

State Assessment for Principal Licensure: Traditional, Transitional, or Transformative?

A Policy Brief

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Stephen P. Gordon
Texas State University

Julie Niemiec
Celina, Texas

In this policy brief we examine the initial licensure process of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and classify each licensure process as traditional, transitional, or transformative, based on criteria suggested by a panel of expert practitioners and university faculty from the field of educational leadership. The expert panel recommended general certification requirements like a teaching certificate, teaching experience, a master's degree, field experiences embedded in principal preparation coursework, and a yearlong internship. The panel suggested a number of specific leadership capacities that should be measured by assessment instruments, calling for the measurement higher-level capacities that integrated knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The experts proposed that assessment instruments be related directly to PSEL and NELP standards, and cautioned the instruments should be equitable. The panel advocated the use of multiple assessment instruments and multiple assessment environments, constructed responses, discussion with assessors, and performance-based assessment. Based on the expert panel's recommendations, we created a set of rubrics to classify state principal licensure processes as traditional, transitional, or transformative across a number of indicators. We reviewed documents on the initial principal licensure process for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and using the rubrics, we classified the certification processes of 24 states as traditional and those of 26 states and the District of Columbia as transitional. Our analysis of state licensure processes is followed by our own recommendations for policy and practice leading to a transformative licensure process.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted principal licensure standards intended “to ensure that candidates have the knowledge and skills to perform tasks necessary for the school to be successful” (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). The Education Commission of the States reports that at least 37 states require teaching or equivalent experience for an aspiring principal to be licensed, 38 states require field experience, and 37 states require a master’s degree. Additionally, at least 39 states and the District of Columbia have adopted alternative paths toward licensure. A state licensure assessment of knowledge and skills for the principalship, in the form of a written test, portfolio, or both, is required by 33 states. One state requires an assessment on protecting student and civil rights, for two states a written test is one of multiple options for licensure, and fifteen states have no test or portfolio. All but one state’s licensure requirements are aligned with state and/or at least one set of national standards (Scott, 2018).

The licensure exam used by the largest number of states is the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The SLLA is used by 14 states and the District of Columbia. The SLLA was revised in 2018 and aligned with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). The new SLLA includes 120 multiple-choice questions (75%) and 4 constructed-response questions (25%). Six states use the Educational Leadership: Administration and Supervision exam (ELAS), also developed by ETS. The ELAS covers the same content areas as the SLLA, but does not include the constructed response portion. A number of states have unique licensure exams, several developed by ETS or Pearson, and others developed by the state. A few states require the submission of a portfolio in addition to or in lieu of a traditional exam.

A trend in recent years is a two-tiered licensure assessment, with initial assessment and licensure followed by additional requirements and assessment for advanced licensure. The advance licensure may require completion of an induction program and continuing education as well as satisfactory job performance (Vogel & Weiler, 2014). The majority of states have moved from lifetime to renewable certificates, typically to be renewed every five years based on semester hour credits or continuing education units related to school improvement and student learning (Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011).

Over the years, both licensure standards and assessments have been critiqued by scholars. Adams and Copland (2005, 2007) were particularly concerned about the incongruence between state goals emphasizing leadership for learning and specific criteria for principal licensure. They wrote, “Licensing today fails to guarantee either entry-level competence or superior leadership. Its mismatch with leadership-for-learning fundamentals flags an incoherence in state policy that diminishes states’ abilities to champion their own learning goals” (p. 182). Fuller and Young (2009) concluded that the results of licensure exams had “little impact on principals retention rates” (p. 3).

Along with their critiques of state licensure requirements scholars have offered suggestions for what those requirements should look like. Anderson and Reynolds (2015) recommend that the assessment consist of or include a portfolio review, and that licensure renewal distinguish provisional from professional licenses, be based on specific benchmarks, and be differentiated by license type. Anderson and Reynolds also recommend that alternative pathways for licensure be provided. Adams and Copland (2005, 2007) recommend that a balance of individual, organization-focused, and learning focused factors be required for licensure. Individual factors include things like character, education, and experience. Examples of organization factors include knowledge of organizations as well as strategic, social, technology, and personnel management skills. Learning factors include knowledge of and skills for working with programs, students, teachers, schools, communities, and learning.

Goals of this Paper

The goals of this paper are to examine the initial licensure process of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, to classify each licensure process as traditional, transitional, or transformative, and to offer recommendations for future policy and practice regarding the licensure process. By licensure process we mean general licensure requirements, any specific assessment instruments used by the state (including licensure exams and/or portfolios), and the overall assessment process and format.

