

# THE PROFESSIONAL PIPELINE

## FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A White Paper Developed to Inform the Work of  
the National Policy Board for Educational Administration

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UNIVERSITY COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION



# The Professional Pipeline for Educational Leadership

**Informing Educational Policy:  
A White Paper Developed to Inform the Work of  
the National Policy Board for Educational Administration**

The project team members for this white paper included Dallas Hambrick Hitt, Pamela D. Tucker, and Michelle D. Young University Council for Educational Administration

This white paper addresses dimensions of the professional pipeline for educational leadership. It identifies key issues and challenges associated with the current state of the leadership pipeline, including recruitment, selection, preparation and development, reviews research on the relationships between these features of the leadership pipeline and effective leadership practice, and provides a set of research-based strategies for supporting a strong leadership pipeline. There are many emerging trends and promising new practices that are not, at this point, supported by a strong base of research. These strategies and trends will be the focus of future white papers. This white paper and the recommendations herein were prepared by the University Council for Educational Administration for the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Please direct any questions to [ucea@virginia.edu](mailto:ucea@virginia.edu).

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## NPBEA

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration is a consortium of national stakeholders in educational leadership. The NPBEA works with government and educational leaders, through its members, to promote changes in policy and practice that support the learning of all children in our nation's school. At the heart of the NPBEA's efforts are the ISLLC and ELCC standards, which influence the preparation and practice of our nation's educational leaders.

## UCEA

The University Council for Educational Administration is a consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children. UCEA promotes the application of research to practice in higher education and K-12 settings. Because our members prepare future leaders for schools and school systems, our community extends into districts, schools, and classrooms—the very spaces where children learn and grow. [www.ucea.org](http://www.ucea.org)

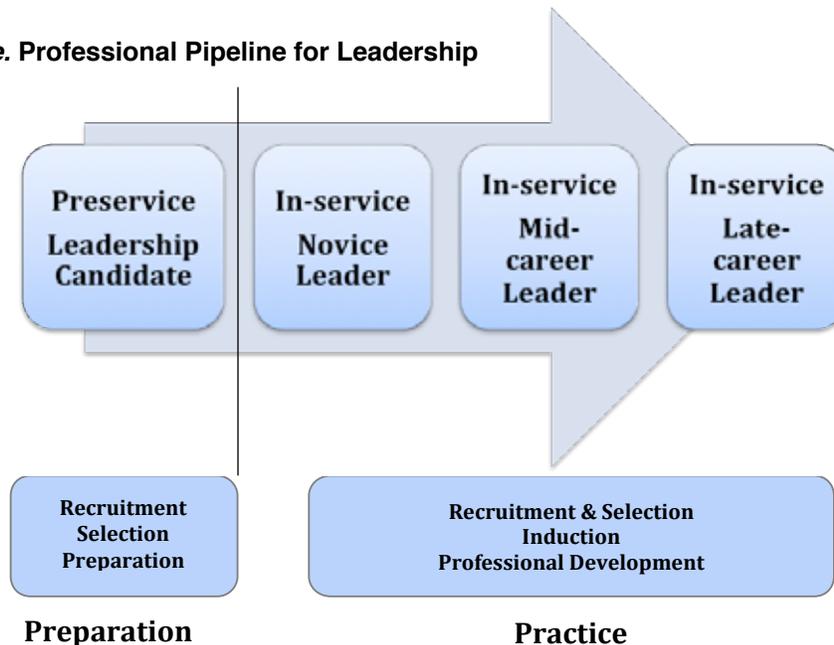
## The Professional Pipeline for Educational Leadership

The professional pipeline represents a developmental perspective for fostering leadership capacity in schools and districts, from identification of potential talent during the recruitment phase to ensuring career-long learning through professional development. An intentional and mindful approach to supporting the development of educational leaders throughout their professional careers is critical to those who aspire to educational leadership and those who comprise the ranks of current administrative positions. How the profession enacts phases of the pipeline and the quality of these experiences serve as a message to candidates and practitioners alike. How we recruit, prepare, induct, and develop educational leaders may influence the expectations of and commitment levels to the profession of both candidates and practitioners, and ultimately may affect our ability to recruit and retain the most capable. Given the sweeping influences of effective educational leadership, our schools, teachers, children and communities deserve highly qualified, rigorously prepared leaders.<sup>1</sup>

