

Prioritizing Leadership: Opportunities in ESSA for Chief State School Officers





Any organization—a small business or start-up, a large established company, a nonprofit, and every level of government—depends on leadership to achieve more than the sum of its parts. The same is true for our schools, where a single principal shapes the practice of dozens of teachers and the learning of hundreds—sometimes thousands—of students.

Fully one-quarter of a school’s influence on student learning can be directly attributed to the effectiveness of its school leaders. And an outstanding principal—one who has deep instructional expertise, hires and supports talented teachers, and creates a great place to work and learn—can improve student academic achievement by as much as 20 percentage points.

Given the significant effect school leaders have on student learning and other student outcomes, it is perhaps surprising that federal education law and local decisions about how to use Federal funds have, until now, paid insufficient attention to leadership. Just four percent of Title II funds have historically been spent on professional development for school leaders.¹ That is simply no way to get results.

2 OUT OF 3 More than two-thirds of districts spend **zero** Title II funds on professional development for school leaders.

Fortunately, the new federal K-12 education law—the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a bipartisan compromise that revises and replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—creates important new and expanded opportunities to strengthen school leadership, particularly in our nation’s highest-need schools and communities. To be sure, there will be substantial inertia and pressure from established interests to spend federal funds as they have always been spent. But chief state school officers, in partnership with governors and forward-thinking local leaders, are well-positioned to change the status quo and take advantage of four opportunities to strengthen school leadership:

-  **1. TARGET** state-level Title II funds on school leadership
-  **3. DEVISE** comprehensive school leadership strategies
-  **2. RE-THINK** approaches to leadership and school improvement
-  **4. USE** competitive federal grants for innovation

Everything that happens in schools — setting high expectations for students, helping teachers grow and improve their practice, engaging families and communities, everything — **depends upon the caliber of our nation's 90,000 principals.**

25%

Fully one-quarter of a school’s influence on student learning is directly attributable to one person: the principal.

97%

Teachers list school leadership as essential or very important for their career choices — more than any other factor.

20%

The difference in student achievement at a school led by a high-performing principal compared to an average-performing principal.

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“As decision-making shifts away from the federal government, it is more important than ever that our nation’s schools be led by individuals who possess the skills and technical prowess to design and adopt school improvement strategies that truly make a difference for kids.”

1. Findings from the 2014-15 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A (July 2015).



1. TARGET

For the first time, states can target up to 8 percent of their Title II allocation specifically for state investments in school leadership.

Every state receives funding under Title II of ESSA, one of two major formula grants that can support school leadership (we discuss the other grant, Title I School Improvement, later). States may devote up to 5 percent of their Title II allocation for teacher and leader development and **an additional 3 percent for leadership investments only**. If Title II funding amounts stay the same, the 3 percent set-aside alone could mean \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually in a small state like Delaware or Wyoming or \$6 million to \$7 million in a large state like California or Texas.

TITLE II STATE & LOCAL GRANTS		FY16 APPROPRIATION	FY17 ESSA AUTHORIZATION
State: 5% for state activities; <i>optional 3% for leadership</i>	Local: 92-95% for district activities	\$2.35B	\$2.3B*
<small>* The Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program is now separately funded. Prior to the passage of ESSA, SEED was funded through a reservation of Title II.</small>			

Smart investments at the state level can leverage bigger change across a state, especially if those strategies also encourage more effective local decision-making. Consider some examples of states using federal resources or their own resources both to set bold agendas for leadership and to take decisive action to build leadership capacity, especially for schools most in need of improvement.

The five percent set-aside in Title II is designed to support a full range of activities for educators and the three percent set-aside for school leadership is specifically focused on strategies to build a robust pipeline of effective school leaders and grow the capacity of sitting principals. But support for school leadership is broadly defined. It could include the more obvious investments in aspiring or sitting school leaders, but we would argue it also includes the full continuum of school leadership, such as funding for principal supervisors who directly supporting principals or to train teacher leaders specifically as a bench of future principals and assistant principals.



