



SCHOOL LEADER PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ILLINOIS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED SUPPORTS

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INTRODUCTION

Illinois has been working at the forefront of innovation and improvement in principal quality for more than two decades. Recognized for bold policy initiatives involving principal preparation and development, the state has received national awards and recognitions.¹ Therefore, we applaud the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for not resting on their laurels and moving forward with establishing an Office of District and School Leadership designed to elevate the importance of a statewide policy-focus on district and school leadership. Further, we support the professional associations and others that have made recommendations to the state aimed at strengthening leadership preparation, development, and support. This white paper is intended to add to those voices by clearly defining the challenges in the current context and provide research-based recommendations for moving the work forward.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Quality school leadership is a key component of any reform effort directed at improving student achievement as research has proven that school and student performance are positively linked to the effectiveness of the principal.¹ Right now, schools are facing a leadership crisis rooted in the changing nature of the jobⁱⁱ and aging workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ Professional demands on principals are swelling.^{iv} Those challenges exacerbate the struggle high-need and rural school systems face 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 duties of the principal, but rather provided training through *General Administrator /Type 75* (Type 75) programs that qualified educators for a multitude of school and district level positions (i.e., principal, athletic director, department chair, dean).^{vi} Type 75 certificate programs have largely been ineffective in preparing principals to lead schools, forcing most educators to

¹ Illinois was selected by the Education Commission of the States as the recipient of the 2014 Frank Newman Award for State Policy Innovation. Nominated by the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), Illinois was recognized for the collaborative efforts of the ISBE (ISBE), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and the CSEP at Illinois State University (CSEP), which engaged a broad group of stakeholders in the development of rigorous program requirements for principal preparation. A list of national publications that also recognize Illinois' work in this area can be found at: <https://education.illinoisstate.edu/csep/publications/principal.php>

informally learn on the job.^{vii} That system produced great variation in terms of principal performance, spurring the establishment of the Principal Endorsement regulations.

Under legislation passed in 2010, Illinois policy makers established regulations for principal preparation and licensure. IL Public Act 096-0903 focused the new Principal Endorsement on the specific knowledge and competencies required of principals. While the new regulations terminated Type 75 programs, fearing a shortage ISBE deemed all Type 75 holders qualified to serve as a principal. There are over 43,000 Type 75 holders in Illinois^{viii} and 3,885 public school principal positions throughout the state.^{ix} On average, Illinois typically experiences less than 400 principal vacancies per year and most newly hired principals possess Type 75 certificates.^x Given that *less than 1% of the current leadership pipeline is necessary to fill all of the open principal vacancies each year*, challenges to hiring new principals cannot solely be explained by an insufficient pipeline. In fact, some district officials have expressed concern about the quality of the principal applicants.^x *While legally qualified to serve as a principal, most have not been adequately prepared to do so effectively* because the old General Administrator/Type 75 programs were just that – *general* and not aimed at developing the instructional leadership competencies needed to be an effective school leader. This suggests strategies involving in-service development supports for aspiring candidates is necessary as well.

Recently, policy makers and district leaders have begun to understand and value the role of the school leadership. However, support systems for principals have not kept pace with the growing expectations of the position. Districts have *relied too heavily on pre-service programs or optional and limited induction supports* to ensure new principals were prepared to lead schools. Each of those strategies independently has demonstrated varying degrees of success. Further, it has been documented that there is a *pervasive lack of attention by policy makers at all levels to provide supports for the important role of the school leader*.^{xi} The common practice of ignoring policies that support school leaders is occurring 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} Research has indicated that 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 2005.^{xvi} The impact of all that turnover has a profound effect on the school, and a staggering *67% of Illinois schools averaged two or more principals in a six-year period*.^{xvii}

Like many other states, *Illinois currently lacks a coordinated statewide infrastructure* that ensures:

- a robust system of support to address the full learning continuum of school leaders (from the aspiring to retiring phase),
- a comprehensive data system that can provide program providers and districts with real-time local supply and demand data to inform preparation program recruitment, succession planning and leadership recruitment efforts;
- an equitable distribution of highly effective leaders for every school in the state, and
- a strategy to increase leadership diversity (currently only 22% of principals are persons of color, while the minority student population in Illinois is at 53%).

We are optimistic about the ability of the ISBE Office of District and School Leadership to address these disconnects and elevate quality supports throughout the state. We view the new Office as a statewide approach similar in nature to the district-level work of the Chicago Public Schools’ Office of Principal Quality (CPS-OPQ), which has had a significant impact on school leadership since its inception nearly 20 years ago.^{xviii} Outcome data on the collaborative efforts of CPS-OPQ and its university partners in providing intensive principal internships indicates significant positive impact on student achievement that warrants investment, further exploration, and replication.^{xix} School leaders prepared through these district/university partnerships have disrupted the long-held belief that the level of a student’s achievement is pre-determined by their zip code.^{xx} Because of that success, principal preparation and development will continue to be a priority for CPS. Innovative and effective approaches to principal

preparation and development in Chicago and other areas of the state (e.g. Northern Illinois University/Rockford Public Schools/Illinois Principals Association partnership, etc.) should be further explored by the ISBE Office of Leadership to inform the development of scalable models appropriate for urban, suburban and rural contexts.

