

Strengthening Professional Development for Principals: High Quality Mentoring Programs

Background

In today's era of school reform, NAESP supports rigorous interventions to turn low-performing schools around, providing sufficient resources over multiple years to implement such reforms, as well as holding these consistently low-performing schools accountable for improving sustained student performance. As the catalyst for reform, principals have the primary role of ensuring that a school's culture reflects the goals of the broader community, and focuses on addressing the social, emotional and academic needs of students. Principals who engage in training and professional mentoring programs aligned to leading learning communities are more successful in setting a shared vision for learning and school improvement.

To institute the commitment required to turn around low-performing schools and dramatically improve student achievement and school performance, principals require significant training and support to develop the skills needed to effectively lead learning communities. Strong principals must be trained in the standards of the principalship and fully informed about the research behind changing school culture and practice.

NAESP's landmark publication, *Leading Learning Communities*, defines the minimum six standards and strategies for principals as a foundation of effective school leadership:

- Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center;
- Set high expectations and standards for the academic, social, emotional and physical development of all students;
- Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon standards;
- Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals;
- Manage data and knowledge to inform decisions and measure progress of student, adult and school performance; and
- Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student performance and development.

Request

New policies in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act must support high-quality leadership mentoring programs to successfully build the professional capacity of principals, especially during the first three years of service. This professional development is critical to the success of principals and the development of their leadership skills to set a vision for the school culture and to drive instruction. There are a number of gaps in the current models of preparation and training that mentoring programs will fill, including understanding how to use a variety of assessment and evaluation data to provide instructional leadership, and sustained involvement in school improvement strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN AND IMPROVE
TITLE II, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS

Create new Subpart 5, Part A of title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6601 et seq.) and reorder, ***Principals and School Leadership Development***.

(a) PURPOSE - The purpose of this subsection is to provide professional development for principals by creating a national model for instructional leadership mentor training that is consistent with State administrative standards.

(b) FINDINGS

Student achievement depends on both outstanding teachers and strong school leaders. Research shows that, second only to teaching, the most important characteristic of a successful school and improved student performance is strong school leadership.

Without a powerful leader, troubled schools are unlikely to implement meaningful reforms to increase student academic performance. Principals are catalysts for change in schools and fundamental to implementing and sustaining school improvement strategies.

Our nation is facing a shortage of effective principals who can lead schools to excellence. As a growing number of principals approach retirement, few teachers and qualified professionals are pursuing school leadership positions.

Better-prepared principals are essential for implementing school reform to meet accountability standards and sustain continuous school improvement. Yet, many teachers who do go on to become principals lack the resources and leadership skills needed to become effective instructional leaders.

Principals are confronted with a variety of tasks that require diverse skills, technical capabilities, cognitive functioning and emotional intelligence. They must function under fragmented circumstances, have strong coping skills, and have a thorough understanding of the complex nature of the job.

Principals new to the profession must understand the many dimensions of transformational leadership. Six of these dimensions have solid empirical support and include: identifying and articulating a vision; providing an appropriate model; fostering the acceptance of group goals; providing individualized support; providing intellectual stimulation; and holding high performance expectations.

The dimensions and actions of transformational leadership set the tone for the school culture. The comprehensive nature of a principal's impact on a school's culture also includes nurturing a healthy sense of belonging, recognizing a sense of accomplishment and perseverance among the school staff, providing shared leadership opportunities, fostering a willingness to assume positive and healthy challenges, instilling the confidence to take action and feel encouraged to make meaningful school decisions, and providing a motivating and inspirational environment that encourages team collaboration.

High-quality standards-based leadership mentoring programs in the principalship are critical to the success of new administrators and the development of important leadership competencies. These programs fill a number of gaps in the current models of principal preparation and training, including understanding how the principalship changes relationships including cases where teachers become principals and adjust to the difficulties associated with moving from a supervisor of students to a supervisor of adults.

Principals who engage in mentor training and have a thorough understanding of the core attributes of transformational leadership as it relates to a professional learning community are more successful in creating a shared vision for learning and school improvement.

(c) DEFINITIONS

In this subpart:

- (1) ELIGIBLE GRANTEE – The term 'eligible grantee' means a nonprofit organization with a demonstrated commitment and capacity to develop and support principals; State educational agencies and local educational agencies, including those that serve high-need schools.
- (2) MENTOR TRAINING PROGRAM – The term 'mentor training program' means a mentor training program that is based on State Administrative standards and supports the standard needs of effective principal performance.
- (3) LEARNING COMMUNITY – The term 'learning community' means a place in which adults and students work collaboratively and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement of school performance.

