

The following tool, adapted from a rubric created by New Leaders and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), helps states assess the extent to which state leaders have prioritized school leadership—especially school leader preparation—and the extent to which the state education agency (SEA) is positioned as a resource to local educational agencies (LEAs) with the crucial capabilities to support new work. For more information on the full SEP³ Toolkit, visit www.sepkit.org.

Tool A: Readiness Assessment Rubric and Process Recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reaffirms and reinforces the central role that states play in creating the conditions for student success. In doing so, it offers an important moment for state leaders to set the direction and focus for education policy for years to come. One of the biggest bets for states to consider is promoting and advancing effective school leadership—from teacher leaders to assistant principals, principals, and principal supervisors.

As states craft comprehensive ESSA plans, they can use school leadership as a strategy to ensure effective implementation of the law. But, implementing a better system of evaluating principal preparation programs or revising mechanisms for supporting school leaders is complex work, and it requires that states have certain conditions and capabilities already in place. Before undertaking the work of designing and implementing new systems, we recommend that states assess their capacity to implement them well. This tool is designed to help with that assessment of readiness. It has two parts: (1) a readiness assessment rubric; and (2) process recommendations for completing the assessment.

The readiness assessment rubric includes information in two broad areas:

- A. **Focus, alignment, and positioning of state leadership:** The extent to which state leadership has prioritized school leadership—and specifically school leader preparation—in the state’s educational improvement agenda, and the extent to which the SEA is positioned to be an effective resource for LEAs and leadership preparation programs.
- B. **Technical capabilities of the state education agency:** The extent to which the SEA has crucial capabilities needed to support a new principal preparation program evaluation system, especially those related to data collection and the analysis and substantive review of programs.

The process recommendations outline how states might use information in these two areas to arrive at conclusions about their readiness to restructure or refine their assessment of leadership preparation programs. Completing this rubric will enable states to determine whether current conditions are *ideal*,

workable, or *underdeveloped* for implementing the pre-service preparation recommendations in the [guide](#). States might also consider capitalizing on [ESSA opportunities](#) in the areas of pipeline development, selection and school match, evaluation and management, in-service support, or retention and rewards.

When conditions are *ideal*, states may move forward with confidence. When conditions are *workable* in most areas, states may decide to move forward and work on improving conditions at the same time. When conditions are *underdeveloped*, states would benefit from developing supportive conditions before adopting our relevant recommendations. To move forward when conditions are underdeveloped would invite low-quality implementation and could unintentionally result in poor and potentially negative outcomes.

It is important to note that this rubric is not a scientifically validated instrument. Those instruments do not lend themselves well to absolute determinations. Rather, this rubric is a heuristic, allowing states to make sensible judgments about where to start and how fast to proceed.

II. READINESS ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A. Focus, Alignment, and Positioning of State Leadership

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
A1. Commitment to improving school leadership			
State leadership prioritization: Public commitment by state leaders and key stakeholders to improving school leadership	State political leaders (<i>e.g.</i> , governor, state chief, state board, legislative leaders) rarely discuss school leadership as a way to improve schools. Stakeholders (<i>e.g.</i> , associations, prominent LEA leaders, university leaders) have major disagreements on the importance of leadership.	State political leaders communicate about school leaders as one among many issues of concern. Stakeholders have a broad array of perspectives on the importance of leadership.	School leadership is a top agenda item for state political leaders. Stakeholders' perspectives are highly aligned regarding the importance of school leadership. Comprehensive ESSA plan includes school leadership as a “big bet” —harnessing school leadership strategies in a cross-cutting manner to strengthen teaching, accelerate learning, and transform schools. Plans articulate a vision of leadership and are improved by engagement of school leaders during development, and opportunities to lift up the practices and voices of effective leaders are identified.
Investment in leadership: Visibility of school leadership in state strategic and ESSA plans and in allocation of resources	The state's strategic plan says very little about strategies to improve school leadership. No discretionary dollars are allocated to improving school leadership, and no effort is made to encourage local investments in leadership.	School leadership is in the strategic plan but is a secondary priority or one on a long list of stated priorities. Investments in leadership are regularly communicated as allowable expenditures in state grant programs (as appropriate).	School leadership is a major focus of the state's strategic and ESSA plans; the state has a clear understanding of how improved school leadership will contribute to improved educational outcomes. The state has targeted funds (including federal, state, and private funds) to specific efforts to improve school leadership. Federal resources most aligned to this work include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title I, Section 1003, which allows states to set aside 7% for school improvement, including by encouraging LEAs to use funds to ensure a great principal is prepared for and supported to lead each identified school; • Title II, Part A, which allows states to set aside 5% for purposes including teacher and school leader preparation and development plus an additional 3% specifically for leadership investments; and • Competitive grants, such as the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program or the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program.
A2. Commitment to improving pipeline development and pre-service preparation			
State leadership alignment:	Lines of authority for improving principal preparation programs	Lines of authority for improving principal preparation programs	State political leaders and relevant agencies are unified in a commitment to recruiting great talent and improving principal preparation programs. They agree

