

Strengthening California's System for Preparing and Supporting Principals: *Lessons from Exemplary Programs*



A Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning Policy Brief on Strengthening Education Leadership in California, based on the research of Linda Darling-Hammond and Stelios Orphanos



The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning is made up of education professionals, scholars and public policy experts who care deeply about improving the schooling of California's children. The Center was founded in 1995 as a public, nonprofit organization with the purpose of strengthening the capacity of California's teachers for delivering rigorous, well-rounded curriculum and ensuring the continuing intellectual, ethical and social development of all children.

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Executive Summary

The link among the quality of principals, caliber of teaching, and levels of student achievement is a tight one. School leadership is a key factor in the recruitment and retention of quality teachers; teaching quality, in turn, profoundly influences improvements in student learning and achievement. Yet despite their central role in this equation, school leaders have received relatively little policy attention during the past two decades of school reform initiatives.

This policy brief, based on the research of Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues, is part of a broader effort to bring the central role of principals to the forefront. It describes the major challenges facing the education leadership workforce, reviews existing data about California principals, provides an overview of the state's current principal development efforts, and draws upon research about exemplary programs in other states that could help California policy-makers create a stronger, more cohesive system for preparing and supporting the state's principals, now and in the future.

A Snapshot of Education Leadership in California

Only 48% of California principals plan to stay in their jobs until they retire, compared to 67% of principals nationwide. Among secondary school principals, the statistics are even more alarming: only 22% plan to stay in their jobs until retirement. In part, this reflects school leadership roles that have become much more demanding, yet require less preparation and offer less support to meet these demands.

California's Current Credentialing and Professional Development System

California has a two-tiered credentialing system based on core standards established by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and adopted as California's Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS). The system is designed to encourage field experience tied to academic study, but how extensively this occurs in practice is unknown. Once principals have received their credential, they have neither state-funded offerings nor requirements to continue their professional development as principals — in marked contrast to other states with exemplary leadership programs.

Common Characteristics of Exemplary Leadership Development Programs

In studies of eight states with exemplary leadership development programs for principals, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues found the following common characteristics:

- **Clear focus and values about leadership and learning** — and a program coherently organized around these values;
- A **standards-based curriculum** that emphasizes instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management;
- **Field-based internships** with skilled supervision in pre-service programs;
- **Cohort groups** that create many (and ongoing) opportunities for collaboration and teamwork in practice-oriented situations;

- Active **instructional strategies linking theory and practice** (e.g., problem-based learning, case methods, assignments that engage candidates in instructional leadership work, such as planning and delivering professional development);
- **Proactive recruiting and selection** of both candidates and faculty; and
- **Strong partnerships with schools and districts** to support quality, field-based learning.

Implications for California

How can California create a stronger, more cohesive system for preparing and supporting principals? Building on the elements of exemplary programs noted by Darling-Hammond and others who have studied this issue, four main areas emerge that appear to fit well with directions the state is already taking with its teacher development system and warrant consideration by the state’s policy-makers:

- Increasing our understanding and knowledge of principals as a current and future workforce by **collecting and interpreting** data about this cohort of educators;
- Stimulating improvements in **pre-service programs**;
- Creating the **recruiting, mentorship and other supports** that help principals feel prepared and able to succeed in their roles; and
- Creating a solid infrastructure for high-quality **professional development**.

Conclusion

California currently has the building blocks of a strong principal preparation, recruitment and retention system, but needs the will and determination to turn these into a cohesive and sustainable system. Doing so requires quality data to understand the contours of the problem, customize and target solutions, and monitor progress. It requires investing in principal preparation as a *system*, not the patchwork quilt of programs and opportunities that Linda Darling-Hammond has so aptly described as “random acts of professional development.” Such investments, in turn, require sustaining infrastructure so that the gains that accrue incrementally from these investments are not lost with budget cuts.

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning sees an inextricable link between the quality of California’s principals and the quality of teaching in our public schools. Work already done to document the status of and strengthen the state’s teacher workforce creates a viable model for developing a system of principal preparation and ongoing professional development — one that is based on the premise that every California student deserves not only a fully prepared, effective teacher in every classroom, but also a fully prepared, effective and supported principal in every school.

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Introduction

For the past two decades, the crucial connection between teaching quality and student achievement has received well-deserved (and long-overdue) attention and emphasis. As teaching quality took center stage, however, the role and diverse responsibilities of school principals was somewhat overlooked — or, at the very least, taken for granted. In part, this gap reflected a lack of evidence about the effect of school leadership on teaching quality and the types of preparation and support that can enhance it.

