

# Statewide School Leadership Initiatives

Julie Fitz and Stephanie Levin

The importance of effective principals for students' and teachers' success has been well established. Research has shown that principals are a critical school-level factor influencing student outcomes, including student achievement, graduation rates, and attendance rates.<sup>i</sup> Additionally, principals' ability to create positive working conditions and collaborative, supportive learning environments plays a critical role in attracting and retaining qualified teachers and developing their skills.<sup>ii</sup> States can support high-quality leadership development by investing in professional learning targeted to the needs of in-service educational leaders.<sup>iii</sup> High-quality professional learning can develop principals' competence in leading across their full range of responsibilities, enabling them to foster school environments in which adults and students thrive.

A recent 50-state scan reveals that 29 states currently fund statewide professional learning opportunities for educational leaders. Some states have developed comprehensive programs with opportunities for many different forms of engagement, while others operate single-purpose programs. Professional learning is provided directly by state entities or through contracts with organizations (i.e., National Institute for School Leadership).

Notably, state school leadership professional learning initiatives serve a variety of different functions. All provide some form of leadership training and skills development to site, district, and/or teacher leaders, but other common functions fulfilled by these initiatives include:

- Developing leadership **pipelines** for aspiring principals;
- Supporting the **induction** of early-career principals into the profession;
- Cultivating the collective leadership capacity of **school- or district-based teams**;
- Facilitating and supporting strategic planning for high need schools and/or districts engaged in **turnaround efforts**; and
- **Training coaches, supervisors, and/or evaluators** of other educators and leaders.

Table 1 presents a list of the states offering professional learning initiatives for school leaders with their functions. Examples of state initiatives fulfilling each function follow the table.

Table 1. Leadership development functions fulfilled by states' professional learning initiatives

	<b>Support for aspiring principals</b>	<b>Support for early-career principals</b>	<b>Support for leadership teams</b>	<b>Support for low performing schools</b>	<b>Coach and/or evaluator training</b>
<b>29 states</b> fund professional learning for educational leaders.	<b>8 states</b> target aspiring leaders for leadership development.	<b>11 states</b> provide programming that supports early-career principals.	<b>10 states</b> provide opportunities for school- or district-based teams.	<b>8 states</b> target activities to leaders in low-performing schools and districts.	<b>5 states</b> provide coaching or evaluation training.
<b>Alaska</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Arizona</b>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Arkansas</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
<b>California*</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Colorado</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Delaware</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Georgia</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Hawaii</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Idaho</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Indiana</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Kansas</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Kentucky</b>	No	No	No	Yes	No
<b>Maine</b>	No	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Maryland</b>	Yes	No	No	No	No
<b>Minnesota</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Missouri</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Montana</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Nebraska</b>	No	No	No	Yes	No
<b>New Mexico</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>North Carolina</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>North Dakota</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Ohio</b>	No	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Rhode Island</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>South Carolina</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Tennessee</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Utah</b>	No	No	No	No	Yes
<b>West Virginia</b>	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

\*California operates regionalized professional learning academies, which vary in function across regions.

## State leadership initiatives can establish leadership pipelines for aspiring leaders.

Principal turnover can be disruptive to school progress.<sup>iv</sup> While certain interventions show promise for increasing role persistence, some level of turnover is inevitable. Identifying, preparing, and creating career advancement pathways for aspiring leaders helps ensure that local education agencies will have a pool of highly-qualified, well-prepared candidates to draw upon when vacancies emerge.

Eight state initiatives target aspiring leaders for leadership development and support in career advancement.

- **Arizona's Beat the Odds School Leadership Academy** provides executive development training to 25-30 current and aspiring school leaders each year using the NISL curriculum. Arizona's **Principals' Academy** similarly welcomes aspiring principals alongside established school- and teacher-leaders for Qualified Evaluator Training.
- **The Arkansas Leadership Academy's ALA Reach Program** provides virtual professional learning and on-demand resources that are oriented toward educational leaders and aspiring leaders.
- **California's 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Leadership Academy (Alameda Region)** facilitates a community of practice supporting individuals who are working toward the submission of their California Administrator Performance Assessment Cycles for their preliminary administrative credential.
- The **Delaware Academy for School Leadership** provides multiple pathways into leadership, including **ASPIRE**, a professional development program for teacher leaders who aspire to become principals or assistant principals, and **Step Up for Assistant Principals**, which provides professional learning for assistant principals interested in transitioning into a principalship role. The **Governor's Institute for School Leadership** administers a similar development opportunity for assistant principals, **The Assistant Principal Academy**.
- **Georgia's Aspiring Principal Program** supports aspiring school leaders—specifically those currently serving as assistant principal, instructional coach, district support, or in teacher leader roles—with opportunities for professional learning and coaching. During the 2019-2020 school year, this program served 46 participants.
- **Maryland's Promising Principals' Academy** provides assistant principals, central office staff, and teacher leaders who have earned their Administrator II endorsement with professional learning and coaching that will help them successfully transition into the principalship.
- The **Oklahoma School Leadership and Talent Development initiative's Moving Up Program** supports assistant principals looking to move into the principalship in developing collaborative leadership skills.