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,”^{xxxi} While it has been widely accepted that instructional quality is the single most important school-based factor leading to student achievement,^{xxii} scaling high-quality instruction schoolwide does not happen without the leadership of an effective principal.^{xxiii} Over the past two decades, researchers have increasingly focused on the importance of principal role and have concluded that principals have a significant impact on student learning - independent of the other factors affecting achievement.^{xxiv} In fact, ***principals’ influence accounts for about one-quarter of school-level variation in student achievement,^{xxv} and the principal’s impact is greatest in schools with the greatest needs.***^{xxvi} 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.^{xxvii} That ***represents a massive return on investment because the principal can act as a multiplier by creating conditions to scale effective practice school-wide.***

Principals’ knowledge, skills, and actions have a profound impact on: 1) recruitment, development, and retention of effective teachers; 2) equitable resource allocation; 3) working conditions; 4) school climate and culture; and 5) the continuous improvement process.^{xxviii} However, none of this happens by accident.^{xxix} Principals are *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.^{xxx} ***Districts pay a steep price with principal attrition, as hiring and onboarding a new principal costs a district on average \$75,000, and student achievements has been shown to decrease in the year following a principal departure.***^{xxxi}

Additionally, teacher attrition costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually, according to a 2014 report from Alliance for Excellent Education.^{xxxii} While statewide teacher attrition has remained fairly low in Illinois, at 15-16% over the past five years,^{xxxiii} that statistics obscures the difficulty that some districts have experienced in finding teachers to replace those that leave, particularly in rural and high-need schools. It is important to note the connection between the actions of the principal and teacher attrition, as leadership is cited as the most important factor in teachers’ decisions to stay in their school or in the profession. Correspondingly, research has found that improvements in school leadership were strongly related to reductions in teacher turnover.^{xxxiv} That is why investments in leadership development have been identified as one of the key strategies to addressing teacher shortages.^{xxxv}

In recent years, much attention has been spent on developing principals as instructional leaders by focusing on activities involved in teacher supervision. In other words, principal development largely focused on the efforts of the leader in developing and providing feedback to meet the individual needs of each teacher. However, a growing body of research has developed a new conceptualization of the principal role as an ***Organizational Leader of Instructional Improvement.***^{xxxvi} This is an important distinction, as it addresses a faulty underlying assumption of the principal as an instructional leader because it does not require the principal to be the ultimate subject matter expert in all content areas and at all grade levels. Rather, it focuses the work of the principal on high-leverage activities that are

consequential to changing practice and increase student learning, such as engaging teacher teams in instructional improvement efforts. In other words, effective principals establish conditions (e.g. scheduling adequate collaborative time, allocating sufficient resources, ensuring access to necessary data, and providing guidance needed to set and achieve ambitious instructional improvement strategies). In this respect, the principal is viewed as a multiplier of effective practice, able to scale improvements school-wide rather than classroom by classroom.

Through the support of two multi-year grants from the US Department of Education, the LEAD Project has supported the development of school leaders in 140 schools around this notion of the principal serving as a facilitator, organizer, and collaborative leader of instructional improvement. CSEP, in partnership with six Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), have provided ongoing training and coaching support to principals and their Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT). The Project aims to build the capacity of principals to distribute leadership focused on high impact strategies that engage teacher teams in instructional improvement efforts that truly change practice. Through this work, the 6 ROEs are serving as Leadership (LEAD) Hubs that will sustain the work after the federal grant funding ends.

These collaborative improvement practices, which focus on developing and implementing responsive strategies, are the key to successfully reaching school improvement goals. Additionally, they have been found to support teacher self-efficacy, which is particularly crucial during the current health crisis that has forced many teachers to shift abruptly to remote or hybrid learning models. Researchers at the Annenberg Institute examined teachers' experiences during the health emergency caused by COVID-19. In order to understand what facilitated or inhibited effective teaching during remote learning, they surveyed nearly 8,000 teachers from across the country.

