

Elevating School Leadership in State Policy

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School and district leaders directly influence student learning. The [impact](#) may be even greater than previously thought, as principals and school district leaders (collectively referred to as “school leaders” throughout the report) continue to assume the roles of instructional and change leaders. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders have shifted their [roles and responsibilities](#) to meet the needs of students in virtual environments, in addition to new functions they have in student health and wellness, school safety, school performance, and operational and staff oversight. They also impact school culture and climate, including [influencing](#) teachers’ school choice and career decisions.

To best train and support school leaders in their evolving roles, they require high-quality preparation and in-service pipelines that both address the changing demands on their positions and acknowledge the cascading effects that well-prepared leaders have on both student outcomes and in school culture and retention.

Including school leaders in the policymaking process will help guide state leaders on the most effective approaches for their states and needs. To that end, this Policy Brief explores school leader representation on state and local boards of education and on statewide task forces and

Spotlight on Equity

The leadership development pipeline, the inclusion of school leaders in policymaking decisions and challenges unique to education leadership all play a role in learning and school climate issues. States are also examining ways to increase educator and school leader diversity to meet the needs of a diversified student population. A [2019 report](#) found a gap of 25 percentage points between leader diversity and the students they serve in schools. The study also found that diversity in school leadership builds a stronger school climate, often with increased student engagement and achievement. Throughout this Policy Brief are callouts that highlight state policies addressing equity in the school leadership pipeline.

commissions. The brief also presents an overview of the school leadership pipeline and examples of recent legislative action that supports development along the continuum.

Principal Turnover and Its Impact on Schools

In a [2020 survey](#), 42% of principals said they were considering leaving their position. This rate is higher for principals in high-poverty schools and rural communities. A [2021 survey](#) of school leaders found that 35% of principals strongly agreed with being generally satisfied in their role, a drop from 63% in the 2019 survey. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the role and function of the principal, with principals indicating they are working harder and longer hours to support their schools and staff. The survey found that 62% of principals have a harder time in their jobs than before; and 26% said the pandemic greatly impacted their consideration to leave their position as a principal. [Additional issues](#) contributing to principal turnover include working conditions, compensation, accountability systems, lack of authority and decision making, and inadequate professional development.

Principal turnover greatly impacts school culture, teacher satisfaction and turnover, and student wellness and performance. Recent studies found an estimated 18% principal turnover rate nationally, with 10% leaving their job altogether.

Principal turnover [negatively affects student achievement](#) in the first year following a principal's departure. These departures also impact the [teacher turnover rates](#), which remain higher than average during the first three years of a new principal's tenure.

School and District Leader Pipeline

[Research](#) shows that supporting school leaders through high-quality preparation and in-service pipelines is critical to supporting schools and educational programs. The research also shows that unprepared school leaders are less likely to improve student outcomes and are more likely to leave their schools than their peers.

A [review](#) of legislation from 2017 through 2020 found two consistent trends that support the school leader pipeline:

- State policymakers have studied and changed preservice training and induction programs to prepare leaders for the job.
- States have increasingly included principals in required in-service professional development training to support student needs and success.

Despite an interest in professional development, many principals [cite](#) time-capacity issues and insufficient financial support as obstacles to participating in learning opportunities. A [study](#) found that professional growth made up an estimated 5% of a principal's functional time. The principals surveyed generally put off their professional development to the end of the day or the end of the week to make time for other responsibilities.

Recent Action Supporting the Pipeline

In [2021](#), at least nine states enacted 19 bills regarding school and district leaders, with measures supporting recruitment and licensure, evaluation and tenure, and professional development.

Recruitment and Licensure



[S.B. 654](#) continues the principal-recruitment salary supplement for eligible schools in the school improvement process; provided to low-performing schools located in the bottom 5% of all schools in the prior school year. Salary supplements may not be used to supplant funds already provided for principal compensation.



[H.B. 533/S.B. 479](#) amends provisions for principal and teacher license reciprocity. The state board of education must issue a principal or teaching license equivalent to the individual's license in the previous state if that state has a reciprocal agreement with the state board. The state board must submit a report on the effectiveness of principals and teachers who obtained a license through the out-of-state pathway.

Spotlight on Equity: Teacher Diversity Working Group

Colorado [H.B. 21-1010](#) directs the department of higher education and the department of education to convene a working group on diversity in the educator workforce that holds the potential for a more diverse school leader pipeline. The working group will investigate barriers to the preparation, retention and recruitment of a diverse educator workforce and will consider strategies to increase diversity. The bill includes specific issues for the working group to consider and requires a written report of the group's findings and recommendations. The membership must include a public school principal selected by the departments of education and higher education.

Evaluation and Tenure



[L.D. 643/H.P. 474](#) establishes a working group to improve the training of district school boards in their hiring, evaluating and overseeing superintendents. The working group must develop a best practices module for diverse and inclusive executive hiring practices, and create a standardized performance evaluation system that solicits feedback from multiple sources and various points of view.



[S. 5576/A. 6750](#) provides teachers and principals appointed during the 2017-18, 2018-19 or 2019-20 school years with eligibility for tenure if they received an effective or highly effective composite score on the annual professional performance reviews in one of the last four years. Individuals are not eligible for tenure if they received an ineffective rating in the final year of their probationary period or the most recent year that a rating was given.

Professional Development



[H.B. 1159](#) defines education leaders as assistant principals, principals and school district leaders. The state’s professional development program for school leaders must consist of a network of school districts, state-approved educational leadership programs, regional consortia, charter management organizations, and state and national professional leadership organizations. The network maintains a clearinghouse and disseminates data-supported information related to enhanced student achievement and learning, civic education, coaching and mentoring, mental health awareness, technology in education, distance learning, and school safety. The professional development program components are offered through universities or educational leadership academies, and educational leadership coaching and mentoring.



