

RESEARCH UTILIZATION BRIEF:

STATE POLICY ON PRINCIPAL PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION



UNIVERSITY COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
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School leadership plays an important, indirect role in student success, second only to teachers (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010); yet, state policies guiding the approval of leadership preparation programs and the licensure of educational leaders have received relatively little attention. This brief provides an overview of a recent publication commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy* (Manna, 2015), and a recent policy report from the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), *A Policymakers Guide: Research- Based Policy for Principal Preparation Program Approval and Licensure* (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Together, these studies provide a comprehensive description of the current state policy environment and provide suggestions to support policy decisions regarding the preparation of leaders who can positively impact the schools they lead.

WALLACE-COMMISSIONED REPORT

The report, *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy* (Manna, 2015) outlines three considerations for policymakers that help identify the important role principals play in student learning:

1. Setting policy agendas,
2. Considering policy levers (standards, recruitment, oversight, licensing, professional development, and evaluation), and
3. Assessing state and local contexts.

Dr. Paul Manna, Assistant Professor of Government at the College of William and Mary, establishes in the report that principals are not a high priority on most state policy agendas. In fact, Manna found that the role of the principal is given a significantly lesser status than teachers. The report suggests that states balance the attention paid to principals and teachers in order to better serve the needs of students.

By highlighting a) quality educational leadership programs, such as the Northeast Leadership Academy in North Carolina; (b) states supportive of program redesign, such as Kentucky

and Illinois; and (c) innovative state paths to licensure, such as Massachusetts; the report provides a thoughtful analysis of the current policy environment.

Furthermore, the report provides an excellent field-based analysis of what the role of the principal entails today and uses this analysis to argue that the traditional managerial tasks associated with the job have not been replaced with instructional leadership tasks. Instead, principals are expected to do more (i.e., focus on building management and classroom instruction). Manna recommends that policy makers consider the reality of the position when developing policies that will impact the preparation and practice of excellent school principals.

UCEA POLICY REPORT

The second report, *A Policymakers Guide: Research- Based Policy for Principal Preparation Program Approval and Licensure*, examined the current policy environment for preparing and licensing principals by examining state legislative code, rules and regulations, and State Board of Education documents for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The analysis involved the application of a research-based rubric reflecting empirical research on leadership preparation and licensure (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), including five policy areas focused on preparation and four focused on licensure. The criteria for principal program approval included:

1. Explicit selection process,
2. Program standards,
3. Clinically rich internship,
4. University-district partnerships, and
5. Program oversight;

The criteria for candidate licensure included:

1. Experience requirements,
2. Assessment requirements,
3. Licensure renewal, and
4. Pathways to alternative certification.

The report focuses on eight of the above policy areas, dividing them into high leverage and regulatory policies. The five high-leverage areas, as determined by the research support and practical significance include 1) experience requirements, 2) program selection, 3) clinically rich internship, 4) university-district partnership, and 5) program oversight.

The report, which contains individual profiles for the 50 states and D.C., provides an overview of all of the identified policy areas for the each state, including the total number of criteria met by each state as well as the average, maximum, and minimum for comparison. In addition, the profiles show how the individual state stacks up against all of the states in the high leverage policy areas.

Key findings from the Policymakers Guide include:

- States are more likely to legislate candidate licensure than preparation.
- Regulatory policies are more likely to be legislated than high leverage policies.
- Only two states met the criteria for all five high leverage policy areas.
- Eleven states did not meet the criteria for any of the high leverage policies.
- The most common high leverage policies present in the states are experience requirements and program oversight.
- The least common high leverage policy present in the states is an explicit plan for selection.
- All fifty states have adopted or adapted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards.

LESSONS LEARNED

The findings from these two studies suggest that many state leaders have yet to engage the full scope of policy levers that can support high quality school leadership. Principals play a central role in coordinating and sustaining the efforts that improve student outcomes in schools across the United States (Louis, et al., 2010), and well-prepared leaders are linked to more successful schools (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). States can support the preparation of educational leaders by creating a policy environment that favors high leverage policies.

State policy agendas contribute to principal preparation by setting standards for the preparation and certification of principals and providing oversight to preparation programs as well as certification practices. As recognition of the important role that preparing and licensing principals plays in ensuring the success of our schools grows among state policymakers, we expect to see more and more states taking up the roles articulated in *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning* and adopting the high leverage policies for educational leadership preparation and licensure

recommended within *A Policymakers Guide: Research- Based Policy for Principal Preparation Program Approval and Licensure*.

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