

Prioritizing Leadership: Supporting Strong Local Implementation of ESSA Opportunities

As officials and advocates across the country work together to ensure that all students get the outstanding education they need for success in school and life, many states are investing in school leadership as a cost-efficient, scalable strategy to strengthen teaching, accelerate learning, transform schools, and advance educational equity. In their plans to carry out the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), every single state has committed to directing some portion of its federal funding into investments in leadership—from teacher leaders to principals and superintendents.¹

This resource can help state policymakers use an important vehicle—the local educational agency (LEA) plan requirement under Section 1112 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by ESSA—to encourage and support districts, charter management organizations (CMOs), and other local practitioners and stakeholders to strategically prioritize and invest in effective, locally-tailored leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships to advance student success. The question and rubric below are intended to be incorporated or adapted by states in alignment with their overarching vision for outstanding, equitable leadership and their specific plans for getting a well-prepared, well-supported leader in every school—especially those serving the children and communities with the greatest need.

Note: While state approval and monitoring of LEA plans is one vehicle for advancing strong school leadership at the local level, this resource is designed to facilitate productive conversations between state officials, district and CMO leaders, and other practitioners and stakeholders in the many contexts in which they work together toward shared goals for student success.

¹ New Leaders. (2018). *Prioritizing Leadership: An Analysis of State ESSA Plans*. New York, NY: New Leaders. Retrieved from <https://newleaders.org/research-policy/prioritizing-leadership-opportunities-essa-chief-state-school-officers/>

LEADERSHIP QUESTION

To support strong, consistent implementation of a coherent, statewide leadership agenda, we encourage states to gather crucial information from districts and CMOs on their leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships. States can use this information to understand how local partners are addressing local leadership needs, identify strengths, uncover gaps, and use information gleaned to inform state-wide leadership investments.

Describe your vision for identifying, preparing, and supporting school leaders in your district or network. In your description, please address how strategies, programs, or partnerships:

Leadership Cycle



1) Reflect a **comprehensive approach to leadership development**, including the entire principal effectiveness continuum and the development of teacher leaders, school leaders, and principal supervisors, especially for under-served schools;

2) Are supported by **evidence of effectiveness**—defined in ESEA section 8101(21)—to improve student achievement and other measures of student success;

3) Contribute to **greater diversity of leadership talent** throughout the district, including attracting, developing, and retaining more outstanding leaders of color and others underrepresented in the school leadership ranks;

4) Enable a **more equitable distribution of outstanding leaders** who support your goals related to ensuring equitable access to effective teachers—consistent with ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(B); and

5) Will be measured to determine whether school leadership efforts are improving teaching and student outcomes and to plan for how you will **continuously improve leadership investments** via implementation in the months and years ahead.

RUBRIC

To help guide local partners in developing and articulating their leadership investments, we encourage states to make publicly available a rubric that outlines their expectations, along an improvement-oriented trajectory, in the five crucial areas addressed in the sample question. States can use the same rubric to assess the quality of an LEA's strategies for identifying, preparing, and supporting school leaders.

STAGE 1 UNDERDEVELOPED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 2 RESEARCH-BASED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 3 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development		
<p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships do not clearly align with broader goals in the LEA's strategic plan for achieving equity and excellence.</p> <p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships leave significant gaps across the leadership effectiveness continuum or may not exist.</p>	<p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships align with the LEA's broader goals for achieving equity and excellence.</p> <p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships reflect a coherent and comprehensive vision of effective leadership. They align with leadership standards adopted or adapted by the state and may be targeted to local needs along the leadership continuum, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ building a bench of future leaders through job-embedded training and support for teacher leaders; ▪ targeting assistant principals with training to put them on a pathway to the principalship; ▪ preparing principals through programs with a school-based residency component; ▪ providing current leaders with high-quality support focused on instructional leadership and customized to priority needs; ▪ recognizing and rewarding effective school leaders, including via financial or non-financial incentives; and/or ▪ selecting effective principals to serve as principal supervisors and providing support focused on improving school performance and student achievement. 	<p><i>In addition to Stage 2:</i></p> <p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships are a key driver for the LEA's broader goals for achieving equity and excellence.</p> <p>Leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships reflect a coherent, nuanced vision of effective leadership deeply connected to local needs and informed by past successes and struggles.</p> <p>All federal, state, and local funding sources are aligned to achieve local goals; all spending supports the LEA's vision for achieving equity and excellence.</p>

