

# Advancing School Leadership Through State Policy

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## What Is the Issue, and Why Does It Matter?

School leaders, specifically principals, play a pivotal role in shaping student learning outcomes. Recent research underscores that [principals](#) have a [lasting impact](#) on all students in a school. These studies have also shown that benefits of strong leaders extend beyond academic achievement, such as reductions in absenteeism and exclusionary discipline.

While quality principals matter a great deal for creating and sustaining quality schools, the staffing pipeline is facing [significant challenges](#), including:

- High turnover rates. Roughly [1 in 10 school principals](#) left the profession between the 2020-21 and 2022-23 school years.
- Inequitable distribution of effective principals across schools. Schools with increased support needs tend to be staffed by less experienced and less effective school leaders.
- Shortage of experience. On average, principals have less experience than in the past. By 2021, principals had fewer than [seven years](#) of experience on average, with over 40% of principals working in their current schools for three or fewer years.
- Lack of racial diversity in the principal workforce. While students in American schools are increasingly diverse, the racial diversity of principals has not kept pace — leaving a growing gap in representation. This gap is particularly concerning given evidence that racial diversity of principals improves outcomes for students of color.

In the context of these challenges, and recognizing the critical influence of effective leadership on student success, many states have recently enacted policies to better [recruit, support and retain](#) principals and other school leaders. This Policy Snapshot reviews trends in recent state legislation from 2022 to 2024 and highlights examples of both proposed and enacted laws. During this period, at least **44 states** considered over **225 bills** related to school leadership and **47** of those bills were enacted.

## Certification and Preparation

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High-quality school leader preparation programs play a critical role in creating effective schools. Under-prepared school leaders are not as likely to [improve school outcomes](#) as their more prepared peers. Additionally, in recent years, at least four states have begun to implement registered [principal apprenticeship pathways](#) with the U.S. Department of Labor that allow for a grow-your-own approach that has been increasingly popular in the teacher pipeline.

### Examples of Enacted Legislation



**California:** [S.B. 1329](#) (Enacted, 2024) clarifies that the \$10 million in grant funds for the [Diverse Education Leaders Pipeline Initiative](#) program are available for preliminary administrative services credential candidates. The purpose of the program is to train, place and retain diverse and culturally responsive school leaders to improve student outcomes and meet the needs of California's education workforce.



**North Carolina:** [H.B. 432](#) (Enacted, 2023) requires the state board of education to develop rules for determining whether individuals who completed an out-of-state administrator preparation program meet or exceed North Carolina requirements. It also requires the state board of education to adopt rules for two classes of administrator licenses: an administrator license and a provisional assistant principal license. The bill prohibits issuance of provisional licenses for principals.



**Ohio:** [S.B. 168](#) (Enacted, 2024) directs the Department of Education and Workforce to develop a proposal for an apprenticeship program for school principals.



**Rhode Island:** [S. 496](#) (Enacted, 2023) revises the fast-track principal certification program to modify the coursework requirements for principals.



**Tennessee:** [H.B. 2343](#) / [S.B. 2163](#) (Enacted, 2022) requires educator preparation providers to ensure candidates seeking instructional leader licenses successfully complete training on reading instruction.

## Professional Development

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Research shows that high-quality learning programs are associated with positive outcomes for principals and the students and teachers in their schools. Recent trends in school leader professional development include professional development to support academic and reading initiatives and programs such as mentoring to support principals in their work.

### Examples of Enacted Legislation



**Alabama:** [S.B. 300](#) (Enacted, 2023) creates the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System. The program’s goal will be to increase the effectiveness of school administrators resulting in improved academic outcomes for all students, including through a statewide infrastructure that provides access to consistent, high-quality professional development and mentoring for school administrators.



**Colorado:** [S.B. 22-004](#) (Enacted, 2022) requires principals and administrators in K-3 schools to complete evidence-based training in the science of reading that includes the concepts of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, oral skills and reading comprehension to assist principals in coaching and evaluating teachers.



**South Carolina:** [S. 418](#) (Enacted, 2024) requires that education preparation programs and school districts provide support and professional development to teachers and school principals based in the science of reading, structured literacy and foundational literacy skills.



**Virginia:** [H.B. 6001](#) (Enacted, 2024) appropriates funding to continue a professional development program intended to increase the capacity of principals as school leaders in under-performing schools.



**Wisconsin:** [S.B. 990](#) (Enacted, 2024) requires school principals and other identified staff to receive training on science-based reading instruction by July 1, 2025.

## Assistant Principals

The role of assistant principal has significantly [expanded](#) in recent years. In 1990, approximately one-third of schools included this position compared to one-half of schools employing an assistant principal by 2015. Some states are considering policies to require or expand the role in schools. Despite its growing prevalence, the assistant principal role often lacks a [clear definition](#) — a challenge some states sought to address through recent policy initiatives.



