How Can State Policy Support Local School Districts as They Develop Comprehensive and Aligned Principal Pipelines?

by
Paul Manna

October 2021

Wallace

How Can State Policy Support Local School Districts as They Develop Comprehensive and Aligned Principal Pipelines?

by
Paul Manna
Hyman Professor of Government
Director, Public Policy Program
William & Mary
https://pmanna.people.wm.edu/

This publication is the first in an occasional Wallace series titled Considerations, in which we invite leading scholars to share insights based on research and theory on issues of importance to the fields that the Foundation supports.

Abstract

State policy contributes to the overall environment that affects how school principals emerge, develop, and lead their schools. School districts are most proximate to the work that principals do and therefore have the most direct, regular engagement with candidates for the principalship, principals in training, and principals on the job. As a result, to understand the multiple processes that bring excellent principals into schools and support them on the job—metaphorically, the "principal pipeline"—one must account for local and state forces. This paper examines the nexus where state and local actions come together to develop and support excellent principals. It describes key policy levers that state officials can pull as they support the work of local officials as they work to develop comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines. Along the way, the paper offers key questions that state and local officials and their policy partners can ask in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses as they work together, leveraging their comparative advantages, to ensure that all schools have excellent principals.

Table of Contents

OVERVIEW OF STATE POLICY LEVERS
to support comprehensive, aligned district principal pipelines

Pipeline Domains	Questions for state and local principal pipeline enthusiasts to consider about state policy levers
Setting principal standards	• **Adoption**: Has the state adopted standards? • **Differentiating:** Are roles differentiated? • **Cross-cutting:** Are the state standards informing other policies? • **Specificity and flexibility:** Do state policies enable adaptation? • **Floor not ceiling:** Can local districts augment the state standards?
High-quality principal preparation	• **Standards and oversight**: Do state standards enable oversight? • **Degree requirements:** Are degrees relevant to the actual work of principals? • **District prep-program partnerships:** Do state policies incentivize cooperation? • **Specificity and flexibility:** Do state policies enable a variety of providers?
Selective hiring and placement	• **District authority:** Does state policy empower to strategically manage principal hiring processes? • **Standards and licensing:** Are state policies informed by differentiated standards for educational leaders? • **Licenses supporting practice:** Do state licensure policies encourage practice-based experiences? • **Placement and evaluation:** Do state principal evaluation systems encourage principals to lead in difficult schools when there is a good fit?
Evaluation and support	• **Standards for evaluation:** Are state principal evaluation policies guided by differentiated standards? • **Local adaptation:** Do state evaluation policies allow for local adaptation? • **Development on the job:** Does state policy provide support for mentoring, coaching and other forms of professional development? • **License renewals that encourage expertise:** For veteran principals, do renewal processes encourage productive development?
Principal supervisors	• **Standards clarity:** Do state standards for education leaders distinguish between different leadership roles? • **Relevance:** Do state standards, licensing requirements and professional development encourage productive supervisor-principal work? • **Evaluation processes:** Do state policies for principal evaluation consider both formative and summative functions?
Leader tracking systems	• **Relevance of state standards:** Is data collection linked to what state standards suggest is important? • **Preparation program and degree attainment:** Do systems offer state leaders a window onto the productivity of degree pathways? • **Evaluation and career trajectories:** Do state re-licensure and professional development processes identify gaps in skills that could be met? • **Leveraging existing expertise:** Do state systems identify veteran or retired principals who could be resources for local pipeline efforts?
Systems of support	• **Political support:** Have state leaders cultivated political environments that help stakeholders understand and accept difficult policy choices? • **Fiscal support:** Does the state provide flexibility or startup and transition support to enhance development of local pipeline initiatives? • **Network support**: Are there state efforts to foster cross-district network partnerships and shared learning to support implementation?

1. Two vantage points, one goal: Excellent principals for all schools

How to ensure that excellent principals lead all schools? At first glance, that question seems to turn on local matters given that school districts recruit, hire, support, and evaluate principals. However, local dynamics reveal only part of the story. That's because school districts operate as agents of state governments and state policies contribute to conditions that touch on all school district operations, including how districts manage their principal corps. As a result, to understand the multiple processes that bring excellent principals into schools and support them on the job—metaphorically, the "principal pipeline"—one must account for local and state forces.

During the last twenty years, The Wallace Foundation has supported much research and professional practice to enhance the quality of the nation's principals. This report draws insights from that work, and the work of others, focusing on the nexus between local and state venues to ask: What would a state's policy environment look like if it were to support local school districts in developing effective approaches to strengthening the principal corps?[1] Before launching more directly into that question, a bit of background is in order, beginning with a local perspective.

Local vantage point on principal development: Pipeline domains

Roughly a decade ago, The Wallace Foundation launched the Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI) to test the hypothesis that large urban school districts could improve student learning by strategically managing their principal workforces—that is, developing what Wallace is now calling "comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines."[2] What makes a principal pipeline comprehensive and aligned? These initiatives are comprehensive when they incorporate elements that span the entire arc of a principal's career, from pre-career recruitment to on-the-job leadership, and even into retirement as former principals sometimes return to serve as mentors. They are aligned when common principles, assumptions, and interlocking activities unify the approach as a seamless whole. Subsequent sections in this report elaborate these ideas.

The PPI's origin was grounded in a research base that, at the time, showed effective principals mattering greatly for developing strong school cultures, supporting and retaining excellent teachers, and fostering student achievement.[3] Despite those research findings, a looming question remained. Could school districts develop comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines that would ensure a steady flow of excellent principals into the profession? Although the research was becoming clear about the positive effects of excellent principals, what remained unclear from a policy design perspective was what school districts could systematically do to produce those sorts of school leaders year in and year out. Pressing on,

---

[1] Across this report, federal, state, or local "policy" can refer to laws, regulations, or guidance that the federal government, states, or school districts have adopted.

[2] The actual wording of the hypothesis was: "If an urban district and its principal training programs provide large numbers of talented, aspiring principals with the right 'pre-service' training and on-the-job evaluation and supports, the result will be a pipeline of principals able to improve teaching quality and student achievement districtwide, especially in schools with the greatest needs." Cited in Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 2).

[3] Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004); Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010); Orr, King, and LaPointe (2010).

Wallace hoped to investigate that challenging issue by investing $84 million in six large urban school districts that participated in the PPI.[4]

The PPI districts took up the charge to construct comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines and test the foundation's hypothesis. Specifically, principal pipelines, as a PPI evaluation report described, were "the range of talent management activities that fall within a school district's scope of responsibility when it comes to school leaders."[5] While the six PPI districts sequenced their plans and set priorities in varying ways, all developed the principal pipeline work around seven specific domains, which Table 1 lists. In the context of principal pipelines, a "domain" refers to a topical area containing specific roles, objects, institutions, and work processes. Some domains, such as the first one focusing on leader standards, have broad, cross-cutting implications for a wide range of principal pipeline activities. Others, including the principal supervisors domain and leader tracking system domain (fifth and sixth, respectively) are more specific. Visually, Figure 1 illustrates how the domains coalesce within a local principal pipeline initiative.

Table 1. Seven domains of comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines

Pipeline Domain: Examples of roles, objects, institutions, work processes.

1. Leader Standards: Develop collaboratively then adopt and use rigorous, relevant standards across the pipeline domains.

2. High-Quality Pre-Service Principal Preparation: Create responsive programming to coordinate recruitment, retention and placement by building programs based on evidence and authentic school-based leadership training.

3. Selective Hiring and Placement: Develop hiring pools of candidates that foster professional growth opportunities and are shaped considering performance tasks and assessments of interpersonal skills that match promising candidates to principal vacancies.

4. Evaluation and Support: Organize evaluation and support activities around standards-based evaluation and support with individualization, and mentoring or coaching in induction.

5. Principal Supervisors: Redefine the supervisor role for support and oversight by building principal supervisor capacity and adjusting caseloads for supervision.

6. Leader Tracking Systems: Develop collaboratively to use data for tracking emerging leadership needs, supporting principals on the job, and developing future corps of principals.

7. Systems of Support: Articulate a vision organized around the need to support pipeline leadership, succession planning, stakeholder perspectives, and sustainable funding.