STAGE 1 UNDERDEVELOPED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 2 RESEARCH-BASED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 3 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
Evidence of Effectiveness of Leadership Investments		
<p>The LEA does not consider evidence of effectiveness in selection of new leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships and/or when renewing existing leadership investments.</p>	<p>All strategies, programs, or partnerships to identify, prepare, and support school leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have a proven track record of improving student achievement, other measures of student success, or other relevant outcomes; or ▪ are innovations with a strong theory of action based on research. <p>Where applicable, the LEA has partnership agreements with programs and providers that include clear goals and desired outcomes, reflect local needs, and build local capacity.</p>	<p><i>In addition to Stage 2:</i></p> <p>The LEA has a process for pre-approving providers and programs based on evidence of improving important outcomes, including student achievement, other measures of student success, or other relevant outcomes.</p> <p>The LEA has a system in place to use data to assess the effectiveness of leadership development strategies, programs, or partnerships.</p>
Greater Diversity of Leadership Talent		
<p>The LEA may mention a commitment to greater diversity, but does not make investments in strategies, programs, or partnerships designed specifically to attract, develop, and retain outstanding leaders of color and others historically underrepresented in school leadership.</p>	<p>The LEA invests in strategies, programs, or partnerships designed specifically to attract, develop, and retain outstanding leaders of color and others historically underrepresented in school leadership.</p>	<p><i>In addition to Stage 2:</i></p> <p>The LEA sets specific goals related to increasing leadership diversity at all levels—from teacher leaders to principals and their supervisors—and provides publicly-available data to track progress against those goals.</p>

STAGE 1 UNDERDEVELOPED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 2 RESEARCH-BASED LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES	STAGE 3 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
More Equitable Distribution of Outstanding Leaders		
<p>The LEA does not differentiate leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships based on the overall level of school performance or on the size of achievement gaps.</p> <p>The LEA may mention the importance of encouraging effective leaders to serve the schools most in need, but does not provide incentives, financial or otherwise, for leaders to serve such schools.</p>	<p>The LEA prioritizes leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships for the lowest-performing schools, those with large, persistent achievement gaps, and other schools identified as high priority based on a comprehensive needs assessment.</p> <p>The LEA plan includes incentives to encourage the most effective leaders to serve the schools most in need, including financial rewards and other non-financial benefits, such as providing operational flexibility or balanced autonomy to turnaround leaders in exchange for greater accountability.</p> <p>Where applicable, the LEA has partnership agreements with preparation programs and professional development providers that reflect equity goals and the needs of high-need, high-priority schools.</p>	<p><i>In addition to Stage 2:</i></p> <p>The LEA sets specific goals related to the equitable distribution of leadership talent and provides publicly-available data to track progress against those goals.</p> <p>Where applicable, the LEA has designed school networks to maximize supports for high-need, high-priority schools, such as ensuring principal supervisors have expertise specific to the needs of schools they oversee, including, where appropriate, past success serving the schools with greatest need or identified as high-priority based on the needs assessment.</p>
Continuous Improvement of Leadership Investments		
<p>The plan includes insufficient measures to allow the LEA to determine whether leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships result in increased school leader effectiveness.</p> <p>The plan insufficiently describes how the LEA will monitor and continuously improve implementation of leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships.</p>	<p>The plan includes measures that will allow the LEA to determine — as required in ESSA — whether leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships are leading to improvements in school leader effectiveness.</p> <p>The plan describes how the LEA will monitor and continuously improve implementation of leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships.</p>	<p>The plan is informed by data and significant reflection about what has and has not worked, and why.</p> <p>The plan includes specific language on how the LEA intends to identify and execute mid-course corrections and improvements based on relevant data from specific leadership strategies, programs, or partnerships.</p> <p>The plan describes the process the LEA will regularly use to review a wide range of data across the leadership continuum to understand and scale what’s working and address unsuccessful strategies, programs, or partnerships moving forward.</p>