The Expert Panel

An expert panel that supplemented our review of state assessments for principal licensure by making recommendations for a transformative licensure process was made up of eight members considered by practitioners and university faculty to possess high levels of experience and expertise in educational leadership. The panel consisted of two assistant principals, two principals, two central office administrators charged with developing and supervising school administrators, and two professors of educational leadership with extensive experience as school and central office administrators. All eight panel members hold doctoral degrees in educational leadership. The expert panel completed a survey asking them to identify elements of a transformative licensure process. Our decision-rule for whether a recommendation would be considered a panel recommendation was that six of eight panel members would make that recommendation.

Expert Panel Recommendations for a Transformative Licensure Process

Regarding general licensure requirements, the panel recommended that a teaching certificate and teaching experience be required for principal licensure. One panel member stated, “I am of the belief that, if you supervise teachers, you need to have walked in their shoes.” Another expert commented, “Teacher experience is necessary to bring credibility to the position. Those that do not have significant teaching experience struggle with buy-in from others around instructional issues.” Panel members’ recommendations for how much teaching experience should be required ranged from two to five years.

The panel advocated that a candidate for licensure be required to have a master’s degree, be endorsed by a principal preparation program, and should have engaged in field experiences during their principal preparation program. The panel proposed that field experiences should first be embedded in regular coursework and then be more extensive in a school-based internship. One expert stated, “The main goal of these experiences is for the candidate to make connections between theory and practice, and have opportunities to apply their learning.” Another expert suggested “Field experiences embedded in coursework as a way to connect real-world experiences with academic coursework.” The panel proposed a yearlong internship. An expert explained, “The experience should last an entire school year to give candidates a true sense of starting and completing a school year. Doing so would facilitate continuity and a sustained experience.”

Expert recommendations included capacities that should be measured by assessment instruments. Table 1 provides a list of recommended capacities. The expert committee noted that merely including such content in an exam or portfolio requirement would be insufficient for a licensure process to be considered transformative. In the words of one panel member,

It is imperative that each item be assessed in such a way that matches the learning that is expected and necessary for the cutting edge, transformative nature of the leadership that is being sought. Problem-based learning needs to be aligned with theory. Laws need to be applied to authentic school scenarios. Self-reflection and ethical behavior need to be cultivated and assessed.

All of the panel members agreed that assessment instruments should measure higher-level capacities that integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Table 1

Expert Panel's Recommendations for Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions to be Measured by Assessment Instrument(s)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision/Instructional Leadership • Team Building • Special Education • School-Parent/Community Collaboration • Leadership Theory & Research • Ethics • School Law • School improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development • Diversity/Social Justice/Cultural Competence • Developing School Mission & Vision • Curriculum Development • Student Assessment • Recruiting, Hiring, and Evaluating Staff • School Culture and Climate • Managing Facilities, Operations & Resources
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The expert panel recommended that licensure assessment instruments be directly related to PSEL and/or NELP national standards, but panel members were more cautious regarding basing the instruments on state standards. One panel member stated,

...whether or not the requirements should be directly aligned to them [state standards] depends on the nature of those standards. Are those standards cutting edge and transformative? This needs to be an ongoing discussion. Alignment that is ever-evolving should be the goal.

The expert panel also advocated that the assessment instruments include measures of leadership capacity from the candidate's principal internship. The panel did not recommend multiple-choice items for written exams. Rather, the panel preferred open-ended written responses to questions based on short cases, scenarios, or videos. Finally, the panel stated that for assessment instruments to be considered transformative they need to be equitable regarding candidates from different cultural groups.

Concerning the overall process and format of licensure assessment, the expert panel believed that there should be multiple ways of assessing candidates, such as written exams, videos of the candidate's leadership performance, portfolios providing evidence of leadership capacities, and direct observation of candidates in authentic situations requiring the demonstration of leadership capacity. One panel member stated, "There should be more than a required test. There should be several types of assessment to check the leadership aptitude of the candidate." The panel also called for the assessment to take place in multiple environments, such as online, at an assessment center, at a university campus, at a PK-12 campus, and in a local community. One panel member noted that a good part of the assessment should occur "in a real-world context." Another panel member described advantages of having part of the assessment at a designated assessment center: "This would allow there to be some assessment of how the leader handles stress and interacts with others."

An interesting recommendation by the panel was to make discussion with those charged with conducting the assessment part of the assessment. A panel member commented, “Some individuals don’t excel on multiple choice items, but they excel in personal conversations and explanations of ideas.” The panel proposed that a transformative assessment process would be in large part performance-based. The performances the panel discussed were authentic in that they would occur either in a real-world situation or the simulation of a real-world situation. The panel proposed that performance-based assessment might take the form of artifacts documenting successful leadership activities in schools or communities; in-basket activities; or group simulations involving candidates discussing an issue, solving a problem, or making a decision. A panel member summed up the value of the panels’ proposals for the process and format of licensure assessment:

While this may be a more complex way of assessing, it provides a more in-depth look at the candidate. This would ensure that the candidate was truly qualified and had the characteristics of a school leader as well as the skills and ability to be reflective and react in situations as needed. There is a lot more to school leadership than a timed assessment that happens in one day without any interaction with anyone. By utilizing some of these tools there would be a more in-depth understanding of the [candidate’s] leadership abilities.