In 2013, **Connecticut** State Superintendent Stefan Pryor and Governor Daniel Malloy made a strategic decision to invest in building leadership capacity across the education system. The State Department of Education issued a request for proposals that brought together a diverse coalition of organizations—universities, non-profit organizations, and state associations—to create LEAD Connecticut (www.leadconnecticut.org). LEAD Connecticut has created innovative new programs that identify, prepare, and induct leaders at the school and the district levels, with an intensive focus on building leadership capacity and creating conditions for success in the state's lowest-performing schools.

A state could:

- Tackle statewide leadership needs, such as revising licensure processes or revamping how preparation programs are approved;
- Partner with an external provider with expertise in school leadership, such as providing grants or contracts to build state capacity to deliver innovative professional development to principals and their instructional leadership teams; or
- Use funds in one or more high-poverty school districts across the state to develop successful models that can be scaled to other districts, such as piloting new initiatives to develop a pipeline of principals in under-served communities.

PROJECTED TITLE II INCREASE FY16 TO FY23*	STATES**
>30%	AZ, GA, NC, NV
20-30%	FL, SC, TN, TX, UT
10-20%	AR, CA, CO, IN
0-10%	AK, AL, DC, DE, HI, ID, ME, MO, MT, ND, NE, NH, NM, OK, OR, RI, SD, VT, WA, WY

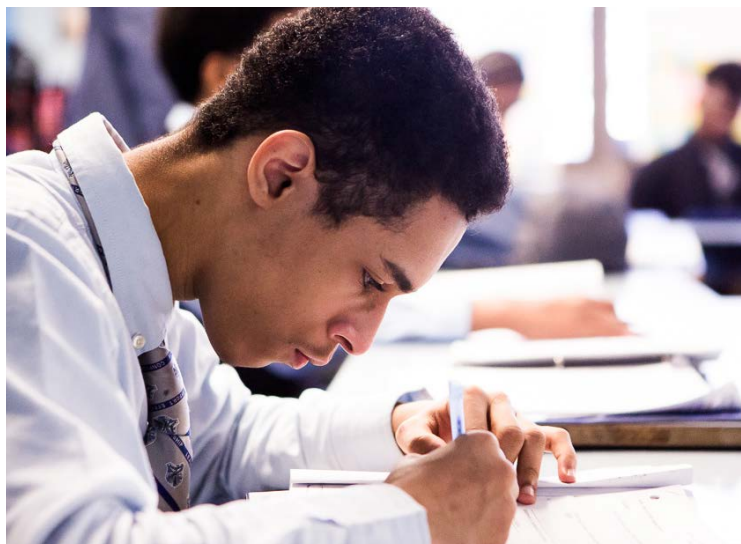
* These increases are estimates over seven years; they do not account for future changes in population or in the percentage of student living in poverty.

** All remaining states are projected to have decreases in their Title II allocations from FY16 to FY23.

Source: Congressional Research Service

How states choose to take advantage of this investment opportunity will undoubtedly be informed by the overall amount of funding available. If Congress maintains current funding levels for Title II, 32 states and the District of Columbia are projected to receive additional Title II grant funds as a result of changes to the allocation formula under ESSA.

These states especially have a tremendous chance to use new resources as a lever to focus on leadership. States projected to have declining Title II resources might consider the 3% set-aside as a chance to achieve more with less, since excellent leaders affect student achievement primarily by supporting improved teacher effectiveness.² Even a small shift from spending directly on a state’s large pool of teachers to spending on the much smaller pool of principals has the potential to create improvements in the quality of instruction and results for students.³



Since winning a Race to the Top grant in 2010, **Tennessee** has invested substantial state and federal dollars in leadership, from funding innovative teacher leadership practices in several local districts to state-wide implementation of innovative teacher and leader evaluation systems. Most recently, State Superintendent Candice McQueen and Governor Bill Haslam collaborated with Vanderbilt’s Peabody College of Education to form the Governor’s Academy of School Leadership. The Academy is currently training a cohort of twenty-four assistant principals selected for their potential to be exceptional principals and will continue growing new leaders over time. State leaders are looking to replicate the program across the state.

