

# DRIVING ALIGNMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN ESEA FLEXIBILITY

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The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has presented you – state leaders – with an enormous opportunity. ED's offer of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) gives you the chance to align critical systems – standards, assessments, school accountability, and educator evaluation – with raised expectations for all students. And, by implementing good processes of engagement in the design of new systems, you can bring in critical expertise and build confidence in a new way of measuring and supporting student growth.

New Leaders is eager to help you take full advantage of this opportunity, beginning with this paper. Our goal is to provide concrete recommendations, focused primarily on Principle 3, for you to consider in preparing your application for ESEA flexibility. Given the importance of alignment across the principles, we start with brief comments on Principles 1 and 2. Under each principle, we describe our understanding of the intent of ED's language, our suggested response, and our rationale, grounded in lessons learned from school leaders making breakthrough gains in student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Where relevant, we indicate opportunities to cross-reference from one section to another; this is critical, we believe, to avoid creating or reinforcing silos. Please note that these recommendations are not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, they focus on the principalship as part of a broader coherent and aligned system of accountability and support that improves teacher and principal effectiveness and increases student success.

Recommendations always come from a particular set of beliefs. We have three:

- 1. Principals matter.** A large body of research backs up the idea that improving principal effectiveness is central to improving student achievement. The principal's impact is significant because of the leadership actions principals take to create the school-wide conditions that support student learning – especially those that directly influence teacher effectiveness, including hiring, professional development, evaluation, and retention or dismissal. As you develop a theory of action and a set of strategies that flow from it, we believe it is critical to include principal effectiveness policy in your thinking. This will necessarily include actions to change expectations for principals and the standards and expected outcomes of principal preparation programs. (For more information, see our Principal Effectiveness Paper cited in the Additional Resources section at the end of this paper.)
- 2. Alignment matters.** Academic standards, school accountability, teacher effectiveness policy, and principal effectiveness policy can work in tandem or at cross-purposes. As you develop your plan, we encourage you to look at these systems together. Having a sound theory of action connecting strategies to expected outcomes is essential to ensuring that they are mutually reinforcing. The flexibility application should be written through a collaboration across offices.
- 3. Implementation matters.** As you pay close attention to the design of your systems for educator effectiveness, make sure to focus on creating guidelines and state investments that will support high-quality implementation across districts. Given the amount of time available, make sure to include sufficient time for implementation and build in mechanisms for continuous improvement as you learn from implementation.

Each state has different conceptions of principal effectiveness, different contexts and priorities, and is in a different stage of design and/or implementation. As you review these recommendations, we encourage you to analyze your own answers against your vision for your state's role in increasing principal effectiveness as part of a coherent, comprehensive system. Also, please note that after the peer reviewer comments from the first round of applications become publicly available, we will review these comments and update our recommendations as needed.

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**About New Leaders:** Founded in 2000 by a team of social entrepreneurs, New Leaders is a national nonprofit that develops transformational school leaders and designs effective leadership policies and practices for school systems across the country. Over the past decade, New Leaders has trained 800 educators who are now impacting the lives of a quarter million students in 12 urban areas across the country. New Leader principals often lead some of the highest gaining schools in our partner districts, and on a national level, students in New Leader schools consistently achieve at higher levels and have higher graduation rates than their peers. Our principal training program has become a model for several of our city partners and multiple other school systems in developing their own principal training programs. Based on over 10 years of experience and research, New Leaders also advises and conducts advocacy at the district, state and federal levels to advance highly effective school leadership and educational excellence at scale.

## PRINCIPLE 1: COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

### 1.B Transition to College and Career Ready Standards

**What the guidance says:** Among other things, you need to communicate (1) how you will prepare and support principals to provide strong, supportive instructional leadership focused on career and college readiness; and (2) how you will work with principal preparation programs to ensure that they prepare principals to provide strong, supportive instructional leadership based on rigorous academic standards.