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
Unified stance of state leaders to improve pipeline development and pre-service preparation	are divided or ambiguous. Agencies with responsibility for principal preparation and licensure (e.g., SEA, professional licensing boards) have limited communication and differing priorities.	are clear. Agencies with responsibility for principal preparation and licensure have goals and strategies that do not conflict, and they communicate regularly.	on the need to rigorously assess the quality of programs, help programs improve, and take action to address underperformance. Agencies with responsibility for principal preparation and licensure have shared goals and are committed to collaboration with each other and with programs (especially when it comes to sharing data). ESSA opportunities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reforming school leader certification or licensure systems or preparation program standards and approval processes (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(i)); • Using up to 2% of Title II funds to establish or expand outcomes-based principal or other school leader preparation academies (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(xii)); • Establishing, improving, or supporting school-based school leadership residency programs (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(A)); and • Establishing, expanding, or improving alternative routes for state certification (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(iv)).

A3. Commitment to improving evaluation, management, and on-going support

State leadership alignment: Unified stance of state leaders to improve evaluation, management, and on-going support	Lines of authority for evaluating school leaders and providing support are divided or ambiguous. Principals have intermittent opportunities to learn that are disconnected from identified needs.	Lines of authority for evaluating school leaders and providing support are clear. Principals have access to training and guidance on how to become effective instructional leaders, talent managers, and culture builders.	State political leaders and relevant agencies are unified in a commitment to evaluating and providing support to school leaders. They agree on the need to provide evidence-based, job-embedded learning that is linked to the results of a high-quality evaluation and support system. ESSA opportunities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing barriers and providing operational flexibility for leaders in high-need schools (ESEA section 1003(b)(2)(C)); • Building school leader evaluation and support systems (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(ii)); • Providing leadership development, opportunities to collaborate, and other learning opportunities (ESEA section 2101(b)(4)(B)(viii)); • Recruiting and retaining great leaders (ESEA section 2101(b)(4)(B)(v) and (vii)); • Developing career advancement initiatives with multiple career paths and mentoring (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(v)); and • Leveraging principal supervisors to help principals with their instructional leadership and operations duties (ESEA section 2101(c)(4)(B)(vii)).
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
A4. Commitment to and capacity for evidence-based, continuous improvement¹			
Collaboration: Perceptions of the SEA as a collaborative partner	LEAs and preparation programs have little interaction with the SEA, viewing the agency as primarily concerned about compliance with statutes and regulations.	LEAs and preparation programs have mixed interaction with the SEA: Some interactions are overly driven by compliance concerns, while other interactions are focused on genuine improvement and making rules work for them.	LEAs, preparation programs, and sitting school leaders view the SEA as a trusted partner committed to continuous improvement; compliance still matters, but the SEA works to make it as seamless as possible. <i>LEAs, preparation programs, and sitting school leaders are active partners in the development of the state’s comprehensive plan and ongoing adjustments.</i>
Communication: SEA systems for communication with partners	Information coming from the SEA to LEAs and preparation programs is either nonexistent or perceived as excessive and disjointed, often sending mixed messages.	Information coming from the SEA to LEAs and preparation programs is perceived as organized, predictable, and reasonably clear.	The SEA convenes local partners in ways that foster two-way communication. <i>Stakeholders—including highly effective school leaders and those leading fast-improving schools—are asked to meaningfully weigh-in on state plans, injecting much-needed energy and ideas.</i>
Innovation: Perceptions of the SEA as a source of ideas	LEAs and preparation programs do not look to the SEA for new ideas to improve schools and universities.	The SEA serves as an effective information clearinghouse, making innovations in the field visible to LEAs and preparation programs.	The SEA shares data; engages LEAs, preparation programs, and sitting school leaders in conversations about improvement; and offers new learning opportunities, including creative strategies for implementing federal and state policy. <i>Data (such as information on principal turnover, principal vacancies, principal effectiveness, ratio of principal managers to principals, and principal compensation) is collected and used to make strategic plan adjustments.</i>
Decision making: Use of evidence in SEA decisions	The SEA offers little explanation or unclear justification for policy changes.	The SEA reports on data used in the design of new policies and articulates the reasons for policy changes.	The SEA transparently shares data, data analysis, and operating theories that underlie policy design and implementation decisions. <i>The SEA applies ESSA’s new evidence-based definition² in reviewing LEA plans to allow for local innovation while simultaneously encouraging LEAs to use funds on activities that meet the evidence bar (e.g., school leadership preparation or support programs with a strong record of success) even where not required by law. The SEA</i>

¹ Determined through anonymous surveys of program leaders.

