Strengthening School Leadership

Effective and Empowering Professional Learning Opportunities for Principals

Marjorie E. Wechsler

December 7, 2023
What is your role?
Share in the chat.
Principals matter.

“It is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership.”

The Principal is a School’s Heartbeat
What did you see Principal Solomon do that may make a difference for the students in her school?
Research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>What are the features of high-quality learning opportunities?</td>
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<td>To what extent do principals have access to high-quality learning?</td>
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<td>What is the role of policy in shaping principal learning?</td>
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What are the features of high-quality learning opportunities?
What do you think are the features of high-quality professional learning? What helped you learn professionally?
Content

- Instruction
- School improvement
- School conditions
- Staff development
- Meeting students’ needs
Now I have an understanding of what it means to create and try to live by a vision, so that it guides any decisions that I make. That’s a whole new understanding of what it means to be an instructional leader.

Source: Perez et al., 2011, p. 239.
Strategies

- Applied learning
- Internships
- Coaching and mentoring
- Cohorts and networks
For me, it was the structure of the program, the projects, the way we would read something and reflect on it and have a concentrated amount of time to apply those concepts ... The learning-by-doing had the biggest impact on me.

What is the relationship between principal learning and school outcomes?
Predicted Probability of Teacher Retention

Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, & Levin, 2022
Projected Gains in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math

Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, & Levin, 2022
Student gains in math (points), by principal experience

Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, & Levin, 2022
Student gains in math (points), by race/ethnicity

Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, & Levin, 2022
To what extent do principals have access to high-quality learning?
Access to important content in preparation has improved, nationally

Over two-thirds of principals had access to all important content areas associated with

- Instructional leadership
- Leading and managing school improvement
- Shaping teaching and learning conditions
- Developing people
- Meeting the needs of learners

Source: National Principal Survey
Access to key content in preparation is increasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Certified over 10 Years Ago</th>
<th>Certified in the Past 10 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selecting effective curriculum strategies and materials</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using student and school data to inform continuous school improvement</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a school environment that uses discipline for restorative purposes</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting and retaining teachers and other staff</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the needs of English Learners</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Principal Survey
But fewer principals report access to high-leverage learning opportunities

- Experienced internships with administrative responsibilities and coaching (preparation) - 46%
- Experienced peer observation 3 or more times in the previous 3 years (professional development) - 33%
- Participated in a principal network 3 or more times in the previous 3 years (professional development) - 54%

Source: National Principal Survey
I learned the importance of following up with a discussion about the walk-through, especially with new teachers or teachers with whom you are concerned. I learned that I should concentrate on the strengths of the teacher and be careful of how you address the areas in which the teacher might need further professional development. I learned that in order for the teacher to really receive and act on feedback given, the way in which you give that feedback is so very important.... I learned that being specific as to what was observed is critical and [that] in delivering the message it is a good idea to do it in person.... I learned that it is important to use the proper observation format.”

Before, I felt like I was practicing in isolation, because you are at your own school, and you have all these issues that arise, and issues that you do not really talk to your teachers about. So it was nice to have a sounding board, being able to talk and share experiences with people who were facing similar issues.

Access to professional development differs across states

- Equitably serve all children: 45% (California), 68% (North Carolina)
- Meet the needs of English learners: 26% (California), 67% (North Carolina)
- Create a school environment that develops personally and socially responsible young people: 40% (California), 57% (North Carolina)
- Lead schools that support students from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds: 39% (California), 62% (North Carolina)

Source: California Principal Survey and North Carolina Principal Survey
Access also differs by school poverty level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>High-Poverty Schools</th>
<th>Low-Poverty Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading a schoolwide change process to improve student achievement</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating collegial and collaborative work environments</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a school environment that uses discipline for restorative purposes</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redesigning the school’s organization and structure to support deeper learning</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing professional learning opportunities for teachers and other staff</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Principal Survey
What is the role of policy in shaping principal learning?
Policies that support high-quality principal learning programs can make a difference.
States generally do not legislate high-leverage policies

Program approval criteria
- Proactive candidate recruitment & selection*
- Clinically-rich internships*
- Strong IHE-district partnerships*
- Regular state oversight with feedback*
- Use of school leadership standards

Principal licensure criteria
- Experience and education requirements*
- Assessment including portfolio review
- License renewal with continuing education

* = high leverage according to UCEA-developed criteria.

Yet...
- Only two states met criteria for all 5 high-leverage policies
- 11 states did not meet any
- State policies are more likely to focus on principal licensure than higher-leverage program approval

Source: Anderson & Reynolds (2015)
Revised program approval and licensure policies
Revised state leadership and program standards
Created new expectations for principal preparation and induction
Policy changes appear to influence principals’ access to learning about key topics...

(California: before & after reforms)

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<tr>
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<th>Recent Completers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading instruction</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing school</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping learning</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing people</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the needs of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse learners</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
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Source: California Principal Survey
... and the extent to which principals feel well-prepared

(California: before & after reforms)

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<td>37%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the needs of diverse learners</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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Source: California Principal Survey
Stronger program approval requirements in Illinois produced positive changes in preparation programs

New requirements:
- Program-district partnerships
- Rigorous selection
- Alignment with standards
- Yearlong internship
- Competency-based assessments

Led to positive changes:
- Stronger partnerships
- Shift from quantity to quality in recruitment and enrollment
- Revamped curriculum
- Greater attention to diversity
- More meaningful internships
- Focus on continuous improvement
University of Illinois
Urban Education Leadership Program

Pre-Residency
- Selective admissions
- Coursework
- Residency matching

Residency
- Coaching from UIC staff
- Mentoring from host principals
- Regular leadership development plan conferences
- Monthly cohort meetings
- Coursework

Post Residency
- Coursework
- Capstone project
- Coaching
Principal Pipeline Project

The Principal Pipeline

- Leader Standards
- High-quality Pre-service Prep
- Selective Hiring and Placement
- Principal Supervisors
- Evaluation and Ongoing Support
- Leader Tracking Systems
- Benefits for Student Achievement

Source: The Wallace Foundation
Long Beach Unified School District
Equity Leadership & Talent Development Pipeline Programs

▷ Programs for all leadership levels
▷ Districtwide expectations for teaching and leadership
▷ High-quality programming
Implications for policy

- Develop and better use state licensing and program approval standards
- Invest professional learning infrastructure (e.g. principal academies)
- Encourage greater attention to equity
- Build local pipelines
Developing Effective Principals
What Kind of Learning Matters?

Linda Darling-Hammond, Marjorie E. Wechsler, Stephanie Levin, Melanie Leung-Gagné, and Steve Tozer

Learning Policy Institute
Wallace