In the following report, Hanover Research reviews programs to prepare instructional staff for positions as school principals. The report begins with a review of the empirical and best practices literature and concludes with profiles of effective principal leadership development programs.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In this report, Hanover Research reviews the literature on district-based principal development programs, often referred to as principal pipeline programs. These initiatives prepare instructional staff within a district to assume roles as principals, with a particularly strong focus on mentoring by experienced principals within the district. Some evidence suggests that principal pipeline programs can help school districts meet their staffing needs and improve principal quality and student outcomes more effectively than traditional university-based principal development programs.

This report reviews evidence of the effectiveness of district-based principal development programs and suggests best practices derived from the secondary literature and from programs that have been recognized for their efficacy. The report includes the following sections:

- **Section I** reviews available secondary literature on the effectiveness of district-based principal development programs and best practices in implementing these programs.
- **Section II** profiles four principal development programs that have been identified as particularly effective in the secondary literature. The profiles cover a diverse array of programs, including district-, university-, and nonprofit-developed initiatives.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Some evidence suggests that school districts can improve their principal hiring and succession planning process by developing principals within their district, rather than relying on external hires.** An evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative determines that developing principal candidates internally enabled districts to adjust the contents of their principal development programs to meet individual district needs, to create a selective admissions process that identifies high-potential leaders, and to evaluate candidates during the principal development program. In addition, the districts profiled in Section II of this report have been able to support high principal placement and retention rates using district-based principal development programs. However, the effectiveness of individual district-based principal preparation programs appears to vary, in part based on the prior experience of aspiring principals.

- **Principal development programs can function as part of a comprehensive succession planning process.** In several of the districts profiled in Section II of this report, principal development programs form part of a larger process of talent development that includes selection and training of assistant principals, training programs for assistant principals or other leaders interested in becoming principals, and ongoing support for new principals. According to research published by The
Wallace Foundation and the Southern Regional Education Board, comprehensive succession planning can help districts avoid problems recruiting effective principals and identify the most effective candidates for positions in individual schools.

- **The Southern Regional Education Board recommends that school districts employ a multi-step selection process to screen applicants for principal preparation programs.** During this process, programs should assess applicants’ mindset (e.g., persistence, optimism) and conduct interviews that include a simulated classroom observation. The University Council for Educational Administration also suggests that districts employ behavioral interviewing strategies such as simulations, site visits, and observations of candidates in their current roles. Hillsborough County Public Schools includes performance tasks in the application process for its Preparing New Principals program.

- **Effective principal preparation often consists of instruction in key competencies, clinical experience, and mentorship.** Each of the programs profiled in this report include a curricular component that familiarizes participants with key competencies required of principals (e.g., leadership, time management, curriculum development). In addition, the Southern Regional Education Board recommends that prospective principals gain hands-on experience through clinical placements. Finally, sustained mentoring over the course of the preparation program features prominently in best practice recommendations and in the practices of profiled programs.

- **Many principal preparation programs incorporate some form of mentoring, often supporting both aspiring principals and new principals.** For example, the Aspiring Leaders Program at San Diego Unified School District’s Educational Leadership Development Academy includes a practicum in school leadership, during which students are placed in school leadership positions with experienced mentors. Effective mentoring programs consist of a structured process that includes training for mentors and participation in a series of school leadership activities with gradually increasing responsibility for mentees. Successful mentorships employ selection criteria for mentors, such as proven success improving student outcomes, willingness to delegate and share information with aspiring principals, and commitment to the development of new principals.

- **The Southern Regional Education Board provides a number of guidelines for effective succession planning.** The organization recommends keeping records of candidates at varying stages of preparedness (e.g., ready in one year) in order to establish long-term plans for filling vacancies. In addition, districts should require existing principals to identify and develop at least one principal candidate within their school. At Gwinnet County Public Schools, principal candidate identification is a core job requirement for principals. To further support internal candidate development, the Southern Regional Education Board suggests that districts provide professional development programs that target early development of staff that show promise and interest in the principal role.
SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, Hanover Research reviews secondary literature relevant to district-based principal development programs. This section begins with a review of existing evidence for the effectiveness of district-based principal development programs. It moves on to discuss best practices identified in the literature for these programs, with a particular focus on strategies for recruiting and selecting candidates and creating effective mentoring programs.

