



e-Lead: Schooling for Principals

by

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The landmark No Child Left Behind Act has sharpened our nation's understanding of the professional development needs of principals and has emphatically confirmed school districts' responsibility for recruiting and developing school leaders. As one report asserts, "If our nation's efforts to implement the No Child Left Behind Act have taught us anything, it is that the principal's role in determining school quality and student achievement is decisive and that most incumbent and newly minted administrators are poorly prepared to fill that role" (Hale & Moorman, 2003, p. 9). In response, a number of foundation-, state-, university-, and district-sponsored efforts are revamping the ways principals are developed and supported and are exploring the policy conditions necessary to support strong leadership in schools.

Efforts such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) have standardized the core knowledge and skills leaders need to effect meaningful change at the school building level. Related efforts—such as those at the Educational Testing Service and WestEd—have linked these standards more specifically to practice. In addition, researchers are codifying the necessary leadership skills and capacities of school principals.

Despite this increased attention to leadership, we know that many districts are struggling to devise effective strategies in response to their unique school leadership challenges. However, this landscape has lacked a central repository of guidance and information. To address this glaring need and to help districts, states, and other providers devise effective school leadership development strategies, the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), in partnership with the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), created e-Lead (<http://www.e-lead.org>). e-Lead is a free website that makes available to states and districts information about how to provide better professional development for principals.

The Right Information at the Right Time

e-Lead identifies the research-based principles that must guide formal training and development efforts. A search-

able database contains comprehensive information about principal programs in varied settings across the country. A library provides annotated information about a number of leadership development content and design topics and provides links to the latest information and research.

The cornerstone of the e-Lead website is its searchable database of principal development programs. The threshold requirement for all programs included in the e-Lead database is that they are standards based (i.e., their content is driven by authoritative standards for what school leaders should know and be able to do). Seventy percent of programs in the database are anchored by the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders, and 30% are anchored by state and other standards based on ISLLC.

e-Lead arrays easy-to-read information about each program's goals, the definition of leadership from which it operates, and the theory of change anchoring the effort. It provides curricular information on how the program is designed to develop the requisite leadership skills of principals, and it describes a program's origin and development, current and enduring challenges, and identifiable successes. e-Lead reports on each program's extent of implementation and the resources necessary to deliver the program. It offers information on the key program variables evaluated, the cycle for conducting evaluations, the tools and instruments used to conduct evaluations, the assessment of participant learning, and the continuous program improvement process. And equally important, e-Lead provides a personal touch—the name, phone number, and e-mail address of the contact person for the program.

Guiding Principles

According to both professional wisdom and current research (a select bibliography anchoring each guiding principle can be found at e-Lead, 2004a), the professional development of school leaders has the strongest impact when it is:

- focused on leadership for student learning—guiding and

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monitoring instruction;

- driven by a clear definition of leadership that is understood and accepted by stakeholders across the district;
- conducted within the context of a coherent professional development plan aligned with the district's goals and objectives for long-term improvement;
- anchored by the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders, which defines the roles and competencies of effective school leadership;
- designed and implemented according to proven professional development practices; and
- evaluated by processes that seek to measure meaningful results, including individual leadership capacities and developmental needs, as well as the impact on student learning.

Although these guiding principles are important, they alone are not sufficient to inform school leadership development planning. e-Lead's goal is to broaden the knowledge base of professional development providers, connect providers to an expanded network of professional colleagues with whom they can discuss programming issues, and generate new ideas. As the current literature on peer assistance describes, "Peer assistance helps build new knowledge. . . . Working together to combine the knowledge they do have, people can more quickly and efficiently create answers that do not yet exist. . . . Peer assistance is a good choice when a well-defined need, problem, or issue lends itself to being solved through the thoughtful application of field-based knowledge and experience" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003).

Emerging Trends

Programs in the e-Lead database operate within a variety of local contexts. Fourteen programs are directed at high-poverty populations, and 14 are directed at low-performing schools. Nine programs report that they address challenges specific to rural school leadership, and five report a similar focus for urban school leadership. As described, these programs are designed to address a variety of pressing district challenges, and about 40% say that their curriculum is designed around the challenges of instructional leadership. Lastly, the programs use a variety of instructional strategies to deliver program content, including mentors, networks, leadership assessment and feedback, case studies, simulations, coaches, action research, and cohorts.

Although it is too early to codify hard and fast "lessons learned," e-Lead's program collection efforts to date reveal important trends: (a) school leadership development programs are designed and delivered to address and resolve *local* challenges, (b) professional development funding is an enduring challenge, and (c) documenting meaningful results is a complex task.

Addressing Local Challenges. Programs in the database reflect a variety of organizational arrangements, local contexts, and challenges addressed—and affirm that context matters. (For a complete listing of programs, see e-Lead,

2004b.) Some programs offer glimpses into promising and stronger university–district partnerships as well as multi-district collaborations and unique "grow your own" programs. In many cases, curricula are designed to adapt to local leadership needs.

Funding. The enduring program challenge cited most often by providers is funding. In many cases, current efforts are supported by grants that will expire. Others cite dwindling district resources and the competition for funding at the local level. Specifically, some providers point to a lack of resources to support the release time necessary for principals to participate in development work.

Link to e-Lead on the Web
at
<http://www.temple.edu/LSS>

Documenting Results. Borrowing from Guskey's (2002) model for evaluating professional development, programs in the database report their results in "critical levels of information." Almost all

programs report participant satisfaction and the use of new knowledge and skills as evidence of their effectiveness. Of the total number of programs, 13 have submitted documentation to support their claims. Most programs' evaluative processes and tools focus on assessing the learning of program participants; only seven programs report any intended evaluative connections to student achievement data. The need to connect this work to more meaningful results—such as improved teacher practice and increased student achievement—is real.

Conclusions

e-Lead is a "just-in-time" resource that evens the playing field of knowledge about quality principal development. It provides multiple models and points of view within an overarching, research-based framework. Equally important, it puts people in touch with each other by providing contact information for the programs in the database, and the effort overall is guided by an expert advisory board representing the natural constituencies of the site. In sum, we believe e-Lead will serve as an important forum for learning and sharing.

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