² For the first time, federal law now defines four levels of evidence that constitute an “evidence-based” strategy: “strong evidence” from one experimental study, “moderate evidence” from one quasi-experimental study, “promising evidence” from one correlational study, and evidence that “demonstrates a rationale” from high-quality research findings or evaluation (ESEA section 8101(21)(A)).

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
			expects LEA applications for Title I and Title II funds to reference a strong research base and contain a plan to ensure comprehensive and targeted support and improvement schools are led by a well-prepared, well-supported principal.
Expertise: Knowledge and skills to manage change process for leadership work	LEAs and preparation programs view SEA leadership as having limited understanding of core leadership issues and as being unresponsive or unhelpful in managing the process of large-scale change.	SEA leadership communicates a solid understanding of the connections between leadership and student outcomes, as well as the adaptive challenges associated with large-scale change.	SEA leadership communicates a strong understanding of—and solutions for—the adaptive challenges associated with large-scale change. SEA leadership is deeply involved in national and statewide conversations about the practice and impact of school leaders. The SEA designs applications for Title I and Title II subgrants that include questions on school leadership to encourage LEAs to reflect on how they will mindfully address identified leadership needs.

B. Technical Capabilities of the State Education Agency

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
B1. Data and data system requirements			
<p>Program data system: System that collects program data (e.g., number of applicants, clinical hours required, 100-word description) from preparation programs</p>	Data are available in isolated locations without an overarching system for integrating the different sources or linking the data points.	A program data system is in place, but it may not include all data points needed for the SEA's annual report; some data may be missing, inaccurate, or lack comparability. Systems support might be needed to design new tools or interfaces to collect needed information from multiple sources or agencies. Substantial budgeting would be required for staff time to request missing data, monitor data completion, and build necessary data systems. Time is allocated to ensure data integrity.	A program data system is in place and includes all fields and variables needed for the SEA's annual report. The system enables consistent reporting and data aggregation. Data are complete and accurate. Programs use common definitions of indicators, making the data comparable across programs. The system is not overly burdensome for programs, LEAs, or school partners.
<p>Placement data systems: Systems that track individual educators and their annual placement role (e.g., teacher, principal, assistant principal, other school leader, district leader)</p>	Data are available in isolated locations without an overarching system for integrating the different sources or linking the data points.	Placement data systems exist and are coordinated but have lots of inaccuracies and missing data. Budgeting would be required for staff time to request missing data and monitor data. Time is allocated to clean data.	Placement data systems are complete and accurate.
<p>Unique identifiers for program participants: Identifiers that link data from preparation programs, licensure status, placement data systems, and effectiveness ratings from educator evaluation system</p>	It is not possible to link individuals across data systems (e.g., for programs, licensure, placements, school outcomes).	Unique identifiers do not exist, but it is possible to link two or more data systems and the SEA has the capacity to do so. Budgeting would be required for junior analyst time to link data systems.	Unique state-level identifiers are in place to link individuals to all of the data required by the evaluation system.
<p>Comparable survey data: Common survey administered to program graduates that gathers their perceptions of program process indicators</p>	Graduates of most programs are not surveyed, or the response rates are too low to make results meaningful.	Surveys of program graduates exist and response rates are reasonable, but the surveys differ, preventing comparison of data across programs.	A common survey is administered to all graduates in the state with reasonable response rates, enabling comparison of data across programs.

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
<p>Measures of teacher and leader effectiveness: Ratings of individual teachers and principals on the state performance evaluation system</p>	Measures do not exist or do not have any variability.	Measures exist and have some variability but lack validity and reliability. The SEA does not share results publicly and does not provide caveats that caution users on interpretation.	Measures exist, have variability, and have been found to be both reliable and valid. The SEA has the capacity to use measures in contextually appropriate ways. The SEA ensures that any public release of data meets federal and state privacy guidelines.
<p>Measures of student learning gains: Student achievement scores across grade levels in core subject areas</p>	Measures are not based on individual student growth from year to year.	Consistent and methodologically sound measures of individual student growth, including proper controls for student- and school-level variables, exist, but they are not comprehensive across grade levels and subject areas. Measures exist, but n-sizes are small (less than 10 individuals) for most programs.	Consistent and methodologically sound measures of individual student growth, including proper controls for student- and school-level variables, exist. These measures allow for assessment of school leaders' influence on student learning after three years at a school site. Adequate consideration is given to bias against high-needs schools. Measures are incorporated into or linked with ESSA accountability system indicators to help ensure alignment in the incentive structure for the many competing demands on a principal's time.
B2. Data compilation and analysis capability			
<p>Monitoring data reporting completion and accuracy: Requires staffing to ensure the submission and accuracy of data from programs and other data sources</p>	No staff or resources exist.	Staff assignments or resources could be prioritized for data monitoring.	Staff or resources are already assigned to data monitoring.
<p>Creating and publishing annual reports: Requires technical skill for website or report design and senior analytical skill to make methodological decisions</p>	No staff or resources exist.	Staff assignments or resources could be prioritized for data reporting.	Staff or resources are already assigned to data reporting.
<p>Creating and implementing methodology for summative rating: Requires specialized assessment and statistical skill</p>	No staff or resources exist.	Staff assignments or resources could be prioritized for data analysis or methodology.	Staff or resources are already assigned to data analysis or methodology.