No longer.

A groundswell of recent research and activity has brought the central role of school principals to the forefront, recognizing that school leadership is a key factor in the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. Effective school leaders can be instrumental in creating a culture of learning within schools and supporting improvements in student learning and achievement. Increasingly, this requires creating an environment for empowerment, resourcefulness, and continuous improvement. Indeed, a November 2007 Wallace Foundation conference on the subject was entitled “Leadership: The Bridge to Better Learning” because, as the proceedings note, “education leadership . . . can bring together the many different reform efforts in ways that practically nothing else can.” As Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita noted in her remarks, “There are no ‘leader-proof’ reforms — and no effective reforms without good leadership.”

This policy brief examines the current status of education leadership in California. It describes the major challenges facing the education leadership workforce, reviews existing data about California principals, provides an overview of

A groundswell of recent research and activity has brought the central role of school principals to the forefront, recognizing that school leadership is a key factor in the recruitment and retention of quality teachers.

the state’s current principal development efforts, and draws upon research about promising programs in other states that can inform improvements in California’s education leadership system. The data are based on a 2007 research study conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond and Stelios Orphanos, *Leadership Development in California*, augmented with an overview on California school administrators prepared by SRI International in 2007.

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning’s interest in education leadership was sparked by *A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Can Learn* — a recent study on teacher retention by respected colleague and researcher Ken Futernick. Among the study’s important findings is the fact that 42% of California teachers who leave the field cite as one of their reasons “an unsupportive principal.” Over half (52%) cite poor administrative support from the district as a reason for leaving — a factor that raises the important link between school site and district office administration.

The education leadership landscape shares many characteristics with that of the teacher workforce a decade ago: potential shortages, a fragmented system, scant data, and profound implications for teaching and learning — and particularly for closing the achievement gap between “haves” and “have-nots” in our public education system.

Our work over the past decade studying the characteristics of the teacher workforce has many parallels to the situation we now see unfolding with education leadership. When we began our research on California’s teacher workforce in 1998 (updated and reported every year since then in our annual publication of research findings, *The Status of the Teaching Profession*), a wave of retirements suggested short- and long-term shortages in the supply of fully prepared and effective teachers. Yet despite the looming crisis, data on the characteristics of the teacher workforce were in scarce supply. In addition, relatively little attention was devoted to the *system* for preparing, recruiting and retaining teachers — and for distributing them more evenly across a decidedly inequitable school system.

Many profound gaps in understanding and strengthening California’s teacher workforce remain, but they do so against a backdrop of considerable progress — progress that we envision for the education leadership workforce as well. In the decade since we began our in-depth research on California’s teacher

workforce, we have worked with our partners to document — and improve — many aspects of the teacher workforce system, drawing attention to the central issue of teacher quality and recommending ways that a more coherent and effective development system can be put in place statewide.

The Center’s ongoing work is targeted to help policy-makers, educators, philanthropy and education support organizations reach consensus about the dimensions of teaching quality and how it can be measured at different points in a teacher’s career. It is designed to draw unprecedented attention to hidden trends, such as the practice of relying on underprepared teachers to fill shortages and the maldistribution of these underprepared teachers within low-performing schools, correlated with an unacceptable achievement gap between wealthier students and their poor and minority counterparts. That scrutiny contributed to a significant drop in the number of underprepared teachers by over 25,000 (from 14% to 5%) between 2002 and 2008. Further, it sparked an interest in a model of regional K-18 databases on teacher development that is now being emulated locally throughout the state.

The education leadership landscape shares many characteristics with that of the teacher workforce a decade ago: potential shortages, a fragmented system, scant data, and profound implications for teaching and learning — and particularly for closing the achievement gap between “haves” and “have-nots” in our public education system. It is through this lens that the Center and our colleagues and partners view both the challenges and opportunities suggested by the current status of California’s education leadership system.

Education Leadership in California: A Snapshot

A Tough Job, Getting Tougher

In 1999, California passed the Public School Accountability Program (PSAA), which made schools accountable for demonstrating academic progress among their students. Coupled with the 2002 federal enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), these standards and results-based accountability standards increased the pressure on California principals by requiring more implementation and monitoring of schools' compliance with them.