Methods

The primary data collection procedures for this review were searching for and mining documents describing the initial licensure process of each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. A file was created for each state, and relevant documents identified through internet searches were organized into sections for (a) documents that focused on the general state licensure requirements, (b) if the state utilized one or more a high-stakes assessment instruments, documents that focused on those instruments, and (c) documents describing the overall assessment process and format.

To guide data analysis, we constructed three rubrics based on the expert panel’s description of a transformative licensure process in relationship to the review’s purpose. The first rubric concerned general requirements and included eight criteria established by the expert panel (teaching certificate, teaching experience, master’s degree, field experiences embedded in coursework, internship, endorsed by preparation program, criminal background check, renewable certificate). The second rubric focused on criteria for content of assessment instruments (measures critical capacities; related to PSEL; measures higher level capacities that integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions; measures capacities developed in internship; evidence of efforts to assure equity). The third rubric included criteria for the overall process and format for the assessment in a transformative licensure process (multiple assessment instruments, multiple assessment environments, constructed responses, discussion with assessors, performance-based assessment).

Levels of state performance for each rubric were traditional, transitional, and transformative, with levels assigned based on the extent to which the established criteria were met. For some criteria, measures of classification were quantitative. For example, for the criterion of critical capacities measured by the assessment instrument(s) rubric, a state was considered at a traditional level if its assessment measured 0 to 8 of the critical capacities, a transitional level if the assessment measured 9 to 12 of the critical capacities, and a transformative level if the assessment measured 13 to 16 of the critical capacities. Other measures were more holistic. For instance, for the criteria of measuring higher-level leadership capacities in the assessment instrument rubric, the measures were “little or no focus on measuring higher-level capacities” (traditional), “some focus on measuring higher-level capacities” (transitional), and “heavy focus on measuring higher-level capacities”

(transformative). Only indirect measures could be used for some of the components recommended by the expert panel. For example, the archival data was not sufficient for determining whether each state was employing equitable licensure assessment, and we were limited to searching for evidence that efforts had been made to assure equity.

Data analysis began with a review of individual state files we had developed to become familiar with each state's licensure process. Next, we analyzed each state's process in relationship to the three rubrics, using criteria across the rubrics to assign each state's licensure process to the traditional, transitional, or transformative level. We then created a single matrix with the 50 states and the District of Columbia identified on the horizontal axis and the criteria from the three rubrics (11 criteria in all) listed across the vertical axis. We entered the levels (traditional, transitional, or transformative) we had assigned each criterion for each state in the matrix cells (see Appendix). This matrix allowed for a direct comparison of the results of our analysis across the various states.

Results of the Review

The first part of our results section provides an overview of the traditional, transitional, or transformative nature of the licensure process for the 50 states and the District of Columbia (for reasons of efficiency, we often treat Washington D.C. as a "state" when reporting general results). The second part of this section provides in-depth descriptions of a traditional licensure process recently phased out by Texas as well as Texas' new licensure process that we have classified as transitional. We have no close-up of a transformative state process to share, because none of the states was classified at that level. However, the recommendations we share later in this paper, taken together, envision a transformative licensure process.

Overview of the States' Licensure Processes and their Classifications

Of the general licensure requirements recommended by the expert panel (teaching certificate, teaching experience, master's degree, field experiences embedded in coursework, an internship, endorsement by the principal preparation program, a criminal background check, and a renewable certificate), only four states required seven or eight of these criteria in their licensure standards and thus were classified as transformative in this area. The largest number of states, 34, were classified as transitional for having five or six of the eight criteria. The remaining states all had no more than four of the general requirements.

At the time this article was written, 35 states and the District of Columbia had high-stakes principal licensure assessment instruments (either written exams or portfolios), and 15 states had no instrument of this type. Table 2 provides the names of assessment instruments used by the various states. The only transformative element within the set of panel recommendations for the high-stakes assessment instrument(s) that the majority of the states possessed was the measurement of specific knowledge, skills and dispositions suggested by the panel. Of the 36 states that had high-stakes assessments, 31 assessed 13 to 16 content areas recommended by the panel. This indicates a new emphasis in recent years on assessing knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to areas like instructional leadership, cultural responsiveness, school culture, ethics, developing school mission and vision, and school improvement. Despite frequent reports in the literature that most or all states now base their principal licensure standards on the PSEL, only 23 states' licensure assessments were classified as having a high relationship to PSEL standards (transformative for this criterion), and 10 additional state assessments were categorized as having a moderate relationship with the PSEL.

