Promising Practices in Approving and Renewing Principal Preparation Programs

High quality school leadership has always mattered. It matters even more as States begin to implement new evaluation systems, standards and assessments. To ensure that every school leader comes prepared to improve schools and lead these reforms, States must cultivate strong principal preparation programs. This report outlines steps States can take to strengthen the approval and renewal processes of their principal preparation programs.

The State of Delaware recognized the importance of school leadership in carrying out its Race to the Top reforms and driving student achievement. Delaware also understood that it needed to increase the quality and rigor of its principal preparation programs. As a result, in 2013, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) initiated reforms aimed at raising the standards for its principal preparation programs. As DDOE began its work, it asked the Reform Support Network (RSN) to help it identify promising practices in this field and guide the State through key changes to its program approval processes and criteria.

The RSN analyzed the policies and practices of six States (Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island). The analysis focused on three main elements: 1) how these States conduct their approval and renewal processes; 2) whether and how these States have adopted processes to changing evaluation systems and standards; and 3) how these States are using data on program graduates to inform renewal decisions. The RSN also conducted several follow-up interviews with State representatives

Key Recommendations from the Field

- Create clear and comprehensive expectations for programs.

- Establish specific, quality-focused fieldwork criteria.

- Plan how to collect and use outcome data.

- Conduct site visits for approving and reviewing programs.

- Clearly indicate requirements on the application for new programs.

from Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Rhode Island and Tennessee, as well as leading experts and representatives from organizations, such as New Leaders, working in the field of principal preparation.

Through this outreach and analysis, the RSN identified five recommendations for States looking to improve their approval and renewal processes: 1) create clear and comprehensive expectations for programs; 2) establish specific, quality-focused fieldwork criteria; 3) plan how to collect and use outcome data; 4) conduct site visits for approving and reviewing programs; and 5) clearly indicate requirements on the application for new programs. Below is a summary of each recommendation, including advice from States and experts as well as promising practices from the field. Initially developed for the DDOE, this report may prove useful for those States looking to reform the approval and renewal processes and criteria for their school leadership preparation programs.

Potential State Action

The RSN has identified several actions States can take to strengthen the renewal process:

1. **Consider creating clear and comprehensive expectations for programs.** Outlining expectations for programs early is crucial, as State requirements will drive how programs function. Representatives from Tennessee put it simply as, "Whatever's written in the policy is what programs adhere to. States need to be purposeful about what's required and what's open to interpretation."[1] This means that regulations must explicitly address every element of program performance, such as requirements for admissions, curricula, assessments and data collection. As States develop rubrics for evaluating programs, leaders might consider how clear and actionable the expectations are and how the criteria for programs will influence program development.

   One solution that many States have employed to clarify their expectations for programs is to provide examples of components of high-performing programs. Illinois, for instance, prescribes in its application exactly how programs should admit candidates, construct their curricula, design assessments and structure fieldwork and internships.[2] Its goal is to eliminate variation across programs and establish a uniform preparation experience.[3]

   Pennsylvania takes a more flexible approach by providing programs with a set of general standards and then giving examples and details of program elements that would and would not meet that standard. For instance, the State requires that all programs assess candidates' skills, then requires programs meeting this standard to incorporate "performance-based ongoing projects designed to measure candidates' knowledge, skills and dispositions."[4] Both strategies provide clear expectations and guide programs toward the State's desired level of rigor.

   Regardless of the approach, States need to clearly outline the expectations from programs and ultimately from school leaders in the field. Representatives from Rhode Island advised, "Show the whole [for preparation programs]. Make a clear connection to [the State's] standards for leaders."[5]

2. **Consider establishing specific, quality-focused fieldwork criteria.** Requirements for fieldwork need to be specific enough to ensure the quality of the candidates' fieldwork experience. These details might include the types of responsibilities candidates must have in the field, the level of supervision or whether and how candidates will be observed and evaluated in the field. Experts warned that if field experience does not provide opportunities for candidates to undergo the full administrative experience, it can leave them poorly prepared.

   The top suggestion from experts and States was to require programs to establish partnerships with schools or school districts. Such partnerships can create a "consumer-driven" approach to candidate preparation and help ensure that fieldwork provides relevant experience. It also creates a mutually beneficial relationship for districts and programs. Louisiana explicitly outlines this partnership in its requirements, saying that programs must provide "evidence of collaboration with school districts, including a plan for development of an advisory board of community, district and university representatives."[6]

   Other strategies include Rhode Island's requirement that programs provide candidates with field experience in a variety of settings before beginning a more intense internship at a single school.