To function as effective leaders, principals must be much more than able fiscal and operations managers. They must be able to recognize, shape and support strong instruction and to develop the kinds of organizations that create a culture of learning for students and teachers alike. Often with little preparation, principals become responsible and accountable for the effectiveness of the school instructional program. They are expected to move from the role of school operations manager to facilitator of unprecedented change as an instructional leader able to create and manage innovation, improve organizational performance, and interpret data to implement strategic objectives. Yet despite emerging consensus on both the high stakes and the demanding job description, principals generally have not received the necessary resources, preparation, or mentoring that would expand their capacity to respond to these increased demands. In fact, California principals may well face more pressure than their counterparts in other states, with expenditures per pupil below the national average and less administrative support at the district and school levels.

Instead, long hours, state and federal mandates, school board politics, extra paperwork, and low compensation have conspired to create waves of retirement and high turnover, with fewer and fewer candidates eager to fill job openings created as principals leave. Compared to their national counterparts, California principals are much more likely to report plans to leave their jobs. Only 48% of California principals plan to stay in their jobs until retirement, compared to 67% nationally — and only 22% of California secondary school principals plan to do so.

A 2000 statewide survey of California school districts by the Association of California School Administrators found difficulties hiring qualified candidates — even though a high (and seemingly adequate) number of candidates were receiving their administrative credentials. A 2002 study of a large urban school district¹ found that only 10% of eligible candidates reported that they would be likely to apply for a principalship; not surprisingly, self-perception of the ability to perform in this role was the strongest predictor of whether or not they applied.

Since the demands of the job are likely to expand rather than constrict, the solution to creating a greater pool of candidates who feel adequately prepared for the tasks they will face appears to lie, at least in part, in how we prepare principals for their crucial role and support them after they become principals.

¹ Winter, P.A., Rinehart, J.S., & Munoz, A.M. Principal recruitment: An empirical evaluation of a school district's internal pool of principal certified personnel. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 16, 129-141. (2002).

What Do We Know About California's Principals?

The data summarized below are from a national survey conducted by Darling-Hammond and her colleagues of 1,086 elementary and secondary school principals, of whom 189 were from California.²

How are California principals similar to their counterparts elsewhere?

In several respects, California principals in this sample were similar to principals elsewhere: they had, on average, 15 years of prior teaching experience (compared to 14 years nationally), with 10 of those years in the same school. Fifty-eight percent of current principals in California had served previously as assistant principals (compared to 59% nationally). Similar to national averages, California's *elementary* school principals were more likely to be women and *secondary* school principals were more likely to be men.

Overall, California principals had similar responses to those from other states about their preparation, the quality of their programs, and their preparedness for their work. Some notable exceptions to these patterns are discussed in more detail below.

How are California principals different from their counterparts elsewhere?

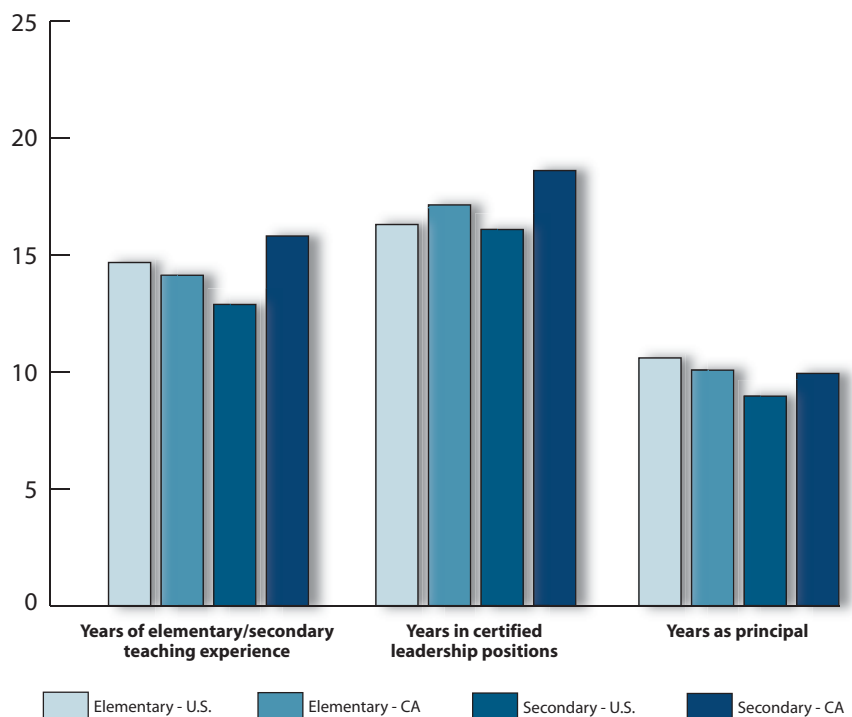
California principals were more likely to be women (59% in California, compared to 46% nationally) and Latino/a (20% in California, compared to 5%

nationally). Secondary school principals were more likely to be non-white (43%, much higher than the national average of 10%).