(transitional). Each of the 10 PSELs includes numerous elements, and some of those elements go beyond the 16 areas recommended by the panel, accounting for more state assessments being directly related to the panel's suggested content than to the PSEL.

For the purpose of our review, we defined higher-level capacities as those that require the integration of higher-order knowledge, skills, and dispositions to carry out complex leadership functions. We did not classify any of the state assessments as transformative in the area of measuring higher-level capacities; we categorized 5 as transitional and 46 as traditional. These results were not due to the lack of any tasks in the assessments that were higher level, but rather were based on the degree of emphasis on measuring higher-level capacities. The rubric on assessment content called for a "heavy focus" on measuring higher-level capacities (in terms of both the number and quality of higher-level assessment tasks) for a transformative classification, "some focus" for a transitional ranking, and "little or no focus" for a state assessment to be placed in the traditional category.

We found only one state assessment instrument that had a strong relationship with the aspiring principal's internship (transformative criterion), and twelve additional state assessments with some relationship to the internship (transitional). Of course, aspiring principals can and do use what they learn in their internships to prepare for licensure exams, and in some cases to develop portfolios to submit as part of licensure assessment. However, few states have provisions specifically tying capacities developed during the principal internship to the licensure assessment.

Although an equitable state licensure assessment instrument was one of the panel's criteria for a transformative assessment, investigation to determine if state assessment instruments were equitable was beyond the scope of this study. We did, however, examine archival data to determine the extent to which developers of various licensure assessments had at least made efforts to assure the assessment was equitable. We did not find extensive evidence of efforts to make any of the state assessments equitable regarding various cultural groups. We did find "some evidence" of evidence to assure equity for 36 states. We assigned these states' assessments to the transitional category.

We found low levels of congruence between the expert panels' recommendations for the overall process and format of licensure assessment and the states' processes and formats. The expert panel recommended that multiple assessment instruments be used for the assessment—suggestions included some combination of written tests, videos of the candidate's leadership performance, portfolios providing evidence of leadership capacities, and direct observation of candidates in authentic situations. We classified the use of one assessment instrument as traditional, two as transitional, and three or more as transformative. Regarding multiple instruments, none of the state assessments were classified as transformative, and only three were categorized as transitional. Similarly, the panel's recommendation of multiple assessment environments (some combination of assessment online, at the principal preparation program site, on a PK-12 campus, in the community served by the school, and at a testing center) was not consistent with state practice—no state provided three or more assessment environments, and only two states used two different environments.

Only one state's assessment placed a major emphasis on constructed-responses and thus was classified as transformative for the constructed-response criterion. The majority of states required some constructed-responses and their assessments were identified as transitional for that criterion. None of the states used discussions with assessors. Although many states use the term "performance-based" in descriptions of their licensure assessment, we found only four state assessments that met our definition of performance-based, which is assessment of leadership activities in real world situations or authentic simulations of real-world situations.

Our overall comparison of the expert panel’s recommendations for components of a transformative principal licensure process with the actual licensure processes across the states indicates that there currently are no states that meet the panel’s recommendations to a high enough degree to classify them as transformative. Our review indicates that 24 state licensure processes are operating at a traditional level and 26 states’ and the District of Columbia’s licensure processes are functioning at a transitional level.

Table 2
States’ Principal Licensure Assessment Instruments

States	Assessment Instrument
AR, DC, KS, LA, ME, MD, MI, MS, NJ, PA, RI, TN, VT, VA	School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) (by ETS) (also see KY)
AL, CO, NE, SC, UT, WV	Educational Leadership: Administration and Supervision (ELAS) (by ETS)
CT	Connecticut Administrator Test (by ETS) (This test is based on the PSEL standards and covers content similar to ELAS)
AZ	Arizona Education Proficiency Assessment (by Pearson)
CA	California Administrator Performance Assessment (Cal APA) (by Pearson)
FL	Florida Educational Leadership Examination (by Pearson)
GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) • Educational Leadership (by ETS) • Georgia Ethics for Educational Leadership (by ETS) • Performance Assessment for School Leaders (PASL) (by ETS)
IL	Principal as Instructional Leader (by Pearson)
IN	Indiana Core Assessment: School Administrator—Building Level (by Pearson)
KY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kentucky Specialty Test of Instructional and Administrative Practices (by ETS) • School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) (by ETS)
MA	Massachusetts Performance Assessment for Leaders (PAL) (by Pearson)
MO	Missouri Educator Gateway Assessment: Building Level Administrator (by Pearson)
NM	New Mexico Teacher Assessments: Educational Administrator (by Pearson)
NY	New York State Teacher Certification Exam: School Building Leader Assessment (by Pearson)
OH	Educational Leadership Ohio Assessment for Educators (by Pearson)
OK	Oklahoma Subject Area Test: Principal (by Pearson)
OR	Oregon Educator Licensure Assessment: Protecting Student and Civil Rights in the Educational Environment (by Pearson)
TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TExES 268 Principal as Instructional Leader Exam (by Pearson) • Performance Assessment for School Leaders (PASL) (by ETS)
AK, DE, HI, ID, IA, MN, MT, NV, NH, NC, ND, SD, WA, WI, WY	No Assessment Instrument