This white paper seeks to outline the distinct phases of building the professional pipeline, share research concerning effective practices for each, and draw attention to the inter-related nature of the phases. For example, preparation programs maximize their effectiveness when districts and universities work together to recruit the right people into leadership roles. The preparation of educational leaders requires the strategic and intentional coordination of efforts by multiple stakeholders in leadership preparation and practice: professional organizations, state departments of education, higher education, and school districts. Each entity possesses a stake in highly qualified educational leaders and can make an important contribution to ensuring the caliber of educators who lead our schools and school districts. See the Table and Figure.

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**Figure. Professional Pipeline for Leadership**



**Table. Recommendations for Preservice and In-Service Educational Leadership**

Area	Recommendations			
	1	2	3	4
<b>Preservice educational leadership</b>				
<b>Recruitment of candidates into preparation programs</b>	Develop district-university partnerships and encourage recruitment from within.	Reduce the financial burden of leadership preparation.	Recruit candidates who reflect the rich diversity of school communities.	Promote better working conditions for educational leaders.
<b>Selection of candidates for preparation programs</b>	Require demonstrated success as a classroom teacher.	Require demonstrated success in leading adults in some capacity.	Require an advanced degree.	Screen for passion and commitment to leadership.
<b>Structure and delivery of preparation programs</b>	Maximize social support networks	Optimize candidate growth through continual cycle of assessment and feedback.	Provide a challenging, relevant and standards-based curriculum.	Focus on field-based experiences and effective adult learning practices.
<b>In-service educational leadership</b>				
<b>Recruitment and selection into professional positions</b>	Create supportive conditions for leadership development.	Structure career ladders for educational leaders.	Consider school context and individual capabilities when making a match.	Use behavior-based interviewing in the selection process.
<b>Induction of novice leaders</b>	Design a coherent and intentional induction program.	Develop high-quality mentors through careful selection and ongoing support.	Provide professional opportunities beyond the district to engage in dialogue and reflection.	Consider induction duration and timing.
<b>Professional development for practicing educational leaders</b>	Ensure time is set aside for professional development.	Assess the impact of professional development.	Individualize the content and focus of professional development.	Enrich the instruction in professional development.

## Recruitment of Candidates Into Preparation Programs

How the education profession presents itself in terms of the caliber of leaders in schools and school districts, and the conditions in which they work, may be the best form of recruitment. Establishing rigorous selection standards encourages candidates who have relevant and competitive skills to aspire to join the ranks of educational leadership, and involving stakeholders in the process affords an authentic and grounded process.<sup>2</sup> At times, the use of incentives may be useful to deepen the applicant pool. Recruiting with diversity in mind yields a more heterogeneous applicant pool from which school communities may select candidates to fit their unique context.

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### Recommendation 1: Develop district-university partnerships and encourage recruitment from within the district

As current and past supervisors and evaluators, districts acquire keen insight into teachers who should be encouraged to pursue educational leadership. Supervisors at the building and district level observe the day-to-day interactions and practices teachers exhibit. This first-hand knowledge can serve as a screening mechanism for university preparation programs. While universities intend for letters of recommendation to serve this function, this approach still relies on the initiative of the candidate and can be pro forma. Greater emphasis should be placed on good recruits nominated by districts versus self-nominated individuals.<sup>3</sup> District and educational leaders have intimate awareness of contextual issues that should have a bearing on candidate selection. School districts can make practitioner-based, insightful recommendations about individuals. Recommending an individual also suggests the level of support the district will provide in later stages of the pipeline process, including the internship experience during preparation, hiring consideration, and future development. Building ways for districts and universities to authentically collaborate and make shared decisions strengthens the relationship as well as the profession.

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### Recommendation 2: Reduce the financial burden of leadership preparation

Recruiting and then supporting the right people for educational leadership preparation may be addressed partially by removing financial burdens associated with the career pathway. Given the salaries of teachers, university tuition makes the cost of preparation programs a deterrent to entering the profession. Some districts work with universities to find ways to make attendance feasible by developing tuition reimbursement programs or even paying outright for a recruit's fees. Districts that extend financial support for the recruit mutually benefits both parties because this type of sponsorship positively influences the recruit's self-perception as a potential educational leader and helps to ensure a qualified applicant pool for districts.