- **South Carolina’s Foundations in School Leadership program** provides a talent development opportunity for teacher leaders interested in moving into administration. The **Instructional Leadership Academy for Assistant Principals** provides similar support for individuals currently serving as assistant principals.

Evidence from district-level initiatives to develop leadership pipelines indicates that attending to school leaders’ pre-service professional learning can contribute to improved outcomes and retention for these individuals in their first placements as principals.<sup>v</sup> Engaging in pre-service talent development on a larger scale is a potential lever for achieving greater overall leadership effectiveness.

### **State leadership initiatives can support induction into the profession for early career leaders.**

Induction programs are intended to build on the experience of administrator preparation and address the specific needs of novice and early-career school leaders. This is consistent with research indicating that early career principals appear to experience greater benefit from professional learning than their more experienced peers.<sup>vi</sup> Programs can be structured to accommodate learning that is adaptable to the new leader’s experience and school context and structured to provide networking through cohort participation and coaching.

Eleven states specifically target programming towards early career leaders.

- The **Alaska School Leadership Academy** is a two-year program of support for early career principals that includes monthly mentoring and in-person and online professional learning opportunities. The 2018-2019 cohort served 25 school leaders.
- **California’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Leadership Academy (Kern Region)** facilitates a community of practice supporting new school leaders.
- **Hawaii’s New Principals Academy** provides two years of cohort-based learning experiences and coaching to new principals.
- **Idaho’s Principal Mentoring Project** pairs principals in their first and second years with mentors who support them through frequent phone calls and periodic site visits. Mentoring is complemented by three professional development institutes.
- The **Kansas Educational Leadership Institute** provides first year principals and assistant principals, superintendents and assistant superintendents, and special education directors and assistant special education directors with mentoring, networking, and professional learning opportunities. These opportunities are also made available for leaders who are new to Kansas. Institute completers earn points toward the renewal of their license. During the 2022-2023 school year, the institute served more than 80 principals and assistant principals.

- The **New Mexico Priority Schools Bureau’s NM LEAD program** supports principals with less than three years of experience to develop best practices in several domains of educational leadership.
- **Oklahoma’s Principal Induction Academy** provides two years of training to 50 early-career principals.
- The **Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program** is a statewide professional learning program that includes a Principal’s Induction Program. The program includes two courses based on the NISL curriculum that school leaders must complete within their first five years in the role of principal or assistant principal.
- **South Carolina’s Principal Induction Program** provides first-year principals with professional learning to support their transition into the role. Completion allows participants to move from a Tier 1 to Tier 2 Principal Certification.
- The **Tennessee Academy for School Leaders** operates an **Academy for Beginning Principals and Assistant Principals** that supports leaders in the first three years of their career with professional learning and networking.
- **West Virginia’s School Leadership Network** provides mentoring, opportunities for in-person networking, and monthly professional learning sessions to new administrators.

Research suggests that induction support can influence teacher effectiveness, teacher retention, and student achievement outcomes, with the strongest relationships concentrated among the most economically and academically disadvantaged schools.<sup>vii</sup> As of 2021, 23 states have introduced principal induction requirements— either as a state rule, state law, or both.<sup>viii</sup> The 11 state programs listed above provide school leaders with options for meeting their states’ requirements.

### **State leadership initiatives can develop the collective leadership capacity of school- and district-based teams.**

State leadership initiatives more commonly provide programming for *individual* leaders rather than leadership *teams*. While serving individual leaders increases the number of schools and districts that are potentially impacted by these initiatives, participating leaders may lack the support necessary to fully implement their new knowledge and practices within their school or district. Team-based professional learning creates opportunities for school- and district-based teams to learn and plan collaboratively, and they broaden the set of stakeholders invested in implementing new professional practices.<sup>ix</sup>

Ten states currently offer statewide opportunities for school- or district-based teams to engage collaboratively in professional learning.