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[1] Interview with Michael Deurlein and Martin Nash, June 7, 2013.

[2] Illinois Principal Preparation Program Application for Approval, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/prep-eval/pdf/prin_prep_app.pdf.

[3] Interview with Erika Hunt, Vicki Phillips and Debbie Meisner-Bertauski, June 20, 2013.

[4] Pennsylvania Rubric for Framework and Guidelines for Principal Certification Programs, 2009, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/ed_leadership/14639.

[5] Interview with Lisa Foehr, May 31, 2013.

[6] Louisiana Standards for Approval of Teacher and/or Educational Leader Preparation Programs, 2011.

The State then collects data on the location and length of fieldwork stints to ensure a diversity of experiences for each candidate.[7] Illinois goes a step further and lays out the specific types of tasks candidates must complete during their fieldwork to ensure that their experiences reinforce the State's standards for leaders. Programs must then submit written evidence that their internships comprehensively address each component of the standards. For instance, according to Illinois standards, all internships must provide: "1) engagement of the candidate in instructional activities that involve teachers at all grade levels, including teachers in general education, special education, bilingual education and gifted education settings; 2) engagement of the candidate in the observation of the hiring, supervision and evaluation of teachers, other certified staff and noncertified staff, and the development of a professional development plan for teachers; and 3) engagement of the candidate in leadership opportunities to demonstrate that the candidate meets [the Illinois] required competencies."[8] Representatives from New Leaders also suggested that States reinforce the importance of fieldwork by requiring programs to include fieldwork in their assessments.[9]

3. **Consider how you will collect and use outcome data.** Reviews of principal preparation programs should include data on the performance of graduates, specifically the growth of student achievement in candidates' schools following placement. Many of the States studied have plans to begin collecting data on graduates and connecting it to preparation programs, though few have reached the point where they are able to use data to inform renewal decisions. Experts

recommended several types of outcome data for preparation programs, including the percentage of graduates who receive initial certification, the percentage of graduates placed in leadership positions in schools, retention rates for graduates, summative evaluation results of graduates and school-level value-added scores of graduates.

Experts advised States to consider several important questions about the collection and use of outcome data to ensure its usefulness:

- *Where does the data come from?* Depending on the type of data to be collected, each State will need to decide whether it is easier for programs to provide data or for the State to use its own data systems. Tennessee and Louisiana require programs to report data on process measures such as graduation rates, though they use internal data for graduate performance and value-added scores.[10] Illinois, on the other hand, requires the programs themselves to provide data on performance.[11] States such as Rhode Island have built data dashboards on which programs can directly input performance data on graduates.[12] This eases the collection process and helps standardize data for the State.

- *What will the data tell you?* Experts emphasized that data collection requirements should aim to yield information that can drive the continuous improvement of preparation programs. Some States warned of over collecting and placing extra burdens on programs. As Tennessee emphasized, "Form should follow function. How will outcome data be used? You need to connect it to the classroom as much as

[7] Rhode Island Educator Preparation Program Approval Guidelines, 2009, http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Educator-Certification/Becoming-an-Educator/Round-3-Guidelines-Final-01-08-09.pdf.

[8] Illinois Principal Preparation Program Application for Approval, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/prep-eval/pdf/prin_prep_app.pdf.

[9] Interview with Ben Fenton, June 13, 2013.

[10] Interview with Michael Deurlein and Martin Nash, June 7, 2013; Louisiana Standards for Approval of Teacher and/or Educational Leader Preparation Programs, 2011.

[11] Illinois Principal Preparation Program Application for Approval, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/prep-eval/pdf/prin_prep_app.pdf.

[12] Rhode Island Educator Preparation Program Approval Guidelines, 2009, http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Educator-Certification/Becoming-an-Educator/Round-3-Guidelines-Final-01-08-09.pdf.

possible."[13] Ultimately, performance data are not helpful if States are unable to use them to help programs get better at training principals.

- *How available are the data?* One issue States have begun to encounter is that graduates can be difficult to track based on the path they take after graduation. If graduates do not pursue certification or if they take a leadership position that does not require certification, it can limit efforts to connect their performance back to their preparation program. Some graduates also take on leadership positions at nonpublic or out of-State schools, further limiting data availability. Regular communication with programs and schools will be important to improve access to data.