### Recommendation 3: Recruit candidates who reflect the rich diversity of school communities

Often, a successful educational leader shares similar life experiences or cultural backgrounds with their faculty and students.<sup>4</sup> Moral and ethical imperatives demand recruitment for diversity, and research supports the benefits for schools as organizations and the students they serve. We live in a diverse society, with student populations that mirror the various cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic

backgrounds of our citizens. It follows that schools need a diverse pool of leaders to draw from when making a match, given the increased likelihood for success when an educational leader in some way resembles the school organization. Recruitment serves as an opportunity to ensure we have a heterogeneous and well-qualified pool of applicants from which schools may choose.

#### Recommendation 4: Promote better working conditions for educational leaders

Teachers who decide not to enter the administrative ranks often cite the working conditions of educational leaders, both at the building and district levels, as a concern. While the working conditions may be seen as an effective selection tool that deters the faint-hearted, consideration should also be given to the reasons principals leave the field and teachers decline to enter it.<sup>5</sup> A better understanding of why some leaders exit the profession may assist in the successful recruitment and retention of talented educators. Most who become public educators do so for perceived potential job satisfaction and efficacy rather than monetary benefits. Professionals who do not expect high levels of monetary compensation instead expect more meaningful and satisfying work. Given the salary

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scale for educational leaders, working conditions increase in relative value to compensation. Supportive working conditions that enable effective educational leadership on behalf of better school environments for students is a potent recruitment tool for the profession, for its preparation programs, and ultimately for school systems.

## Selection of Candidates for Preparation Programs

Admission, rather than selection, tends to be the process by which universities cull students for preparation programs. The distinction between the two activities is important: admission connotes meeting minimum requirements, whereas selection indicates that admission is a necessary but insufficient condition. Selection implies that schools assemble a pool of qualified applicants, and then from that pool individuals are purposefully, thoughtfully, and deliberately chosen. Meeting a minimum grade point average (GPA) and test-score threshold provides a far different applicant pool than requiring career and professional experiences aligned with the act of improving student achievement via working through others or exercising influence. GPA and test scores give us insight into the academic dimension of individuals but “are virtually useless in projecting performance in administrative practice.”<sup>6</sup> Further, some programs require neither, and for others, the current standards for GPA and test scores are so low that “most educational leadership programs lack rigor.”<sup>7</sup>

The following set of recommendations focuses on discussing empirically supported recommendations for the practice of selecting potential school administrators whose profiles demonstrate promise and potential as educational leaders and questions the current widespread reliance upon undergraduate GPA and test scores. Literature on recruitment and selection asserts that educational leadership preparation programs cannot compensate for an individual’s lack of prior exposure to leader roles.<sup>8</sup> Instead, preparation programs serve as a way to hone and harness existing strengths and proclivities. In consideration of this reality, four key practices are recommended.

#### Recommendation 1: Require demonstrated success as a classroom teacher

An individual’s experience as a classroom leader undoubtedly contributes to success as an educational leader. A strong foundation as a classroom teacher provides potential educational leaders with

the experience and insight necessary to lead others who continue to occupy that role.<sup>9</sup> Individuals with strong instructional backgrounds are better able to relate to and lead teachers, and identify and model effective classroom practices. In short, successful teaching experience indicates the ability to *lead* a classroom, with the classroom being a microcosm of the school.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it reflects a foundation for instructional leadership as the educator moves into an educational leadership position. From a practical standpoint, limited teaching experience is correlated with decreased likelihood of entering educational leadership and can be seen as jeopardizing an individual's likelihood of seeking an administrative position.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the reasons to select candidates based on teaching experience, of 450 programs surveyed, only 40% required teaching credentials or K-12 teaching experience. Furthermore, 60% allowed those enrolled in preparation programs to simultaneously complete minimum teaching requirements.<sup>12</sup>

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## Recommendation 2: Require demonstrated success in leading adults in some capacity