This section draws heavily on research published by advocacy organizations that support the creation of district-based principal development programs, in particular The Wallace Foundation and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). In addition, this section relies on relevant research published in academic and professional journals. Although this report focuses on district-based principal development programs, this section includes best practices identified for university-based programs and teacher mentoring programs, which may be applicable in areas where the programs overlap (e.g., providing effective mentorship).

Efficacy of District-Based Principal Development Programs

According to a 2011 report by the SREB, high performing school districts rely primarily on hiring principals from within their existing staff. This report notes that four recent winners of the Broad Prize for Urban Education, including Gwinnett County Public Schools, which is profiled in Section II of this report, rely on external hires for less than 10 percent of their principal positions. In addition, this report cites research from the private sector suggesting that corporations led by internally-hired CEOs tend to outperform corporations led by externally-hired CEOs.¹

In addition some evidence suggests that effective preparation programs can contribute to the leadership skills of new principals. In 2007, The Wallace Foundation commissioned the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI) to study effective development programs for pre-service and in-service principals. The SELI identified four exemplary pre-service programs sponsored by universities, and four in-service programs within school districts for inclusion in its research. Researchers surveyed principals in these programs, as well as a comparison sample of principals taken from the membership lists of professional associations of principals. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which they engaged in nine effective leadership practices on a four point Likert scale.² Respondents


who participated in exemplary programs reported engaging in the following eight activities significantly more frequently than respondents in the control group:

- Facilitating student learning,
- Building a professional learning community among faculty and staff,
- Evaluating and providing instructional feedback to teachers,
- Guiding the development and evaluation of curriculum and instruction,
- Using data to monitor school progress, identify problems, and propose solutions,
- Working with teachers to change teaching methods where students were not succeeding,
- Fostering teacher professional development for instructional knowledge and skills, and
- Working with faculty to develop goals for their practice and professional learning.³

However, university-based programs may not address specific job functions of particular importance to an individual district. For example, a 2011 article in Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice, and Research surveyed professors teaching courses in educational administration and leadership at 40 graduate education programs in the United States.⁴ Researchers found that only 25 percent of courses at the respondent institutions related to testing and measurement included course objectives focused on the use of data to drive instructional decisions.⁵

A 2010 study by The Wallace Foundation examined eight urban school districts that had recently reformed their principal development programs. Of these districts, four created their own principal preparation programs to compete with university-based programs, while the remainder relied solely on collaboration with university-based programs to improve principal preparation. Based on a qualitative analysis of these programs, The Wallace Foundation found that the districts that created competing principal development programs were able to more easily meet their new principal hiring needs than were the comparison group. However, these districts tended to have lower enrollments than districts that did not develop competing programs, which may have reduced their need for new principals.⁶

Beginning in 2011, The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative supported principal development programs in six large urban school districts, including Gwinnett County Public Schools and Hillsborough County Public Schools, profiled in Section II of this report. A 2015

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³ Bulleted text taken nearly verbatim from: Ibid., p. 41.
⁵ Ibid., p. 24.
evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative identified several advantages of developing leaders through internal preparation programs, rather than relying on external principal preparation programs. These advantages include the ability to adjust program content to meet the specific needs and policies of the individual district and the ability of district leaders to directly observe and assess potential leadership candidates through participation in class sessions. In addition, districts can establish a selective admissions process for internal principal development programs, giving them the ability to distinguish high-potential leaders.7

However, some evidence suggests that district-led principal preparation programs may not be significantly more effective than traditional university-based programs. A 2012 study published in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* examined principals prepared through the Aspiring Principals Program (APP) at the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA), a district-led residency program to prepare new principals for chronically underperforming schools in New York City. The study compared principal turnover and student achievement for a sample of schools with new principals trained through the APP and a group of other schools led by new principals trained through traditional principal preparation programs.8