**What we recommend:** Strong instructional leadership is essential to helping schools transition to new standards. With respect to #1, make clear and consistent connections between “strong, supportive instructional leadership” as described here and the “instructional leadership” standard that is part of your principal evaluation system (described in Principle 3). Specifically, we suggest including the following:

- A description of instructional leadership that includes principals’ being effective at conducting rigorous teacher evaluations, giving frequent and high-quality feedback, using data to inform instruction, creating robust professional learning structures at the school level, and supporting backwards planning of units and lessons based on rigorous academic standards.
- A description of the high-quality training you will provide for principal managers<sup>1</sup> to ensure their deep knowledge of the state’s adopted academic standards and to ensure that they have a shared understanding of its connection to the instructional leadership practices expected in principal performance standards.
- A description of how new standards for teacher effectiveness will incorporate the rigor and expectations of high academic standards, and how principals will receive training on observing for and providing feedback around this new level of rigor.
- Any progress the state has made or is planning to make on actions that will support instructional leadership such as: new interventions to support the lowest performing students, data systems that can support data-driven instruction, professional development to help school leaders and principal managers understand the implications of new standards for classroom practice, trainings on new assessments, support for curriculum realignment, development of instructional modules, opportunities for vertical alignment of curriculum, and professional learning opportunities for school leaders and their managers focused on understanding what college and career readiness means.

With respect to #2, extend the alignment of “strong, supportive instructional leadership” to the discussion of principal preparation programs. Specifically, we suggest including:

- A description of increased expectations and standards for principal preparation programs across the state that matches the expectations of the new principal evaluations, including the work around rigorous academic standards. This should include raising the standards for both admission into and completion of principal preparation programs.
- A description of the data collection and analysis process you will employ to generate the information necessary to evaluate how well preparation programs are doing at graduating principals who are in fact prepared to provide strong instructional leadership. This necessarily includes tracking principals from their preparation programs to their initial and subsequent placements and tracking student outcomes of these principals over time.

Instructional leadership is only one part of effective principal practice – we posit that effective principals are also strong human capital managers and leaders in building strong school cultures.

The support for strong instructional leadership is an excellent example of the opportunity provided through ESEA flexibility to drive a strong theory of action with a connected set of educator effectiveness strategies. The instructional leadership concept noted above (Principle 1) that a principal needs to demonstrate in developing the skills of teachers to support students in reaching higher academic standards needs to connect directly with the competencies and principal standards used in the evaluation strand (Principle 3), as well as with the expectations for acceptable levels of student outcomes (Principle 2).

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1. Throughout this document we use the term “principal managers” to refer to the individuals who supervise principals. They are traditionally Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents, but their titles vary from place to place.

## PRINCIPLE 2: STATE-DEVELOPED DIFFERENTIATED RECOGNITION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUPPORT

### 2.B Set ambitious but achievable annual measurable objectives

**What the guidance says:** Describe whether and how the Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) at the heart of the accountability system will cut the number of students below proficiency in half (Option A), move all students to proficiency by the spring of 2020 (Option B), or meet other ambitious goals (Option C).

**What we recommend:**

- Choose Option C and construct a system that *improves* on Option A and Option B. To achieve the ultimate goal of raising achievement for all students and specifically accelerating the learning growth of historically high-need subgroups, AMOs need three kinds of student outcome measures (none of which is solely sufficient):
  1. Attainment, or reaching a designated goal: As part of a broader set of measures, attainment is critical to setting a high expectation of what is possible for students. But, as with the current federal accountability system, attainment can create perverse incentives for principals (e.g., encouraging them to focus on students closest to the target at the expense of lower-performing students; or encouraging them to leave very low-performing schools for fear of sanctions). **Develop a system that has high expectations and choose either Option A or Option B as your measure of attainment; if you choose A, include an aggressive timeline.**
  2. Growth for individual students, or making progress toward a goal: Value-added growth models in particular put the focus on improving the performance of all students in a school from their starting point toward an ambitious goal. This includes students who have already reached proficiency and should be challenged to attain even higher standards of excellence.
  3. Gap closing, or making faster progress toward a goal for lower-performing students: Gap closing is at the core of our work and, we believe, reflects the core mission of public education to provide opportunity for all students. A system could address this by, as one example, awarding points to schools for moving low-performing subgroups by certain percentages and subtracting points if the scores of all students decrease.

Finally, especially in secondary schools, assessment measures are insufficient to a complete understanding of student success. It is important also to know who persists in school, so we recommend including non-assessment measures such as high school graduation in your model. Equally as important – as emphasized by ED in Principle 2.A – effective accountability systems can identify high-achieving and fast-improving schools and then marshal resources to document and share the best practices that schools are using for success.