The field of educational leadership recognizes that leaders work primarily through others. That is, their effects on student achievement are *indirect* and are mediated by the school environment and teachers.<sup>13</sup> Schools experiencing success generally have leaders who exercise influence in a way that supports and enables teaching and learning through setting direction for the school, supporting and facilitating the development of both individuals and the greater organization, as well as harnessing and leveraging contextual strengths of the school to facilitate student success.<sup>14</sup>

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Individuals who come to educational leadership preparation programs with previous experience in leading adults in educational settings demonstrate their leadership skills and potential, in contrast to teachers whose career histories only include exercising influence over students. The transition from leading a classroom to leading a school involves a steep learning curve that may be better addressed by a combination of preparation program learning and prior knowledge garnered through lived experience.<sup>15</sup> Such prior leadership roles may include department head, dean, grade level chair, or team leader.

## Recommendation 3: Require an advanced degree

Prospective educational leadership students should already be equipped with an education-related advanced degree (masters or more) before seeking administrative credentials. This accomplishment demonstrates greater commitment to teaching and education of students in general.<sup>16</sup> When individuals show the initiative to earn a degree in English as a second language, reading, mathematics, science, or other curriculum-related area, they further elevate themselves from the applicant pool in terms of commitment to and expertise in teaching and learning, and also elevate themselves in terms of garnering respect from the future faculties they will be charged with leading.

Requiring advanced degrees listed above strengthens an educational leader's ability to practice instructional leadership.<sup>17</sup> There are many dimensions of effective educational leadership, but having a solid grasp of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is fundamental to earning the respect of classroom teachers to lead instructional programs and improving student achievement.

## Recommendation 4: Screen for passion and commitment to leadership

Empirical work makes the roles of effective educational leaders increasingly clear, and we now know that leaders indirectly influence students through teachers, yet that insight has not been used fully to select potential educational leaders. Asking educational leadership candidates if they understand the importance of working with adults seems to be an appropriate starting place, as does examining career histories for evidence of such an inclination. Currently, research indicates that many students of educational leadership express more commitment to working with students than they do to working with adults.<sup>18</sup> Future educational leaders should possess significant interpersonal skills and commitment to addressing the issues and challenges of managing and developing adults, yet we find currently that upon completion of educational leadership programs, many individuals prefer to remain in the classroom. As noted by researchers, “over credentialing is no way to build a profession,” and is costly in terms of time, attention, and resources left for those who genuinely desire to work with adults.<sup>19</sup>

## Structure and Delivery of Program Preparation

Of the pipeline phases, preparation programs provide the most robust sources of research on effective practices, thereby allowing the field to assert with relative certainty the facets of appropriate experiences for students of school administration.

### Recommendation 1: Maximize social support networks

For a number of reasons, admitting, matriculating, and preparing students as a group makes sense.<sup>20</sup> Students learn and are afforded an improved opportunity to practice much valued interpersonal and collaborative skills. Supportive networks can be developed in a number of ways, but organized cohorts for program delivery are ideal. Cohorts begin as an assembly of individuals, but through the navigating of shared experiences, peer support and trust is often built and a community of learners and practitioners emerges. Engaging in a cohort allows preservice administrators to experience the formation of community<sup>21</sup> and negotiate professional and collegial relationships, similar to the challenges they will be charged with upon accepting a position as an educational leader. As discussed in the Selection section, much of an educational leader’s work entails interacting with and developing adults. The cohort provides an accurate glimpse of an administrator’s work-life as he or she transitions from leader of the classroom to leader of the school,<sup>22</sup> and allows the preservice leader a safe yet authentic place to practice the skills in organizational and individual development that preparation programs’ curriculum should reflect.

### Recommendation 2: Optimize candidate growth through a continual cycle of assessment and feedback

Over the last decade, many preparation programs engaged in restructuring their experiences to reflect the changing demands of an educational leader.<sup>23</sup> This type of work increases in importance as we begin to understand how different expectations for educational leaders link to preparation programs.<sup>24</sup> Beginning with the end in mind clarifies what educational leadership preparation programs want their graduates to know and be able to do. Clarity about preparation program outcomes guides the development of meaningful assessments and the necessary mechanisms to scaffold the student learning experience in meeting the standards set forth by the assessment.