**Alabama:** [H.B. 22](#) (Enacted, 2024): Defines the role of assistant principals to include assisting the principal with student discipline, instruction, management, safety, security and any other duties assigned. Requires each public K-12 school to have an assistant principal if the funding to do so is available.



**Hawai'i:** [H.B. 246](#) (Proposed, 2024): Would require the department of education to employ one full-time equivalent counselor, vice principal and media specialist at each department school.

## Evaluation

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Evaluation systems are integral to a comprehensive [principal pipeline strategy](#). Evaluation systems are intended to further on-the-job learning by helping leaders understand their strengths and areas for development. These systems also facilitate connections between principals and [principal supervisors](#). Recently, state policy changes have concentrated on refining evaluation systems and have paid particular attention to the use of assessments in evaluation, the linkage between evaluation and professional development, and how evaluations influence continuing contracts.

## Examples of Enacted Legislation



**Michigan:** [S.B. 395](#) (Enacted, 2024) amends the components that must be a part of the teacher and administrator annual performance evaluation system. Starting in the 2024-25 school year, the percent of an administrator’s annual evaluation based on student growth measures will decrease from 40% to 20%. The bill also amends requirements for the observation of administrators and requires new administrators to be assigned a mentor for the first three years in the position.



**Minnesota:** [H.F. 2497](#) (Enacted, 2023) requires a principal’s annual evaluation to support and improve a principal’s culturally responsive leadership practices and be linked to relevant professional development on such practices.



**New Jersey:** [S. 2082](#) (Enacted, 2024) establishes the New Jersey Educator Evaluation Review Task Force to examine the educator evaluation process, including evaluations for principals, assistant principals and vice principals. The bill references [findings](#) of the Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey, which included the need to reduce paperwork and administrative task loads to improve employee retention.



**New York:** [A. 9600](#) / [S. 8276](#) (Enacted, 2022) makes an exception for individuals who did not receive an annual performance review rating during the 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years and allows for them to receive tenure if the individual would have been qualified if they received such performance review.

New York: [S. 9054](#) / [A. 9849](#) (Enacted, 2024) amends the statewide teacher and principal evaluation system. The bill decouples professional performance reviews from the granting of tenure for teachers and principals. It also allows districts and boards of cooperative educational services to negotiate new annual performance review plans, which must be subject to a collective bargaining agreement, be approved by the state department of education and meet additional requirements.



**West Virginia:** [H.B. 2597](#) (Enacted, 2024) requires that performance evaluations for teachers and school personnel provide an explanation and data to support any area, quality, skill or level of performance in which the employee is rated less than accomplished in.

## Financial Incentives and Compensation

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In recent years, many states have sought to improve compensation for school leaders and recognized it as a tool to address [turnover](#) in the field. While compensation is often negotiated at the local level, at least seven states set a statewide salary schedule or minimum salary requirements for principals. [Financial incentives](#) can also attract candidates to the role, including short-term positions for retirees or incentives for continuing education.

### Examples of Enacted Legislation



**North Carolina:** [H.B. 259](#) (Enacted, 2023) enacts the 2023-24 school principal salary and bonus schedules. In addition, this budget bill includes a provision that requires the North Carolina Board of Education to monitor and compile an annual State of the School Administration Profession report. The report must include data on principal turnover including the extent to which principal attrition and mobility led to changes in school performance.

North Carolina: [S.B. 332](#) (Enacted, 2024) enacts the 2024-25 school principal salary and bonus schedules. This budget authorizes an average 3% raise for principals and other leaders. The bill also authorizes a bonus program for principals who supervise a school scoring in the top half of student growth in the state.



**Washington:** [H.B. 1699](#) (Enacted, 2022) allows certain retirees to return to work up to 1,040 hours during the school year as either a district superintendent or in-school administrator for a school district that has less than 2,000 students without the suspension of their retirement benefit. This provision expires July 1, 2025.

# About the Authors

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As a policy analyst, Lauren provides quality research on a variety of education topics. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Lauren earned a master's degree in public policy from the University of Michigan. Before attending graduate school, Lauren spent four years teaching and three years working with a community-based neighborhood center in Denver. Lauren strongly believes in the importance of creating education policies that allow all children to excel. Contact Lauren at [lpeisach@ecs.org](mailto:lpeisach@ecs.org).

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As policy director, Tiffany contributes to a variety of policy issues. She brings more than a decade of experience working to improve teaching and learning, including work at the Tennessee Department of Education and as an advisor to education leaders while at TNTP. Tiffany began her career as a fifth-grade teacher and is passionate about ensuring all students have access to an excellent education. Contact Tiffany at [tmcdole@ecs.org](mailto:tmcdole@ecs.org).

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