Source: Described in Gates, Kaufman, Doan, Tuma, and Kim (2020) and in a forthcoming Policy Studies Associates report based on their implementation studies of the PPI.

An important feature that Table 1 and Figure 1 convey is that effective principal pipelines are comprehensive and aligned, following the definitions of these terms noted above. Collectively, the table

---

[4] The pipeline districts were Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; New York City Department of Education, New York; Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland.
[5] Gates, Baird, Master, Chavez-Herrerias (2019, p. xiv).

and figure convey that developing a comprehensive and aligned principal pipeline involves much, much more than maintaining a human resources system that treats hiring, on-boarding, supporting and evaluating principals as bureaucratic exercises. Principal pipelines cultivate, manage, and support talented people. They don't simply staff school buildings.

Figure 1. The principal pipeline
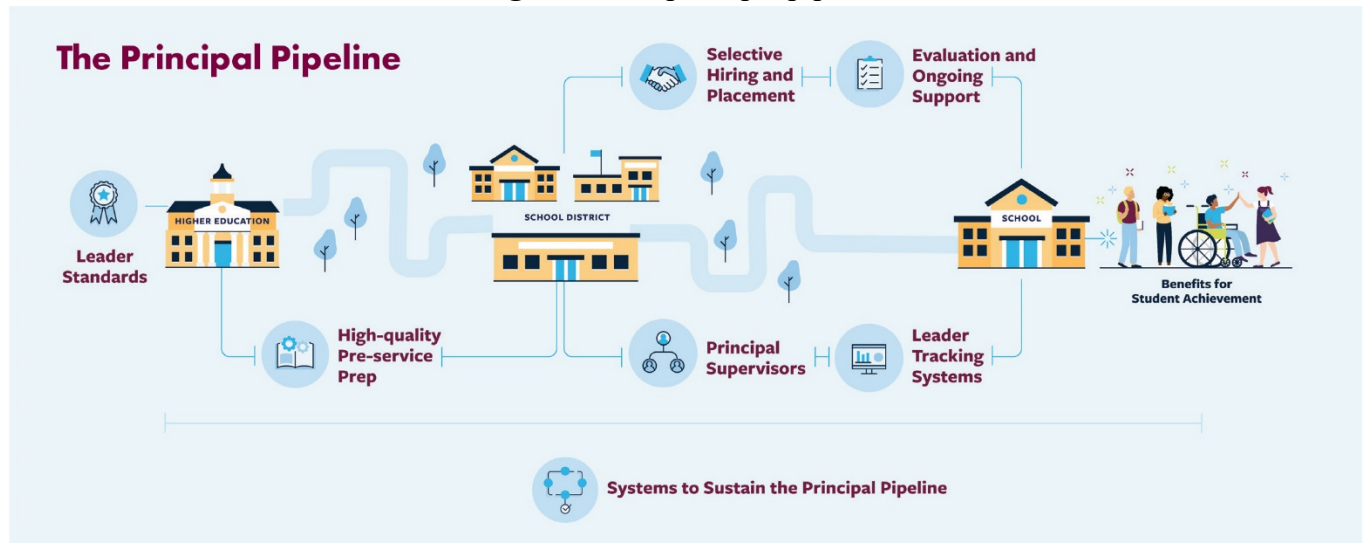
The PPI's evaluation focused on work within the six Wallace-supported districts and produced compelling results. A series of evaluation reports from Policy Studies Associates (PSA) and the RAND Corporation (RAND), documented three key findings.[6] First, the districts succeeded in developing and sustaining principal pipelines that were comprehensive and aligned, supplying a steady flow of talented people into their principal positions. Second, the work mattered for student achievement as the results showed schools benefiting from principal pipelines outperforming a control group of schools. Third, the results were cost effective. The PPI districts performed impressively, but given the intense local focus of the initiative the knowledge that the evaluators derived focused primarily on local district policy and practices, not those of states or the connections between local pipelines and state policy.

State vantage point on principal development: Policy levers for action

While the PPI districts implemented their Wallace grant plans and the PSA and RAND evaluators studied their efforts, research on a separate track, including work that Wallace has supported, has explored how states can influence the development of principals across their school districts.[7] Although local school districts are more proximate, obviously, to principals' daily work, state governments themselves can powerfully shape the overall context in which school districts operate and principals lead their schools.

---

[6] The major final reports from PSA and RAND were Anderson and Turnbull (2019) and Gates, Baird, Master, and Chavez-Herrerias. (2019), respectively. Other reports were also part of the overall evaluation and are cited in subsequent sections.
[7] For example, see Hunt, Haller, Hood, and Kincaid (2019) and Manna (2015).

These state environments are complicated, too, given that multiple institutions contribute to the policies, regulations, and initiatives that bear on principals and schools.[8]

In an attempt to sharpen discussions about the state's potential roles relevant to the principalship, Wallace supported research that produced an additional report in 2015.[9] That report began by describing how states can use their political agenda-setting power to spotlight the principalship. It then catalogued six key policy levers that state leaders can consider pulling if they want to increase the number of talented principals in a state.[10] Those levers appear in Table 2. The discussion clarified that "state policy levers" are the collection of formal and informal powers state leaders can wield to take action in helping schools recruit, hire, and support principals who advance teaching and learning.

The report concluded by noting that the particular contexts in which states and their school districts operate likely would influence the success states would enjoy with each lever. In other words, the six levers did not represent an off-the-shelf kit that states could mechanically use to improve schools. Rather, how they worked could vary depending on the particular conditions in a school district such as its size, its community resources, and its historical trajectory. The report encouraged state leaders to consider those nuances before pulling the levers to obtain results.

Table 2. State policy levers to cultivate and support excellent principals

---

State Policy Lever: Examples of actions.

---

1. Setting principal leader standards: Adopt into law and regulation. Differentiate among leaders. Embed in practice. Reconcile with other standards.

2. Recruiting aspiring principals into the profession: Facilitate coordination between local school districts and principal preparation programs. Alter incentives to influence who seeks certification. Support special institutes, including academies, to identify potential principals and recruit them into the profession. Forecast future needs.

3. Approving and overseeing principal preparation programs: Actively oversee programs. Consider sunsetting current programs. Use licensing authority to incentivize programs to improve. Serve as an information clearinghouse about programs. Avoid overregulating to ensure flexibility.

4. Licensing new and veteran principals: Connect licensing requirements to real-world conditions. Delegate licensing authority to organizations beyond the state when the organizations demonstrate strong track records.

5. Supporting principals' growth with professional development: Study current state priorities to better allocate resources. Support local school districts in setting priorities. Provide professional development to help principals implement state initiatives. Create links between professional development and license renewal processes.

6. Evaluating principals: Remain flexible during implementation as principal evaluation systems develop and take hold. Learn from other states' experiences.

Source: Manna (2015, pp. 8-10)

---

[8] Wirt and Kirst (2009); Manna and McGuinn (2013).
[9] Manna (2015).
[10] Manna (2015).

The state-local nexus and principal development

The previous paragraphs have considered the local vantage point of principal pipelines and the state vantage point of key policy levers, both of which have the potential to ensure that all schools possess excellent principals. The analysis in this report attempts to extend the discussion by focusing not on local pipelines or state policy levers in isolation, but by scrutinizing the important points where they intersect, something the remaining pages of this report refer to as the "state-local nexus." It does so by suggesting a set of state policies and practices that principal pipeline enthusiasts should look for if they were assessing state readiness to help school districts develop and operate comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines. In a sense, the discussion herein extends the pipeline metaphor in two ways.

First, while recognizing that local efforts provide the heavy lifting for developing principal pipelines, given the states' power to shape the contexts in which local leaders work, it is useful to consider the state-local nexus as it bears on principal pipelines' development and operation. Metaphorically, local districts and states both contribute materials forming the pipeline's conduits, the pipes themselves and the connectors that fuse them together at their joints. Just as the combination of materials that go into making pipelines for other purposes can influence pipeline performance—e.g., pipelines for natural gas require different materials than pipelines transporting waste water—collectively, state and local action can influence whether the conduits for principal pipelines will burst, become clogged at bottlenecks, or supply a steady, reliable flow.