Close-up on Texas’ Old and New Licensure Processes: From Traditional to Transitional

Texas’ general requirements for both the licensure process recently phased out as well as its new licensure process include the following: a candidate must hold a valid classroom teaching certificate, have two years of teaching experience, have received a master’s degree and completed an approved principal educator preparation program, complete a practicum/internship during the preparation program, and pass a criminal history background check. Texas offers a renewable certificate for

principals. Beyond these general requirements, Texas also requires a passing score on its licensure exams.

The high-stakes licensure exam recently phased out by Texas and the new exam provide good examples of traditional (the old exam) and transitional (the new exam) instruments. The old exam, the TExES 068 principal exam, focused on three domains: School Community Leadership (33%), Instructional Leadership (44%), and Administrative Leadership (23%). The TExES 068 Principal exam consisted of 120 multiple-choice questions, including discrete items, cluster sets, decision sets, and technology-enhanced items. Decision sets were frequently used, providing the test taker with an initial stimulus describing the primary problem plus additional information that would occur later in the scenario throughout a series of five to nine questions. The TExES 068 Principal assessment had a 72% passing rate for 2015-2016 and 73% for 2016-17, with over 4000 test takers each year (Texas Education Agency, 2016; 2017).

The old assessment covered thirteen critical content areas noted by the expert panel as being included in a transformative assessment instrument. The old assessment had a low relationship to the PSEL (traditional), little or no relationship to capacities developed during the internship (traditional), and some evidence of efforts made to assure equity (transitional). Regarding the overall assessment process and format, candidates were assessed on a single exam in a single assessment environment, without the use of constructed responses. No discussion with assessors was part of the assessment. No performance-based assessment was used with candidates. Thus, the outgoing assessment instrument was classified as traditional across all five criteria for administration and format. Based on the criteria recommended by the expert panel, the overall classification of the Texas initial licensure using the TExES 068 exam was traditional.

The new TExES 268 exam consists of six domains: School Culture (23%), Leading Learning (45%), Human Capital (19%), Executive Leadership (6%), Strategic Operations (6%), and Ethics, Equity and Diversity (6%). Scenarios in the test represent various groups, including rural, urban and suburban schools, and early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools. The exam includes 91 discrete items, cluster sets, technology-enhanced items, and constructed-response questions. Videos are integrated into some of the cluster sets and the constructed-response questions in the new exam. Authentic documents, such as school schedules, school and student data reports, student work samples, and portions of professional development plans are integrated into the cluster sets and constructed-response questions. The four constructed response questions focus mainly on the School Culture and Leading Learning domains. Question 1 focuses on how the principal monitors instruction and provides evidence-based feedback. Question 2 focuses on how the principal develops and implements a rigorous curriculum. Question 3 focuses on how the principal supports staff in using data to inform instruction and interventions. Question 4 focuses on creating a positive, collaborative culture and setting high expectations (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The exam uses a 0-4 scoring rubric to evaluate each constructed response on five different criteria.

The ETS Performance Assessment for School Leaders (PASL) is the second of the new TExES licensure exams. Principal candidates complete three tasks during their internships. Task 1 requires the candidate to address and resolve a problem that influences instructional practice and student learning, and is documented with artifacts, including pages of the plan, the timeline, communication with stakeholders, and student work. Task 2 requires the candidate to establish and support continuous professional development with staff to improve instruction, and is documented with artifacts, including pages from the professional development plan, a completed walk-through observation form, a student work sample, and feedback survey. Task 3 requires the candidate to

build a collaborative team within the school to improve instruction, achievement, and the school culture. A video of the candidate facilitating the team is a required artifact of this process.

The new Texas assessment instruments cover thirteen critical content areas noted by the expert panel as being important for an assessment instrument, therefore the instruments were classified as transformative for this criterion. The new instruments have a moderate relationship to the PSEL, have some relationship to capacities developed during the internship, and there was some evidence of efforts made to assure equity, thus the instruments were classified as transitional for these three criteria. Candidates are assessed with two exams in two assessment environments (transitional), and the assessments include the use of some constructed responses (transitional). Discussion with assessors is not part of the assessment (traditional). Extensive performance-based assessment is included (transformative). Based on the panel's criteria, the overall classification of the new Texas principal initial licensure with the TExES 268 exam is transitional.