Compared to their counterparts in other states, California principals were far more likely than those elsewhere to have begun their pre-service programs *after* they had become principals (24% in California, compared to 7% nationally) — most likely a reflection of looser licensing procedures.³ Although California principals (especially secondary school principals) generally described pre-service training activities that were closely connected to their work in the field, they also reported less experience and less access to internships, mentoring programs, and other types of experiential learning than principals in other states.

California principals were much less likely to have participated in certain professional

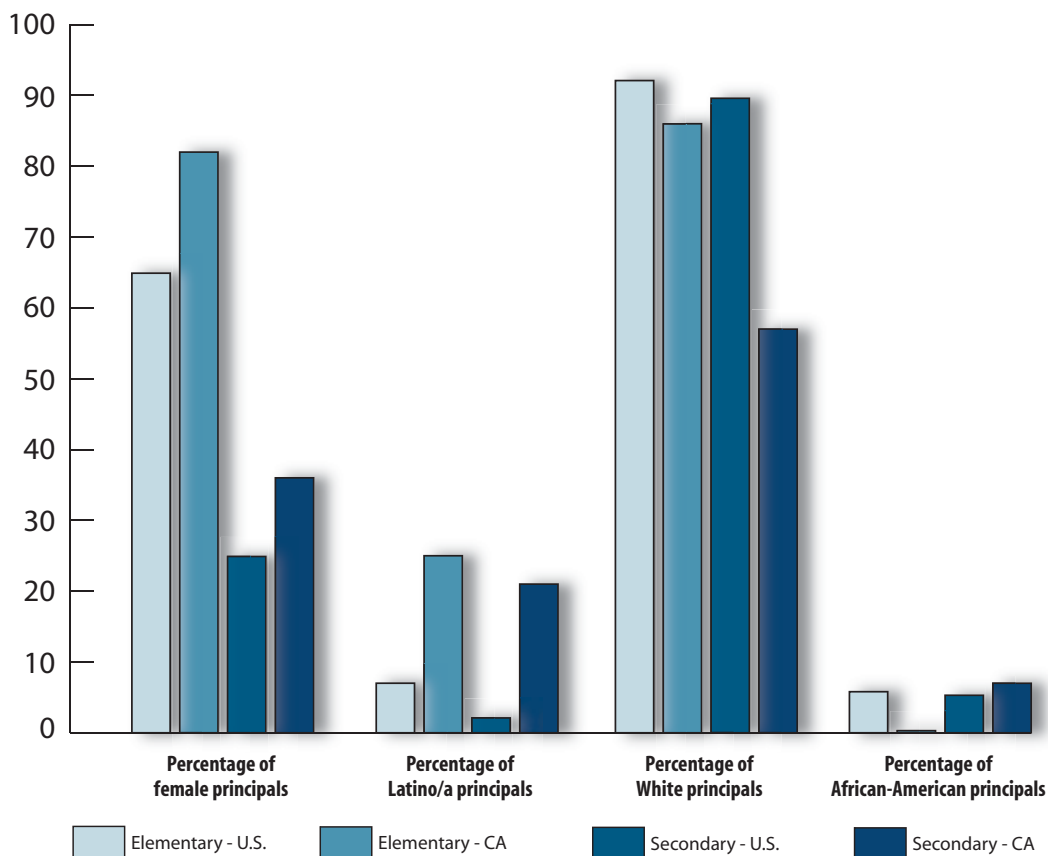
Figure 1: Elementary and Secondary School Principals' Experience, U.S. and California



² The sample was weighted to oversample eight states that were included in the study because of exemplary leadership development programs and/or approaches to state policy and financing of these programs.

³ The features of California's pre-service and credentialing system that make this possible are described in greater detail in the next section, "Overview of California's Current Credentialing and Professional Development Systems for Principals."