2. Branch, G., Hanushek, E.A., & Rivkin, S.G. (2012). *Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education; Louis, K.S., Leithwood, K. Wahlstrom, K.L., & Anderson, S.E. (2010) *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota; Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 31-56.

3. Rowland, C. (June 25, 2015). *Improving Educational Outcomes: How State Policy Can Support School Principals as Instructional Leaders*. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.



2. RE-THINK

States have substantial flexibility to re-think their approaches to leadership and school improvement.

All states can take advantage of language throughout ESSA that provides states and districts with greater flexibility to develop and adopt research-based, locally-tailored strategies that can harness school leadership to strengthen teaching, accelerate learning, and transform schools into environments in which teachers thrive and all students excel. In particular, states can leverage Title I funds to build the capacity of school leaders to increase high-quality implementation of standards, assessments, accountability, and other policies and systems to accelerate student achievement, particularly for our most vulnerable students.

TITLE I SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	FY16 APPROPRIATION	FY17 ESSA AUTHORIZATION
<p>State & Local: 7% for school improvement (including leadership); of which 95% for districts and 5% for state</p>	\$14.01B	\$15.01B*
<p>* The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program was eliminated in ESSA and the 1003(a) state-level reservation was increased from 4% to 7%.</p>		

Title I, Section 1003 requires states to set aside seven percent of their Title I, Part A funds for a range of activities to help school districts improve low-performing schools. Of that reservation, states may reserve five percent for state activities, including reducing barriers and providing operational flexibility to schools implementing improvement plans. The remaining 95 percent are distributed by states to districts on a formula or competitive basis for schools implementing comprehensive or targeted support and improvement activities. If a state decides to run a competition to target those funds, they must give priority to districts that have concentrations of schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support, have the greatest need, and demonstrate a strong commitment to using the funds well. With the approval of districts, states also have the option to provide activities directly or through outside providers with expertise in using evidence-based strategies to improve student achievement, instruction, or schools.

Local school districts and individual schools are required to include “evidence-based” interventions in their action plans to use these funds, specifically interventions that demonstrate strong, moderate, or promising levels of evidence. This new lever allows states to play a critical role by approving these plans, including potentially guiding districts to interventions that have the strongest research basis. The state also has the authority to establish alternate evidence-based strategies that can be used in comprehensive support and improvement schools. A strong body of evidence demonstrates that improving school leadership is an evidence-based strategy for improving school performance and developing teacher practice.



In 2013, **New Mexico** launched Principals Pursuing Excellence to improve the practice of sitting principals in low-performing schools (those with grades of C, D, and F in the state’s school rating system). After a rigorous screening process, participating principals attend a summer institute focused on core leadership practices: data-driven instruction, staff and student culture, observation, and feedback. Then they put these lessons into practice, assessing school needs and establishing a 90-day action plan containing effective turnaround strategies. Two successful leaders assist in the development of the plan and provide ongoing coaching and

mentoring during monthly onsite visits and frequent check-ins. New Mexico is starting the fourth cohort of Principals Pursuing Excellence this summer and the program was lauded by one of its biggest champions, Governor Susana Martinez, in her 2016 State of the State Address: “It’s helping turn around struggling schools. In fact, after just one year, 53 percent of schools with participating principals saw their school grade increase by at least one letter grade. The next year, 60 percent saw grades improve in their first year... What a difference that makes for students. When we choose to reform, and commit to reform, we see results.”



3. DEVISE

States can devise comprehensive school leadership strategies.