Discussion

All but one of the eight general criteria that the expert panel suggested as characteristic of a transformative principal licensure process seem commonsensical, and a strong argument can be made for the eighth recommended criterion, field experiences embedded in the principal preparation program's coursework. Yet only four of the states meet at least seven of the panel's eight general criteria. Regarding assessment instruments, the areas where state instruments mirrored experts' conceptions of transformative assessment were in their specific content (knowledge, skills, and dispositions measured) and the relationship of that content to the PSEL. These results are most likely due to the strong influence of the PSEL on states and the general tendency in recent years for both university preparation programs and school districts to place increasing emphasis on areas such as instructional leadership. Broadly defined, instructional leadership encompasses many of the panels' suggestions as well as the national standards, including the development of capacities in instructional supervision, professional development, curriculum development, and student assessment. Other areas emphasized in recent years by the PSEL, universities, and school districts, and which are reflected in many state-assessment instruments, include cultural responsiveness, school culture and climate, ethics, school vision and mission, recruitment, hiring and evaluation of staff, and school improvement.

Higher level capacities—those that require integration of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in order to identify and address critical goals and problems—are essential to the modern principal, yet none of the state assessment instruments are at the transformative level for this criterion, and only five were classified as transitional. Our data was inadequate to determine whether state assessment instruments are equitable, and there was insufficient evidence to classify any of the states as transformative even in their *efforts* to assure equity. This should be an area of concern for those interested in preventing test bias and promoting social justice.

With respect to the assessment process and format, very few states make use of multiple instruments, multiple environments, or truly performance-based assessment, and no states provide for discussion between candidates and an assessment team. These results are no doubt due in part to the expense of such components. The logic of the expert panel members for including these ingredients in the assessment is powerful. Some types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions are best measured in different environments (online, schools, communities, the university campus, a testing center) and through different instruments (tests, videos, portfolios, direct observation). And some capacities can only be fully assessed through personal interaction between the participant and

the assessors. Along with these considerations, we must recognize the reality that different candidates have different communication styles and cultural assets, and a single environment or instrument could be biased in favor of some candidates and against others. Performance-based assessment is widely acclaimed by many state agencies, principal preparation programs, and school districts as the preferred way of measuring the capacities of aspiring principals, but for the most part there is a considerable gap between rhetoric and reality in this area. The one criterion on the assessment process and format rubric for which a good number of states were classified as transitional was the one on constructed response items. For these states the constructed response items were mixed with other types of items.

The overall results indicate that, when compared to the expert panel's criterion, the state principal licensure assessments are fairly evenly split between transitional and traditional assessment processes, with no transformative models in place. Whether we feel good, bad, or indifferent about these results depends to some extent on whether we agree with the expert panel's criteria. It also depends on what we believe the purpose of the initial licensure assessment should be: should it be to determine whether the new principal or assistant principal has minimal entry skills, with higher level capacities to be developed through experience; or should it be to assess—and promote—higher-level capacities for new school leaders? The scholars are split on this issue. However, given the research that tells us the principal is a critical factor in teacher performance and student learning (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNutty, 2005; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Orr, 2006), it makes sense to us for the field to make every effort, through principal preparation and initial licensure assessment, to place high-capacity leaders in the principal's role, then follow-up with high-quality induction, continuing professional development, and license renewal requirements that foster continuous capacity building to meet the ever changing needs of our schools, teachers, and students.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Although we have no state models of a fully transformative principal licensure process to share, based on the expert panel's suggestions and transformative components of some state processes, we make the following recommendations for developing a transformative licensure process.

Increase State Agency-University-School District Partnership

All states tend to promote their licensure processes by stating that principal preparation programs and school districts were consulted during the development of the process, but we have doubts about how widespread, and how authentic, such partnerships have been in many states. Although a particular state agency has the legal responsibility for licensure requirements, there is no reason a state cannot seek and seriously consider input from universities and school districts at each stage of the development process, including the establishment of general requirements, the content of assessment instruments, and the overall assessment process and format. Principal preparation programs and school districts can be partners not only in preparing aspiring principals to meet licensure requirements, but also in the actual assessment process and follow-up.

