

IMPACT STORY

Launching a Tiered System of Support for Leaders in the Bureau of Indian Education Schools

A Partnership of the Bureau of Indian Education and the Region 13 Comprehensive Center

Through a newly developed tiered system of support, Bureau of Indian Education school leaders are now receiving training and resources to help them more effectively develop talent, build school community, and transform instruction.

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) recognized the need to better support its school leaders in the use of evidence-based instructional and leadership practices with the goal of building school leaders who can effectively develop talent, build school community, and transform instruction. Accordingly, BIE requested assistance from the Region 13 Comprehensive Center (R13CC) to develop and implement a system of support for its school leaders that would focus on (1) BIE policies, processes, and procedures; (2) evidence-based leadership practice; and (3) transformational leadership strategies.

Designing support to address school leadership's evolving needs

Over four years (2019–23), the R13CC partnered with BIE to design and implement a new system of support for its school principals. This work included developing trainings, guidance, and resources.

Planning an academy to support principals

At the start of this work in 2019, BIE and R13CC staff formed a design team to create a leadership academy for principals focused on instructional leadership and management skills in four topic areas: BIE policies and procedures, the Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement, jumpstarting instructional transformation, and implementing transformation plans.

This team initially designed the principal academy as an in-person, two-year engagement of school leaders which would start with a small cohort of principals in their first year and add additional cohorts in subsequent years. BIE and the R13CC also developed a new resource, *The Principal's Playbook*, to use as guidance in the trainings with principals.

The plan and implementation of BIE's system of support for school leaders have evolved over time—demonstrating the importance of flexibility when unanticipated circumstances arise, such as the dramatic shift in leadership needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pivoting to respond to shifting needs due to COVID-19

COVID-19 hit before the academy could officially launch its first in-person sessions. Due to COVID-19, schools were closed, Native communities

were disproportionately suffering from the impact of COVID-19, and school leaders' needs dramatically shifted.

The BIE and R13CC went back to the drawing board to figure out the best way to support school leaders through this tumultuous period. They realized that principals needed universal, just-in-time support to navigate the impact of COVID-19. Accordingly, they collaborated to adapt the original principal academy plan into a virtual series focused on the most timely and urgent topics, including the following:

- Best practices in remote learning
- Selecting and using evidence-based practices for learning acceleration
- Addressing student and staff social–emotional well-being
- Strategic use of American Rescue Plan funds

The R13CC also developed a resource, *Returning to School: A Toolkit for Principals* (2020), to support principals in back-to-school and recovery efforts.

Creating a tiered system of support to address principals' varied needs

As circumstances began to normalize and schools began to re-open for in-person learning, the R13CC worked with BIE to further adapt the plan for supporting school leaders. Recognizing that BIE principals had varying needs and that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be sufficient, the R13CC proposed a tiered system of support for school leaders. The system that the R13CC and BIE ultimately created includes three main tiers, based on different levels of need:

- Universal training and tools for all principals
- Targeted training and mentoring for new principals
- Intensive support for principals leading struggling schools

BIE’s new tiered system manifests a concerted focus on differentiating support for principals, a focal point not previously present.

School leaders are benefiting from the new tiered support system

As part of the universal tier of support available to principals, BIE sponsored in-person principal leadership sessions in the summer of 2022 at multiple regional sites for all school leaders focused on resuming instructional leadership and effective management. BIE is also currently preparing to launch a targeted training and mentoring program for new principals. As shown in the text box, participant feedback on the trainings that have been provided to principals thus far is very positive.

Participant Ratings of Principal Trainings Offered Through the Tiered System of Support

- » **95%** reported sessions were a valuable use of their time
- » **93%** reported increased knowledge and understanding of topics addressed
- » **93%** indicated content was relevant and useful for their school

Participants in the various trainings have also shared a range of positive comments, including

“Good quality and relevant information. The SEL [social-emotional learning] piece is critical and glad we spent time specific to that area.”

“Thank you and great tools for my toolbox!”

“This was wonderful! Very amazing! It was great to have this knowledge shared and understood. The content was useful and discussions were helpful. This was a great guide to other discussions that need to happen within our school.”

BIE has bolstered its capacity to sustain tiered support for its school leaders

The R13CC has deliberately focused on fostering the BIE’s capacity to implement the tiered system of support for its principals so BIE can continue to grow and sustain the work moving forward. Through the R13CC’s assistance, BIE staff have reported increased skill in planning and delivering training support sessions for principals—from strategizing, to managing logistics for large-scale trainings, to developing and utilizing tools that make sessions more efficient. In addition, ownership of academy planning and implementation is gradually shifting into the hands of BIE leadership and staff. Since the tiered system of support began, the role of leading the trainings and support has transitioned from R13CC leading and BIE assisting to BIE leading and R13CC assisting, as needed.

With this new capacity, BIE is well poised to sustain this system that enables them to strengthen, support, and retain school leaders—and, in turn, support all of their teachers and students.

For more information about the Region 13 Comprehensive Center, visit the [Center's webpage](#).