**Summative assessment.** Before earning leadership credentials, students should be required to demonstrate proficiency in a multifaceted summative assessment. Including an examination aligned with national and state standards in the assessment battery ensures that students have mastered the body of knowledge critical to role before stepping into a leadership position. To supplement the exam, students should develop, with the guidance of a mentor or university advisor, a cumulative portfolio providing further evidence of the ways the student has met state and national standards during their preparation program experiences. The portfolio should include a leadership platform that communicates the candidate's deep understanding of educational leadership.<sup>25</sup>

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**Formative assessment.** The development and implementation of formative assessments assists programs in reaching clarity regarding student outcomes and serves as tool for monitoring student development and status throughout their participation in a program. Formative assessments provide feedback for the candidate and assist faculty in understanding the student's progress toward the eventual mastery of the knowledge and skills required in the summative assessment. Currently, rubrics aid faculty in examining and assessing students' work. Depending on the nature and importance of student work, multiple faculty members can examine the student work using the same rubric to help ensure reliability and rigor.<sup>26</sup> Although the development of the rubric tends to be a difficult process, implementing rubric-based assessment clarifies the desired outcomes for students and adds a level of impartiality to the judgment process for faculty. Clearly defined learning outcomes not only leaves little room for doubt about what the student should strive for, but also moves the profession toward widely accepted and understood criteria that are rigorous and research based.

### Recommendation 3: Provide a challenging, relevant, standards-based curriculum

The common foundation for most preparation programs is the nationally recognized Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards.<sup>27</sup> These standards include (a) development of a vision for learning, (b) nurturance of a culture of learning, (c) management of the organization, (d) collaboration with the school community, (e) ethical and fair conduct, and (f) advocacy and influence on the broader context of schooling. These national standards and their reflection in accreditation standards create a framework for designing curriculum better aligned with the challenges that graduates will face on the job, such as working with increasingly diverse communities, collaborating with external agencies, and more seamlessly integrating technology.

In addition to these standards that define the knowledge and skills that need to be mastered in a preparatory program, research demonstrates that program features are just as important. A set of essential core program attributes includes a well-defined, leadership-for-learning focus; coherence; challenging and reflective content; student-centered instructional practices; competent faculty; positive student relationships; a cohort structure; supportive organizational structures; and substantive and lengthy internships.<sup>28</sup> Programs aligned with the ISLLC standards that include the above research-based program attributes are more likely to produce graduates who are well prepared to provide high-quality leadership in their schools and communities.

### Recommendation 4: Focus on field-based experiences and effective adult learning practices

Learning, refining, and mastering knowledge and skills related to facilitation of positive school culture, community relations, school improvement, social justice, and competent school management may be best approached through a blend of learning experiences that span traditional classroom-based coursework and field-based experience and inquiry.<sup>29</sup> We also know that adults learn differently than younger students, and an emphasis on meaning-making through application of knowledge generally

engages adult learners in ways that an emphasis on lectures and readings cannot. More powerful learning experiences involve field-based activities as part of course requirements. A combination of field-based experiences that are followed by sense-making activities helps students better understand the realities of educational leadership and provides an authentic way to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for a grounded understanding of educational leadership.

Generally timed as a capstone experience in a preparation program course sequence, the internship experience allows students to immerse themselves in the daily practice of an educational leader under the guidance of a mentor who is paving the way for them in terms of access to work with increased responsibility. Theory meets practice as the internship arrangement also calls for the presence

of a university clinical faculty member who ensures that the student intern encounters experiences that are planned, purposeful, and aligned with state and national criteria for certification.<sup>30</sup> Ideally, the practitioner mentor and the clinical faculty member participate in individualizing and personalizing the internship experience in a way that challenges the student intern to apply knowledge and skills acquired through previous coursework leading up to the internship.<sup>31</sup>

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## Recruitment and Selection Into Professional Positions

This phase of the pipeline is all about finding the right match and entails considering context, an applicant's background, and the contextual support for the potential school leader. Applicants with competitive skills look for work environments that support and develop their existing skills, and savvy schools look for ways to meet applicants' needs. Underperforming schools occupy a particularly vulnerable position in the recruitment and selection process.