Include Multiple General Requirements

In the main, we agree with all of the general criteria for a transformative licensure process recommended by the expert panel: a teaching certificate, teaching experience, master's degree, field experiences embedded in course work, an internship, endorsement by the principal preparation program, a criminal background check, and a renewable certificate. Regarding the field experiences embedded in course work, it is imperative that these be developed collaboratively with the principal preparation program (which will require and supervise the field experiences), and school districts (where most of the field experiences will take place). Also, it makes sense that the principal preparation program decides whether particular field experiences take place in regular coursework, the internship, or both. The power of a quality internship and the variety of experiences that should take place in an internship suggests to us that the internship should be a year in length. The topic of general requirements raises the issue of alternative licensure, which we noted earlier is an option in 39 states and the District of Columbia. The routes to alternative licensure currently vary widely from state to state. Alternative licensure could certainly be an option in a transformative process—the key here would be whether the alternative process provided evidence that the aspiring principal possessed the same personal qualities and professional capacities as candidates certified by the regular process.

Incorporate Specific Content Areas in Assessment Instruments

We agree with the expert panel that an exam should be part of the principal licensure process. We also agree with the panel's 16 recommended content areas for the assessment instruments, but we would add some additional content, such as measurements of leadership development during the aspiring principal's teaching career, growth during the candidate's graduate studies, and the capacity to engage in and facilitate reflective inquiry. An important aspect of instrument content is the relative emphasis placed on different types of content through the number and depth of assessment tasks. For example, we would place considerable emphasis on school culture, content concerning instructional leadership and affiliated areas, special education, school-family and school-community collaboration, ethics, school improvement, cultural competence, school mission and vision, curriculum development, and recruiting and hiring. We also agree with the panel that the content should be directly related to the PSEL, but the degree of emphasis on different standards and elements within those standards is critical.

Employ Constructed-Response Items

Constructed-response items are items that require test takers to create their own answer to a question rather than to choose from a set of possible responses provided to them. Typically, the constructed response is a short answer or essay. Popham (2003) compares constructed-response items to selected-response items: "Clearly, creating a response represents a more complicated and difficult task" and the test taker "really needs to understand something in order to construct a response based on that understanding" (p. 86). The expert panel clearly preferred constructed response items to multiple choice items on principal licensure exams. We agree with the panel that constructed-response items can be important ingredients in a broader, transformative licensure assessment process.

Emphasize Higher-Level Capacities

Assessing higher-level capacities goes beyond the basic content areas covered by the assessment instrument; in reference to the definition we proposed earlier, it involves measuring the aspiring principal's ability to integrate higher-order knowledge, skills, and dispositions to carry out complex leadership functions. The design process here is to (a) identify critical, complex leadership functions, (b) identify the higher order knowledge, skills, and dispositions that, considered together, are needed to accomplish those functions, and (c) design measures that will indicate whether the candidate has developed the requisite capacities and that can be incorporated within one or more assessment instruments. This is a complex undertaking, and no doubt calls for the aforementioned collaboration of state agencies, principal preparation programs, and school districts.

Focus on Performance-Based Assessment

There clearly are relationships between performance-based assessment and assessment instruments that measure higher-level capacities, but performance-based assessment has a number of specific characteristics: it requires the application of knowledge and skills to a complex, real-world task or simulation of such a task, and also requires evidence that the individual being assessed can transfer the required knowledge and skills to other real-world situations. Criteria for assessing the individual's product or performance include content (knowledge and skills displayed), process (methods used to complete the assigned task), quality of the product or performance, and impact of the product or performance in relationship to its purpose (McTighe, 2015).

Utilize Multiple Assessment Instruments and Environments

Although it probably would not be feasible to use all of the various assessment instruments and environments suggested by expert panel members, given the different types of capacities to be measured and the different styles and assets brought to the assessment by aspiring principals, a transformative assessment process would use multiple instruments and environments based on the various capacities the particular state's assessment process was intended to measure. One can fairly easily envision different capacities that are best measured by review of a video of an aspiring principal carrying out a leadership activity, one or more artifacts submitted as part of a portfolio, and results of a written test. The same argument holds true for multiple assessment environments. In some cases a PK-12 school is the best place to assess a candidate assisting teachers, and a community environment may be the best place to appraise an aspiring principal's work with parents and community members.

Build Discussion with Assessors into the Assessment Process

A two-way discussion between aspiring principals and those charged with assessing the candidate is related to several of the other criteria for a transformative assessment process, but we treat it separately here because it is both an unused and a powerful assessment format. Discussion allows assessors to engage directly with aspiring principals, to ask follow-up questions, and to observe candidates' spontaneous responses. Assessors might hold discussions with an individual aspiring principal or a group of candidates. If the discussion is with a group of aspiring principals, it can be structured to allow interaction among candidates as well as between candidates and assessors. Such

discussions, whether with individuals or groups, would need to strike a balance between some level of standardization (e.g., common guidelines, topics, and assessment rubric for all discussions) and sufficient flexibility to allow assessors to probe the aspiring principal's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The protocol for discussion could be developed collaboratively by state officials, representatives of principal preparation programs, and school-district practitioners, and the assessment teams could include trained representatives from each of these stakeholder groups.