- Align the accountability demands of schools and LEAs with the teacher and principal evaluation systems described in Principle 3, so that principals receive consistent messages about what matters. Give consideration to the following:
  - Require that annual school performance targets for a principal in his or her evaluation are the same as (or aligned to) the Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) for that school.
  - In all systems, include growth for individual students, attainment, and gap closing measures (as noted above); put more weight on growth measures so that the incentives are focused on improving growth for all students, not just those near the proficiency bar.
  - In all systems, include non-assessment measures particularly for secondary schools, such as graduation rates and grade completion. States should also provide guidance to districts on how principal managers can incorporate additional non-assessment measures (such as attendance, postsecondary matriculation and persistence, and discipline information) that strengthen – not dilute – the focus on improved student outcomes.

This is by no means a comprehensive recommendation for responding to Principle 2.A, but instead may serve as a guide for ensuring greater systemic coherence.

## PRINCIPLE 3: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

Principle 3 centers on the design *and* implementation of strong teacher *and* principal evaluation systems. We emphasize the “ands” given the temptation to pay much greater attention to the design of teacher evaluation systems than to the implementation of those systems or the design and implementation of principal evaluation systems. The success of your teacher evaluation system in improving teacher effectiveness is dependent on its alignment with your system for principal evaluation. Principals play a central role in improving teacher effectiveness, and we encourage you to include a focus on the principal evaluation system.

By their very nature, systems will become better through on-going refinements and improvements learned through implementation. While it’s important for the design to be strong from the start, we urge you to shift the balance of work toward implementation with continuous system improvement.

### 3.A Develop and Adopt Guidelines for Local Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support Systems

**What the guidance says:** If you have developed a robust<sup>2</sup> principal evaluation system that goes beyond the current provisions of ESEA, describe its content and how it was developed. If not, describe the process you will use to develop one.

**What we recommend:** Our recommendations focus on principal evaluation, but many concepts may be relevant to teacher evaluation as well. If you have developed a robust principal evaluation system, we think it suffices to describe the system, how it was developed, and how it is being implemented. If not, you should describe a comprehensive process for constructing a robust system, using state policy tools to support LEA success.

We see three levels of decisions that states need to make in developing a strong principal evaluation system:

- **Use statute to establish required characteristics of the system.** States need to identify the non-negotiable policies. This includes both substantive characteristics (e.g., that principal evaluation should include direct observation of practice) and process characteristics (e.g., that the state will work to continually improve upon the initial design through the experience of implementation). These characteristics that define the backbone of your system for educator effectiveness and are unlikely to be changed through implementation should be established in the most expedient way given your specific state context; given the opportunity or need to address state law, these are the types of parameters that would go into statute.
- **Establish rules for the design and implementation of these systems informed by a robust stakeholder engagement process.** States need to determine the process for designing the details of the system. This often involves charging a group of stakeholders with designing the system and refining it over time. Given the expectation for refinement, these are the details that would not go into statute but may be appropriate for regulations or other processes so that they can be updated and improved upon through implementation.
- **Make decisions about how to support implementation.** This includes resource allocation as well as guidance and technical assistance to LEAs.

The following chart elaborates on these core ideas in each of the columns. Each row is one of the six characteristics of a robust evaluation system described in ED’s flexibility guidance.

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2. Guidance from ED names six characteristics of a robust system which are addressed in the chart included in this paper.