This study controlled for the tendency of schools led by APP-trained principals to be initially lower-achieving than schools in the control group using a propensity score matching procedure. This procedure measured the likelihood that an individual school would be led by an APP-trained principal given a series of school, student, and achievement characteristics.9 The study found that principals trained through the NYCLA APP were between 3.1 and 5.7 percent more likely to leave their school in a given year than other principals. In addition, the study did not find any significant differences between student achievement trends in schools led by new principals trained through the APP and other schools.10

However, this study noted that principals trained through the NYCLA APP were significantly younger, on average, than principals in the control group and had an average of 2.3 fewer years of teaching experience. In addition, less than 33 percent of new principals trained through the APP had previous experience serving as an assistant principal, compared to 83 percent of new principals in the control group. Furthermore, 36 percent of new principals in the control group obtained positions in schools where they had previously been employed as a teacher or assistant principal, while very few APP-trained principals did so.11

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9 Ibid., pp. 237-238.

10 Ibid., pp. 242–248.

11 Ibid., pp. 239–240.
discussed later in this section, district-based principal development programs with more stringent experience requirements may obtain stronger outcomes.

**BEST PRACTICES FOR PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Several principal development programs have identified best practices for implementing this type of initiative. For example, The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative focuses on the following four domains of effective leadership development:

- Leader standards to which sites align job descriptions, preparation, selection, evaluation, and support.
- Preservice preparation that includes selective admissions to high-quality programs.
- Selective hiring, and placement based on a match between the candidate and the school.
- On-the-job evaluation and support addressing the capacity to improve teaching and learning, with support focused on needs identified by evaluation.12

The following subsection reviews the literature and presents best practices on the following key components of principal development programs: recruiting and selecting candidates, key program components, and effective mentoring.

**RECRUITING AND SELECTING CANDIDATES**

Effective principals may need skills beyond those required of effective teachers. In particular, the SREB’s 2011 report on succession planning recommends that districts focus on candidates with the skills to perform as principals, including persistence, optimism, oral and written communications skills, the ability to develop teams, and the ability to hold adults accountable.13 This report suggests that districts adopt the following multi-step selection process to identify candidates with these skills for principal development programs:

- **Application**: Applications should include a resume, cover letter, and professional references. The SREB recommends that districts require applicants to have a minimum of three years of teaching experience.
- **Inventory of Beliefs and Behaviors**: Applicants complete an assessment designed to determine whether they have the desired mindset.
- **Timed Essays**: Applicants complete a series of timed essays that demonstrate logical analysis, problem solving, and communicating a school vision. The SREB recommends including school datasets in some essays.
- **Team Interview**: Applicants interview with a selection committee, including a simulated classroom observation, and scenarios to assess persistence, instructional

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strategies, and core beliefs. The SREB recommends including university faculty, district administrators, and current principals in selection committees.\(^{14}\)

**School districts may wish to include specific experience requirements, such as previous service as an assistant principal, in the process of selecting candidates for principal preparation programs.** The study of the NYCLA, which found no significant impact of the APP on student achievement trajectories, notes that principals who had participated in the APP were less experienced and less likely to have served as assistant principals than other new principals in similar schools.\(^{15}\) District-based principal training programs that recruit more experienced candidates, particularly those who have previously served as assistant principals, may be more effective. Notably, Gwinnett County Public Schools requires participants in its APP to have at least two years of experience as an assistant principal.\(^{16}\)

School districts may also wish to further screen candidates for principal development programs through the interview process. A 2012 report on university-based principal pipeline programs prepared for the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) recommends that principal preparation programs screen candidates using behavioral interviewing. This interview strategy is designed to predict future performance by examining past performance through extended interaction between the candidate and the selection committee. Behavioral interviewing strategies recommended by the UCEA include simulations, extended visits to a school, and observing the candidate functioning in their current role.\(^{17}\) Similarly, Hillsborough County Public Schools, profiled in Section II of this report, requires candidates for its Preparing New Principals program to complete between two and three performance tasks as part of the interview process.\(^{18}\)

