	51%
1.2.3. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will be “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with the quality of LWL professional learning experiences. (Years 2-3)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				90%			94%

Explanation of Progress: Measure 1.2.1 met the targeted number. Project staff worked with coaches to ensure that they were logging all coaching interactions. For **Measure 1.2.2.**, coaches conduct make-up sessions for our participants when they need to miss a session, and there is a section in the coach log that asks coaches to report out on make-up sessions with their aspiring leaders. However, we continue to find that some of our coaches neglect to report the make-up sessions that they do with participants. For **Measure 1.2.3.**, we calculated average ratings on the training evaluation surveys that participants fill out after every training session. The findings from the annual survey of treatment group leaders showed that the average satisfaction ratings ranged from 3.48 to 3.36 (on a 4-point Likert Scale). Presenter quality received the highest rating, followed by clear objectives, a supportive learning environment, useful materials, fulfilled expectations for professional learning, and a useful format (listed in decreasing order). In the mid-year survey of the sustainability pilot, the mean satisfaction rating was 3.3 (on a 4-point Likert Scale), with participants reporting that the sessions were engaging, that synchronous sessions extended learning from asynchronous sessions, and that they learned new leadership skills they can apply in their practice.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: Aspiring school leaders will work with a group of teachers to complete a year-long learning cycle project aimed at improving instruction and learning.

1.3.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will work with a group of teachers to complete a learning cycle project	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%

focused on improving teaching and learning. (Years 2-3)				90%	59	59/59	100%
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1.3.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Students in participating schools who are the focus of a student learning problem will demonstrate positive learning improvements in student learning outcomes. (Year 3)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				75%	999		

Explanation of Progress: Data in 1.3.2 are not reported at this time. This is an outcome measure that will be reported in PY5 and the final report.

Project Objective 2: Principal/Assistant Principal Objectives

OBJECTIVE: 2.1. Participants who successfully complete the aspiring leaders phase of the LWL project will be hired as new principals or assistant principals in predominantly rural and/or schools serving a concentration of high needs students.

2.1.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will be hired as new principals or assistant principals. (Year 3)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				90	18		
2.1.2 Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Aspiring leaders will be hired as new principals or assistant principals in rural schools or schools that serve a concentration of high needs students. (Year 3)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				60	9	9/18	50%

Explanation of Progress: The data reported in this table are for LWL research group participants who advanced to an assistant principal/principal position during PY4. In PY5 and the final report, we will provide a cumulative total that includes the pilot program participants, the research group, and the sustainability pilot participants. In its first year, the pilot program had four participants obtain principal positions, and four obtain assistant principal positions. Seven participants in the research group have earned assistant principal and principal positions.

Objective 2.2: LWL principals/assistant principals continue to participate in LWL professional learning experiences.

2.2.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
LWL principals/assistant principals will participate in at least 60 minutes of coaching per month during the 2-year in-service period (Years 3.5-5)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				80	6		
2.2.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
LWL principals/assistant principals will have access to LWL novice leader professional learning support (e.g., training modules, sessions, tools) over the 2-year inservice training period. (Years 3.5-5)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				80	6		
2.2.3. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
LWL principals/assistant principals will be either “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with the quality of LWL professional learning experiences (Years 3.5-5)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				90	6		

Explanation of Progress: The data reported in this table are for LWL participants who obtained new leadership positions and received support in PY4. A cumulative count across all program years will be reported in PY5 and the final report. **Performance Measure 2.2.3.** The coaching, training, and satisfaction data were collected for the participants who obtained new leadership positions. The satisfaction survey was sent to six of the new leaders and all six responded.

Objective 2.3: LWL principals/assistant principals will work with a team of teachers to implement a learning cycle process aimed at improving instruction and learning.

2.3.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
LWL principals/assistant principals and teacher teams will implement learning cycle projects for instructional improvements (Years 3.5-5)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%

				90	7	7/7	100%
2.3.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
LWL principals/assistant principals will stay in their schools for two years at statistically higher rates in comparison to other similar schools with new principals/assistant principals. (Year 4-5)	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				80	999*		

Explanation of Progress: Measure 2.3.2. Data are not reported in PY4 because PY4 participants who obtained assistant principal/principal positions received coaching and training supports during their aspiring leader phase of this project, and will not have had enough time in their positions to be in the position for two years. We will report data retention rates in PY5 and the final report.

Objective 2.4: LWL principals/assistant principals will establish school conditions that support instructional improvements leading to improved student learning.

2.4.1. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Treatment schools will demonstrate statistically-significant, positive ratings on state climate/culture survey (The 5 Essentials) after two years, in comparison to other similar schools	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				70	999*		
2.4.2. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Treatment schools will demonstrate statistically-significant positive ratings on school leadership quality after two years, in comparison to other similar schools	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				80	999*		
2.4.3. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
ELA and mathematics statewide student test scores show a statistically significant, positive difference	Project	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%

in schoolwide scores for schools that hired LWL principals in comparison to other similar schools with new principals that are not trained by LWL.				80	999*		
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Explanation of Progress: Data are not reported in PY4 because PY4 participants were still receiving coaching and training supports during their aspiring and new leader phase of this project. Impact data will be reported in the final report.