Figure 2: Demographics of California and U.S. Principals



development activities. For example, few had participated in an internship as part of their training experience (only 27% had done so, compared to 63% in the national sample and 92% in New York). They were also less likely to have participated in a principal network, individual or collaborative research, or mentoring/coaching by a veteran principal.

California principals were much less likely than their counterparts in the other states in the study to have participated in professional development activities with teachers. This is significant because of its connection to strong instructional leadership. In general, California principals reported spending less time on key instructional leadership functions than their national counterparts. For example, they were significantly less likely than principals elsewhere to report that they worked frequently with teachers to change teaching methods in situations where students were not succeeding, or to work with faculty to develop goals for their

own practice and professional learning. They also spent less time evaluating teachers and providing instructional feedback, supporting professional development, or guiding the development of curriculum and instruction.

In several areas, California principals seemed more discouraged than principals elsewhere. They

were much less likely than other principals to believe that all the students in their schools had access to expert teachers and high-quality teaching (reflecting the higher levels of underprepared and novice teachers in California). They also were less likely to report increases in attention to the needs of low-performing students, sharing best practices among teachers, or using performance data for instructional improvement.

These responses are consistent with a recent EdSource survey, in which California principals ranked training in using assessment data as their top professional development need, followed by evaluating teachers' instruction (among those in high-performing schools) and addressing the needs of English language learners (among those in low-performing schools, although the latter also was a priority for principals of high-performing schools).

As described in greater detail below, many of the differences between California principals and their counterparts elsewhere are cause for concern because they signify gaps in pre-service training and professional development that are tied to the emerging consensus about what principals need to know and be able to do in order to be effective as instructional and organizational leaders.

Another concern is the lack of data about important aspects of the education leadership experience in California, including various routes to entering and staying in the profession. The final section of this policy brief lists specific data elements that would greatly increase our understanding of the status of education leadership in California — and thus the ways in which it can be strengthened.

Overview of California's Current Credentialing and Professional Development Systems for Principals

A Two-Tiered Credentialing System

California's credentialing process is based on the six core standards embodied in the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS), which were themselves adapted from standards for school leaders established by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in the 1990s.

The CPSELS core standards delineate the following expectations for school leaders:

- Fostering and communicating a **vision of learning** that can be translated into attainable goals;
- Promoting a **school culture and instructional program** oriented toward continuous improvement in student learning and staff professional growth;
- Providing the conditions for a **safe, efficient, and effective learning environment**;

California principals were far more likely than those elsewhere to have begun their pre-service programs after they had become principals...

- Responding to **diverse interests and needs of families** and other local stakeholders;
- Serving as an **ethical model** of reflective practice and continuous growth; and
- Being **attuned to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts** of the school leader's work.

Collectively, these standards demand certain core competencies from school leaders. These include, among others:

- Instructional leadership — an ability to interpret and apply research on advances in instruction and curriculum that lead to improved student learning and achievement;
- Organizational leadership — the ability to improve schools as organizations by setting goals, motivating teams, and managing change; and
- Using assessment data effectively — including collecting, interpreting, and communicating data.

In 2003, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) adopted the CPSELS, which meant that California's credentialing and professional development programs for administrators had to align their curricula with these standards.

California now has a two-tiered credentialing system. The first tier — the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential — allows a candidate to begin working as an administrator and is valid for up to 5 years. This preliminary (or pre-service) credential is awarded when a

candidate completes a CTC-accredited program or internship (usually through a local college or university) or a standardized test, the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, which poses hypothetical situations that the candidate responds to in an essay format.

The second tier — the Professional Clear Administrative Services Credential (called the clear credential) — is an in-service credential that must be completed within 5 years of beginning an administrative position, through continued preparation or a test, and is renewed every 5 years thereafter.

Before earning an administrative credential, applicants must have a valid teaching credential (or a credential as a reading, math or other specialist or as a pupil services provider, such as a counselor) and at least 3 years of experience in that role.

Although California's credentialing system is designed to encourage field experience that is tied to academic study, existing data sources cannot provide a clear picture of how extensively this actually occurs in practice. The current alternative testing route for the preliminary credential, in particular, raises questions about whether a 6-hour pencil-and-paper test, however well-designed, can serve as a sufficient screen of candidates' competence and hands-on problem-solving skills. However, in October 2008, the CTC voted to develop a test specifically aligned with California's Administrative Services Credential program standards, including the CPSEL. It is expected that this assessment will replace the existing exam in 2011.