**KEY PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

A 2005 SREB report on state standards for university-based principal development programs suggests that states require the following elements within principal development programs:

- Require aspiring principals to gain experience leading a broad range of school improvement activities, including working directly with teachers to implement standards-based instruction and to implement and evaluate a specific school improvement effort.
- Provide training for mentor principals, including designing and implementing learning experiences for novices. Training should emphasize:
  - Competencies the aspiring principal should demonstrate during the internship,

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\(^{14}\) Bulleted text adapted from: Ibid.


\(^{18}\) “Preparing New Principals Program Application and Selection Process.” Hillsborough County Public Schools. http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/docs/00/00/06/01/HPP_PNP_AppSelectProcess_Final.pdf
Characteristics of ideal performance,
- Observing and evaluating the performance of the aspiring principal,
- Giving feedback, and
- Providing opportunities to practice a skill or skill set to develop proficiency.

Evaluate the performance of aspiring principals using a uniform procedure based on state standards for school leaders. This procedure should be valid and reliable enough to meet standards for professional licensure.\(^{19}\)

The SREB’s 2011 report on succession planning recommends that school districts provide new principals with coaching and mentoring for at least two years after their placement, as part of a comprehensive onboarding process.\(^{20}\) Figure 1.1 shows a sample comprehensive onboarding process for a principal’s first year, adapted from an onboarding process used in the corporate sector.

**Figure 1.1: Comprehensive Onboarding Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPECTATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists of Key Relationships to Build</td>
<td>- If the principal is new to the school, the principal’s predecessor or direct supervisor provides an annotated list of the most influential teachers in the building. In-person introductory meetings are arranged with all key support staff in the central office prior to the school year. The district arranges a reception honoring the new principal, inviting parents and local community members with an active interest in education. The principal’s supervisor carefully monitors and supports his or her progress in developing critical relationships with the staff and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists of Key Information to Master</td>
<td>- The district provides organized lists of key information regarding compliance issues and special dates (federal and state regulations; district policies and procedures; state and district standards and expectations for grade-level instruction and achievement; attendance, grading, testing and personnel policies; daily routines and logistics; building maintenance and safety plans), with a timeline for mastery. The key information to master would include the district strategic plan, how to request and receive special assistance from the district office, school budgeting and the use of discretionary funds. The new principal’s supervisor frequently checks to ensure an accurate and timely understanding of key information, rather than assuming the new principal knows how to do what he or she has never done before.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clear Goals for the First 45 Days, 90 Days, and Year</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>End of 45 days:</strong> Lesson planning expectations are understood by teachers and are being met. Student expectations (for both learning and discipline) are clear. The principal has selected a school leadership team, and it is meeting and already working on an agreed-upon set of priorities for the year. The principal has personally conducted at least one walkthrough of every teacher’s classroom and provided feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>End of 90 days:</strong> Student and teacher attendance rates are at 95 percent or are improving. Teacher professional development has a clear focus. Formative assessments for key subjects either are happening or are being planned and will be available soon. District walkthroughs see evidence of literacy standards and strategies being embedded in lesson plans and in the classroom to advance both literacy and subject-matter achievement in all classes (or other key practice identified as critical to this school’s improvement and discussed in advance with the new principal). The principal has organized at least one focus team of teachers and others to take ownership of a major school problem having to do with improving student engagement in school. The focus team has been charged to identify the problem, its root cause, a set of desired student goals, and changes in school and classroom practices and the types of support needed to achieve the goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>End of the year:</strong> School climate results (teacher, parent and student perceptions) are positive or perhaps mixed if the principal has had to really change the culture of the school. Minimum targets on end-of-year assessments (set at the beginning of the year by the district, in consultation with the new principal) have been met. Teaching assignments and the master schedule for the next year are completed, and they prioritize student needs over adult desires. Hiring for teacher vacancies for the next year is under way and is on pace to have all vacancies filled at least 30 days prior to school start, and a plan is in place for orientation and training of new teachers. At least one major school improvement initiative has been planned for year two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative 360-degree Feedback Early in the First Year</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>VAL-ED (or similar) evaluation in December of the first year, with a debrief and a conversation about guided professional reading, tailored coaching and possible adjustments for the remainder of the first year.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Peer Networking Plan and Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time for networking is included in monthly principals’ meetings. Membership in professional organizations is encouraged. Attendance at one professional conference of principal’s choice is supported.</strong></td>
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</table>