Second, although the main conduits are where material moves through a pipeline, those conduits also need supportive structures. Above-ground pipelines that transport oil and gas, for example, are held aloft by beams and footings that elevate them safely above the ground. In contrast, underground pipelines rest atop groomed beds where crews place the pipes before burying them. In both cases, pipelines are not casually dropped along the landscape, but carefully positioned with appropriate supports for the environments above or below the ground where they reside. Local support, again, is perhaps most crucial because nobody could imagine a state successfully imposing a principal pipeline initiative on a local district given the substantial variation in local demographic, economic, social, and political contexts. The PSA and RAND studies of the Wallace PPI districts, cited throughout this report, make that claim abundantly clear. Still, state policy can play a role in providing support for local pipeline development or incentives to encourage local leaders to consider the pipeline approach. (Subsequent discussion calls out examples of those possibilities.) As a result, it makes sense to ponder more deeply the state-local nexus, a topic that the PSA and RAND researchers, given their more intense local focus, tended to mention only briefly.

The bulk of this report presents a perspective on principal pipelines focusing on the state-local nexus. The next section, which is the heart of the analysis, is organized around the seven principal pipeline domains that appeared in Table 1 and Figure 1. Within each domain, the discussion considers how state leaders might use the policy levers outlined in Table 2 to help develop local principal pipelines that are comprehensive and aligned. The discussion also poses key questions that people could ask about their states to help determine in which areas states are best positioned to be supportive partners in the development of local principal pipelines. The final section of the paper offers concluding thoughts.

The method guiding the analysis focuses on policy implementation and surfaces key intersections between state and district policies and practices relevant to principal development. In so doing, the discussion below creates metaphorical dialogues between these perspectives as a way to help seed actual

dialogues between policy practitioners working in the state-local nexus. The approach focuses attention on how policy plays out at the "street level" where ground-level officials execute "critical tasks."[11] The source of evidence for the discussion comes from three main bodies of literature. The first is general work on state and local education governance that documents important constraints and opportunities that affect implementation of education policy in a broad array of areas, including principal pipelines. The second stream of literature is more focused work that has examined specifically how governance and policy choices at either state or local levels bear on principals' work. The third source is the rich collection of independent evaluation studies that Wallace has funded to examine performance of the PPI districts.

2. State policy levers to advance local principal pipeline development

What would be signs that a state's policy and political environment could support local school districts as they develop comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines? This section considers that question for each of the PPIs seven domains, beginning with the first, leader standards.

Pipeline domain #1: Leader standards

Box 1. State policy levers and local leader standards in pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

> **Adoption:** Has the state adopted standards for educational leaders?
>
> **Differentiating:** Do state standards for educational leaders differentiate between leader roles, such as principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and other school leaders?
>
> **Cross-cutting:** Does the state use its standards for educational leaders to inform its development of other policies that influence the recruitment, training, hiring, work, and continued support of principals?
>
> **Specificity and flexibility:** Are state standards for educational leaders specific enough to help guide practice, but also flexible enough so local school districts can adapt them to meet their particular needs for principals?
>
> **Floor not ceiling:** Do state standards for educational leaders allow local districts to augment state standards with their own standards for principals?

---

[11] Lipsky (1980); Wilson (1989).

The PPI districts all agreed that leader standards provided crucial frameworks for their work to develop principal pipelines. Evaluation reports of the PPI echoed enthusiasm from district officials about leadership standards being "the primary vehicle for lending coherence" to the PPI work.[12] As the initiative moved forward, standards remained "a cornerstone of principal pipelines in the districts."[13] A state having adopted leadership standards, then, would be evidence of its readiness to support principal pipeline work. Adopting standards is a low bar to clear, however, and all states have incorporated some form of leader standards into state policy.[14] How states craft and then deploy standards is perhaps more important because those factors affect whether districts actually see state standards as a resource to advance their work or as an unnecessary burden or irritant hampering their progress.

One way states can ensure standards are relevant and useful for school districts is to develop leader standards that differentiate between various leadership roles.[15] Standards organized in general terms around "school leadership" are not entirely helpful because they imply that good leadership practice is identical across the formal positions that educational leaders hold. Leadership then becomes a mushy category and standards do not effectively define practices for specific types of leaders such as school principals, assistant principals, superintendents, or other leaders in schools such as teacher coaches or department heads. The PPI districts discovered, for example, that it was often difficult to reconcile the varying roles that assistant principals play with the same set of standards designed to evaluate and support lead principals.[16] In failing to differentiate, states can create additional work for local districts, which must clarify these matters on their own to avoid the uncertainty that generic standards are likely to create as they construct comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines.

Two additional related points, beyond differentiating among school leader roles, focus on the content of state standards. Here the issues are how much detail standards provide and whether they offer space for school districts to elevate their expectations over time. This can be tricky for states to accomplish because the best standards strike a balance between being specific enough to provide useful guidance to local districts as they build principal pipelines, while remaining flexible enough to recognize that local communities often have varying needs. One way to make standards relevant for district pipelines is to enable them to adapt to local circumstances and prompt processes where entire communities buy into their ambitions. Embracing flexibility also reflects the reality that local conditions can shift, so if state leader standards are to remain relevant to practice, local districts must be able to adapt them as times change. As one leader from Prince Georges County, Maryland, a PPI district, noted, "I definitely see a trend of our principals being more prepared for what's in front of them, but I think what's in front of them keeps changing and gets more complex."[17] Providing guidance but remaining flexible also will allow local school districts to aim high and set expectations that go beyond what state leader standards appear to require. As a result, state standards become a floor to ensure minimum quality rather than a ceiling that stifles ambitious local pipeline agendas.[18]

---

[12] Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, and MacFarlane (2013, p. 44).
[13] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 12).
[14] Education Commission of the States (2018).
[15] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 11); Rutledge and Tozer (2019, p. 74).
[16] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 49).
[17] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 12).
[18] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 11).

States also can make standards useful and relevant when they are cross-cutting and become a backbone for all pipeline activities. The same differentiated, flexible, state standards, then, should inform the processes that evaluate potential candidates districts recommend for principal preparation programs, the courses and learning activities within those programs that states approve, state licensing procedures, recruitment and interview procedures that districts use to hire new principals, and professional development activities and evaluations that principals participate in once they are hired.[19] (Subsequent discussion of the other pipeline domains elaborates those issues.) States that use standards in these cross-cutting ways make them relevant to the varied people and institutions that contribute to pipeline activities, thereby "forcing alignment" between these potentially disparate parts.[20] The alternative, a situation where different standards exist for program development, hiring, and licensing, for example, can sow confusion. In those cases, standards are incoherent, likely irrelevant to practice, and require districts to waste effort to create needed coherence out of chaos as they construct their pipelines.[21]

Pipeline domain #2: High-quality pre-service principal preparation

Box 2. State policy levers and high-quality pre-service principal preparation in pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

---

Standards and oversight: Do state standards for educational leaders inform how states oversee and support institutions that prepare principals?

Degree requirements: When states approve degree programs that prepare principals, do they demand that these degrees are relevant to the work that principals actually do in local school districts?

District and preparation program partnerships: Does the state create incentives for principal preparation programs to partner with school districts in shaping their program admissions criteria, as well as curricular content, and other learning experiences?

Flexibility among providers: Are state policies open to allowing a variety of providers to prepare and license principals, including school districts, while holding all providers to the same high standards?

---

[19] Syed (2015, p. 4); Kaufman, Gates, Harvey, Wang, and Barrett (2017, p. 8).
[20] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 9).
[21] Young and Perrone (2016).

Leader standards, just discussed, can force alignment among principal pipeline components, including the component that focuses on preparing future candidates for the principalship. This component involves identifying talented people who have the potential to be excellent principals, recruiting them into the pipeline, and training them in a rigorous preparation program. Previous research has shown there is much room for states to improve as they set expectations to ensure that programs are effective at preparing principals to lead schools.[22] States can facilitate the flow of quality candidates into principal pipelines when they adopt effective leadership standards for principals and then use those standards to guide decision-making about oversight of preparation programs.

