

# The Changing Role of School Leaders

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Damion Pechota and Deven Scott

## What Is the Issue, and Why Does It Matter?

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It is no secret that school leaders — particularly principals — play a significant role in the learning environment for both students and teachers. Decades of research have proven the principal's influence on student achievement, climate and teaching quality. New [evidence](#) suggests that their impact may be even greater than previously thought, as principals continue to assume the roles of instructional and change leaders.

[Research](#) shows that policy shifts, including multiple-measure evaluation and a heightened focus on equity, have had some of the largest effects on how principals perform their jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic expanded the principal's role even more — with state policymakers relying on local-level leaders in areas, such as student health and wellness, school safety, school performance, and operational and staff oversight. Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, some state policymakers have targeted professional development opportunities related to social and emotional learning, and suicide awareness and prevention.

From 2017 through 2020, state legislators passed measures to require or encourage more training and professional development that prepares principals to adapt to their continuously evolving role. Specifically, two trends have emerged:

- State policymakers have studied and made changes to **pre-service training and induction programs** to prepare leaders for the job.
- States have also increasingly included principals in required **in-service professional development training** to support student needs and success.

# How Many States Considered Legislation in 2017-20?

Based on a review of legislative activities concerning the preparation, induction, mentoring and professional development of school leaders, at least 34 bills were enacted in 19 states between 2017 and 2020.

STATE	LEGISLATION
<b>Alabama</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 175</a> (2018)
<b>Alaska</b>	<a href="#">H.R. 7</a> (2018)
<b>Arkansas</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 1154</a> (2017)
	<a href="#">S.B. 647</a> (2017)
<b>California</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 75</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">S.B. 113</a> (2017)
<b>Colorado</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 19-1002</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">H.B. 20-1128</a> (2020)
	<a href="#">H.B. 17-1211</a> (2017)
	<a href="#">H.B. 18-1355</a> (2018)
<b>Connecticut</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 19-069</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">H.B. 7113</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">H.B. 7251</a> (2017)
<b>Georgia</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 953</a> (2017)
	<a href="#">H.B. 338</a> (2017)
<b>Illinois</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 3466</a> (2018)
<b>Indiana</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 1449</a> (2017)
	<a href="#">S.B. 230</a> (2018)
<b>Kentucky</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 30</a> (2018)

STATE	LEGISLATION
<b>Maine</b>	<a href="#">H.P. 315</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">H.P. 969</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">L.D. 390</a> (2017)
<b>Minnesota</b>	<a href="#">H.F. 2</a> (2017)
<b>Nevada</b>	<a href="#">A.B. 77</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">S.B. 155</a> (2019)
<b>North Carolina</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 377</a> (2019)
<b>Oregon</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 182</a> (2017)
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 6084</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">H.B. 6085</a> (2019)
<b>Tennessee</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 1240/ S.B. 1386</a> (2018)
<b>Utah</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 99</a> (2020)
<b>Washington</b>	<a href="#">S.B. 5082</a> (2019)
	<a href="#">S.B. 5883</a> (2017)
<b>West Virginia</b>	<a href="#">H.B. 4006</a> (2018)
	<a href="#">H.B. 4619</a> (2018)
	<a href="#">H.B. 4804</a> (2020)

## Pre-Service Training and Induction Programs

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**Maine:** [L.D. 1569](#) (2017) establishes requirements to obtain an administrator certificate. These requirements include three years of satisfactory teaching experience, demonstrated knowledge through relevant graduate or undergraduate courses or programs, and an approved internship relating to an administrator's duties. Additionally, to renew their certificate, administrators must complete at least six semester hours of professional or academic study or in-service training.



**Rhode Island:** [H.B. 6085](#) (2019) establishes a fast-track principal certification program requiring participants to take courses on school finance, school law, and program evaluation and analysis. In addition, the participants in the fast-track program must complete a year-long internship with a principal in a district where the participant is employed, lead a district or school-wide initiative and successfully pass assessment requirements. To be eligible, the participants must show instruction competency as an educator for 10 years and demonstrate professional development within the school or local educational agency. The participants that earn a fast-track principal certificate must complete a state-developed leadership development program during the certificate renewal period to continually build leadership skills that support teaching and learning.



**Utah:** [S.B. 99](#) (2020) creates a grant program to provide awards for mentorship and training activities for new and aspiring principals. The local education authority receiving the grant must use evidence-based activities designed to improve principal leadership including, providing mentoring activities to a new principal and providing job-embedded experiences, such as an internship or residence.