Source: Southern Regional Education Board

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Several of the programs profiled in Section II of this report provide ongoing support to first and second-year principals, often in the form of additional mentoring and professional learning communities with other principals in the district. For example, new principals in Gwinnett County Public Schools receive two years of mentoring from a highly effective retired principal in the district, as well as peer support from other new principals in their Aspiring Principal Program cohort. Likewise, New Leaders’ Principal Institute provides graduates of the New Leaders Aspiring Principals Program with one to two years of mentoring and peer support, depending on the grade level of their school.

**Effective Mentoring**

Mentoring can be an effective element of principal preparation and development. In a survey of new principals participating in The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative, respondents were significantly more likely to strongly agree that a mentor or coach had prompted them to make changes in their work than a supervisor, evaluator, or other professional development experiences. However, a 2007 report by the SREB argues that mentoring components of principal development programs are often perfunctory and fail to develop the leadership skills necessary to drive school improvement. This report surveyed mentor principals participating in university-based principal preparation programs in the 16 SREB states, and found that:

- Aspiring principals were frequently matched with mentors in the schools or districts where they already worked, or based on their own choice of mentors, rather than being assigned a mentor based on their own needs, meaning that aspiring principals often experienced a narrow range of schools and strategies to solve school problems;
- States, university-based principal preparation programs, and school districts did not invest adequate resources in mentoring, particularly with regards to training, evaluation, and support for mentors;
- Mentoring often focused on observation of the mentor, rather than opportunities to practice school leadership, and mentors indicated that their responsibilities focused on helping aspiring principals complete a specific sequence of tasks rather than implementing a project focused on school improvement or a professional growth plan;
- School districts had limited involvement in the process of selecting mentors, and did not appear to use the mentoring process to identify effective aspiring principals; and

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Mentors’ evaluations of aspiring principals appeared to carry little weight within principal preparation programs, and tended to focus on task completion and meeting performance standards rather than leadership competencies.\(^{25}\)

To deliver effective mentoring, the SREB’s 2007 report on mentoring programs asserts that mentors in principal preparation programs should provide a variety of opportunities for aspiring principals to practice solving problems, beginning with observation and participation in problem-solving activities, before independently leading problem-solving teams.\(^{26}\)

School districts may also wish to include structured activities and assessments in mentoring programs. For example, a mentoring program for mid-career principals discussed in a 2013 article in the *Journal of School Public Relations* included formative assessments, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning Assessment (5D), designed to measure leadership skills and high-quality instructional practices. Participants used the assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses, which they discussed as part of group sessions. After these discussions, principals worked with their mentors to develop strategies to address weaknesses identified through these assessments.\(^{27}\)

**SELECTING AND PLACING MENTORS**

The SREB’s 2007 report on mentoring programs suggests that aspiring principals should be matched to mentors who have particular strengths in areas where the aspiring principals need further development. In addition, the SREB recommends that districts emphasize a record of improving student achievement when selecting principal mentors.\(^{28}\) Similarly, a 2010 study of nine innovative principal development programs conducted by the Rainwater Leadership Alliance, a think tank focused on reforming school leadership sponsored by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, reported that these programs worked to place aspiring principals with mentors who demonstrated:

- The ability to provide support focused on the aspiring principal’s areas of weakness or growth;
- Willingness to delegate substantial, high-stakes projects to aspiring principals and to allow aspiring principals to make mistakes;
- A personal investment in their mentees;
- Leadership skills that reflected the specific goals of each program;

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 11–14.