As expected, they found that the abrupt shift to remote learning resulted in a sudden and significant drop in teachers' sense of self-efficacy. They also identified specific school conditions that leaders established that shielded teachers from the drop in self-efficacy, including: 1) time for meaningful collaboration with peers; 2) targeted training, and 3) fair and transparent expectations. Teachers who reported that these conditions were present in their schools were significantly less likely to experience declines in their sense of self-efficacy and more likely to provide high-quality instruction. **Researchers stressed that response data “demonstrated the power of supportive working environments in helping teachers adjust to even catastrophic change.”^{xxxvii} Effective principals establish the collaborative conditions that support teacher engagement in meaningful improvement efforts, and they model and guide that work through supporting a culture of inquiry.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

By focusing on improving school leadership preparation and development as a high-leverage improvement strategy, Illinois has been recognized as a national leader. We agree with the recent report from the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) that there is still a great deal of work to be done to improve the working conditions and supports needed by leaders currently working in our schools. To address the growing crisis in school leadership, CSEP offers the following recommendations:

State/Regional Leadership Support System:

- ISBE Office of Leadership should collaborate with a wide group of stakeholders to set statewide direction and ensure cohesive alignment to other policies and initiatives. Of particular consideration should be the adoption of the new Professional Standards for Education Leadership (PSEL) coupled with the IPA School Leader Paradigm, which could be used as a statewide framework on created an aligned continuum of leadership support.

- ISBE should prioritize the development of a data portal that can provide real time information on educator supply and demand at both the state and local level, by making important investments in data collection and data sharing mechanisms.
- ISBE and IBHE should collaborate with a network of Leadership (LEAD) Hubs housed in a Regional Office of Education located within each of six Education Service Areas in the state. LEAD Hubs, which are charged with coordinating a comprehensive system of supports for school leaders to ensure the equitable distribution of effective principals for all Illinois schools. LEAD Hubs, which are currently funded through two federal LEAD grants, are guided by Regional Advisory Committees that include membership of other area ROEs, local education organizations (IPA, IASA, IEA, IFT, etc.), and area districts.
- Echoing the IPA recommendation, the state budget should meet the leadership staffing requirements outlined in the Evidence Based Funding Model.
- The ISBE Office of District and School Leadership should consider strategic partnerships with districts and universities to encourage a funding model that includes shared costs for leadership placements and training to support districts' succession plan. This strategy is currently being done through a leadership pipeline by Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the Rockford Public Schools in partnership with organizations such as IPA.
- The ISBE Office of Leadership should partner with the Governor's P-20 Council Teacher and Leadership Effectiveness Committee (TLE), which is embarking on a systemic Diverse Educator Pipeline initiative that will bring together multiple agencies and educators, associations, and higher education institutions throughout the state to develop strategies that span the whole career continuum for identifying, recruiting, preparing, placing and retaining more diverse P-12 educators in our schools and early learning centers. Partnering with the Governor's P-20 Council would aid ISBE's Diverse Leader effort, making it part of a larger and more systemic effort.

Improvements to School Leader Development System:

- ISBE should request a state appropriation to support a pilot program to develop diverse principals and assistant principals for targeted high-need districts and schools in Illinois and that would be focused on supporting diverse educators that currently possess a Type 75 General Administrative license, but are not currently working in leadership positions. Through a survey conducted by Goshen Consulting during the summer of 2020, a preliminary list of 103 Black and 38 Latinx teachers were identify that possess a Type 75 and expressed interest in a pilot aimed at developing a diverse leader pipeline. Additionally, a readiness rubric is currently in development by the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) that is aligned to the national Professional Standards for School Leaders (PSEL) and the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders. The readiness rubric can be used to frame and support participants' development needs. The entire program is designed to support the development and demonstration of high-leverage competencies in evidence-based leadership practices to improve schools.
- ISBE Office of District and School Leadership should partner with six Regional Offices of Education who have already begun to establish Leadership (LEAD) Hubs that are geographically spread across all 6 Service Areas in Illinois. Through these LEAD Hubs, the 6 ROEs have developed a bench of successful instructional leaders that can serve as coaches to pilot participants. The LEAD Hubs have collaborated on the development of a series of Principal Coaching Micro-Credentials aimed at increasing competency in high-leverage instructional leadership areas and over the next five years the LEAD Hubs can train up to 100 principal coaches at no cost. This service and partnership can be used to identify, train, and sustain a cadre of diverse leadership coaches around the state through ROEs, which serve as an extension of ISBE.

- ISBE Office of District and School Leadership should partner with six LEAD Hubs to scale distributed leadership supports provided through federal LEAD grants that build principals' capacity to work with Instructional Leadership Teams with instructional decisions in their schools.
- ISBE should establish research-based performance standards for Principal Coaches and support annual appropriations for the New Principal Mentoring Act. Through the LEAD Hubs, principal coaching competencies were developed and used as a framework for a four-part micro-credential series that can be used as a standardized training for principal coaches among the LEAD Hubs.
- ISBE state should adopt an evidence-based funding system required for use of professional development funds.
- ISBE should work with stakeholders from around the state in the creation of standards for micro-credentials so that districts and educators can be certain their investment will increase their competencies. Additionally, ISBE, in partnership with local districts, should provide incentives for micro-credentials in high-need areas such as equity and social-emotional learning.
- ISBE Office of District and School Leadership should explore ways in which the Assistant Principal role can be re-imagined to further develop the school leaders in a way that supports the district's vacancy strategy.