### Recommendation 1: Create supportive conditions for leadership development

Competitive and well-informed applicants may make decisions about job acceptance based on the working conditions of a particular position. Self-aware applicants know the value of working for a direct supervisor who displays the leadership qualities necessary for empowering adults—both within the faculty and the administrative team. A school's reputation generally derives from the leadership manifested by the principal and how he or she taps into teacher capacity and sets an example for assistants.

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Prospective administrative new hires likely know that the principal will serve not only as a supervisor, but also an in-house mentor. Potential assistant principals largely approach the assistant principal position as a training ground for the principalship and look for principals who will afford them

growth opportunities and exposure to a spectrum of responsibilities reflective of their future positions. Such exposure will benefit not only the individual, but ultimately the future of the profession, for it is the quality of assistant principals' learning and growth that helps determine the quality of tomorrow's principals.

## Recommendation 2: Structure career ladders for educational leaders

Research demonstrates that principals who only served as teachers and skipped the role of assistant principal are more likely to leave the profession.<sup>32</sup> Ideally, school districts should intentionally develop leadership capacity through a full range of leadership roles for teachers and novice administrators. For example, the time spent as an assistant principal helps prepare future principals and functions as an extension of the more formal learning during preparation programs. Districts invite the crippling effects of rapid leader turnover when they do not support the development of leaders throughout their organizations.

## Recommendation 3: Consider the school context and individual capabilities when making a match

We know that leaders whose careers include previous experience working with student populations demographically similar to those of the school recruiting and selecting them have been found to function at higher levels.<sup>33</sup> Research in this area reveals that the recruitment and selection process should be highly personalized and extensive. To the extent possible, schools and applicants need time together in a two-way exchange of information to better understand one another before committing to a job offer.

The issue of match is particularly critical for underperforming schools. Successful school turnarounds often occur by improving human capital in the organization. Turnaround leaders influence school culture improvement through using data, developing relationships, coaching teachers, and knowing how to hire the right people.<sup>34</sup> Of these four behaviors, three involve human capacity building. Influencing school culture, particularly a school culture experiencing dysfunction, calls for a leader with significant emotional intelligence and resiliency. Just as teachers who effectively reach at risk learners succeed in meeting their students' affective needs before meeting their academic needs, leaders of underachieving schools must relate to their faculty's socioemotional needs and leverage the work of helping students in a way that helps teachers gain a sense of efficacy.<sup>35</sup> Such orchestration requires true commitment and astute ability to connect with people that yields a culture of trust and perseverance.

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## Recommendation 4: Use behavior-based interviewing in the selection process

A scientifically based interview process improves the school's capability to screen and predict how a candidate will match the organization.<sup>36</sup> Behavior-based interviewing helps to discover the skills, expertise, and experience of candidates. Also called behavioral interviewing, this technique derives from the premise that how someone handled a situation in the past best predicts their future performance. The interview thus focuses on concrete events and not superficial responses. To develop deep understandings on both sides of the hiring event, it is recommended that extended periods of time be set aside for interaction between the members of the organization and the individual. Inviting the applicant for a day-long visit to the school, observing the candidate in their own setting, and engaging the applicant in a simulation comprise ways to gain better insight into their strengths and limitations.

## Induction of Novice Leaders

As students become practitioners, approaching the transition in a supportive way has implications for the individual's early development and socialization into the profession as well as the well-being of the organization. The induction phase of the pipeline plays a critical role in maximizing retention of the new practitioner and yields organizational benefit for the school.<sup>37</sup>

### Recommendation 1: Design a coherent and intentional induction program

In conjunction with their university partners, districts can approach induction in an organized and programmatic fashion to foster and anticipate developmentally appropriate experiences for new leaders. Induction programs should be multifaceted with support woven into the day-to-day practices of the new administrator as well as more formalized sessions especially designed for new administrators. The mentoring relationship should be formalized with scheduled time over the course of the induction years,

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in addition to anticipation of times when steep learning may occur, such as the first days on the job or during personnel reviews. When assigning duties to the new leader, the supervisor should consider exposing the inductee to a variety of responsibilities. Ensuring a balanced slate of duties not only yields a well-rounded administrator, but also improves the individual's future leadership capacity.