- The **Arkansas Leadership Academy’s School Team Empowerment program** supports school-based teams with professional learning, coaching, and site visits with the goal of collaboratively developing stronger instructional practices.

- **California’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Leadership Academy** offers team-based professional learning opportunities through three of its Regional Academies. Opportunities vary in focus and structure.
- **Delaware’s UDEL Professional Learning Network on Leading Special Education** provides school-based teams with a year-long professional learning experience focused on developing more effective leadership for special education programs and services.
- **Georgia’s District Sustainability Program**, offered through the **Governor’s School Leadership Academy**, supports district-based teams in refining their own leadership development programs.
- **Idaho’s Building Capacity program** provides schools and districts with three years of on-site assistance, professional learning, and resources and self-evaluation tools with the goal of supporting teams with school improvement.
- **Maine’s Leading Early Learning program** supports elementary principals and one of their colleagues to identify attributes of high-quality early childhood programming, develop leadership abilities, and network with other early childhood leaders.
- **New Mexico’s Principals Pursuing Excellence program** provides school leaders of “struggling schools” and their core teams with professional learning and performance coaching oriented around schools’ annual and 90-day improvement plans. The program serves approximately 40 principals per year.
- **North Carolina’s Instructional Leadership Academy** provides a two-year professional learning experience to teams composed of a principal, district leader, and two other school representatives.
- The **Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation and Instructional Improvement initiative** provides a two-year professional learning program focused on improving student outcomes, especially for those from marginalized groups (e.g., students with disabilities or learning difficulties and students living in poverty). Although the initiative focuses on building the capacity of principals and assistant principals, it also provides targeted professional learning, including coaching, for leadership teams.
- **South Carolina’s Collective Leadership Initiative** provides professional learning and technical support for school leadership teams that are engaged in the voluntary implementation of the state’s Collective Leadership Framework. Another South Carolina program, **Building Instructional Capacity**, supports individual leaders and teams of leaders (with preference given to teams that include an administrator and at least one teacher leader) in developing instructional leadership at their school site.

As these examples illustrate, team-based professional learning initiatives may be developed to accomplish different aims (e.g., improving instructional practices, implementing new policy frameworks). Across contexts, however, this type of initiative shows potential for creating broader shifts in culture and leadership practice by engaging a larger group of stakeholders in ongoing improvement work.<sup>x</sup>

## State leadership initiatives can support school turnaround efforts.

The positive outcomes that high-quality principals often achieve—improved student outcomes and decreased teacher attrition—are most needed in schools and districts that experience persistent performance challenges. Professional learning that builds the capacity of leaders in these schools has the potential to stabilize school environments by reducing principal and teacher turnover.<sup>xi</sup> It can also connect leaders with training, coaching, and other supports specifically tailored to their school improvement needs and goals.

Eight states target leadership programming toward leaders in low-performing schools and districts.<sup>1</sup>

- **California’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Leadership Academy (Shasta Region)** facilitates **The Team Level**, a year-long professional learning and coaching opportunity for leadership teams from districts that serve Title I students or receive Comprehensive Support & Improvement or Differentiated Assistance through the Statewide System of Support.
- The **Delaware Academy for School Leadership** offers school improvement services to school and district leaders, including a needs assessment, support in the creation of long- and short-term action plans, tailored professional learning and coaching, and more.
- The **Georgia Governor’s School Leadership Academy** operates a **Principal Support Program** that provides professional learning and coaching for principals in federally designated schools as they work toward school improvement. During the 2019-2020 school year, this program served 82 principals.
- The **Idaho Principals Network** is a professional learning community designed specifically to support school leaders in schools that are working towards developing more effective instructional practices.
- **Kentucky** funds participation in the **National Institute of School Leadership’s (NISL) Executive Development for School Leadership** program for leaders in Focus Schools.
- The invitation-only **Nebraska Leadership and Learning Network** provides the leaders of five schools receiving comprehensive support and improvement with opportunities for collective learning with the goal of building equity-drive leadership capacity and helping leaders design strategies to support school improvement.
- **New Mexico’s Priority Schools Bureau** operates the **NM Eclipse Leadership Program**, which supports a statewide cohort of school leaders working toward improving student outcomes, particularly for students with disabilities.
- **North Carolina’s** newly launched **Instructional Leadership Academy** uses accountability data from past years to determine eligibility for a two-year professional learning fellowship through the Relay Graduate School of Education. The initiative will serve up to 1,600 participants. Additional support—including job-embedded professional

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<sup>1</sup> Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina

learning, coaching, and on-site support—will be made available to participants in six districts that already receive intensive support from the state.