- *When will data impact decisions?* Experts agreed that the timing of data is important; States must establish a timeline that accurately accounts for student achievement but also provides time for programs to adapt to the new expectations. Representatives from New Leaders suggested gradual implementation of the approval process—particularly around the weight of growth measures on renewal decisions—to demonstrate how the new system will function and allow programs to adjust. They added, "[States] really need to know what the data will look like before they use it in their decisions."[14] Using a longer timeline also provides time for States to conduct ongoing assessments of evaluations and revise the process as needed.

- *How will you report the data?* If States plan to share data on program performance with stakeholders, State leaders need to decide how they will do so and then share those plans with the programs. Many States have seen success with program report cards, which publicly report how programs perform on process and outcome measures. North Carolina designed a report card that details information on program graduates (for example, grade point averages, placement rates, evaluation results) on one side and information on the program itself (for example, faculty credentials, general philosophy, partnerships with districts and schools) on the other.[15]

4. **Consider how to conduct site visits for approving and reviewing programs.** Periodic and purposeful site visits can be a valuable tool for assessing the progress of new and existing programs. "Site visits are a part of our process; they're certainly worth investing in," said representatives from Tennessee. "You get a really clear perspective from a number of stakeholders. It's a good alternative to just submitting a lot of paper."[16] Rhode Island conducts a comprehensive site visit process. First, the State organizes an initial visit to verify all claims made in program applications and discuss any concerns. For these visits, Rhode Island constructs site visit teams that represent a balance of expertise in terms of knowledge of content, instruction, assessment and professional development. After the initial visit, the team prepares a report for the program, which includes recommended actions for improvement. If a program is designated as "low performing," the State schedules interim visits in which two-person teams of experts routinely visit the program to follow up on improvement areas and monitor progress.[17] Tennessee also employs teams for site visits, with representatives selected to represent the State's "four quadrants" of practice: higher education, teachers, administrators and department staff.[18]

For new program approval processes, experts suggested employing targeted site visits of principal preparation programs using identified

[13] Interview with Michael Deurlein and Martin Nash, June 7, 2013.

[14] Interview with Ben Fenton, June 13, 2013.

[15] North Carolina Institute of Higher Education Educator Preparation Report Cards, 2013, http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/ihe/.

[16] Interview with Michael Deurlein and Martin Nash, June 7, 2013.

[17] Rhode Island Educator Preparation Program Approval Guidelines, 2009, http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Educator-Certification/Becoming-an-Educator/Round-3-Guidelines-Final-01-08-09.pdf.

[18] Interview with Michael Deurlein and Martin Nash, June 7, 2013.

and trained school leadership specialists. One of the most common challenges associated with site visits is staffing. Visits can take several days and often require a significant commitment from participants. States often involve department representatives as well as outside experts and K–12 practitioners. This can help reduce the need for State staff participation, but it means that States will have to conduct ongoing outreach to build a pool of volunteers. Tennessee representatives suggested that States consider out-of-State university experts to provide a more neutral perspective. If building a network of volunteers is not practical, States can directly reach out to available reviewers and experts for a fee.[19] Louisiana, for instance, uses contracts with out-of-State experts to ensure that it has sufficient staffing for its reviews.[20]

5. **Consider how to clearly indicate requirements on the application for new programs.** Many States provide clear guidance on what information programs should include in their applications. Rhode Island's application requires programs to submit a full accounting of their assessment

systems, including assessment schedules, rubrics and methodologies.[21] The State requires programs to provide the information in a chart that details the documents programs must submit to substantiate the information. Similarly, Maryland requires programs to complete a matrix in their applications that outlines how the curriculum for each class offering addresses each of the State's instructional leadership standards.[22] In both instances, the application allows for program flexibility while still creating clear guidelines and expectations for new programs. The applications are also clear about the evidence programs must use to validate their claims.

While many States do not yet do this, experts indicated that this could help make the process more accessible and improve clarity, since the application could link directly to regulations and standards.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Interview with Blanche Adams, Barbara Burke and Molly Hortsman, June 5, 2013.

[21] Rhode Island Educator Preparation Program Approval Guidelines, 2009, http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Educator-Certification/Becoming-an-Educator/Round-3-Guidelines-Final-01-08-09.pdf.

[22] Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework, 2005, http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/DF957230-EC07-4FEE-B904-7FEB176BD978/19877/MDInstructionalLeadershipRramework.pdf.