Ensure Equity

Although we were unable to measure the degree of equity provided by the assessment instruments used across the nation, there is no question that assessment instruments in a transformative licensure process would be equitable. Documentation of surface efforts to assure equity is not sufficient. The only way to assure equity is to pilot assessment instruments across different and sufficiently represented cultural groups, compare the results across those groups, revise the instruments, and continue this cycle until all cultural bias has been eliminated. This can be an expensive and time-consuming process, but if states are going to use high-stakes assessments such assessments need to be equitable. Here it may be necessary for state agencies to call on outside experts to review processes used by corporate test makers to assure equity or to assist with state development of assessment instruments for the same purpose.

Provide Educative Feedback

A transformative principal licensure process will no doubt prevent some individuals—those without the necessary leadership capacities or the potential to develop those capacities—from becoming school administrators; however, aspiring principals who do not succeed in their first attempt to navigate the assessment should be provided additional opportunities to do so. Feedback to those individuals should go beyond simply informing them of their overall score or scores on particular sections of an assessment instrument, but should include specific information on improvements they need to make in their knowledge and skills and identify resources that can help them prepare for another effort. Specific feedback on assessment results also should be shared with those who pass the assessment and become school leaders. It's unlikely that any given candidate will perform perfectly on a state assessment, and detailed feedback can assist new principals to further develop their leadership capacity through tailored induction, mentoring, and continuing education programs. Assessment feedback should be:

- Specific to an intended outcome
- Explicit in comparing the aspiring principals expected and actual performance in relation to the intended outcome
- Constructive in explaining how the candidate can improve their performance in order to meet the intended outcome
- Promotive of reflection and metacognition (Hooper, 2010).

Additionally, principal preparation programs can benefit from group data on assessment results for their students. These programs can use such data to adjust their curriculum, instruction, student assessment, and field experiences to address areas of need revealed by assessment data. Preparation programs that offer early-career assistance to their graduates in new positions in school administration can use assessment data to help the graduates successfully transition to school leadership and begin the journey toward license renewal.

Feedback on assessment results needs to be a two-way street. Group results might indicate problems with the assessment content, instruments, process, format, or analysis that preparation programs and school districts can make the coordinating state agency aware of. University faculties have experts both in educational leadership and assessment who can serve as valuable consultants to the state on piloting and revising assessments, as well as utilizing assessment results.

Closing Comments

The principal licensure process, in our view, should be part of a continuum of growth and development of school leaders. This continuum includes principal preparation, licensure, induction, and repeated cycles of continuing professional development and license renewal. The purpose of all of the elements on the continuum should be to develop transformative leaders who have the commitment and capacity to transform our schools. Principal licensure now is being emphasized by most states strictly as an accountability measure. The potential of the licensure process as part of a continuum of transformative growth and development is not being realized. In the words of Adams and Copland (2007), “While states may anchor leadership development in licensing, the emergence of real capacity requires additional investments and a conscious, purposeful plan” (p. 158). Each state needs to join with principal preparation programs and school districts to develop a comprehensive plan for developing transformative school leaders, and principal licensure needs to become an educative and congruent part of that plan.

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Appendix Comparison of State Principal Licensure Assessment Processes

⚙=Transformative ⦿=Transitional ○=Traditional												
State	General Requirements	Content of Assessment Instruments					Assessment Process and Format					Overall
		Specific Content	Related to PSEL	Higher Level Capacities	Measures Capacities Developed in Internship	Efforts to Assure Equity	Multiple Tools	Multiple Environments	Constructed Response Items	Discussion with Assessors	Performance Based	
AL	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○
AK	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
AZ	⦿	⚙	⦿	○	⦿	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
AR	○	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
CA	⦿	⚙	⦿	⦿	⚙	⦿	○	○	○	○	⚙	⦿
CO	○	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○
CT	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○
DC	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
DE	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
FL	○	⦿	○	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
GA	⦿	⚙	⚙	⦿	⦿	⦿	○	○	○	○	⚙	⦿
HI	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
ID	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
IL	⦿	⚙	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
IN	○	⦿	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
IA	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
KS	⚙	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
KY	⦿	⚙	○	⦿	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
LA	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
ME	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
MD	⚙	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
MA	○	○	⦿	⦿	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	⚙	⦿
MI	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
MN	⚙	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
MS	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
MO	○	⚙	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
MT	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
NE	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○
NV	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
NH	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
NJ	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
NM	⦿	⚙	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○
NY	⦿	⦿	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	⚙	○	○	⦿
NC	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
ND	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
OH	⦿	⚙	⚙	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿
OK	○	⚙	⦿	○	○	⦿	○	○	○	○	○	⦿