Specifically, states can bolster the effectiveness of principal pipelines when they use their oversight authority to approve degree programs likely to position principals to succeed on the job. At present, states have the undisputed power to shape the types of degrees that preparation programs offer and the courses that constitute those programs. States can wield that power to dismantle degree tracks that prove unsuccessful, as Illinois did in eliminating its general administrative certificate across its preparation institutions. This track had graduated thousands of people over the years, but was ineffective at producing graduates prepared for and interested in becoming principals.[23] Drilling down into the specific features of degree programs, all six PPI districts resided in states that specified course and credit hour requirements for aspiring principals pursuing their degrees.[24] As PPI evaluators noted, "The six districts were eager to hire principals who brought strong skills and knowledge" to the job.[25] States can use their oversight authority to help advance that goal by setting expectations that prompt programs to offer learning experiences and lessons grounded in daily practice. Doing so can help increase the flow of quality candidates into local principal pipelines.

Evidence that a state policy environment is prepared to support pipeline development would be state policy on the books or networking efforts from state leaders that foster connections between local school district pipeline initiatives and the institutions that prepare and certify principals. In other words, policies can force entities like school districts and principal preparation programs to cooperate, but so, too, can state leaders who engineer or facilitate convenings between district personnel and program faculty or staff. A prominent theory of action emerging from the PPI was that the potential flow of candidates into and through pipelines would be stronger if the districts themselves could help shape the programs of study that candidates attended. The PPI districts invested much time forging these connections with allies inside partner institutions.[26]

Although district networking efforts were substantial, there is only so much that locally grown efforts can accomplish, making supportive state policy essential to build coherence between institutions that prepare principals and the districts where they work. Sometimes preparation programs balk at closer coordination. One would expect some resistance given the tradition of academic freedom that faculty in universities, the main place where principal preparation occurs, are accustomed to enjoying.[27] Still, even in university environments where faculty and leaders support the pipeline concept, state policies can create barriers that limit local districts' ability to shape programs. State policy might require preparation

[22] Levine (2005); Syed (2015, p. 4); Hunt, Haller, Hood, and Kincaid (2019).
[23] Hunt, Haller, Hood, Kincaid (2019).
[24] Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2013, p. 10).
[25] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 15).
[26] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 18).
[27] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 60).

programs to offer particular courses of study, even courses that may no longer be relevant to local practice.[28] State-supported institutions also could invite the ire of state policymakers if they begin catering too much to the particular needs of a single district or handful of districts, given that a wider range of diverse locales may traditionally have relied upon these programs to serve many different needs.

State policy that encouraged program-district coordination could take many forms. For example, states that require clinical placements or similar learning opportunities for principals in-training would necessarily require programs and districts to coordinate. Programs could not succeed in fulfilling that mandate without securing district cooperation, which creates an opportunity for districts to engage with the programs about the preparation opportunities they offer.[29] Additionally, states could use their oversight power as part of program review to try to ascertain from the programs' perspectives where they have forged partnerships, what is making them succeed (if they are), and what might be preventing them from taking off. That sort of classic "SWOT" analysis[30] would have the double benefit of making program review a more meaningful exercise, connected to practice, and also "determining what motivates universities to invest and engage" with districts interested in building comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines.[31] Such an exercise could surface other impediments in state policy that undermine pipeline initiatives.

A final sign that state policy is ready to support local districts as they develop principal pipelines is whether a state embraces flexibility when determining which sorts of institutions can prepare principals. Illinois's experience reforming principal preparation provides an instructive distinction between "alternative providers," which the state embraced, versus "alternative programs," which it rejected.[32] When state policy allows a variety of *providers*, including local school districts themselves or formal district-university partnerships, to design and execute principal preparation programs held to demanding state-standards it expands the range of options available to pipeline developers without undermining program quality.[33] In contrast, state policy that incorporates alternative *programs*, which could allow providers to prepare principals while deviating from high-quality state standards, runs the risk of approving weaker pre-service preparation routes. In short, state policy that created the potential for varied, creative preparation partnerships with local districts, without diluting quality, would help districts develop and sustain their principal pipelines.

---

[28] Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2013, pp. iii and 68).
[29] Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2013, p. 57). For a specific example from Georgia see Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, and MacFarlane (2013, p. 17).
[30] SWOT refers to a style of analysis that examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing an organization attempting to solve a problem.
[31] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 19); Manna (2015, p. 8).
[32] Haller, Hunt, and Baron (2019, p. 10).
[33] Turnbull, Riley and MacFarlane (2015, part 4).

Pipeline domain #3: Selective hiring and placement

> ### Box 3. State policy levers, and selective hiring and placement in pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider
>
> **District authority:** Does state policy empower school districts to strategically manage their processes for hiring principals or can other local actors veto district preferences?
>
> **Standards and licensing:** Are state principal licensing policies informed by differentiated state standards for educational leaders?
>
> **Licenses supporting practice:** Do state principal licensing expectations encourage rigorous practice-based experiences, not merely knowledge or experiences disconnected from relevant practice?
>
> **Placement and evaluation incentives:** Do state principal evaluation systems encourage principals to take on difficult school assignments that their districts believe provide a strong fit between a principal's capabilities and a school's needs?

School districts with a deep pool of well-prepared principal candidates have many options as they hire and place principals in schools. The shift from leader-in-waiting to leader-on-the-job is a critical juncture in a principal's career. Here again is yet another area where state policy intersects with district pipeline initiatives and can affect their performance. Sizing up a few key issues can help one assess whether state policy is ready to support the selective hiring and placement domain of principal pipelines.

At first glance, principal hiring and placement would appear to be a quintessential school district function. Principals typically apply for jobs via district human resources departments, after all, when they seek employment in local schools. State policy, though, can influence this process and alter hiring processes so that school district leaders have less power than one might assume. For example, favoring more decentralization in the hiring process, state lawmakers sometimes craft legislation that limits a district's ability to hire principals and instead delegates that power to local school councils. The logic has a reasonable impulse, which is to enhance parental and neighborhood involvement in schools and to ensure that principal positions are not simply distributed on the basis of "who you know" in school district central offices.[34]

State policy that defers to neighborhood or individual school preferences for principal hiring, though, substantially undercuts the ability of school districts to construct and implement principal pipeline initiatives. Without the power to hire and place principals districts would be unable to act strategically in

---

[34] For example, see Schlemmer (2019 and Wheatley (2019) for coverage of debates about changing Kentucky's School-Based Decision Making (SBDM) policy, which empowers local school councils to select principals.

staffing the most important leadership position in schools.[35] Certainly, one could imagine school districts developing pipeline initiatives that incorporate parental or other neighborhood involvement in principal hiring, perhaps by inviting local school councils to meet with the pool of potential candidates that the district is grooming for future principal positions. The councils could then provide feedback to district officials who would then make the ultimate hiring decision. But state policy that allowed a school-level veto over district choices would prevent pipelines from properly functioning. Evidence from the PPI suggests that strategic district placements can be responsive to school conditions, as novice principals in PPI districts have consistently said that their placements provide an excellent match between their school's needs and their own skill sets.[36]

Power over principal licensing is another way that state policy can influence local school district pipelines that hire and place principals in schools. Echoing an important earlier theme, state licensing policies that are informed by state principal standards can help foster coherence in local principal pipelines by forging connections that link pre-service preparation and the eventual acquisition of a license. Further, standards that push principal preparation programs to ground their learning experiences in substantial performance tasks, not simply passing exams or writing papers disconnected from practice, should logically connect with licensing policies that call for concrete performance-based experiences, as well. That can foster further coherence between the preparation and licensing functions that states oversee.[37] The PPI districts' own work demonstrated this. As they built out their pipelines over the course of the Wallace grant they increasingly turned to performance-based activities in the hiring process.[38]

A final area where state policy can play into the hiring and placement domain of principal pipelines is state requirements for principal evaluation. Although that may seem more relevant for principals once they begin leading their schools—a topic that the next section discusses—the incentives that evaluation systems create can affect district pipeline leaders as they attempt to match the skills of principals with principal vacancies. Slight changes in the assumptions that state evaluation systems make can have huge implications for how those systems judge principals' levels of success on the job.[39] State evaluation systems that seem to place unreasonable or capricious demands on principals could deter future principals from taking on the most difficult assignments, such as in schools that have struggled to perform or that might be undergoing district turnaround efforts, even when officials running district pipelines have determined those individuals would be the best equipped to lead in those environments.[40] Adoption of an evaluation system that appeared to account for the difficulty of such placements would suggest a state was set up to support local principal pipeline initiatives.

