TITLE: Leveraging the Federal Role in Developing High Quality Principal Preparation Under Title II

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ABSTRACT:

In this policy brief Title II of ESSA is examined. Title II of ESSA includes provisions for developing high quality principals. This brief elaborates two strategies the federal government can employ under Title II to support principal quality:1) competitive grants and 2) monitoring return on investment.

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Policy Brief 2020 – 1: Leveraging the Federal Role in Developing High Quality Principal Preparation under Title II

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Currently, the kinds of data the Department of Education collect under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are being reviewed. Under Title II of ESSA, provisions are specifically included to develop high quality principals. Yet most of these provisions and subsequent data collected are related to current principals, not aspiring. Second only to teachers in terms of improving student outcomes, a school leader's preparation affects both teachers and students. Many aspiring and practicing school leaders, however, lack the robust preparation and ongoing development for the job's rigors. This brief therefore discusses two cost effective, politically feasible strategies the federal government can employ under Title II—1) competitive grants and 2) monitoring return on investment—as a means to leverage high quality principal preparation nationally.

How can the federal government better leverage Title II to promote high quality principal preparation nationally?

Competitive grants. Although competitive grants have been used under prior ESEA reauthorizations, their use under ESSA has retreated. These kinds of grants provide additional funding to states and districts who voluntarily comply with certain requirements. Research shows this approach is effective under other federally administered grant programs like Race to the Top. Because states depend on federal funding, nearly all states (46) applied and redesigned their K-12 education policies for districts. Consequently, we propose restructuring the two existing provisions under Tittle II—Leadership Preparation Academies and Leader Residency Programs—as competitive grants. Statutory criteria in both programs would also be codified to require the below elements reflective of high quality principal preparation:

1) *Developing rigorous candidate selection strategies*
   a) Include academic criteria/assessments
   b) Include documented evidence of candidate as a teacher (or other professional educator)
   c) Include evidence of leadership potential

2) *Developing university-district partnerships*
   a) Include evidence of working relationships with local districts

3) *Providing clinically rich, application-oriented internship/residency experiences for aspiring and practicing principals*
   a) Integrate coursework and field experience activities to actively develop professional practice
   b) Utilize mentors and/or coaches

4) *Ensuring a continuous improvement process by designing innovative pedagogy and curriculum*
   a) Include formative tools/artifacts, such as mid-program reviews or end-of-course assessments
   b) Include summative tools/artifacts, such as candidate program-end portfolios, capstone/culminating projects, or comprehensive exams

5) *Providing high-quality program structures, personnel, and standards*
   a) Include cohort models
   b) Include full-time tenured, tenure track, or clinical faculty leading the majority of program courses
   c) Include professional and state standards aligned to curriculum and assessments

Currently, only about one-quarter of states/districts implement policies addressing these above elements. By creating a voluntary incentive, though, the federal government can better promote high quality principal preparation nationally. States and districts seeking more federal funding would now have to redesign their principal preparation certification pathways toward such ends. This is politically feasible because states/districts still maintain control over their education strategies.

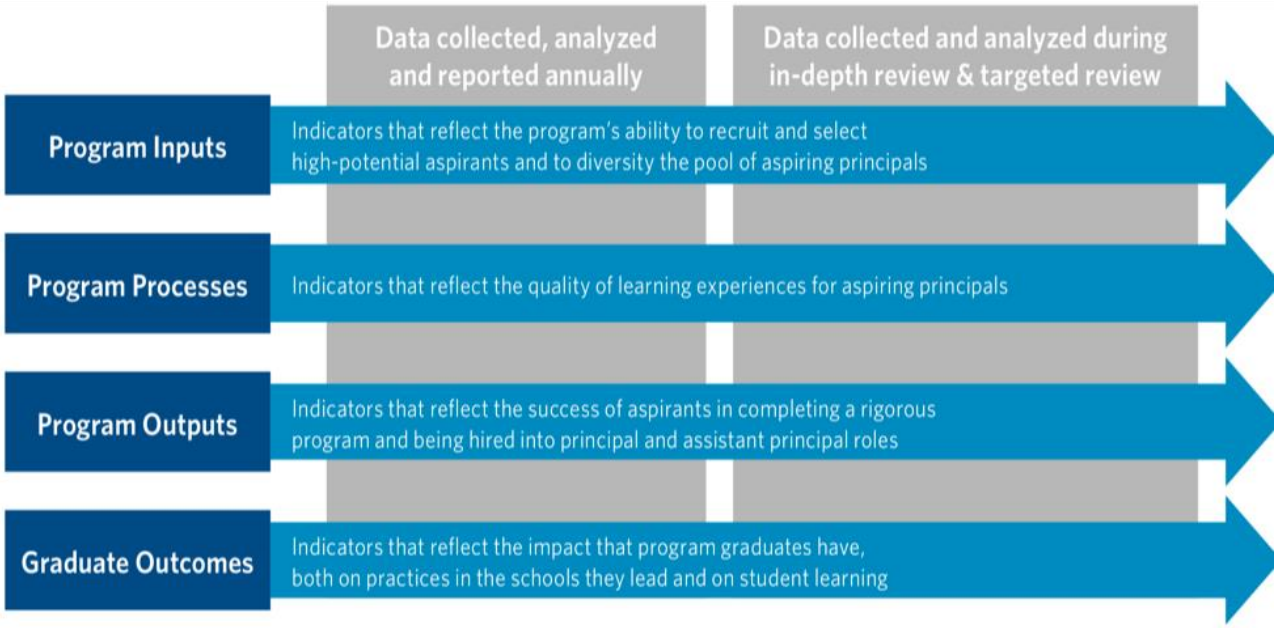
Monitoring return on investment. One issue with competitive grants is what happens after states/districts receive funding. For example, while Race to the Top did show competitive grants were successful in getting them to revise their education strategies, many did not follow through with their proposed strategies. As such, to protect the return on investment, the Department of Education needs to monitor and collect more data on those receiving either grant. The University Council for Education Administration (UCEA) recommends a two-stage process:

The first stage involves collecting data on every preparation program annually. Data include four high-leverage areas: 1) program inputs; 2) program processes; 3) program outputs; and 4) graduate outcomes.

The second stage involves investigating those data more deeply to promote continuous improvement. But UCEA does not recommend conclusions about program quality be based on these indicators alone. Rather, the results should be used to identify areas of concern that warrant further investigation. Programs exhibiting areas of concern would then work with states to develop a coherent plan addressing them. In doing so, programs are held accountable for effective preparation practices and outcomes, while raising their quality.

So, what's the cost?

Although political feasibility is important, federal reforms must also be cost effective. Research shows developing high-quality principal preparation is similar to or less expensive than other education reforms. A recent study showed in-service district principal preparation only amounts to $13 per-pupil. By restructuring existing Title II provisions under ESSA to include *competitive grants* and *monitoring return of investment,* we argue that the law can effectively address high quality principal preparation. Simply put, quality school leadership matters. There are no documented cases of troubled schools being turned around without a powerful leader. But powerful school leaders are not just created, they are grown. The federal government can therefore play a pivotal role in this process.



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