Improvements to Principal Preparation:

We agree with other organizations that have recommended that updates need to be made to address what we have learned since the new principal preparation program regulations were enacted in 2010. For example, we recommend that ISBE:

- Align the internship requirements to new National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards (which are the university complement to the PSEL standards) and IPA School Leader Paradigm. We recommend that the new internship requirements include a standardized competency-based framework utilized by all P-12 Principal Endorsement Programs and that maintains the program's focus as a P-12 principal endorsement.
 - Aligned with this, we recommend that a state committee made up of the representation of stakeholders involved with the development of Illinois P-12 Principal Requirements be convened to review and adopt revised internship requirements as well as consider other updates to Illinois' P-12 Principal Endorsement programs.
- Provide incentives to increase diversity in the educator pipeline at all levels
- Partner with Advance Illinois Educator Pipeline Workgroup in developing a variety of research-based tools that provide partnership and participant selection criteria, and strategies for preparing diverse school and district leaders. Through the engagement of a group of Illinois educators and professional associations from across the state, this committee can provide staffing support to ISBE for the development of a vision for this work and to help identify other organizations that may be engaged in the effort.
- Explore strategies with principal endorsement programs and other related organizations to create a one-year residency and/or induction programs for educators with a Type 75 certificate who are interested in leadership positions but are not yet in the job. This can provide immediate relief to districts facing principal shortages, as it provides an additional pool of qualified school leaders that are ready and willing to take on challenging principal positions if they are provided with adequate supports to ensure success.

Further, we would caution ISBE to avoid a rush to judgement about the effectiveness of the research-based approaches that were included in the changes made to principal preparation program regulations until a greater exploration of impact has been conducted. For example, the concern expressed about the shrinking pipeline provides little evidence that the current number of qualified candidates is insufficient.

Specifically, it was anticipated that principal preparation programs would experience greatly reduced enrollment as they shifted programs to focus on the role of the Principal. However, because the state previously produced an *oversupply* of educators that were prepared in General Administrative/Type 75 programs ***the current pipeline provides a more than sufficient number of candidates from which to draw.***

That said, the current pipeline certainly lacks an equitable geographic distribution of qualified candidates. Results of the Illinois Association of Regional School Superintendents (IARSS) 2020 Educator Shortage Survey identify the geographic areas of the state where the principal shortage area is most severe, many of which are in isolated rural areas. Continuing to collect data that drills down to areas in most need can be helpful to targeting scarce state or local resources on areas of the state experiencing the greatest shortages. As a result, ISBE and IBHE should partner to develop Grow Your Own strategies to preparing school leaders as well as explore strategies to bring principal training programs to areas of the state identified as “higher education deserts,”

Additionally, in order to focus the scarce resources of the State on strategies that are likely to have the greatest impact, we need to gain a greater understanding of the root cause and extent of the problem. To that end, it is imperative that the state simultaneously continue to engage in strategies that support a robust and highly effective leadership pipeline, while exploring new ways of creating working conditions that make the principalship more manageable so that our current leaders avoid burn-out and are retained.

Finally, because claims regarding the adequacy of the leadership pipeline are largely anecdotal and/or somewhat conflicting, we strongly recommend that ISBE not prematurely revise any of the major research-based requirements for preparation programs. Further, that ***prior to making any large-scale changes, the state invest in building a strong data infrastructure that ties principal data through the ISBE Partnership for Educator Preparation (PEP) initiative to educator supply and demand data that can reliably provide quantitative data involving state and local supply and demand trends, as well as help to identify specific gaps/shortage areas in the distribution of effective leaders.***

CONCLUSION

Statewide policies create the conditions within which districts and school leaders operate. Those working conditions influence whether or not improvements aimed at school effectiveness are implemented with fidelity at the local level. Therefore, we conclude our recommendations by highlighting a note of caution from the Illinois School Leader Advisory Council’s Final Report: “As our expectations for schools rise, our expectations for school leaders have risen; if we expect more from school leaders, then our expectations for the programs that prepare and develop them must be elevated as well.”^{xxxviii} We strongly urge the state to continue its work as a national leader in innovative and high-quality leadership preparation and development. By investing resources in developing a statewide infrastructure that creates cohesion among the many organizations and individuals working hard to support our schools, the state will make great strides toward improving outcomes for all students in Illinois.

SOURCES

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