---

[35] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 25).
[36] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. vii); Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 6)
[37] See, for example, Massachusetts's efforts to create more meaningful performance-based licensing in Manna (2015, pp. 36).
[38] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p 21).
[39] Manna (2015, pp. 38-40); Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2015).
[40] Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2015).

Pipeline domain #4: Evaluation and support

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

Box 4. State policy levers and principal evaluation and support in pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

Standards for evaluation: Are state principal evaluation policies guided by differentiated state standards for educational leaders?

Local adaptation: Do state principal evaluation policies allow for local adaptation?

Development on the job: How well does state policy provide support for mentoring, coaching, and relevant professional development experiences for principals?

License renewals that leverage expertise: For veteran principals, does the process of state license renewal steer principals toward productive activities that will continue their development while helping leverage their expertise to sustain district pipelines?

</div>

Recruiting talented, well-prepared people into the principalship can help increase their chances of success as they launch their careers. But even the most promising principals with the best preparation will struggle to succeed without support on the job and meaningful evaluations that help them improve as leaders. One expert in the field, for example, has noted that because there is so much for new principals to learn, it is better to see pre-service preparation programs, even excellent ones, as "boot camps" that groom principals in the basics but cannot enable aspiring principals to become experts in all dimensions of their jobs.[41] Continuous development and meaningful principal evaluations are therefore essential for principals to improve their craft.

Assessing the readiness of a state's policy environment around evaluation and support to help enhance local principal pipelines begins by discerning whether the same rigorous and differentiated state leadership standards informing other pipeline domains continue to guide state policy here. Further, state policy for evaluation, especially, can enhance principal pipeline development when it creates room for locally generated standards and processes to enter the evaluation process. That makes evaluation more relevant to local practice rather than a compliance exercise that may or may not help school districts discern useful information about their principals and other school leaders.[42]

One other aspect of flexibility or adaptability one could look for in state policy is the extent to which principal evaluation allows school districts to provide feedback to principals via various modalities. For example, in Denver, one of the PPI districts, district administrators had a vision to "blur the lines between

---

[41] The quote, appearing in Manna (2015, p. 35) is from Jackie Wilson, director of the Delaware Academy of School Leadership.
[42] New Leaders (2012).

coaching feedback and formal evaluation" with the goal of wanting "it to all blend together and all feel like the exact same thing."[43] As Denver's experience suggests, rather than having evaluation be an isolated set of activities or a process organized around "gotcha" moments to spotlight principals who struggle, one could envision evaluation as an on-going process linked to relevant practice. State polices that firewalled principal evaluation from other developmental or supportive practices, by imposing artificial timelines or evaluation protocols lacking flexibility, for example, would undermine a principal pipeline initiative's ability to be comprehensive and aligned. Instead, it would be a better approach to make evaluation a more organic and seamless activity relevant to the daily flow of a principal's work. Districts in the PPI recognized the value that more flexible state policies afforded.[44]

Another indicator that state policy is prepared to support principal pipeline work would be the degree to which it enables districts to offer effective mentoring, coaching, and learning experiences to develop their principals on the job.[45] Clearly, it would be asking a lot to have states organize and provide these kinds of activities for principals in local school districts. The PPI districts themselves found carrying out these activities to be a challenging part of their work.[46] Still, because local professional development experiences often lack relevance and coherence—e.g., they frequently amount to a series of disconnected, ad hoc events—states could use their broader perch to help districts identify meaningful vendors or experiences that are linked to state standards. That sort of clearinghouse or quality control function could at least begin to focus the efforts of local pipeline enthusiasts, especially those not geographically proximate to large numbers of potential providers.

Another avenue for enhancing the quality of professional development activities for principals by more tightly coupling them to pipeline activities is to consider the state's role in license renewal for veteran principals.[47] Frequently, the license renewal process involves current principals accumulating a certain number of points or credits toward re-licensure during a specific period of time. Rather than creating ad hoc expectations that encourage principals to grab whatever credit-bearing activities they can get (e.g., at a random conference or via an on-line course that might embrace relevant leader standards), states could link activities that proved central to PPI district experiences, such as principal mentoring and coaching, to the re-licensing process. One could envision a system, for example, where talented, veteran principals gained credit toward a license renewal if they pursued training to become a mentor or coach. They could earn additional points if they used those skills to assist principals in their own district pipeline initiatives, mentored principals in other districts in regular on-line or phone communication with those mentees, or participated in a professional learning community that convened mentors and coaches with novice principals.

There would be two obvious virtues flowing from state policies that stoked such activity to connect re-licensure, mentoring, and coaching. The first would be for the novice principals who could learn from talented veterans, something the PPI districts found to be highly valuable.[48] A second virtue would be for the veteran principals themselves. One insight from the PPI evaluations was districts realizing that a fully mature principal pipeline should not only stress the important early stages of a new principal's

---

[43] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 28).
[44] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, pp. 37-39).
[45] Rowland (2017).
[46] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. v and 37).
[47] Manna (2015, pp. 33-36).
[48] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 30).

professional life—the recruitment, pre-service training, and hiring and placement components—but also strategically consider the entire arc of a principal's career. Some officials in PPI districts began to consider this idea of the career continuum to strategically build into veteran principals' experiences opportunities to help their novice counterparts succeed.[49] State license renewal expectations that rewarded the time spent on these activities, then, would be one way that state policy could support the development of district principal pipeline initiatives.

Pipeline domain #5: Principal supervisors

Box 5. State policy levers and the role of principal supervisors in pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

Standards clarity: Do state standards for education leaders make meaningful distinctions between leader roles (i.e., assistant principals, principals, and others) to help guide the work of principal supervisors?

Relevance: Do state standards, licensing requirements, and professional development focus on relevant activities that steer conversations between principal supervisors and principals in productive directions?

Evaluation processes melding oversight and support: Do state policies for principal evaluation thoughtfully consider how evaluation can be a formative and summative process, which can facilitate principal supervisors' work as overseers of performance and also supportive allies of their principals?

Compelling evidence shows that principals bear substantial weight as they lead their schools.[50] Over time, as views of the principalship have evolved, principals have seen a layering of responsibilities—they are school managers *and* instructional leaders—onto their already thick job descriptions. Principal supervisors, individuals in school districts who oversee and support principals, can help principals manage their large workload and juggle their leadership responsibilities.[51] A key challenge for district principal pipeline initiatives is to assess how to envision, design, and support their principal supervisors' as they offer that support. Those challenges can vary depending on a school district's size. Larger ones tend to have more capacity to create stand-alone principal supervisor positions and offices as part of a pipeline initiative. In contrast, smaller districts might not have that luxury and therefore would have district administrators play multiple roles, including principal supervisor, as part of their overall portfolio. Despite these differing conditions across a state's school districts, state leaders can use their policy levers to help create conditions where principal supervisors, regardless of their specific position, have more chances to succeed.

---

[49] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 37).
[50] Manna (2015).
[51] Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall, and Simon (2013).

Most generally, state policymakers can remain attentive to how they manage the overall regulatory environment that might bear on principals and their supervisors.[52] Minimizing those burdens whenever possible could make it more likely that supervisors will use their time to mentor and coach principals in areas such as instructional leadership rather than helping them navigate the thicket of more bureaucratic tasks like completing reports to fulfill state mandates.[53] An example, which the earlier discussion of Box 1 noted, was the value of differentiating leadership standards to accommodate different district leadership roles, including principals and assistant principals. A lack of clarity in standards can create administrative challenges for principal supervisors, especially those who have multiple jobs themselves within a medium-sized or smaller school district. Principal supervisors might lack time to develop differentiated uses of standards for the different leaders they supervise. At the same time, though, it also is important for state standards not to become too tedious or unwieldy and, in the process, overburden principal supervisors with too many "boxes to check." Such requirements can undercut their ability to provide engaging and authentic support.