**RECOMMENDED STATE ACTIONS**

3.A.ii. Will the system...	Use statute to establish required characteristics of the system	Establish rules for the design and implementation of these systems informed by a robust stakeholder engagement process	Make decisions about how to support implementation (using regulation or other processes to provide the necessary guidance and resources)
a. Be used for continual improvement of instruction	<p><i>Require LEAs to adopt a principal evaluation system that meets requirements established by the state. While the process for establishing rules for design and implementation is described in the next column, enabling legislation should outline the main contours, including the content below.</i></p> <p><i>Require a comprehensive, long-range evaluation of the principal evaluation system and its correspondence with principal effectiveness, teacher effectiveness and student growth. The surest way to guard against a compliance orientation in the implementation of new systems is to embed formal learning processes for the state as a whole. Further, a well-conceived and executed program evaluation can surface needed investments to improve principal effectiveness.</i></p> <p><i>Establish minimum data collection from LEAs regarding the outcomes of principal evaluation systems. It is our belief that making the aggregate results of the system visible (e.g., the number of principals deemed effective compared to the number of schools making adequate growth in achievement) will encourage closer attention to principal effectiveness.</i></p> <p><i>Establish a stakeholder engagement process. This process will be used to establish rules for the design and implementation of these systems informed by a robust stakeholder engagement process, described in the next column.</i></p>	<p><i>Constitute a small, representative group of stakeholders (including sitting principals) to design the system on the front end and to review program evaluation results as a basis for recommending future changes. The group should be charged to do four things:</i></p> <p>(1) Develop one state principal evaluation model which may include several options of particular tools within the model.</p> <p>(2) Design a rigorous waiver application process for LEAs to use if they want to adopt their own system. The process should have high standards for instrument design and should require LEAs to show how they will invest in the training of key personnel in the use of locally-developed tools. The process should also include the review of correlations between practice ratings and student outcomes, with waiver rights removed in the event of ongoing inconsistency between the two.</p> <p>(3) Recommend any additional rule-making or legislation that would be needed to support the system design or implementation; and</p> <p>(4) Review the evaluation system on an ongoing basis and recommend adjustments in rules and/or the model as needed.</p>	<p><i>Invest in the development of current and potential principals based on the aggregate results of the program evaluation. Patterns will emerge from the aggregation of evaluation ratings. If these correspond with research findings in the field, there will likely be a need to support principals to improve as instructional leaders, as managers of human capital, and as leaders in building school culture. The state should make investments in these areas, either through new programs or by repurposing existing programs that are not producing adequate results. As noted in Principle 1, the state should also use the results of principal evaluations to assess the effectiveness of principal preparation programs.</i></p>

## RECOMMENDED STATE ACTIONS

<p>b. Meaningfully differentiate performance using at least three performance levels</p>	<p><i>Set 4 as the minimum number of performance levels. Three is not enough. With four, there is one level to describe unacceptable performance, one for a basic level of performance (perhaps appropriate for some novices but not for more experienced principals), one to represent the “effective/proficient” target (i.e., proficiency) for an acceptable standard of long-term performance, and one to recognize excellence.</i></p>	<p><i>Charge the stakeholder group with providing a recommendation on the number of performance levels. While we recommend four levels as ideal, we recognize that there are also advantages to 5 levels.<sup>3</sup></i></p>	
<p>c. Use multiple valid measures in determining performance levels, including as a significant factor data on student growth for all students and other measures of professional practice</p>	<p><i>Require that principals meet student outcome targets in order to be considered effective. We recommend making the accomplishment of student outcome targets (attainment, growth, and gap-closing) a condition for receiving an effective or proficient rating.<sup>4</sup> We believe that principal effectiveness is inextricably linked with student success and evaluation systems should reflect this.</i></p> <p><i>Require that principal ratings include assessment of their practice against standards of professional practice. This should be the heart of an evaluation system, with the articulation of the standards accomplished through the stakeholder engagement process.</i></p> <p><i>Provide incentives for districts to pilot the use of direct measures of teacher effectiveness in the ratings of principals. This could include, for example, a principal’s success at retaining effective teachers and exiting ineffective teachers.</i></p>	<p><i>Charge the stakeholder group with creating a state model that defines appropriate measures for student achievement and professional practice and with setting minimum standards for each of these areas for local systems to meet. The stakeholder group should also identify potential approaches to incorporating measures of teacher effectiveness for use in principal evaluation.</i></p> <p>Student achievement: Good systems will include both growth and attainment (with a stronger focus on growth), encourage growth for all students (not just those approaching proficiency), set targets that close in-school or cross-school achievement gaps, include “on track” to college non-assessment measures, and align to other state/LEA accountability systems for principals and schools.</p>	<p><i>Invest in the development of a rubric of professional practice that is research-based and can be adopted by LEAs across the state. This is the most time-intensive aspect of the design phase. We recommend that it be done with substantial stakeholder involvement, but not written by committee given the needed technical expertise. A reasonable alternative is to select an existing rubric, as long as it is aligned to the standards and competencies identified by the state.<sup>5</sup></i></p> <p><i>Use survey instruments and other data on principal practice to inform the principal manager’s ratings, rather than as ratings on their own. There are few validated staff and community survey instruments available to measure principal effectiveness. Because of the substantial cost of validating new instruments, we do not recommend that states build their own data collection instruments and instead suggesting selecting from the available pool.</i></p>