### Recommendation 2: Develop high-quality mentors through careful selection and ongoing support

Mentoring at its essence is a symbiotic, trusting relationship that allows for the protégé's support and growth as well as the mentor's development. The success of the mentoring relationship largely depends on the quality of the mentor and his or her experience in facilitating a trusting and meaningful interaction. It follows that mentor selection includes multifaceted requirements, not just experience. Mentors should be those who possess interest in supporting another through utilization of their skills

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*Good mentors are at once supporters and challengers, as well as guides, teachers, and sponsors.*

in emotional intelligence,<sup>38</sup> lived experience in the practice, and commitment to furthering the profession of educational leadership. Good mentors at once support and challenge their protégés<sup>39</sup> and function as guides, teachers, and sponsors.

Traditionally, we focus on the benefits mentoring affords the protégé, but research also reveals that mentors experience perceived benefits in terms of reflection on practice and subsequent growth. Mentor development can occur before selection to assist a potential mentor in better understanding their role<sup>40</sup> and the seriousness of the responsibility.<sup>41</sup> It can also take place during mentoring to bolster a mentor in the midst of the relationship by providing perspective and guidance.<sup>42</sup> Mentors often experience unanticipated growth through examining their own practice as they seek to help their protégé.

### Recommendation 3: Provide professional opportunities beyond the district to engage in dialogue and reflection

When timed correctly, sending a new leader to conferences and other professional trainings outside of the district affords new insight and perspective. The hectic work-life and demanding learning curve inductees experience can be taxing, and off-site learning helps broaden thinking by expanding the range

of possibilities and providing space for reflection and discussion of new ideas. Districts can ensure new leaders attend conferences by setting aside time and providing funding.<sup>43</sup>

#### Recommendation 4: Consider induction time and duration

New educational leaders should receive the benefits of induction for 2–3 years.<sup>44</sup> While conventional thinking often limits induction to the 1st year in a position, mentoring, district programmatic experiences, and conferences should be applied in a way that meets the individual inductee’s needs over the course of the first few years. Some new leaders may find travel to a conference overwhelming Year 1 but may welcome it during Year 2 or 3. Mentoring can adapt to fit the inductee’s needs and has the potential to span the entire career of the new leader if the relationship entails trust and authenticity. At a minimum, inductees need the support and guidance of a veteran during the formative years.

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## Professional Development for Practicing Leaders

As novice leaders leave the induction stage, their learning should continue, but the emphasis in development should shift from the needs of a new practitioner to supporting an experienced leader faced with the day-to-day realities of leadership practice.

#### Recommendation 1: Ensure time is set aside for professional development

The professional life of school leaders may not always allow for reflection, growth, and renewal, and time for professional development helps to ensure that these vital activities connect to the recruitment of leaders. Furthermore, professional development composed of application-based, hands-on learning opportunities has been shown to be associated with effective educational leaders.<sup>45</sup> In terms of expectations for growth outcomes, incremental change, rather than dramatic turnarounds, tends to be more realistic and long lasting.<sup>46</sup> This illustrates why universities and district have reason to extend their collaborative efforts, since partnerships lead to increased levels of authentic learning over the entire course of professional careers in educational leadership.<sup>47</sup>

#### Recommendation 2: Assess the impact of professional development

Much like the cycle used in university-based preparation programs, solid professional development evolves from deliberate and intentional assessment standards. The desired learning outcomes should be individually designed and based on a leader’s evaluation data compared to district objectives for student achievement and organizational improvement, as well as performance standards. A personalized program of development experiences results in moving the leader toward enhanced performance. Current work in this arena includes the development of VAL-ED, a psychometrically sound instrument for formative and summative assessment of a leader’s performance, which indicates growth areas and a subsequent prescription for professional development.<sup>48</sup> As the field continues to develop assessments like this one, the link between the leader’s growth and the impact of their practice will become more transparent.

### Recommendation 3: Individualize the content and focus of professional development

Professional development for educational leaders should be developed in collaboration with their supervisors and based on their individual needs. The content for practicing leaders should stem from the intersection of their performance review and state/national standards. Overlaying standards with current performance data illuminates strengths as well as domains in which practitioners need further development. Given that organizational and individual development continues to be crux of leadership, educational leaders will likely need regular work and support in maximizing their ability to exercise influence. Principals, for example, with the ability to create trusting schools that embrace improvement rather than defend against it<sup>49</sup> optimally position themselves to engage an organization in a continual improvement process.