Given new opportunities in Title I and Title II, states can re-think how to use formula funds in a cross-cutting manner to support evidence-based school leadership strategies—such as the recruitment, preparation, and ongoing support of school leaders.

State officials are required to write and submit plans to the U.S. Department of Education that outline their vision for implementing ESSA at the state and local levels, including how they will spend

Title I and Title II funds. These plans, including the option to draft a consolidated application, represent a window of opportunity for chief state school officers to determine the appropriate state role in ensuring that every school has a great principal, especially those most in need of improvement. To accomplish this goal, chief state school officers and their partners can reflect on a number of critical questions during the development of a state's plan to spend formula funds in a cross-cutting manner to support school leadership:



Are there sufficient efforts to boost the quality of school leader preparation?

Principal preparation has long been a weak link in the educational human capital chain. To take full advantage of new opportunities to support school leadership, a state's plan should include actions to improve school leader preparation programs—including those focused on developing principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders—and support the implementation of evidence-based strategies. For example, states can raise expectations for preparation programs and encourage residency-based models that provide clinical experiences.



Is there sufficient investment in building a leadership pipeline?

Developing aspiring leaders and supporting early career principals need to be top priorities. Investments in these priorities can include intensive mentoring and support for new school leaders during their first two to three years on the job or development trainings to address specific trends identified by evaluation results for sitting principals. States should pay particular attention to the role of principal supervisors in providing tailored support and should create a pipeline of future school leaders by providing leadership coaching to great teachers who are interested in moving into leadership positions at the classroom and school level.



Is there a clear strategy for getting effective leaders into the highest-need schools?

When planning school improvement activities under Title I, states and districts should consider how they will ensure a well-prepared and well-supported principal leads each of their lowest-performing schools (those identified for comprehensive support and improvement) and schools with large achievement gaps or a low-performing subgroup (those identified for targeted support and improvement).



What data do we need to collect to inform the implementation of our state plan?

A plan should include data the state plans to collect and a description of how it plans to use the data to make decisions and strategic plan adjustments. States might consider collecting data on principal effectiveness, such as principal turnover (especially those in the role for two years or less), principal vacancies (especially those that exist far into the summer), principal evaluation scores, ratio of principal managers to principals, and principal compensation.

State chiefs can bring new voices to the table. Typical state processes for getting feedback on plans tends to be highly bureaucratic and can be dominated by those with a vested interest in preserving

the status quo. State chiefs can ask others—from highly effective principals to civic and corporate leaders—to weigh in, injecting much-needed energy and ideas.



4. USE

States can use competitive federal grants as opportunities for innovation.

States, districts, and their partners can build on and bolster efforts to strengthen leadership by applying on their own, or joining with expert partners, to take advantage of competitive grant programs.

PROGRAM	FY16 APPROPRIATION	FY17 ESSA AUTHORIZATION
SCHOOL LEADER RECRUITMENT & SUPPORT PROGRAM (SLRSP) Training for current & aspiring leaders in high-need schools	\$16M	\$15.9M
SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT (SEED)* Preparation, certification, and PD activities	\$94M	\$53.4M
TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER INCENTIVE PROGRAM (TSLIP) Recruitment and retention strategies	\$230M	\$468M
EDUCATION INNOVATION AND RESEARCH (EIR) Evidence-based innovations	\$120M	\$70.5M

* For the SEED program, a state must work with an eligible entity (i.e., a non-profit organization or an institution of higher education).



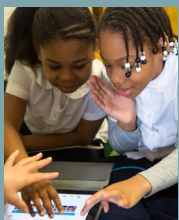
Prepare and support the next generation of leaders for high-need schools. Formerly the School Leadership Program (SLP), the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP) makes grants to states and districts (including in partnership with non-profit organizations) to recruit, prepare, place, support, and retain effective school leaders in high-need schools. Priority is given to programs with a proven record of developing leaders who get results.