3. We recommend four levels because it is the fewest number that allows the kind of differentiation that we believe is needed for a successful system. With each level of performance, there is additional work to create shared understanding among principals and their supervisors about the meaning of the levels. There are some advantages to five levels: scales with five levels may be more psychometrically sound than scales with four levels and they allow for more differentiation at the top of the spectrum. However, we worry that with five levels, ratings will drift to the middle even in the cases of principals whose performance needs to improve significantly. Having no middle choice forces a more clear distinction between proficient performance and the level below proficient.

4. States may be struggling to determine the “right” percentage of an evaluation tied to student outcomes. Setting a specific percentage is certainly one approach; another could be to design a matrix that balances student outcomes and professional practice, and requires that a principal meet student outcome targets to be rated effective (for examples, see Delaware’s Race to the Top application or the New Haven teacher evaluation ratings matrix created by TNTP).

5. See the New Leaders Leadership Action Rubric in the Additional Resources section of this paper. Please note that we are in the process of generating additional versions of this rubric based on our experience helping to adapt it to various states and districts. An updated version will be available for use by interested states during the spring of 2012.

## RECOMMENDED STATE ACTIONS

	<p><i>Require the stakeholder group to – after either considering the impact of the above-referenced pilots or growing knowledge across the country – recommend rules regarding the most effective methods for including teacher effectiveness measures into principal evaluation systems.</i></p>	<p>Professional practice: Good systems will include a focused set of leadership actions that can be connected with research evidence to improved student achievement. These “standards,” often further elaborated into specific “competencies,” should not be a litany of what a principal does.<sup>6</sup> Note that the stakeholder group’s charge should focus on naming the standards; see the next column for approaches to rubric development. Note also that the standards of practice need not be equally weighted.</p> <p>Teacher effectiveness: After the first few years of implementation, identify and recommend rules regarding the most effective methods for including teacher effectiveness measures into principal evaluation systems. This may prompt piloting a variety of approaches before including as part of a statewide requirement.</p>	<p>Most of these instruments do not comprehensively address all of the critical leadership actions contributing to improved student achievement. We suggest these are used to give principal managers data points (and not used as sole measures) to make informed judgments about principal practice. Other data points include, but are not limited to, direct observations.</p>
<p>d. Evaluate principals on a regular basis</p>	<p><i>Require every principal to participate in a formal evaluation and receive a summary evaluation rating every year. This is a fundamental shift from current practice and is critical to signaling attention to principal effectiveness across the spectrum of principal performance.<sup>7</sup></i></p>	<p><i>Charge the stakeholder group with including the annual requirement in the state model and in the minimum standards for local systems.</i></p>	<p><i>Collect and share information on district management structures. Of particular interest are innovative ways to organize the role of principal manager to make the principal evaluation process manageable (in larger school systems this can often mean lowering the caseload or shifting the responsibilities of principal managers) and ensure sufficient time devoted to coaching and assessment of principal practice.</i></p>

6. See the New Leaders Leadership Action Rubric in the Additional Resources section of this paper. Please note that we are in the process of generating additional versions of this rubric based on our experience helping to adapt it to various states and districts. An updated version will be available for use by interested states during the spring of 2012.

7. In considering differentiation for high performing principals, LEAs may choose to use only using minimum process requirements for those principals rated as highly effective. These principals should continue to receive annual evaluations, as the evaluation system should be structured to provide on-going feedback for all educators. This could also be structured as part of a career ladder, where highly effective principals may be identified as mentors with additional responsibilities and be prepared to take on broader leadership.