### Recommendation 4: Enrich the instruction in professional development

In keeping with effective adult learning, the mechanisms for delivering the content of professional development experiences should be job embedded and application based to the extent possible.<sup>50</sup> Examples

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of such experiences include peer coaching, mentoring, peer observation, participation in principal networks, and school visits.<sup>51</sup> Attending conferences and presenting in conferences also provide meaningful learning opportunities. Districts can support learning and growth by allotting time for these events in the work lives of principals. Financial support also helps educational leaders attend and present at conferences.

## Recommendations to Support an Effective Pipeline Spanning Preparation and Practice

Recognition of the important role educational leaders serve in designing and supporting the learning environment of schools for both educators and students continues to grow. By extension, attention is focused on the quality of preparation programs and the effect they contribute to the professional pipeline of educational leaders. Preparation programs that critically examine their own practices and continually strive for improvements in recruitment, selection, and program content and delivery better position themselves to improve the quality of aspiring educational leaders, and ultimately outcomes for schools and students. Preparation programs working in tandem with school districts, however, have the greatest potential to create and enrich a seamless pipeline of better prepared and successful educational leaders. Recommendations to support an effective pipeline are enumerated below and individually discussed.<sup>52</sup>

1. Attend to the relationship between preparation program features and outcomes for schools and students.
2. Ensure preparation programs align with the practices and challenges of schools and districts.
3. Use a combination of external (accreditation) and internal review strategies to evaluate preparation programs.
4. Continue work in documenting individual program features and approaches to leadership preparation and development.

## Recommendation 1: Attend to the relationship between preparation program features and outcomes for schools and students

Linking program features and school outcomes, particularly enhanced student learning, presents a daunting but worthwhile endeavor for the field. Focusing on school outcomes marks a movement away from the large, existing body of work that examined participants' perceptions of their training experience. The new challenge calls for educational leadership preparation programs to demonstrate their value-added effects on leadership practices and student achievement. Through the use of longitudinal research studies using a framework that acknowledges the indirect-effects approach, evidence is beginning to surface that confirms the differential effects of educational leadership programs and specific program features.<sup>53</sup> Future efforts to enhance this research base must meet adequate sample size requirements and investigate multiple programs.<sup>54</sup>

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*The new challenge for preparation programs is to demonstrate their value-added effects on leadership practices and student achievement.*

## Recommendation 2: Ensure preparation programs align with the practices and challenges of schools and districts

Research studies robustly document the power of universities and school districts when they develop and maintain partnerships for the preparation of school leaders.<sup>55</sup> District partners can assist in program recruitment, selection, delivery, and evaluation. Universities can offer structured leadership preparation programs. Striking a balance between research and practice can be mutually beneficial, as it enables both universities and districts to each offer their expertise while simultaneously engaging in growth. Working together, districts and universities can improve the quality of graduates rather than the quantity.<sup>56</sup>

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*Research studies robustly document the power of universities and school districts when they develop and maintain partnerships for leadership preparation.*

## Recommendation 3: Use a combination of strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of preparation programs

By using both external (accreditation) and internal review strategies, preparation programs can respond more nimbly to both national and local expectations. The accreditation process calls for an independent agency to regularly review preparation programs against national standards. This external review process holds universities accountable to widely accepted expectations for resources, program integrity and evidence of graduates' learning and professional success. External reviews create a counter force to institutional drift and offer an objective perspective that can precipitate needed change.

Programs also answer to their own local and state contexts, which makes internal review an important, complementary component of the program evaluation process.<sup>57</sup> Internal review allows the program to participate in a self-evaluation responsive to particular issues and concerns that an external, national-standards-oriented review may not reveal.

## Recommendation 4: Continue work in documenting individual program features and approaches to leadership preparation and development

The implications of documenting individual program features for both preservice and in-service education provide the foundation for a fruitful future research agenda. Attention given to relationships among program features, leadership practices, and school outcomes allows the profession to better delineate effective and ineffective strategies to enhance the leadership pipeline. The field has made a good start in this area, and further study will enhance replication and certainty about the linkages that ensure a seamless career path for school leaders.

## Endnotes

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