

Your Question:

You requested resources on state and district examples of policies and practices related to strengthening school leadership - with a focus on both urban areas and scaling statewide - to ensure principals are in schools that need them most.

Our Response:

Our response is broken into two parts. First, we summarize research and best practices for improving school leadership statewide. Then, we provide examples of district-focused strategies, including case studies, with a focus on both urban areas and low-performing schools.

In addition to the resources included below, Education Commission of the States tracks changes made to state policies throughout the legislative sessions. To see policy changes made in 2017, visit our [state policy tracking database](#) on district and school leadership.

Best Practices and Policies for Improving School Leadership Statewide

[Re-Imagining State Policy: A Guide to Building Systems that Support Effective Principals](#) (New Leaders, 2016) This report identifies opportunities available for state leaders to improve policies designed to attract, retain and empower school leaders who will drive students toward success. For **selection and school match**, the authors recommend states:

- **Align job descriptions** to school leadership standards.
- Design and distribute **high-quality principal hiring tools** for districts.
- Embed **succession planning** into districts.

They provide additional recommendations related to pre-service preparation, evaluation and management, in-service support, and retention, rewards, and dismissals.

[Improving Education Outcomes: How State Policy Can Support School Principals as Instructional Leaders](#) (National Governors Association, 2015) This report identifies short- and long-term state strategies to support principals' leadership. Improving principal professional development is described as a short-term strategy that can positively affect currently practicing school leaders. Improving principal preparation programs is described as a long-term strategy that can positively affect future school leaders. State examples are provided throughout the report.

[Preparing a Pipeline of Effective Principals: A Legislative Approach](#) (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012) This report provides a variety of examples for how states have approached principal policymaking across the pipeline through legislative activity. The authors provides six state policy approaches, including ways states have targeted improvements to leader recruitment, selection and retention (p. 5). These strategies include monetary incentives, such as tuition reimbursement and paid residency experience, and non-monetary incentives, such as improved working conditions.

- **State Example:** In 2003, Arkansas created the [Master Principal Program](#), which provides bonus incentives to principals who successfully complete the program and receive the master principal designation. Additionally, the department of education offers increased bonus incentives to those selected to serve in a "high need" school.

[Missing: Top Staff in Bottom Schools](#) (The School Superintendents Association) This feature article discusses potential solutions to closing the achievement gap related to teacher and leader policies on both a state and district level. The policy recommendations include:

- **Eliminating residency requirements** that a teacher and/or principal live within city limits.
- Monetary incentives, including **signing bonuses and mortgage assistance**.
- Non-monetary incentives, such as **improving working conditions and providing opportunity for advancement**.

Best Practices and Policies for Improving School Leadership Districtwide

[Perspective Building Principal Pipelines: A Job the Urban Districts Can Do](#) (The Wallace Foundation, 2017) Informed through observations and evaluations of the six school district’s participating in Wallace’s Principal Pipeline Initiative, this report summarizes district solutions to building strong leadership pipelines and discusses the state’s role in the process. It’s key findings include:

- Develop clear and specific leader **standards** that combine state requirements with local needs and considerations.
- Improve district-provided **pre-service preparation** that piggy-backs on training provided by universities through mentoring and other clinical experiences.
- Implement more **meaningful hiring practices** that includes “practical demonstrations of ability” and the use of data.
- **Align evaluations with standards** and create ongoing, collaborative evaluation practices.

A full [review](#) of the Principal Pipeline Initiative was conducted after four years of implementation. Among the findings, researchers note that both defining standards and changes to hiring practices were productive first steps. Other best practices include:

- **District-run preparation programs** that were tailored to district priorities and needs.
- Using **data** to inform hiring and succession planning.
- Introduce new tools, programs, and procedures on a **pilot basis** to allow for learning and improvement over time.

A recent [report](#) published by the RAND Corporation outlines the cost estimates of principal pipeline implementation using data from the six districts participating in the Principal Pipeline Initiative – including developing standards, strengthening principal preparation, creating systematic hiring practices and improving on-the-job support and evaluation. These findings suggest that, of all the efforts performed by the districts, **developing leader standards and implementing selective hiring and placement efforts provide low-cost “quick wins.”**

[Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership](#) (Policy Studies Associates, 2017) One way districts have looked to improve their hiring practices and place the most qualified candidate in the right positions is by utilizing data and **developing leader tracking systems**. The report identifies the practical uses of leader tracking systems, which includes selecting the right principal for a school vacancy and building the bench for future school leaders, and reviews best practices for implementation.

- **State Example:** Highlighted on pg. 9, Denver’s Vacancy Matching Tool produces a dashboard of data on potential candidates for an open principal position, including educational background, current role, evaluation scores, and other relevant qualifications. This dashboard provides hiring managers the ability to prioritize candidates with certain abilities (i.e. Spanish language proficiency) that match the school’s needs (i.e. high population of English language learners).

[Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors](#) (The Wallace Foundation, 2013) This report serves as a review of six school districts participating in a study of the way principal supervisors are selected, supported and evaluated. It covers how districts are implementing supervisory systems in different ways, as well as provides recommendations for building effective systems.

- **State Examples:** [This video](#) highlights efforts by principal supervisors in Washington, DC and Tulsa, OK.

[The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership](#) (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010) Researchers interviewed school leaders from seven school districts of varying size and demographics to determine their level of support from the state, district, and school. Their findings conclude that the highest performing school district surveyed also had a high level of support for leaders. From these results, researchers constructed seven strategies related to school leadership to improve low-performing schools and discuss state, district, and school actions to accomplish this (p. 45-50). These strategies include **investing heavily in instruction-related professional learning for principals, teacher leaders, and district staff** and recommends the following state and district actions:

- **State Action:** Establish policies requiring districts with a high number of low-performing schools to form partnerships with universities to prepare principals to improve teaching and learning.
- **District Actions:** Provide principals with flexibility in providing professional development opportunities for their schools; focus professional learning around developing literacy skills; and ensure leaders have the training and capacity to lead change.

[Strategic Staffing for Successful Schools: Breaking the Cycle of Failure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools](#) (The Aspen Institute, 2010) This report reviews the school turnaround strategies performed in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district beginning in 2008. One of these strategies used was developing a strategic staffing initiative, which focused on placing high-performing employees in struggling schools. This study reports, as a result of the initiative, significant gains in student achievement in a variety of areas, including reading and math, from the first cohort of schools that participated in the initiative. The school district performed its own [evaluation](#) of the program a year later, reporting mixed results.