State leaders also can recognize that districts themselves often have varying ways they envision using principal supervisors, which means that state policy levers should recognize those varied interests.[54] Districts may wish to develop their own sets of standards to meet local needs, for example. As one evaluation of a separate Wallace initiative focused on principal supervisors noted, school districts with principal supervisors sometimes "revisit and refresh" the job descriptions of their supervisors in order to "match evolving district goals for school support."[55] States could provide districts with flexibility in using state funding for school improvement and principal development, either from the state's own allocation to districts or funds that flow through federal programs, to enhance the work that principal supervisors do.

Another way that state policy levers intersect with the work of principal supervisors is in formal principal evaluation processes. Here it is important for state leaders to remember that principal supervisors wear multiple hats that can complicate their relationships with principals. The daily work of principal supervisors can involve a mix of oversight, coaching, and daily support to put out fires for building-level principals.[56] As the PPI unfolded, the participating districts had their principal supervisors taking on more important responsibilities as evaluators, mentors, and coaches.[57] If state principal evaluation systems burden principal supervisors with oversight roles, leaving little room for more collegial or formative mentoring, then they can create dynamics between principals and their supervisors focused around compliance (sometimes punitive, even) rather than more collegial collaborative problem solving. In fact, research shows that principal supervisors do some of their best work when they are focused on professional development and growth of their principals rather than compliance-oriented activities.[58]

---

[52] Sayed (2015, p. 10).
[53] Goldring, Grissom, Rubin, Rogers, Neel, and Clark (2018).
[54] Saltzman (2016).
[55] Goldring, Clark, Rubin, Rogers, Grissom, Gill, Kautz, McCullough, Neel, and Burnett (2020, p. xxiii).
[56] Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall, and Simon (2013). Not all school districts have principal supervisors, so that function may be one component of an individual's larger professional role in a local district central office.
[57] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 37).
[58] Goldring, Clark, Rubin, Rogers, Grissom, Gill, Kautz, McCullough, Neel, and Burnett (2020, p. xviii).

Pipeline domain #6: Leader tracking systems

> ### Box 6. State policy levers and principal pipeline leader tracking systems: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

---

Relevance of state standards: Do state standards regarding school principals' preparation and performance motivate the collection of relevant data?

Preparation programs and degree attainment: Do state leaders have an overall perspective on which institutions and degree pathways in their state are producing principals in ways consistent with the needs and priorities of local principal pipeline initiatives?

Evaluation and career trajectories: Do state re-licensure or ongoing principal professional development expectations help identify strengths and gaps in the development of principals' skills across the arcs of their careers?

Leveraging expertise to support recruitment, preparation, and professional development: Do state systems help identify veteran or retired principals who could be resources for local principal pipeline initiatives, especially support for recruitment, preparation, and professional development of principals at earlier stages of their careers?

It is commonplace for elected officials and education policy leaders at national, state, and local levels to embrace data. Being data-driven means guiding policy choices based on evidence rather than just intuition or what might favor politically connected interests.[59] Although sometimes such an embrace is more symbolic than real, PPI districts' development of leader tracking systems revealed an important way that education data can advance, as one evaluation report noted, the "preparation, hiring, and support of school leaders."[60] Leader tracking systems vary in their design, but generally speaking districts build them to compile data on current principals and potential new recruits into the role. Constructing leader tracking systems as part of a comprehensive and aligned principal pipeline initiative involves several things. They include identifying useful data to inform pipeline processes, building computerized systems that collate those data, creating easy-to-use data dashboards or interfaces so district staff can examine the data, and all the while upholding various laws and regulations designed to safeguard data and protect individual privacy. Without question, these are challenging tasks for local school districts to complete.[61]

---

[59] Kanstoorom and Osberg (2008). See also material from The Data Quality Campaign at https://dataqualitycampaign.org/.
[60] Gates, Kaufman, Doan, Tuma, and Kim (2020, p. 9).
[61] Kanstoroom and Osberg (2008).

State policy-makers can pull several relevant levers to create conditions supporting the development of leader tracking systems in comprehensive and aligned principal pipeline initiatives. In constructing state standards for principals and principal preparation programs, states can steer data collection activities in productive directions.[62] The task of principal evaluation can be incredibly time-consuming, for example, with principal evaluators or principals themselves, as part of self-reflections, required to document large quantities of information. While some might assume that collecting data on more variables is always better, data that are tedious to collect or focus on less relevant subjects do not lend themselves to future use. The same idea applies to data collection systems on licensing and re-licensure. Where such requirements exist, they could be developed to capture information about relevant skills that principals are demonstrating rather than simply accounting for time logged each year or licensing cycle.

A further, related point is that state requirements for data reporting systems often are developed or implemented in silos, which undermine future use of the data to track potential and current leaders. Nearly everyone working in the education field can recount a story about how it would have been incredibly helpful to have district-level data systems that can "talk" to one another.[63] This problem is not confined to principals and leadership, of course. Teachers and school counselors and others feel these frustrations, too. Such problems sap resources from local school districts when district officials commit to developing leader tracking systems but discover they need to build such systems from scratch by culling relevant data from different systems and then populating their own new system with that raw information. Further complicating matters is that federal and state policy (and state interpretations of federal policy that education regulations embody) often create different rules guiding use of certain data. The impulse to protect privacy is reasonable, but when those choices themselves are made in silos it adds yet another complicating layer. Attending to these matters of data governance is an important area for attention as state leaders use their policy levers to support principal development.[64]

In addition to breaking down data silos and harmonizing or clarifying rules that guide how local school districts can use data, states have a potentially unique vantage point that can enable them to support professional development and mentoring of principals, an area that district leaders in Gwinnett County, a PPI district, have built into their leader tracking system.[65] With their overall high-level view and some key adjustments to state policy regarding data use, state education officials have the potential to use their data systems to identify successful veteran principals across their states and also retired principals who enjoyed much success on the job. Thinking about the arc of a principal's career to extend beyond the principal's official retirement would allow states to gather data that serve local school districts whose leader tracking systems signal an on-going or acute professional development need. Because all districts might not have an abundant local population of talented veteran principals or retirees who could serve as mentors, states could play a sort of matchmaking function to help connect those districts with potential mentors living in other communities. Thinking about data collection with that career arc in mind, rather than as a one-shot exercise each year, would help data system designers create panel data structures that make possible multi-year analyses of principals' work and the environments that principals might have faced in their schools. Such systems could help identify those who appear to be on positive trajectories who could become

---

[62] Clifford, Hansen, and Wraight (2014).
[63] Kanstoroom and Osberg (2008).
[64] Data Quality Campaign (n.d.); Anderson, Turnbull, and Arcaira (2017, p. 31).
[65] Anderson, Turnbull, and Arcaira (2017, p. 15).

valuable resources for colleagues as mentors or those who may appear to be struggling and need extra assistance to succeed.

Pipeline domain #7: Systems of support

Box 7. State policy levers and systems of support for principal pipelines: Questions for state and local officials and their partners to consider

---

Political support: In marshalling state policy levers to support local principal pipelines, have state leaders cultivated political environments that help stakeholders understand and accept sometimes difficult policy choices?

Fiscal support: When the use of state policy levers implicates developing new resources or repurposing old ones, does the state provide valuable flexibility or startup or transition support that can enhance development of local principal pipeline initiatives?

Network support: Has the use of state policy levers to support local principal pipeline development occurred with accompanying state efforts to foster cross-district network partnerships or shared learning to support policy implementation?

Supporting development and ongoing maintenance of the six pipeline domains discussed in the previous sections requires the standing up and maintaining of overall systems of support. These systems include staff, leaders, and administrative resources being dedicated to local principal pipelines.[66] Unfortunately, investments in such systems are easy targets for criticism, especially from people who lack understanding about the challenges of sustaining comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines and also the substantial contributions to student success, at relatively low cost, that the evidence shows they can provide.[67] The most obvious criticism, especially when budgets are tight, is that devoting money and personnel to creating systems of support can, on the surface, seem like wasteful spending on district bureaucracy, rather than investments in teachers, their classrooms, and their students. State leaders can help inoculate local school district officials from these criticisms when they pull state policy levers to support the development of excellent principals. There is not one specific lever that necessarily contributes to that kind of support. Rather, it is how states pull the levers that can help backstop and support local pipeline efforts.

