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Your Question:

You asked for examples of states that have policies or programs supporting rural principal professional development.

Our Response:

Background

Unique challenges exist for rural school districts and the principals that lead them. These specific [**challenges**](#) resulting from geographic isolation can include professional loneliness, limited personnel and budgetary constraints.

Supporting tailored professional development for rural principals may be an effective tool states can utilize to support these school leaders and achieve student success. A [**research study**](#) performed by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas surveyed over 300 rural school leaders and identified six of their most important professional development needs as:

- Building a Team Commitment.
- Creating a Learning Organization.
- Sustaining and Motivating for Continuous Improvement.
- Setting Instructional Direction – Results Orientation.
- Communicating Effectively.
- Facilitating the Change Process.

Challenges can also arise in the delivery method of the professional development opportunities to these isolated areas. In our review, we found that some programs tailored to rural school leaders utilize technology to overcome this barrier. Additionally, [**research**](#) performed by Utah State University found that principals in small to medium school districts view district-level professional development activities, state department of education professional development activities and leadership academies as the most useful resources available to them.

State Examples

Though many states support principal professional development opportunities, we are aware of only a handful that have developed and/or funded programs targeted towards rural school leaders. In this response we highlight state efforts in four states: **Alaska, West Virginia, North Carolina and North Dakota**.

Alaska

The Alaska State Department of Education supports an annual school leadership conference tailored to the state's small and rural school districts. The [**Alaska School Leadership Institute**](#) is a three-day conference that focuses on topics such as building teacher efficacy, collaboration and team building skills and leading effective math instruction.

Additional Resources

[**Tackling Teacher and Principal Shortages in Rural Areas**](#) (NCSL, 2017)

[**Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy**](#) (The Wallace Foundation, 2015, p. 43-44)

[**Principal Professional Development New Opportunities for a Renewed State Focus**](#) (AIR, 2017)

[**50-State Comparison: School Leader Certification and Preparation Programs**](#) (Education Commission of the States, 2018)

Principals from schools that are designated as priority or focus are offered school improvement dollars to support their participation in the event.

West Virginia

Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the [Building Leadership Capacity in Rural West Virginia program](#) is designed to provide principals from three rural West Virginia counties a customized and innovative principal leadership development experience to improve the quality of school leaders in the targeted districts. The goals of the project include to “improve student academic growth, decrease the principal turnover rate, [and] build a sustained infrastructure for principal development training.” The program utilizes technology as a training mechanism and includes researched-based activities in problem-based learning, along with on-site performance monitoring and feedback and self-reflection.

North Carolina

The Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA 2.0) is a partnership between North Carolina State University and 13 rural, high-need school districts developed to “increase student achievement by preparing and retaining assistant principals and principals to serve as instructional leaders.” The [Principal Academy](#) is the program’s professional development component in which principals recommended by their superintendent are brought together for professional development and coaching on how to serve rural, geographically isolated schools.

North Dakota

Noted in its [ESSA State Plan](#) (p. 97) the North Dakota Department of Education plans to expand the state’s principal mentoring program with the ultimate goal of ensuring all new principals are provided a mentor. The objective of the program is both to increase the rate of effectiveness for new administrators and to decrease turnover in rural and struggling schools.

Additionally, Education Commission of the States tracks and summarizes state legislation related to principal professional development in our [State Education Policy Tracking database](#) (for bills enacted in 2017 and 2018) and [here](#) (for bills enacted between 1996-2016).