Develop and support leaders capable of meeting a wide range of school district needs. The Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program makes grants to non-profit organizations and institutions of higher education (including in partnership with states and districts) to recruit, select, and prepare, or provide professional development activities for teachers, principals, or other school leaders. Special emphasis is placed on supporting nontraditional and evidence-based programs, particularly those serving high-need districts.



Reimagine compensation and career ladders to recruit top talent and keep the best leaders in the schools and communities most in need of strong, consistent leadership. Formerly the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSLIP) makes grants to states and districts (including in partnership with non-profit organizations) to develop and implement sustainable, performance-based compensation systems for teachers, principals, and other personnel in high-need schools in order to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement. Of note, project activities must be evidence-based.



Invest in promising new leadership models, expand proven programs, and build our knowledge base of what works. Formerly the Investing in Innovation (i3) fund, the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program makes grants to states, districts, or non-profit organizations (including in partnerships) to support the development, validation, and scaling up of innovative strategies and interventions for addressing persistent education challenges. The program can play a key role in identifying and expanding the successful implementation of school leadership development programs that have a positive effect on student achievement and school performance.

State chiefs can take the lead.

The passage of ESSA was, above all, an affirmation of the central role of states in managing and improving public education. That responsibility falls primarily to state chiefs who—along with their state board of education and governor—can exert real leadership over the agenda. Specifically, they can:

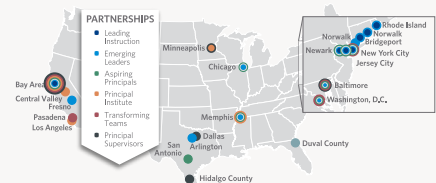
Articulate a vision of leadership. State chiefs, along with their governors, are uniquely positioned to articulate a vision of leadership. Chiefs can speak to the social and economic benefits that accrue to educated citizens. They can describe the characteristics of effective leadership and the hard work involved in cultivating it at all levels. They can lift up the practice and voices of principals and superintendents and they can convene private sector and civic leaders who can be champions for leadership. Whether by sponsoring fellowships for aspiring leaders, spotlighting transformative principals in editorials, creating policy advisory groups consisting of effective school leaders, or simply identifying leadership as a priority, state chiefs can use their position to put leadership at the center of the ESSA conversation.

Champion legislation on key leadership priorities. Creating incentives for principals to take on challenging schools. Adding rigor to licensing requirements to become a principal. Authorizing innovative new principal preparation pathways. Requiring the state department of education to draft a specific school leadership plan. By promoting these and other ideas in the legislative process, state chiefs can crystallize their interest in leadership and focus the legislative dialogue on those issues that have the biggest potential for affecting student learning.

Influence the planning and budget processes. States will be planning for full implementation of ESSA in school year 2017-18 and beyond. States have their traditional processes for writing, editing, and approving plans for compliance with federal legislation—processes that generally result in more of the same. State chiefs can interrupt those processes and demand a more profound, more evidence-based conversation that starts with the presumption that no school improves without effective leaders. Whether by mobilizing allies inside and outside of education, bringing concrete ideas to the table, or identifying state resources that can supplement federal resources to create a coherent leadership strategy, state chiefs can take the lead on how their states will respond to this opportunity.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES EVERYTHING

In 2001, New Leaders launched its flagship Aspiring Principals program with a cohort of 14 participants. Since then, the national nonprofit organization has trained nearly **2,500 outstanding education leaders** who reach **450,000 students annually**.



We also conduct original research on effective school leadership and advocate for the policies and practices that foster it.



The RAND Corporation named New Leaders as the **principal preparation program** with the **strongest evidence of positive impact**. More information about school leadership and ESSA can be found in *School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*, a Wallace-funded RAND report.

DERICK SPAULDING NEW LEADER | COHORT 7



"A lot is changing—from performance measures to accountability systems. The one constant amidst all of this change is school leadership."