(d) STANDARDS-

CORE ATTRIBUTES OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES- For purposes of this section, principals and teachers must establish learning communities that-

- (1) Share a school mission and goals with an explicit vision of quality teaching and learning that guides all instructional decisions;
- (2) Commit to student outcomes and improving performance;
- (3) Set a continuous cycle of improvement;
- (4) Foster a culture of collaboration where teachers and principals work together on a daily basis to analyze and improve practice;
- (5) Engage in collective inquiry; and
- (6) Support and share leadership.

(e) NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IMMERSION INSTITUTE –

- (1) ESTABLISHMENT - The Secretary shall establish a national institute for the development of principals and school leaders to turn around low-performing schools, and create models for strengthening instructional leadership for newly-assigned principals through mentor training programs that are aligned to professional and State administrative standards.
- (2) APPLICATION - To receive a grant under this section, an eligible grantee shall submit to the Secretary an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(A) ACTIVITIES –

IN GENERAL - In carrying out this section, the eligible grantee shall develop and implement mentor training programs for principals for a period no less than three years for newly-assigned principals that-

- (i) Create an aligned process for screening, selecting, and pairing a principal or school leader with a mentor for the purpose of developing a reflective learning relationship based on communicating, listening, analyzing, and providing feedback regarding effective instructional leadership;
- (ii) Provide mentor training programs aligned to State administrative standards;

(iii) Provide clearly defined outcomes that detail the knowledge and skills to be attained by the principal or school leader participating in the mentor relationship, including skills to turn around low-performing schools described in section (B)(iii);

(iv) Implement a learner-centered model of mentor training that emphasizes investment of time and commitment of a mentor-protégé relationship to assist new principal leaders;

(v) Establish methods to foster continuous sharing of information and resources to improve leadership skills;

(vi) Establish a plan to improve instructional leadership skills and school performance aligned to the core attributes of learning communities; and

(vii) Evaluate professional development needs to improve leadership skills and provide opportunities during the school day to pursue professional development needs.

(B) REQUIRED ACTIVITIES –

(i) Funds in this section shall be used to develop a mentor training program curriculum for principals and school leaders that shall include professional development and learning regarding

(aa) Designing and implementing data-driven school improvement plans;

(bb) Training on the use of student assessment data, including formative and summative assessments and program evaluation data, for the purpose of making instructional decisions and improving school-based programs;

(cc) Training on building relationships within the learning community and collaborating with the school community, including parents and community stakeholders;

(dd) Designing detailed collaborative professional development plans that are school-based;

(ee) Facilitating and conducting group meetings;

(ff) Building relationships and communicating effectively with State and central office officials;

(gg) Developing a sense of self-confidence in leadership;

(hh) Understanding how the principalship changes relationships when a teacher becomes a principal;

(ii) Ensuring that rigorous, relevant and appropriate teaching practices are implemented through strong instructional leadership;

(jj) Understanding staff recruitment, hiring and dismissal courses of action to create highly functioning instructional teams;

(kk) Understanding the dynamics of adult learners; and

(ll) Promoting on-going professional mentoring for principals in low-performing schools.

(ii) Provide stipends for mentoring coaches who are veteran principals skilled in transformational and instructional leadership;

(iii) Conduct rigorous research, evaluation, and reporting on the activities described in this paragraph in order to create-

(A) a national research and knowledge base to inform the development of effective principals for high-need schools; and

(B) a model of a performance-based program under which Federal funds maintain and expand principal mentoring activities contingent on a rigorous demonstration of impact on student academic achievement, and principal skills to turn around low-performing schools which include –

(1) The ability to develop a comprehensive plan for the evaluation of a professional learning program that specifies evaluation questions, multiple data sources, data collection, methodology, data analysis, interpretation, dissemination, and assesses the impact of professional development on student achievement;

- (2) Demonstration of advanced skills in determining research design, interpreting research results, and developing capacity to analyze research that supports schoolwide instructional decisions, including school improvement plans;
- (3) Ensuring that professional development aligns with expected school goals, and provides long-term, in-depth sustained professional development opportunities to support the goals, including setting expectations for classroom practices and use of technology;
- (4) Applying knowledge of the change process when planning and implementing school-based professional learning;
- (5) Providing differentiated professional learning opportunities;
- (6) The ability to communicate high expectations for self and the school community; and work with staff to understand the impact of attitudes on instruction to modify classroom practices.