

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of State Support Progress Check Quarterly Protocol.

New Leaders is a nonprofit organization that develops dedicated, skilled leaders at every level of our education system—from teacher leaders to principals and superintendents—equipping them to elevate instruction and achievement across classrooms, schools, and districts. Since 2000, we have trained 3,200 great school leaders who reach 500,000 students annually. We have active partnerships in over 30 cities and with over 150 charter schools. Our leaders—64 percent of whom are people of color—overwhelmingly work with America’s highest-need students: 78 percent of students served come from low-income families and 87 percent are children of color. And an independent study by the RAND Corporation found that students who attend New Leader schools outperform their peers by statistically significant margins specifically because of the strong leadership of their New Leader principal.

New Leaders knows great leadership: we are the principal preparation program with the strongest evidence of positive impact on student achievement.^[i]

More than a decade of research shows—and our experience confirms—that well-prepared, well-supported principals have a huge influence on teacher practice and student success. School leaders account for 25 percent of a school’s impact on student learning,^[ii] and an above-average principal can improve student achievement by 20 percentage points.^[iii] Moreover, like workers in any other profession, the best teachers want to work for the best bosses. Outstanding school leaders attract and retain great educators: fully 97 percent of teachers list principal quality as critical to their retention and career decisions—*more than any other factor.*^[iv] And school leaders transform the lowest-performing schools, where the positive effects of strong leadership on student achievement are most pronounced.^[v] In fact, a landmark study found “virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.”^[vi]

In every type of school, great leaders ensure children and their families have access to great schools.

Yet the importance of school leadership has historically been overlooked and leadership is consistently underfunded. For example, during each of the past several years more than two-thirds of districts have invested zero federal professional development funds on school leaders.^[vii] Fortunately, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), our new bipartisan federal education law, has taken significant steps to elevate the importance of leadership^[viii]—and states have responded with universal agreement.

Every single state has included in its ESSA plan a commitment to investing federal dollars on school leadership.^[ix]

As states continue their work to successfully transition to ESSA and implement their plans to comply with the federal law and advance student success, the Department has an opportunity to build on these locally-driven efforts to advance a critical, shared goal and national imperative:

Let’s get a well-prepared, well-supported principal in every school.

To enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected during quarterly check-ins between the Office of State Support (OSS) and state directors, we encourage the Department to inquire about the following aspects of states’ Title I and Title II plans* specific to school leadership**:

- ESEA section 2101(d)(2)(A) and (D): Recognizing that principals represent 25 percent of a school’s influence on student achievement, how has the SEA used Title II, Part A funds to enhance the ability of school leaders across the state to improve student achievement?

- ESEA section 2101(d)(2)(E): Recognizing the critical role school leaders play in attracting, developing, and retaining great teachers, how has the SEA used Title II, Part A funds to invest in school leadership in support of its goals to increase equitable access to effective teachers (consistent with ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(B))?
- ESEA section 2101(d)(2)(M): What actions have you taken to improve preparation programs and strengthen support for principals and other school leaders? What steps have you taken to ensure these strategies meet the highest level of available evidence, including promising evidence regarding innovative new strategies, on what works in school leader development and support?
- ESEA section 2101(d)(2)(B): Is your school leader certification and licensure system training principals who are truly prepared to lead? How do you know? If applicable, what changes or upgrades have you made to your state’s system of certification and licensing of principals or other school leaders? How will these adjustments enable principals and other school leaders to more effectively strengthen teaching, learning, and culture in schools across your state?
- ESEA section 2101(d)(2)(K): What data on principals and other school leaders do you collect and review, including from LEAs and with regard to the effect those leaders yield on teacher practice and/or student outcomes, to continually update and improve the activities supported under Title II, Part A? With whom and on what timeline do you consult to inform ongoing improvements to the school leadership strategies that support your state’s Title II, Part A plan?
- ESEA section 2101(c)(3): *If the state has opted to use the 3% set-aside for leadership*: What strategies have you put in place using the set-aside to strengthen school leadership in your state? How are you measuring the success of these strategies?
- ESEA section 1111(d)(1)(B)(ii) and section 1111(d)(2)(B)(ii): How are you supporting LEAs to implement evidence-based strategies to improve schools identified for improvement? How has the State supported LEAs in identifying evidence-based strategies to ensure they meet the definition in ESEA section 8101(21)? How have LEAs incorporated effective school leadership in their school improvement strategies?

*Note: To support the Department’s efforts to minimize burden, we have focused on the statutory requirements highlighted in the ESSA state plan template along with select research-based best practices on effective school leadership.

**Note: We know that principals influence everything that happens in schools—setting high expectations for students, helping teachers grow and improve their practice, engaging families, managing change, *everything*. We also know that the best principals do not conduct their critical work alone. Great principals build and are supported by teacher leaders and leadership teams and, together, these educators achieve stronger results for teachers and students. Principals are even more effective when supported by a supervisor who understands their needs and creates supportive conditions. Advancing leadership in the 21st century requires that we rethink both the leadership continuum and the network of supports necessary for principals and other school leaders to be successful. When we refer to “school leadership,” we expect the Department will inquire about states’ strategies to strengthen the caliber of principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders, including principal supervisors and other leaders who meet the statutory definition in ESEA section 8101(44).

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Office of State Support Progress Check Quarterly Protocol. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact policyteam@newleaders.org.

[i] Herman, R., Gates, S. M., Chavez-Herrerias, E. R., and Harris, M. (updated 2017). *School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*. The RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1550-2.html.

[ii] Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning from Leadership Project*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.aspx>.

[iii] Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

[iv] Scholastic Inc. (2012). *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on the Teaching Profession*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/pdfs/Gates2012_full.pdf.

[v] Seashore Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Washington, DC: Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.aspx>.

[vi] Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004).

[vii] U.S. Department of Education (2015). *Findings from the 2014-15 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. U.S. Department of Education (2014). *Findings from the 2013-14 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. U.S. Department of Education (2013). *Findings from the 2012-13 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. All retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/resources.html>.

[viii] New Leaders. (2016). *Prioritizing Leadership: Opportunities in ESSA for Chief State School Officers*. Retrieved from http://newleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PrioritizingLeadership_OpportunitiesESSAChiefStateSchoolOfficers.pdf?vsmid=2646&vcid=3.

[ix] New Leaders. (2017). Analysis of state ESSA plans. Unpublished data.