For the majority of these states, programs supporting low-performing schools are only one of several different services and leadership development programs offered through the state leadership initiative. Leadership development responsive to the needs of leaders in low performing schools and districts has potential for high impact.

### **State leadership initiatives can provide training for leaders in their capacity as coaches, supervisors, and/or evaluators.**

Evidence suggests that principals' impact on student achievement occurs by way of improved teacher effectiveness.<sup>xii</sup> As such, attending to the capacity of leaders to develop talent through effective supervision and evaluation holds promise for improving teacher practice and student performance. Relatedly, highly effective leaders can contribute to the professional growth of other school leaders through coaching and mentoring. Many states facilitate these types of relationships, but few intentionally develop the capacity of leadership coaches. Given the value of high-quality coaching,<sup>xiii</sup> it may be a worthwhile investment to provide professional learning opportunities to leadership coaches.

Four states provide training to leaders specifically in their capacity as supervisor, evaluator, or coach through their leadership initiatives.

- **Arizona's Principals' Academy** provides principals, assistant principals, teachers on special assignments, and other instructional leaders with Qualified Evaluator Training that aims to increase their effectiveness during the teacher evaluation process.
- The **Delaware Governor's Institute for School Leadership** operates an **Executive Leadership Academy** that provides professional learning tailored to the needs of Principal Supervisors. Supervisors learn tools for better supporting principals with processes of instruction, evaluation, and operational management.
- **Utah's Department of School Leadership** offers an **Evaluation for Effective Teaching and Learning course** that helps new evaluators understand the state teacher evaluation system and become rater-certified.
- **West Virginia's Evaluation Leadership Institute** trains principals and central office administrators on how to effectively evaluate personnel. Administrators are required to complete this training within 90 days of being hired.

Intentionally cultivating the skills and knowledge of leaders in relation to talent development has the potential to amplify the impact of professional learning investments by initiating behavior change in personnel working under the supervision of participating leaders.



## Conclusion

Each state's professional learning initiative(s) aims to equip school leaders with important skills and knowledge, but the broader functions of initiatives vary, from focusing on developing future talent to building the capacity of coaches supporting school leaders. The number and variety of initiatives and programs that have been developed by states suggests there are opportunities for states to share insights, knowledge, and the lessons they have learned while designing and implementing leadership development initiatives. For states interested in establishing new, or improving existing, leadership development initiatives, the above examples can inform program design or suggest future opportunities for programmatic refinement and expansion.

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<sup>i</sup> Bartanen, 2020; Coelli & Green, 2012; Grissom et al., 2015; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Grissom et al., 2021.

<sup>ii</sup> Grissom, 2011; Grissom et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2015; Podolsky et al., 2016

<sup>iii</sup> Manna, P. (2015). *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy*. [Report]. The Wallace Foundation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Developing-Excellent-School-Principals.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Levin, S. & Bradley, K. (2019). *Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

<sup>v</sup> Gates, S.M., Baird, M.D., Master, B.K., Chavez-Herrerias, E.R. (2019). *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2666.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2666.html).

<sup>vi</sup> Campoli, A. K., & Darling-Hammond, L. With Podolsky, A., & Levin, S. (2022). *Principal learning opportunities and school outcomes: Evidence from California*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/438.376>

<sup>vii</sup> Steinberg, M.P., & Yang, H. (2021). *Does Principal Professional Development Improve Schooling Outcomes? Evidence from Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership Induction Program*. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-190). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/z46p-cq19>

<sup>viii</sup> Rogers, L.A. & VanGronigen, B.A. (2021): *Beyond Preparation: State Approaches to Early Career Principal Induction, Leadership and Policy in Schools*, DOI: 10.1080/15700763.2021.1977333

<sup>ix</sup> Witmer, J.T., & Melnick, S.A. (2006). *Team-based professional development: A process for school reform*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

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- <sup>xiii</sup> Duncan & Stock, 2010; Goff et al., 2014; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Houchens et al., 2012; Lackritz et al., 2019; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014; Tingle et al., 2019; Wise & Cavazos, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2014