Professional Development for Principals

Until its funding was eliminated from the state budget in 2003, the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) was a nationally recognized source of professional development for California principals that was operated regionally through the state's County Offices of

Education. The CSLA, like similar leadership academies in other states, was designed to connect research and practice through a variety of approaches such as cohort peer groups, project-based learning, school leadership teams, and research on problems drawn from participants' day-to-day work. It also featured an Executive Leadership Center devoted to professional development for superintendents.

Currently, principals have access to professional development through California's Principal Training Program, which was authorized under AB 75 in 2001 and reauthorized in 2006 as AB 430. This program uses state funding to reimburse local education agencies for the costs of hiring an approved administrative training provider (although the local site must also partially match the state grant), who in turn provides at least 80 hours of training to local administrators (followed by 80 hours of intensive individualized support). The training aligns with state accountability standards and curricula and is organized into three modules: leadership and support of student instructional programs, leadership and management for instructional improvement, and instructional technology to improve pupil performance.

The Principal Training Program has reached a large proportion of the state's principals and assistant principals and is credited with helping them become more familiar with curriculum and instruction — especially as these relate to state textbooks and standards. Another benefit is that the training helps principals become more familiar with important aspects of their administrative work, such as management and resource allocation strategies and the use of technology. Typically, school districts apply for funding through an application process; the Principal Training Program is funded through the state's General Fund (at approximately \$5 million each year) and federal funds (approximately \$1.5 million each year). However, under the recently

Principals in California (and much of the United States) experience “random acts of professional development and workshops, not tightly linked to instruction.”

passed budget act, districts will be able to use these funds flexibly and it is not yet clear how they will be dispersed by the state.

Despite its many pluses, it must be noted that the program, at 80 hours of coursework, is relatively brief. It generally is not customized

to individual needs and only rarely includes direct mentoring or coaching. The 80 hours of practicum that follow the coursework can be satisfied in several ways, including by participating in curriculum training with teachers — which may or may not be job-specific or related to their effectiveness and performance as education leaders. New principals can use this training to meet the requirements for their Tier 2 credential, but after the credential is obtained, principals have neither state-funded offerings nor requirements to continue their professional development as principals. As Darling-Hammond has observed, principals in California (and much of the United States) experience “random acts of professional development and workshops, not tightly linked to instruction.”

In marked contrast, every other state in the eight-state study of exemplary leadership programs conducted by Darling-Hammond and Orphanos had instituted ongoing professional development requirements in order for principals to renew their licenses. Some even had developed a three-tiered licensing system, specifically designed to incorporate ongoing professional development requirements. Most of the states also had created

institutions that organized and provided ongoing professional development opportunities through universities or free-standing academies — supported by line-item state funding.

Common Characteristics of Exemplary Leadership Development Programs

In several studies examining exemplary leadership development programs and approaches in eight states, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues found the following common characteristics:

- **Clear focus and values about leadership and learning** — and a program coherently organized around these values;
- A **standards-based curriculum** that emphasizes instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management;
- **Field-based internships** with skilled supervision in pre-service programs;
- **Cohort groups** that create many (and ongoing) opportunities for collaboration and teamwork in practice-oriented situations;
- Active **instructional strategies linking theory and practice** (e.g., problem-based learning, case methods, assignments that engage candidates in instructional leadership work, such as planning and delivering professional development);
- **Proactive recruiting and selection** of both candidates and faculty; and
- **Strong partnerships with schools and districts** to support quality, field-based learning.

At the in-service or professional development level, successful programs were comprehensive, using a “wrap-around” approach to envelop school leaders with support. These supports were integrated with recruiting, evaluation, and supervision strategies, all of which focused on instructional improvement.

Another important feature of these exemplary programs was the state policy context in which they operated. State policies that appeared to strengthen the preparation and professional development of school leaders included:

- **Adopting Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards to guide principal preparation programs and sharpen their focus.** The key is not only to adopt these standards, but to create incentives for their incorporation into programs — such as program monitoring and approval, licensure assessment, and investments in internships and other program elements. In California, the state body that monitors such preparation programs is the CTC’s Committee on Accreditation. Yet California lacks the licensing assessments that some other states use to document the outcomes of principal preparation programs. However, California does have programs such as San Diego’s Education Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) that exemplify the incorporation of ISLLC standards into principal pre-service course content and approaches.
- **Conducting rigorous principal assessments and program reviews.** Several states have adopted a “carrot-and-stick” approach to program review that combines leverage and support for program improvement. For example, in Mississippi, the state took an unusually aggressive approach in the late 1990s, closing all of its university administration programs and requiring them to re-apply for accreditation. In addition to compliance with national standards (aligned with the ILSCC standards), Mississippi required at least 80% of a program’s graduates to pass the state administrator test in the 3 years preceding the accreditation process. In the first round, none of the state’s programs passed the stringent accreditation requirements — but the programs were

overhauled and now receive very high assessments from their graduates. In Georgia, the state’s Leadership Institute for School Improvement engages its members — educators, business leaders, members of the Board of Regents — in annual principal program evaluations that demand impact data and evidence of partnerships with K-12 districts as part of an effort to highlight comparisons with the ISLLC standards.

- **Conducting licensure assessments for the principalship, based on ISLLC standards.** In six of the eight states in the Darling-Hammond study, such assessments were already in place. The Connecticut Administrator Test (CAT) poses authentic problems for potential principals in a four-module test that places principals in situations such as responding to a teacher’s lesson plan, videotaped lesson, and samples of student work; or describing a process for improving the school or responding to a school-wide problem. The test is rigorous enough that 20% of the candidates do not pass on their first attempt.
 - **Requiring and supporting administrative internships under the direct supervision of veteran principals, to recruit and support principals.** In North Carolina, the Principal Fellows Program (PFP) provides scholarship loans (\$20,000 for each of 2 years) to cover both tuition and a stipend at a public university, with the first year devoted to academic coursework and the second to a supervised, full-time administrative internship in a public school. The fellows repay the scholarship loan with 4 years of service as a principal or assistant principal in one of the state’s public schools. Since the program began in 1994, over 800 scholarship loans have been awarded and over 12% of the state’s practicing principals and assistant principals are PFP alumni.
- In Kentucky, a three-member team (a mentor, district representative, and university

education administration professor) provides support to new principals, focused on attaining ISLLC standards. Despite a temporary funding cut from 2002-2005, the program was valued so highly that it was reinstated by the state legislature in 2005.

- **Supporting professional development for principals throughout their careers.** Delaware, as part of its new three-tiered licensing system, offers new principals 30 hours of mentoring each year for 3 years — with each year’s mentorship focusing on a different aspect of the standards. Another approach is state-funded administrator academies, such as North Carolina’s Principals’ Executive Program (PEP), which has offered continuing education for North Carolina’s principals for over 20 years through residency programs and topical workshops and conferences.

Implications for California

How can California create a stronger, more cohesive system for preparing and supporting principals? Building on the elements of exemplary programs noted by Darling-Hammond and others who have studied this issue, four main areas emerge that appear to fit well with directions the state is already taking with its teacher development system and warrant consideration by the state’s policy-makers:

- Increasing our understanding and knowledge of principals as a current and future workforce by **collecting and interpreting data** about this cohort of educators;
- Stimulating improvements in **pre-service programs and assessments**;
- Creating the **recruiting, mentorship and other supports** that help principals feel prepared and able to succeed in their roles; and

- Creating a solid infrastructure for high-quality **professional development**.

Better Data: The First Step in Strengthening School Leadership

Collecting accurate, comprehensive data about California’s teacher workforce became the basis for raising awareness about the problem of underprepared, uncredentialed teachers deployed throughout California’s schools — especially in schools serving low-income, minority students. This acute focus on the problem, in turn, led to a series of important insights and changes (at the state and local levels) that drastically reduced the number of underprepared teachers in our workforce.

As suggested by the research findings in this policy brief, several specific ways to improve the system for preparing and supporting principals already have been identified. However, an urgent and basic need is to develop a much more thorough understanding of the status of education leadership and the barriers to entering and staying in the profession. This includes the aggregation of already existing information on principals’ preparation, retention, mobility and professional development, as well as other data collection strategies that compare the conditions under which those who stay in the profession, those who leave, and those who consider but do not enter it. For example, a survey of principals and administrative credential holders (i.e., those who choose not to pursue a principalship) would add to our understanding of the features of their pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development needs that are the most salient. This, in turn, could become the basis of a professional development agenda for principals (as well as a broader research agenda) that could look ahead for decades, not just a few years.⁴

⁴ Later this year, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning will be releasing a *CenterView* highlighting the current gaps in existing data on California administrators.