- Willingness to discuss their decision-making process, including openness about mistakes; and
- A commitment to invest the time needed to regularly plan with and provide feedback to their mentees. 

Gwinnett County Public Schools, profiled in Section II of this report, places aspiring principals in residencies with mentor principals who have particular expertise in areas where the aspiring principals have been identified as needing further development. New Leaders focuses on placing residents with principals who have demonstrated a record of improving student achievement, and, where possible, places residents with principals who were themselves trained through the New Leaders program.

**Professional Development for Mentors**

The UCEA recommends providing mentors with professional development both before and during their work with principals. A 2007 article in the journal *Mid-Western Educational Researcher* recommended that training for principal mentors include strategies for working with new principals and a focus on instructional leadership. This article reported interviews with 20 experienced principals who served as mentors for new principals in two school districts, as well as around 80 new principals who received mentoring. Mentors were selected based on their level of experience and reputation for managing schools with high levels of student achievement. Mentors also received training that emphasized that the primary goal of the mentorship was to improve new principals’ instructional leadership skills.

This study found that the most effective mentors had a clear understanding of the developmental needs of their individual mentees. Respondents reported that a simplified framework for instructional improvement developed by one of the districts, which contained five essential leadership competencies, was more helpful in identifying the developmental needs of individual principals than more comprehensive frameworks developed by national professional organizations.

In some cases, principal mentors can be trained by outside providers. For example, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) operates the National Mentor Training and Certification Program, which provides mentors with a structured training process that includes classroom activities focused on adult learning and a nine-month

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34 Ibid., pp. 24-26.
practicum in which the aspiring mentor works with a mentee under the supervision of a mentoring coach provided by the NAESP.\(^{35}\) In other cases, school districts directly train mentors working in their principal preparation programs. For example, Hillsborough County Public Schools, profiled in Section II of this report, has trained principal coaches to serve as mentors to new principals in its Principal Induction Program.\(^{36}\)

**SUCCESSION PLANNING**

District-based principal development programs can form part of a comprehensive succession planning process. In recent years, many districts, especially those facing high population growth, low achievement, and high student poverty, have faced challenges identifying and recruiting effective principals.\(^{37}\) A 2010 report on principal development programs published by The Wallace Foundation notes that, despite a surplus of candidates with the formal qualifications for principal roles, districts may face challenges recruiting principals because many of these candidates obtain principal certification without actually intending to become principals. In addition, many candidates who do initially plan to become principals may lose interest after several years without obtaining a leadership position. Districts may also face challenges in recruiting principals for low-achieving schools – often considered difficult working environments – and ensuring demographic diversity in their principal recruitment pools.\(^{38}\) Therefore, districts may wish to develop proactive succession plans that identify and develop leadership talent within existing staff.

According to the SREB’s report on succession planning, developing a comprehensive succession plan enables districts to take a proactive, rather than reactive approach to leadership development that ensures every school is led by an effective principal. As part of the succession planning process, this report recommends that districts:

- Schedule an annual meeting between the superintendent and district leadership to discuss succession planning;
- Maintain a list of internal candidates for principal vacancies divided into “ready now,” “ready in one year,” and “ready in two to five years”, with a target of at least two “ready now” candidates for each vacancy;
- Provide potential leaders with assignments to stretch their skill sets and range of experience;
- Enable aspiring principals to participate in formal preparation programs that combine classroom studies with authentic learning in schools;
- Collaborate with university-based principal development programs to ensure that course work includes opportunities for applied practice;


\(^{36}\) “Preparing New Principals Program Overview.” Hillsborough County Public Schools. https://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/docs/00/00/06/01/HPP_PNP_Overview_Final.pdf


- Provide all new principals with at least two years of mentoring; and
- Require each principal to identify and develop a staff member with leadership potential.\(^{39}\)

SECTION II: PROFILES

In this section, Hanover Research profiles four principal development programs that have been identified as exemplary or particularly effective in the secondary literature. Two of these programs, Gwinnett County Public Schools and Hillsborough County Public Schools, were developed internally by the districts themselves. The other two programs, San Diego Unified School District and the New Leaders Program, were developed in partnership with a local university and by a national nonprofit organization, respectively.