	Underdeveloped	Workable	Ideal
B3. Review process capabilities			
Staffing: Requires specialized leadership experience and skills	There is no SEA staff committed to leadership preparation, or those responsible have multiple other roles.	There are staff members at the SEA focused on school leadership, including preparation, but they have limited backgrounds in school leadership or adult leadership.	There are staff members at the SEA focused on school leadership, including preparation, and they are deeply credible with leaders and preparation providers in the state.
Management and training of reviewers: Requires specialized review process capabilities	No staff or resources exist.	The state has a reasonably adequate pool of high-quality, credible reviewers but does not have a track record of systematically vetting them for leadership expertise or training them for inter-rater reliability. The state does not have a strong track record of outsourcing functions and maintaining quality.	The state has a robust pool of high-quality, credible reviewers who have been (or could be) trained for inter-rater reliability and normed to provide useful feedback to programs. or The state has a strong track record of outsourcing functions and maintaining quality. This record allows for bringing in an established process (<i>e.g.</i> , review by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council).
Implementation of reviews: Requires financial and human resources	No staff or resources exist.	A review process exists, but it is not sufficient for high-quality, in-depth review of all programs flagged.	Sufficient resources exist to carry out in-depth reviews for all programs flagged as needing it, and for conducting periodic reviews of all programs.

III. PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The readiness assessment rubric can be used in more than one way. A state working to build political support for their new ESSA plan (including an evidence-based approach to assessing the quality of principal preparation programs or revising mechanisms for supporting school leaders) may want a formal process to engage stakeholders in completing the rubric and agreeing on next steps for the work. Meanwhile, a state already committed to an evidence-based approach and with an initial plan already drafted may want the SEA to simply undertake an internal diagnosis of conditions in order to surface critical gaps and needed resources.

While this tool is primarily focused on school leader preparation, states might consider strategies for the full leadership continuum—from teacher leaders to principal supervisors—and at each step of an educator’s career:



For a more extensive process, we recommend these general steps:

1. **Create a vision for the work.** In order to demonstrate executive-level commitment to an open and honest process of assessing the state’s readiness for implementing a better system of evaluating principal preparation programs, it can be helpful to write a purpose statement outlining why the work is important and how it connects to the state’s broader vision of leadership. The state’s strategic plan for education is an important resource for this step.
2. **Create a project plan.** In order to ensure that the right people will be engaged and will have access to authentic information, it can be helpful to craft a project plan that includes roles and responsibilities and to assemble available data to conduct the readiness assessment.
3. **Convene stakeholders.** In order to build trust in and commitment to the process, it can be helpful to convene leaders from universities, preparation programs, administrator associations, districts, and schools, including highly effective school leaders and those leading fast-improving schools. The purpose of such a convening is to share the goals and work plan, ask for authentic feedback, and ask for a commitment to participating in the process.
4. **Conduct the assessment.** This is the heart of the work: gathering data, making sense of it, surfacing and discussing important,

substantive issues, and agreeing on rubric ratings.

5. **Set action steps.** With the assessment complete, state leaders and stakeholders need to make decisions about their readiness and identify areas of focus that are consistent with the conclusions from the readiness assessment. This is also an opportunity to establish a new work plan for the implementation phase, including strategies for addressing any areas of weakness that need to be remedied in the short term.

For a more targeted approach within an SEA, the critical steps are numbers 4 and 5 above, as well as some amount of stakeholder engagement (step 3). Note, however, that some categories of the rubric require information from sources outside of the SEA (e.g., perceptions held by LEA leaders and program leaders), so some level of external engagement is helpful regardless of the scope of the analysis.

As implementation of ESSA moves to the state, local, and school levels, it is more important than ever that we ensure every school is led by an outstanding principal—a focus that can lead to incredible results for kids. For effective planning and implementation, we encourage states to use this opportunity to develop evidence-based, innovative strategies for preparing and supporting school leaders in schools where they are needed the most—leaders who can attract and retain great teaching talent, design and adopt school improvement strategies that will truly make a difference for students, and raise the rigor of learning across an entire building.