Pre-service Programs

As the Darling-Hammond study and those of others have noted, California is not starting from scratch in strengthening its pre-service programs. The adoption of CPSEL standards to guide programs was an important foundational step. Additional approaches to strengthening pre-service for principals derived from this data include:

- Using assessment data to gain insight into the extent to which principals are prepared to recognize high quality teaching, lead instructional improvement, design and lead productive learning organizations, and allocate and manage resources in ways that achieve gains in learning.
- Working closely with organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators to disseminate research- and evidence-based best practices (and to use grants and other incentives to stimulate adoption of these practices) in both pre-service and professional development programs.

Recruiting, Mentorship, and other Supports

As noted above, California's principals are far less likely than their peers in other states to plan to stay in their jobs. As existing principals retire — and as the next wave of credentialed administrators becomes increasingly reluctant to step into the vacancies — continued shortages are bound to occur. Strategies used successfully by some states to recruit more principals into the field (and support them once they enter it) have included providing stipends to talented prospective principals interested in obtaining their credential and entering the field. While California largely relies on self-recruitment and support for pre-service principal programs, other states have shown how effective even small amounts of support can be. North Carolina's Principal Fellows Program, described above, is one successful model, affecting not just the

recruitment of principals but retention as well. (North Carolina's principals were the most likely of those in all eight states to say they planned to stay in the principalship until their retirement.) Mississippi offers another approach — a year's sabbatical that gives talented teachers a full year to pursue their preparation for a principalship.

Internships and mentoring are another key element — especially when paired with recruitment strategies. The exemplary programs in the Darling-Hammond study demonstrated that strong leadership development programs tightly link high-quality coursework with supervised practice.

Professional Development

California does not require ongoing professional development as part of the renewal process for an administrative credential, and current professional development activities (through AB 75/430) are concentrated upon — and most helpful to — new principals early in their careers.

Funding for the highly successful CSLA and its 12 regional centers was cut in 2003, and some CSLA elements are still housed at WestEd. California's experience with this type of ongoing institution reflects the policies that other states have put into place to offer cutting-edge professional development opportunities to principals. Such structures offer options for many different formats for professional development — ranging from residencies, coaching, principal networks, site visits, workshops, and training for teams of principals — as well as specific topics driven by needs assessments of veteran principals.

In addition to leadership academies, Connecticut involves its principals in the state's teacher evaluation process. As assessors, principals gain a great deal of expertise about evaluating teaching — while also earning professional development credits. California's

recent adoption of a Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) as a capstone for obtaining a preliminary credential offers a similar opportunity for principals to apply this expertise to link the credentialing process with induction support and professional development at their own school sites.

It should be noted, however, that most assessments currently do not follow the

candidates to their school sites; rather, they remain in the domain of the preparation institution. They still offer value to individual principals and build their assessment skills, yet the tie to teacher quality could be strengthened even further. Connecticut's teacher assessment program has a corollary in California's TPA and might serve as a helpful model for principals as they usher new teachers into the profession.

Conclusion

California's schools are struggling with reform, but many of them — particularly the state's many low-performing schools — need not just reform, but transformation. Effective school leaders are essential to that transformation and to closing the persistent achievement gap that is widening between California's privileged and poor students. Both basic fairness and the imperatives of the state's economy demand such a transformation.

California's principals are being called upon to manage this unprecedented change and transformation of public schools. But in order to support this change, policy-makers need to know far more about who is leading these efforts and how to support high expectations for students' academic performance, including engaging and inspiring teachers to embrace strategies, systems and methods for achieving excellence. More data are needed on how to build principals' knowledge and capabilities — as well as how to create opportunities to apply this new knowledge in experiential ways that help them practice and refine newly acquired skills.

California currently has the building blocks of a strong principal preparation, recruitment and retention system, but needs the will and

determination to turn these into a cohesive and sustainable system. Doing so requires high-quality, reliable and timely data to understand the contours of the problem, customize and target solutions, and monitor progress. It requires investing in principal preparation as part of a cohesive system of leadership development, not the patchwork quilt of programs and opportunities that currently exists. Such investments, in turn, require sustained support so that the gains that accrue incrementally from these investments are not lost with budget cuts.

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning sees an inextricable link between the quality of California's principals and the quality of teaching in our public schools. Work already done to document the status of and strengthen the state's teacher workforce creates a viable model for developing a system of principal preparation and ongoing professional development — one that is based on the premise that every California student deserves not only a fully prepared, effective teacher in every classroom, but also a fully prepared, effective, and supported principal in every school.



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