This section focuses on programs with substantial mentoring components. Although several of these districts also offer support programs for recently hired principals or for teachers exploring other administrative positions, these profiles will focus primarily on programs to prepare teachers or administrators specifically for roles as principals.

GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gwinnett County Public Schools, located in Georgia, supports new and aspiring principals through its Quality-Plus Leader Academy, which includes the following programs:

- **Aspiring Leader Program (ALP)** to develop aspiring assistant principals,
- **Aspiring Principal Program (APP)** to develop aspiring principals, and
- Ongoing **professional development** for current school leaders.40

The APP is designed as the final stage in a multi-stage certification process for aspiring principals, following completion of a university-based program for administrative certification.41

In 2011, Gwinnett County Public Schools was selected to participate in The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative.42 The Quality-Plus Leader Academy has been identified as an exemplary program by the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership (AREL), a network of reform-oriented principal preparation programs sponsored by the George W. Bush Institute.43 In addition, Gwinnet County Public Schools received the Broad Prize for Urban Education in both 2010 and 2014.44

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40 “About the Quality-Plus Leader Academy,” Gwinnett County Public Schools. http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/content/key-initiatives/about+the+quality-plus+leader+academy
42 Ibid., p. i.
PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The APP was created in 2007 to address a projected need for increased principal hiring as a result of retirements and population growth. Since then, the Quality-Plus Leader Academy has added additional cohort-based programs, which are intensive year-long programs designed to prepare staff for leadership roles, and ongoing training and support programs. Figure 2.1 shows all programs offered by the Quality-Plus Leader Academy.

![Figure 2.1: Quality-Plus Leader Academy Programs](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM TYPE</th>
<th>PROGRAMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort-Based Programs</td>
<td><strong>Aspiring Principal Program (APP):</strong> Year-long program that prepares assistant principals to become principals. Includes 12 classroom sessions and a 90-day residency during the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Aspiring Leader Program (ALP):</strong> Year-long program that prepares teachers, instructional coaches, and academic staff to become assistant principals. Includes six classroom sessions and a 3-week residency during summer school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>District Leader Program (DLP):</strong> Year-long program to build leadership capacity at the district level. Includes six classroom sessions and online learning modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Training and Support</td>
<td><strong>Leadership Development Seminars:</strong> Provides opportunities for school leaders to develop expertise in particular aspects of leadership.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Summer Leadership Conference:</strong> School and district leaders discuss leadership theory and trends in education.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Leader Mentor:</strong> New principals receive mentoring from a retired principal in the district during their first two years as a principal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: George W. Bush Institute

Gwinnett County Public Schools allocated a total of $5.5 million to the Quality-Plus Leader Academy in the 2013 fiscal year. Of this allocation, $3 million was funded through external grants and $2.5 million was funded directly by the district.

SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

The selection process for the APP is competitive, with around 50 percent of applicants in any given year being admitted to the program. Although any assistant principal in Gwinnett County Public Schools is eligible to apply for the APP, the district relies on current principals to identify and recruit promising candidates. Recruiting APP candidates is considered a core job function for principals in Gwinnett County Public Schools. According to the APP application form, candidates must:

- Have at least two years of experience serving as an assistant principal, and currently work as an assistant principal;

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46 Chart adapted from: Ibid., p. 20.
47 Ibid., p. 11.
48 Ibid., p. 22.
Be prepared to move into a principal role within one to three years;

- Demonstrate a strong record of job performance as a teacher and leader, and progressive responsibility; and

- Receive a strong recommendation from their supervisor and demonstrate high levels of credibility within their school.\(^49\)