**Georgia:** [H.B. 338](#) (2017) establishes a joint committee to study strategies for providing opportunities to update and expand their school leaders' knowledge and skills to meet the role's evolving needs. Released in November 2017, the committee's [final report](#) offered six recommendations, including: focusing on training, developing and supporting the leaders in the chronically lowest-performing schools; strengthening the district-level support; and developing a strategy for providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for school leaders of all experience levels. In addition, it recommended the creation of the [Governor's School Leadership Academy](#). Established in 2018, the academy offers two programs to help principals address the state-wide needs for instruction-focused school leadership:

- The Aspiring Principal Program provides resources and support to individuals who are interested in becoming school principals.
- The Principal Support Program provides services and support to existing school leaders needing additional assistance for school improvement.

The program includes cohort meetings to build best practices, enable data-driven decision-making and cultural competency, and to offer coaching opportunities.

## In-Service Professional Development

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**Alaska:** [H.R. 7](#) (2018) includes support for school safety training for school staff, including school principals and leaders, to ensure the appropriate emergency responses in schools. The training must coordinate with law enforcement agencies and first responders.



**California:** The [21st Century California School Leadership Academy](#) in the department of education organizes resources and provides grants to local education authorities to ensure the implementation and success of professional development. [S.B. 75](#) (2019) adds professional learning opportunities and strategy development to the leadership academy curriculum to address school performance gaps.



**Colorado:** [H.B. 19-1002](#) (2019) created a pilot program to provide professional development to principals in distributive and collaborative leadership skills to improve educator retention, school climate and culture, and student outcomes. School principals may apply to the department of education during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years to receive professional development through the pilot program. The program ends on July 1, 2022.



**Illinois:** [S.B. 3466](#) (2018) makes changes to school district procedures regarding truancy and includes student mental, emotional and physical health or safety as valid causes for student absences. School districts are required to make reasonable efforts to provide ongoing professional development to school personnel, including administrators, on support services for the promotion of student attendance and engagement.

## Targeted Professional Development Trainings

In addition to providing funding and programming for broader professional development for principals and other schools leaders, some state policymakers have targeted professional development opportunities in specific competencies. Two areas that have seen recent activity concern social and emotional learning, and suicide awareness and prevention.

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



**Oregon:** [S.B. 182](#) (2017) establishes a variety of professional development opportunities for educators, including school leaders. The funding is provided to school districts to design and implement programs that provide professional development to educators, including school leaders, on trauma-informed strategies that decrease rates of school absenteeism among students.



**Washington:** [S.B. 5082](#) (2019) requires the Washington professional educator standards board to incorporate social and emotional learning standards, benchmarks and related competencies into principal knowledge, skill and performance standards to ensure that principals recognize signs of emotional or behavioral distress in students, and appropriately refer students for assistance and support. Social and emotional learning standards and benchmarks must include competencies related to adverse childhood experiences, mental health literacy, antibullying strategies and culturally sustaining practices. Professional service days must incorporate social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practices on a semi-annual basis.

## SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION



**Indiana:** [S.B. 230](#) (2018) requires each public school to adopt research-based youth suicide awareness and prevention training for school leaders serving grades 4 through 12. [H.B. 1003](#) (2020) amends the language adopted by S.B. 230 and aligns the training with the state board of education's authority to determine the timing, frequency and method of training. The state board of education maintains [resources and training requirements](#) aligned with the statutory requirements for suicide prevention and response.



**Kentucky:** [H.B. 30](#) (2018) adds suicide prevention training to the existing school leader professional development requirements. Middle and high school leaders must complete a minimum of one hour of training on high-quality suicide prevention. The existing professional development requirements include four days of training provided by the state. If a school leader's employment begins during a school year in which the state does not require the training, the school district must provide suicide prevention materials to the school leader.

### Related Resources

- [Principal Development as a Strategy in School Improvement](#)
- [50-State Comparison: School Leader Certification and Preparation Programs](#)



# About the Authors

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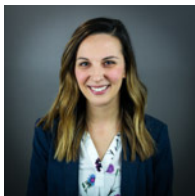
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As a policy analyst, Damion provides research and analysis on a diverse set of state-level education issues. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Damion worked as a senior policy analyst with Legislative Council at the Colorado General Assembly. Damion is dedicated to the idea that a nonpartisan perspective can enhance the discussion and understanding of state education issues from early learning to workforce development. Contact Damion at [dpechota@ecs.org](mailto:dpechota@ecs.org).

## Deven Scott

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As a state relations strategist, Deven works to build relationships with all policymakers and seeks opportunities to support their education priorities. She is the liaison for Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. She comes to Education Commission of the States with experience from both the state and national policy arenas, having held positions in a governor's office and the U.S. Senate. Deven earned both a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Dakota — Go 'Yotes! Contact Deven at [dscott@ecs.org](mailto:dscott@ecs.org).

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