When states act with intentionality and care to support development of excellent principals they send important political messages across their states that such work deserves sustained support. As in any field, identifying promising candidates for a job, supporting their development, bringing them on board, and evaluating them requires, as one evaluation report described, "investments in systems and capacity."[68] The same is true for principals. Further, development of comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines also

---

[66] Gates, Kaufman, Doan, Tuma, and Kim (2020, pp. 9 and 14).
[67] Gates, Baird, Master, Chavez-Herrerias (2019).
[68] Kaufman, Gates, Harvey, Wang, and Barrett (2017, p. 82).

can run into political walls because the effective operation of some pipeline domains may require a reshuffling of traditional arrangements of power and influence. Examples include making changes in the processes of principal preparation or adjusting who at local levels controls principal hiring. State leaders can help shelter local officials developing principal pipelines from that political fallout. Even in challenging political environments, there is evidence that winning coalitions of state and local supporters can come together to advance reforms that ultimately support the development of principal pipelines. Illinois's efforts to reform principal preparation, an essential component of pipeline initiatives, is a case in point.[69]

In addition to political support, states also can provide valuable yet flexible fiscal backing to help stand up and sustain systems of support for comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines. Offering flexible support does not mean state education agencies or appropriations committees in state legislatures should take an "anything goes" approach. Rather, with clear, relevant, differentiated school leader standards as their guide star, states can offer flexibility but ensure accountability. This is important given the experiences of the PPI districts. Much variation existed in how the districts chose to invest their money across the pipeline domains.[70]

States positioned to leverage their own fiscal resources to support pipeline development would have an approach recognizing that excellent principals are essential for school improvement. Seeing principal pipelines through that lens would open up a wide array of funding streams as potential sources for principal pipeline development, streams that traditionally have flowed toward other purposes. This would include funds that states and local school districts themselves raise, and also resources from major federal programs, such as Title I and Title II of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).[71] Using standards for school leaders to guide state funding decisions also could create opportunities to repurpose funds historically deployed elsewhere. For example, principals (and teachers, for that matter) commonly complain that district professional development activities do not provide meaningful learning experiences that enhance practice.[72] Linking professional development to pipeline activities, as standards could do if they served as a backbone for state dealings with local districts, would be an additional way to direct funds in more useful ways.

Finally, states will play an invaluable role if they hope to see principal pipelines operating at scale across many school districts. The aforementioned political and fiscal support from states will be especially valuable in medium-sized or smaller school districts that lack economies of scale. Beyond that states can use their powerful convening functions to help collate and distribute insights more broadly to help local school districts develop and sustain systems that support principal pipelines. For example, state agency leaders could convene meetings, either in person or virtual, of local district officials and leading experts on principal pipelines to help build partnerships and supportive networks of pipeline enthusiasts. Even large districts that participated in the PPI relished opportunities to meet together in professional learning communities and to communicate with partners in virtual meetings as they built and ramped up their

---

[69] Hunt, Haller, Hood, and Kincaid (2019).
[70] Kaufman, Gates, Harvey, Wang, and Barrett (2017, p. xx).
[71] Rowland (2017); Herman, Gates, Arifkhanova, Bega, Chavez-Herrerias, Han, Harris, Leschitz, and Wrabel (2017). See also Price and Goodson (2019), which rated the results from Gates, Baird, Master, Chavez-Herrerias (2019) using the ESSA evidence framework. They found the results strong enough to qualify principal pipeline work as being eligible for support using ESSA funds.
[72] Mader (2015); Rowland (2017).

principal pipelines.[73] Participating in these kinds of meetings or forging these connections would be especially valuable for leaders and staff in small school districts where the task of pipeline development might fall to only one or two people who already have other demanding responsibilities. States are uniquely positioned, given their purview overseeing all their districts, to use their convening power to help build these professional networks for local people who are craving such communities of support.

Consider another example where state agencies seeking to foster pipeline development in medium-sized and smaller school districts could see themselves as collators, curators, and distributors of valuable information and model practices to all school districts interested in exploring pipeline development. Districts in the PPI spent much of their own effort, and effort working with consultants and external partners, developing guides, rubrics, and other tools to inform decision-making and make their principal pipelines comprehensive and aligned. These include materials for interviewing new principals or training current ones using activities such as role plays, in-basket exercises, hypothetical school data reviews, and video exercises that simulate teacher observation and feedback.[74] States could use their own resources and work with partners, such as state principal associations or other non-profit organizations, to collate and widely distribute these sorts of items to interested districts. If state agencies don't marshal this sort of coordination, states could leverage their role as overseers of principal preparation programs to encourage programs themselves to operate as pseudo-pipeline hubs of activity that develop and curate building blocks for systems of support to serve many smaller districts simultaneously. A preparation program at a university that served multiple rural school districts, for example, could be better positioned to do this work than any one small district alone. A model case of this kind of teamwork is the award-winning Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) at North Carolina State University.[75] The NELA program came into existence as a result of local efforts augmented by state and federal funding streams.

3. The state-district nexus and ecosystems for developing excellent principals

It is a challenging yet exciting time to be engaged in the work of developing the next generation of school principals and supporting the tens of thousands more who currently lead their schools. Given the tremendous diversity in conditions across the nation's fifty states and nearly 14,000 school districts, those interested in developing comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines will quickly understand that although the PPI framework is generally applicable in many contexts, given varied conditions across the nation's communities there exists no one formula for bringing pipeline initiatives into being. While the PPI districts built their pipelines around the seven domains this report describes, the sequencing of that development and how each took shape varied across the districts.[76] The same likely will be true in districts and states across the nation interested in nurturing principal pipelines in other locales. That variety of local experiences, as the PSA and RAND researchers discovered in their various evaluation studies of the PPI, means that rigid state mandates, even if motivated by good intentions, will struggle to succeed and may

---

[73] Gates, Baird, Master, Chavez-Herrerias (2019, p. 73); Anderson, Turnbull, and Arcaira (2017, p. 24).

[74] Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016, p. 28).

[75] For information on NELA see the organization's home page at https://nela.ced.ncsu.edu/nela-innovative-leaders-academy/. On NELA's award recognition see the NELA blog at http://thenelablog.weebly.com/blog/nc-state-wins-national-award-for-preparing-rural-school-leaders.

[76] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 44); Gates, Baird, Master, Chavez-Herrerias (2019, p. 29).

even do harm. State approaches that embrace flexibility and provide local school districts with incentives to consider launching principal pipeline initiatives would be a better approach. A place for states to start would be simply to disseminate information via some of the mechanisms that the earlier discussion of systems of support (pipeline domain #7) explored above.

Overall, as one PPI evaluation report noted, a key leadership goal should be for each local school district to have a lively "ecosystem for talent development" that ensures all schools bring on board excellent principals and then support them on the job.[77] The idea of a comprehensive and aligned principal pipeline provides a basis for conceiving and establishing such a flourishing environment. Succeeding will depend upon renewed efforts by states and local school districts, giving special attention to the state-district nexus this report has highlighted, and further work to recruit into the effort other partners inside and outside government.

To reiterate a crucial point from the introduction of this report, the development of principal pipelines may appear to depend primarily on local energy and effort, yet state and local venues both contribute elements that create the conduits of principal pipelines. Certainly, local school districts play the most proximate roles as they pursue this work. Nobody is advocating that state policymakers participate in the interview sessions that identify potential candidates for principal preparation programs or select and place newly minted principals in schools. Those are obvious local responsibilities. States, though, bring comparative advantages of their own to the development and support of principal pipelines, especially as they wield the six state policy levers described earlier in Table 2. Just as it would be difficult, if not impossible, for local governments to secure the rights of way needed to construct major pipelines that transport water and gas across many different political jurisdictions, local districts alone will be challenged to see their principal pipelines produce a steady flow of excellent school leaders without the states drawing on their own particular areas of strength to help. Summoning such state-local coordination is a tall order, no doubt, but given the evidence showing that excellent principals can transform school communities for the better and, further, that comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines can generate those sorts of formidable leaders, the potential payoffs are obvious and within reach.

---

[77] Anderson and Turnbull (2019, p. 43).

Works cited

Anderson, Leslie M. and Brenda J. Turnbull. 2019. *Sustaining a Principal Pipeline.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/sustainability-of-principal-pipeline-initiative.aspx.