## RECOMMENDED STATE ACTIONS

<p>e. Provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development</p>	<p><i>The statute should be explicit that the purpose of the evaluation system is for improving principal effectiveness as well as accountability.</i></p>	<p><i>Charge the stakeholder group with identifying and studying local evaluation processes that have demonstrated an effective focus on individual growth and development and embedding the lessons from these investigations into the state model and the minimum standards for local systems. The recommendations will likely need to include structural considerations (e.g., an individual growth planning process with feedback loops, observation of practice with actionable and growth-oriented feedback, check-ins [e.g., mid-year formative review to test progress on individual goals and make adjustments if needed], and feedback through summary ratings) and human capital considerations (e.g., the role of principal supervisors).</i></p>	<p><i>Invest in building the capacity of principal managers to take on new roles. They need to know what good principal practice looks like and how practice is described in the standards and rubric of professional practice. They also need training on using the model and tools for both accountability and support, including giving good feedback for professional growth and feedback that helps principals know how they measure up against the standards of practice. Finally, they need to understand how to integrate various data sources (including survey data and student achievement data) into a comprehensive assessment of a principal's effectiveness.</i></p>
<p>f. Be used to inform personnel decisions</p>	<p><i>Require LEAs to include in their system how they will use principal evaluations to inform personnel decisions.</i></p>	<p><i>Charge the stakeholder group with determining appropriate state action when the data from evaluation systems does not align with other critical data. Two situations merit particular attention: (1) when an LEA has very few dismissals despite significant numbers of principals who are not meeting student achievement outcomes; and (2) an LEA rates a substantial number of principals as effective despite a lack of growth in student achievement.</i></p>	<p><i>Provide guidance for how districts can use a scale with clear consistent expectations while adjusting the impact on personnel decisions for first and/or second year principals. For example, while it is essential to always include both student achievement and principal practice, the state could provide guidance on how they might be weighted differently for first and/or second year principals compared to other principals.</i></p>

### 3.B Ensure LEAs Implement Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support Systems

**What the guidance says:** Describe how you will ensure that each district has an inclusive process for adopting a principal evaluation system, adopts a system that meets state requirements, and is likely to have a high-quality system fully operational by the 2014-15 school year.

**What we recommend:** We have five recommendations.

**1. Use the full timeline permitted by the flexibility guidance.** The guidance points to 2013-14 as the target year for full implementation but grants an additional year (to 2014-15) if a pilot is in place by 2013-14. Taking the extra year has two significant advantages: (1) Well-designed evaluation systems will require changes in other systems of support for principals, including but not limited to the job description and caseload for principal managers, professional development and coaching systems, and placement and compensation systems; and (2) it provides for an adequate amount of time for system learning and improvements based on that learning.

We recommend the following timeline:

2011-12 (winter/spring):

- Complete standards and competencies, and adopt into rules. Stakeholder input is critical here both to bring in needed expertise and promote ownership - and also because it serves as important professional growth for participants.
- Complete rules definition for use of student outcomes in principal evaluation (with stakeholder input) including specifics of how any state growth model or VAM should be used.
- Select or adapt state model instruments (rubrics for practice, staff/community surveys, school visit/observation tools, professional growth plan forms). This may have to continue into 2012-13, though it would be better to complete it this year so that LEAs choosing to apply for a waiver to design their own system in subsequent years can consider these instruments as examples.
- Confirm dollars allocated for state-level training or set requirements for local training.
- Begin setting up data systems to gather evaluation results and to share state-level student outcomes information with LEAs (to be completed in 2012-13).
- Begin design of a rigorous waiver application, as described in the chart above, for LEAs seeking to design their own systems. The process should have high standards for instrument design and should require LEAs to show how they will invest in the training of key personnel in the use of locally-developed tools. The process should also include the review of correlations between practice ratings and student outcomes, with waiver rights removed in the event of ongoing inconsistency between the two.

2012-13:

- LEAs design or select all instruments for use in their pilots<sup>8</sup>; LEAs seeking a waiver from state instruments complete a waiver application.
- Implement a statewide pilot for all student outcome measures in order to review incentives and outcomes across a wide range of schools.
- Provide incentives for a small number of LEAs or principals to pilot all state instruments (rubrics, surveys, growth measures, tools).
- Design principal evaluator training based on the state model, delivering it in spring 2013 to support the launch of pilots in 2013-14. Include use of instruments, how to set student outcome targets, how to interpret examples of evidence, how to give effective feedback, and how to align supports based on evaluation outcomes.
- Revise all state model instruments in late spring based on pilot information.

