

Research Utilization Brief:

How Districts and Universities Work Together to Develop Leader Tracking Systems



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How do districts forecast vacancies and plan for succession? How do districts know if candidates are well prepared? How do districts know if they are selecting the right principal for the job? For many districts, the answer is: they don't. Although districts are awash in data, few have data systems that enable them to use data to answer these and other critical leadership pipeline questions. Districts involved in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative were in a similar position not long ago, but have taken steps to develop Leader Tracking Systems (LTSs).

According to a new report, *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership* (Anderson, Turnbull & Arcaira, 2017), LTSs include a variety of data sources on educational leaders that enable districts to place principal candidates in schools, improve "on the job" support, project hiring needs and engage in succession planning. LTSs include data on demographics like gender, age, race, languages spoken and experience as well as information on where and when individuals were prepared or professionally developed. LTSs also include information on the results of leadership evaluations and the positions an individual has held within the district and for how long. According to the Leader Tracking Systems report, LTSs "have fundamentally improved the consistency, fairness, and quality of the hiring process. These tools (1) allow apples-to-apples comparison of candidates, (2) permit efficient, comprehensive, and often sophisticated searches for possible candidate/school matches; and (3) lesson the power of "who you know" in hiring."

Importantly, LTSs can also provide critical information for educational leadership preparation programs. For example, the districts involved in the Wallace Principal Pipeline included the following in their LTSs: candidate demographic information, where candidates received their principal preparation, how candidates fared on state certification exams, where and in what positions candidates worked both prior to and following their preparation program completion, data on the schools in which candidates worked (e.g., school

level and size, student demographics and school performance), and what kinds of professional development candidates participated in.

While all parts of the principal pipeline are delicately intertwined and difficult to separate, two LTS focal areas emerge as central for preparation programs: data that can inform program efforts to engage in continuous improvement and data concerning the selection and placement of program graduates into leadership positions.

Data-informed Feedback for Continuous Improvement

While many districts provide anecdotal information to preparation programs about how their graduates are faring on the job, Leader Tracking Systems offer empirical data. For example, Hillsborough County provides university partners with data on how many of their graduates were accepted into the district's leadership development program as well as how many then became either principals or assistant principals. Similarly, one district collected detailed performance evaluation data on first-year principals and shared this data with university preparation providers. Subsequently, partners were able to engage in data-informed discussions regarding district leadership needs vis-à-vis preparation provider's curriculum offerings. The data helped inform a collaborative and productive discussion about where novice leaders were struggling and how preparation programs can address gaps in training. When needs are made explicit, preparation program curriculum can focus on competencies most closely related to future success. Furthermore, by evaluating principal competencies over time, and sharing this information with preparation and professional development providers, leader development can be strengthened across the career span.

Placement of Program Graduates into Leadership Positions

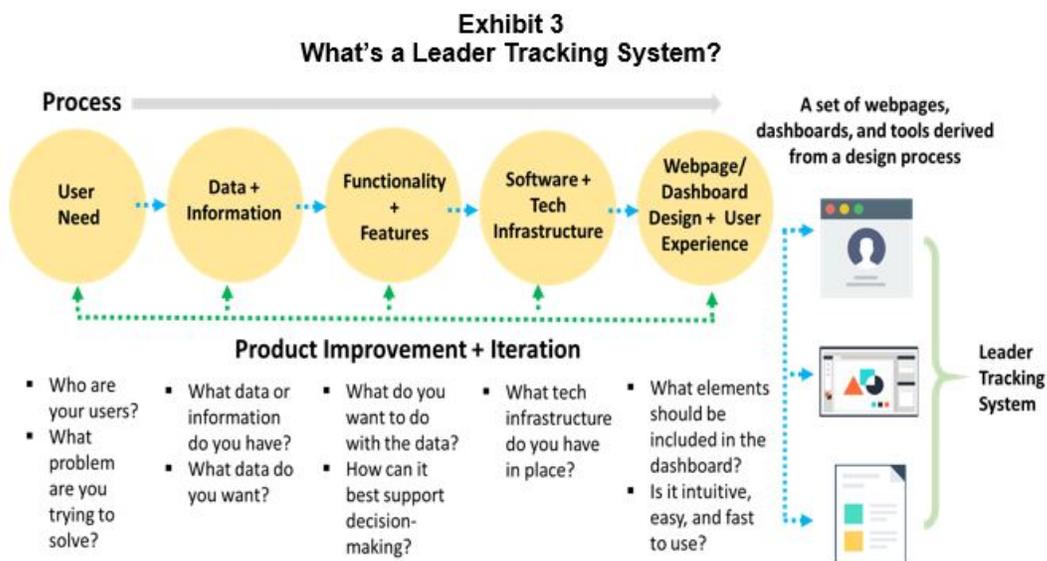
Every preparation program aims to have its graduates placed into leadership positions. Prior to LTS, the concern about school leader recruitment practice was that it was strongly influenced by “who you know.” Through data sharing and collaboration with districts through a LTS, recruitment of school leaders from preparation programs can be more informed, fair and likely to identify strong candidates whose preparation and experiences best fit the leadership position in question. Importantly, data sharing can be two-way. Although universities and districts face legal and regulatory barriers to sharing some data with each other, data collected from preparation programs such as student demographics, clinical experience and coursework, can be shared with districts for incorporation into a LTS. For instance, one district included executive summaries of graduate dissertations in their LTS. As dissertations largely address specific problems of practice within the district, this enabled districts to gauge which candidates had the specific expertise needed within a school and increased the likelihood of a successful match between candidate and position.

Summary

Districts and university partners alike have been pleased with the opportunities provided by LTSs as well as the many potential uses of such systems as they develop over time. The reports, *Chock Full of Data: How School Districts are Building Leader Tracking Systems to Support Principal Pipelines* and *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership*, share the experiences of the pipeline districts, how they built their LTS and how they use them to support high-quality principal preparation.

Citation

Anderson, Turnbull & Arcaira (2017). *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data Into Information for School Leadership*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Leader-Tracking-Systems-Turning-Data-Into-Information-for-School-Leadership.pdf>



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This brief is part of a Research Utilization Brief series supported by a grant from The Wallace Foundation. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development, particularly research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, with faculty, staff, and leaders at the program, institutional, and state levels, as these individuals are in positions to use this research to make positive changes. Available for downloading at <http://ucea.org/research-utilization-briefs/>

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