Anderson, Leslie M., Brenda J. Turnbull, and Erikson R. Arcaira. 2017. *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/leader-tracking-systems-turning-data-into-information-for-school-leadership.aspx.

Clifford, Matthew, Ulcca Joshni Hansen, and Sara Wraight. 2014. *Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Principal Evaluation Systems (Revised Edition).* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/PracticalGuidePrincipalEval.pdf.

Corcoran, Amanda, Michael Casserly, Ricki Price-Baugh, Denise Walston, Robin Hall, and Candace Simon. 2013. *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors.* Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/rethinking-leadership-the-changing-role-of-principal-supervisors.aspx.

Darling-Hammond, Linda, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen. 2007. *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs.* Palo Alto, CA: The Finance Project. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/preparing-school-leaders.aspx.

Data Quality Campaign (n.d.). Data Systems that Work. https://dataqualitycampaign.org/topic/data-systems-that-work/ (accessed November 29, 2020).

Education Commission of the States. 2018. School Leader Certification and Preparation Programs. https://www.ecs.org/ (accessed August 2, 2019).

Gates, Susan M., Matthew D. Baird, Benjamin K. Master, Emilio R. Chavez-Herrerias. 2019. *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/principal-pipelines-a-feasible,-affordable,-and-effective-way-for-districts-to-improve-schools.aspx.

Gates, Susan M., Julia H. Kaufman, Sy Doan, Andrea Prado Tuma, and Deborah Kim. 2020. *Taking Stock of Principal Pipelines: What Public School Districts Report Doing and What They Want to Do to Improve School Leadership.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/taking-stock-of-principal-pipelines.aspx.

Goldring, Ellen B., Jason A. Grissom, Mollie Rubin, Laura K. Rogers, Michael Neel, and Melissa A. Clark. 2018. *A New Role Emerges for Principal Supervisors: Evidence from Six Districts in the Principal Supervisor Initiative.* Nashville, TN and Princeton, NJ: Vanderbilt Peabody College and Mathematica Policy Research. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/a-new-role-emerges-for-principal-supervisors.aspx.

Goldring, Ellen B., Melissa A. Clark, Mollie Rubin, Laura K. Rogers, Jason A. Grissom, Brian Gill, Tim Kautz, Moira McCullough, Michael Neel, and Alyson Burnett. 2020. *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative*. Nashville, TN and Princeton, NJ: Vanderbilt Peabody College and Mathematica. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/changing-the-principal-supervisor-role-to-better-support-principals.aspx.

Grissom, Jason A., Demetra Kalogrides, and Susanna Loeb. 2015. "Using Student Test Scores to Measure Principal Performance." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37(1): 3-28.

Haller, Alicia, Erika Hunt, and Debra Baron 2019. Setting the Stage for the State Policy Change Process Involving Principal Preparation in Illinois: The What and How. In Erika Hunt, Alicia Haller, Lisa Hood, and Maureen Kincaid (eds.) *Reforming Principal Preparation at the State Level: Perspectives on Policy Reform in Illinois*. New York: Routledge. pp. 3-27.

Herman, Rebecca, Susan M. Gates, Aziza Arifkhanova, Andriy Bega, Emilio Chavez-Herrerias, Eugene Han, Mark Harris, Jennifer Leschitz, and Stephani Wrabel. 2017. School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review (Updated and Expanded as of December 2017), Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/school-leadership-interventions-every-student-succeeds-act-volume-1.aspx.

Hunt, Erika, Alicia Haller, Lisa Hood, and Maureen Kincaid (eds.). 2019. *Reforming Principal Preparation at the State Level: Perspectives on Policy Reform in Illinois*. New York: Routledge.

Kanstoroom, Marci and Eric Osberg (eds.). 2008. *A Byte at the Apple: Rethinking Education Data for the Post-NCLB Era.* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/byte-apple-rethinking-education-data-post-nclb-era.

Kaufman, Julia H., Susan M. Gates, Melody Harvey, Yan Wang, Mark Barrett. 2017. *What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/what-it-takes-to-operate-and-maintain-principal-pipelines-costs-and-other-resources.aspx.

Leithwood, Kenneth, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom. 2004. *How Leadership Influences Student Learning.* Ontario, Canada: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/how-leadership-influences-student-learning.aspx.

Levine, Arthur. 2005. *Educating School Leaders.* Washington, DC: The Education Schools Project.

Lipsky, Michael. 1980. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Louis, Karen Seashore, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, and Stephen E. Anderson. 2010. *Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning.* New York: The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/investigating-the-links-to-improved-student-learning.aspx.

Mader, Jackie. 2015. "New report reveals that teacher professional development is costly and ineffective." *The Hechinger Report*. August 4. [Teacher professional development is costly and ineffective (hechingerreport.org)](hechingerreport.org) (accessed August 2, 2019).

Manna, Paul. 2015. *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy.* New York: The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/developing-excellent-school-principals.aspx.

Manna, Paul and Patrick McGuinn (eds.). 2013. *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

New Leaders. 2012. Principal Evaluation Toolkit: Resources for Building Strong Principal Evaluation Systems. November. https://www.newleaders.org/principal-evaluation-toolkit (accessed March 14, 2021).

Orr, Margaret Terry, Cheryl King, Michelle LaPointe. 2010. Districts Developing Leaders: Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches from Eight Urban Districts, Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/districts-developing-leaders.aspx.

Price, Cristofer and Barbara Goodson. 2019. Memorandum to The Wallace Foundation: ESSA Evidence Review and the Principal Pipeline Initiative. April 2 (revised April 25). https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/essa-evidence-review-of-the-principal-pipeline-initiative.aspx.

Rowland, Cortney. 2017. *Principal Professional Development: New Opportunities for a Renewed State Focus.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Principal-Professional-Development-New-Opportunities-State-Focus-February-2017.pdf.

Saltzman, Amy. 2016. *The Power of Principal Supervisors: How Two Districts are Remaking an Old Role.* New York: The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/the-power-of-principal-supervisors.aspx.

Schlemmer, Liz. 2019. "Here are the education-related bills signed into Ky. law this year." March 29. https://wfpl.org/here-are-the-education-related-bills-signed-into-ky-law-this-year/ (accessed July 26, 2019).

Syed, Sarosh. 2015. *Building Principal Pipelines: A Strategy to Strengthen Education Leadership.* Update. New York: The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/building-principal-pipelines-a-strategy-to-strengthen-education-leadership.aspx.

Rutledge, Diane, and Steve Tozer. 2019. *Policy Transfer From Local to Statewide: Scaling Evidence-Based Principal Preparation Practices in Illinois.* In Erika Hunt, Alicia Haller, Lisa Hood, and Maureen Kincaid (eds.), *Reforming Principal Preparation at the State Level: Perspectives on Policy Reform in Illinois*. New York: Routledge.

Turnbull, Brenda J., Anderson, Leslie M., Derek L. Riley, Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, and Daniel K. Aladjem. 2016. *Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 5. The Principal Pipeline Initiative in Action.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/building-a-stronger-principalship-vol-5-the-principal-pipeline-initiative-in-action.aspx.

Turnbull, Brenda J., Derek L. Riley, Erikson R. Arcaira, Leslie M. Anderson, Jaclyn R. MacFarlane. 2013. *Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 1. Six Districts Begin the Principal Pipeline Initiative.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/six-districts-begin-the-principal-pipeline-initiative.aspx.

Turnbull, Brenda J., Derek L. Riley, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane. 2013. *Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 2. Cultivating Talent Through a Principal Pipeline.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/building-a-stronger-principalship-vol-2-cultivating-talent-through-a-principal-pipeline.aspx.

Turnbull, Brenda J., Derek L. Riley, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane. 2015. *Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 3. Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/building-a-stronger-principalship-vol3-districts-taking-charge.aspx.

Wheatley, Kevin. 2019. "Bill stripping school councils of power to hire principals clears committee." WDRB.com (accessed July 26, 2019).

Wilson, James Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It.* New York: Basic Books.

Wirt, Frederick M. and Michael W. Kirst. 2009. *The Political Dynamics of American Education (4th edition).* San Pablo, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Young, Michelle D. and Frank Perrone. 2016. "How Are Standards Used, By Whom, and to What End?" *Journal of Research on Leadership Education* 11(1): 3-11.