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8. Our use of the word "pilot" here does not reference a subset of LEAs. The expectation needs to be that all LEAs need to pilot the tools and systems without consequences with some or all of their educators and/or schools. The goal is for each LEA to practice using the tools through a "pilot" before full implementation.

2013-14:

- All LEAs – including those who have been approved for a waiver – pilot chosen systems and instruments.
- Establish a process for LEAs that applied for waivers to report on their pilots and confirm the quality and use of their local instruments (noting that success is contingent to continued use of waiver).
- Revise training based on lessons learned in 2012-13 and provide training again in spring of 2014 to prepare for full implementation in 2014-15.

**2. Establish a clear theory of action to guide a wide range of decisions.** There are at least two critical dimensions to a strong theory of action that can guide the design and implementation of an effective principal evaluation system. The first is what you believe will produce improved outcomes for students. For example, New Leaders believes that dramatically improving the effectiveness of the principal corps in a school district will lead directly to increased teacher effectiveness and, by extension, to improved student outcomes. If this were a core belief in your state, it would lead to a set of strategies and investments focused on boosting principal effectiveness. The second dimension of a strong theory of action is what you posit as the right balance between state and local decision making. For example, we believe that principal evaluation, as a component of a broader talent management strategy, needs to be understood and owned by local leaders. In this context, the state is well-positioned to raise expectations about principal effectiveness and provide exemplars of principal evaluation systems. This perspective leads to the actions described under Principle 3.A, with the state both developing a rigorous evaluation model to be adopted locally and establishing rigorous standards that LEAs must meet if they choose to adopt a different system. We urge you to communicate clearly about both dimensions of your theory of action – what will move student outcomes and what the state’s role is – and align your strategies (including your accountability system described in Principle 2.A) and investments to it.

**3. Don’t reinvent wheels.** The number of high-quality tools for principal evaluation – from standards rubrics to survey instruments to technology platforms – continues to grow. Wherever you can select existing tools, you save time and resources for other priorities (see #5 below). We especially recommend that states not create wholly new standards rubrics, given the substantial amount of time associated with writing high-quality rubrics and the cost of establishing the reliability of new rubrics.

**4. Put in place a monitoring and learning plan as a basis for continuous improvement.** Two of our top recommendations for the design of the principal evaluation system (see Principle 3.A) are to require a long-range evaluation of the system and to include stakeholders in the process of learning from implementation. We specifically recommend that the monitoring and learning plan include the following:

- Requiring LEAs to report on principal evaluation ratings (overall and broken down by components), so that you can compare ratings to other available data.
- Auditing LEAs whose systems produce principal evaluation results that do not match student outcome results. Audit teams should include current practitioners in order to maintain a focus on results rather than compliance.
- Creating opportunities (e.g., conferences, webinars) for LEAs to share promising practices and implementation challenges, particularly while they are in the pilot phase.

**5. Invest in implementation.** As discussed in Principle 3.A, there are substantial training needs associated with developing a strong principal evaluation system. These should include norming activities, designing robust examples of evidence, and providing guidance and skills on student outcomes goal setting. You should identify funding for professional development as well.

## CONCLUSION

As noted at the outset, the Department's offer of greater flexibility presents states with a significant opportunity. We hope that these recommendations are helpful to you in designing accountability and evaluation systems that promote continuous improvement toward ambitious outcomes for students. After the peer reviewer comments from the first round of applications become publicly available, we will review these comments and update our recommendations as needed.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As you are preparing your application, helpful resources may include:

- **New Leaders Principal Effectiveness Paper** documents lessons learned from school leaders making breakthrough gains in student achievement and teacher effectiveness. It includes policy recommendations for school turnarounds and key insights from The Urban Excellence Framework™ (UEF).  
<http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications-2/principal-effectiveness/>
- **New Leaders Evaluating Principals Paper** outlines four ideas for improving principal evaluation systems as well as specific policy recommendations for the federal, state, and local levels.  
<http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications-2/evaluating-principals/>
- **New Leaders Principal Leadership Action Rubric** is a detailed guide to assessing principals based on actions they take to drive student achievement – at four distinct levels of performance. Please note that we are in the process of generating additional versions of this rubric based on our experience helping to adapt it to various states and districts. An updated version will be available for use by interested states during the spring of 2012.  
<http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications-2/evaluating-principals/principal-leadership-actions-rubric/>