[S.B. 211](#) requires that, beginning in the 2021-22 school year, all public and nonpublic school teachers, principals and other administrative staff will be required to participate in at least one hour of professional development each year on adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed education.

Spotlight on Equity: Professional Development

Washington [S.B. 5044](#) requires professional learning on equity, cultural competency and the dismantling of institutional racism. It also requires the state school directors’ association to develop standards for school directors regarding cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion, along with associated training. The professional educator standards board is directed to develop or update cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion standards, including an associated rubric for evaluating training and professional development materials. It further directs the standards board to include these standards in requirements for certification. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, school districts must use at least one professional learning day to address these topics.

School Leader Representation

The educator workforce is an important voice that is [often left out](#) of education policymaking because of a variety of factors, including inaccessible decision-making processes. This ultimately impacts the school leader pipeline, as educators engaged in leadership and policy often grow into effective school and district leaders. One way to support schools and their workforce is to elevate their voices in policymaking, including school and district leader representation on state boards and commissions.

School and district leaders serve an important function to [enhance teaching and learning](#), including school climates, operations and management, and safe learning environments. Elevating these voices helps ensure that schools and their leaders get what they need to support students and that their concerns are acknowledged and potentially addressed. Representation in policymaking may address issues like school culture and working conditions that cause higher principal turnover rates. These roles and perspectives make them an important voice in the governance of schools at the state and local levels. A review of state governing policies and task forces and commissions shows that states are including school and district leader representatives. These leaders' unique perspectives are valuable to state decision-making and policy considerations.

Representation on State and Local Boards of Education

In a [scan](#) of all 50 states and territories, three included school leadership representation on the state board of education.

Arizona [requires](#) the state board of education to include a person who is an owner or administrator of a charter school and a superintendent of a high school district. In **Mississippi**, the [state board of education](#) is composed of nine members. One member must be an active, full-time school administrator. **Nevada** [requires](#) the state board of education to include a school superintendent as a nonvoting member.

While [no states require](#) a school or district leader be a member of the school district governing body, some states do include local governance structures requiring school or district leader participation within a school district. For example, **Illinois** requires a [local school council](#) for each school in a district. Each council must consist of 12 members, including the school principal.

Spotlight on Equity: Local Advisory Committee

Oregon [S.B. 732](#) created the educational equity advisory committee at the local level. The committee’s duties include advising the school district board about the educational equity impacts of policy decisions; advising the school district superintendent about the educational equity impacts of policy decisions; and informing the school district board and school district superintendent when a situation arises that negatively impacts underrepresented students, and advising the board and superintendent on how best to handle that situation.

Recently Established Task Forces and Commissions

In 2021, several states established task forces and commissions that require school leadership representation.



Arizona [S.B. 1028](#) establishes the alternative assessment study committee to discuss and evaluate 1) how the state can improve outreach and professional development to ensure support for parents and educators of special education students who are ineligible for the alternative assessment; 2) accommodations provided to special education students while taking assessments; 3) guidance on properly identifying students for the alternative assessment; 4) professional development opportunities for special education educators and school administrators; and 5) a parent guidebook on assessments for students with special needs.



Florida [H.B. 7033](#) creates the Task Force on Closing the Achievement Gap for Boys to examine evidence-based strategies and to make recommendations. Specifically, the task force must recommend strategies regarding, among other things, professional development for instructional personnel and school administrators. The task force must include a principal of a public elementary school and a superintendent of a school district who has implemented programming and strategies to close the achievement gap for boys.



[H.B. 3223](#) creates the Ensuring Successes in School Task Force to draft and publish model policies and intergovernmental agreements for interdistrict transfers and complaint resolution procedures. The task force must also identify the mandatory educator and staff training and additional trainings needed to meet the requirements. Its recommended policies and agreements must be survivor-centered and rooted in trauma-informed responses. It must include a member representing a statewide organization for school principals appointed by the state superintendent of education. It also must represent the geographic, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity and cultural diversity of the state.



[H.R. 119/S.R. 133](#) requests that the department of education recreate the Louisiana Early Literacy Commission to study and make recommendations related to early childhood reading instruction for students from kindergarten through grade three. The recommendations must include evidence-based reading instruction, interventions to address reading learning loss due to the pandemic, increasing reading proficiency, and future benchmarks. The commission must include a school principal who has successfully implemented evidence-based reading instruction and two superintendents from school districts that have successfully implemented evidence-based reading instruction.



[H.B. 5650/S.B. 840](#) creates the Rhode Island Holocaust and Genocide Education Commission to conduct several duties related to understanding, advising, educating and planning holocaust and genocide education. The commission consists of 13 members, including a member of the Rhode Island Association of School Principals and the president of the Rhode Island Superintendent's Association, or their designees.



[S. 114](#) creates the Advisory Council on Literacy to advise the education agency, the state board of education and the general assembly on improving proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and on how to sustain those outcomes. The council has 16 members, including

the executive director of the Vermont Principals' Association and the executive director of the Vermont Superintendents Association, or their designees. Both serve as ex officio members.

Final Thoughts

School leaders are critical to maintaining a good work and learning environment. Recent state action shows that states are acting in two key areas of support: strengthening the school leadership pipeline and elevating the voices of school leaders in the policymaking process. A well-structured leadership pipeline, including induction and in-service support, helps the development of these leaders to best meet the needs in their respective schools. Giving school leaders a voice in the policymaking process ensures that state-level perspectives and services continue to serve the needs of school leaders and their schools. It is important to continue understanding the function of school leaders because they are one of the key players in addressing challenges and maintaining success in the education system.

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