Applications are evaluated by a group of assistant superintendents and members of the superintendent’s cabinet, led by the district’s Executive Director of Leadership Development, who oversees the Quality Plus Leader Academy.\(^50\) This group evaluates candidates for the APP using the criteria outlined in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2: Aspiring Principal Program Candidate Selection Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PERCENT OF EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Recommendation</td>
<td>A recommendation from the candidate’s principal, including job performance and potential to lead a school</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallup Principal Insight Tool</td>
<td>Generates a score from 1-99, which measures three dimensions: achievement drive, school structure and planning, and staff</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay Responses</td>
<td>Written responses to essay questions, which are scored on a scale of 1-3 across eight dimensions, including motivation, leadership experiences, and communications skills</td>
<td>30*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: George W. Bush Institute\(^51\)

The final selection process balances evaluation scores with Gwinnett County Public Schools’ projected needs for each school level and school characteristics such as Title I programs. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy, including both the ALP and APP, comprised about 70 participants in 2013.\(^52\)

The APP itself serves as an additional stage in the selection process for principals. According to district officials interviewed for The Wallace Foundation’s evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, the year-long cohort program serves as a second screening process, allowing the district to observe principal candidates functioning in real-world leadership roles. Participants who do not succeed may be counseled out of the principal role or withdraw from the program.\(^53\)

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\(^49\) Bulleted text adapted from: Ibid., p. Appendix B.

\(^50\) Ibid., p. 22.

\(^51\) Chart contents adapted from: Ibid., pp. 22–23.

\(^52\) Ibid., pp. 11, 23.

**CURRICULUM**

The APP begins with 12 day-long classroom sessions, taught by members of Gwinnett County Public Schools’ Executive Cabinet. Eight of these sessions align with Georgia’s state standards for school leaders, while the remaining sessions include three sessions on general leadership skills and a concluding session. According to a 2015 evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, Gwinnett County Public Schools engaged outside experts to review its school leadership standards. District leaders reported that developing specific standards for school leaders enables Gwinnett County Schools to clearly communicate desired outcomes and goals, and ensure that participants “speak the same language.”

Classroom sessions apply general leadership skills and principles to the particular context of Gwinnett County Public Schools. Typically, class sessions begin with a lecture that reviews assigned readings, before moving to an experiential learning activity such as a case study or simulation. As part of a district-wide technology initiative, the APP has recently added an online learning element, which allows participants to discuss course content with their cohort online. Participants generally complete experiential learning activities in performance-based teams. Figure 2.3 presents suggested texts for participants to read in the APP.

**Figure 2.3: Aspiring Principal Project Reading List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TITLE</strong></th>
<th><strong>AUTHORS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership on the Line</td>
<td>Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execution – The Discipline of Getting Things Done</td>
<td>Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of Effective Principals</td>
<td>James Stronge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Balanced Leadership Framework</td>
<td>McREL – T. Waters and G. Cameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good to Great Monograph</td>
<td>Jim Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership That Works</td>
<td>Marzano, Waters, and McNulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-Based Leadership</td>
<td>Tom Rath and Barry Conchie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Heart of Change</td>
<td>John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working With Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Daniel Goleman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gwinnett County Public Schools

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57 “The Aspiring Principal Program.” Gwinnett County Public Schools.
http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/content/key-initiatives/leadership-development-programs/the-aspiring-principal-program
58 Chart taken directly from: “Aspiring Principal Program Reading List.” Gwinnett County Public Schools.
http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/wcm/connect/72a5851c-9f54-4d16-a60b-4a70fdd6c7c6/Reading-List-for-APP-Cohort9.pdf?MOD=AJPERES
**CLINICAL RESIDENCY**

During the clinical residency, APP participants leave their current position to serve as a resident at a different school. This allows participants to gain experience working in different types of schools and the opportunity to develop skills. In addition, residents can apply the skills and knowledge developed in the classroom sessions to real-life situations. The residency concludes with a reflection activity in which participants summarize their experiences and how these experiences will be applied to their practice moving forward. Residents are placed at schools where the principal has expertise in particular areas where the resident needs additional support. In addition to the school principal, residents receive support from a facilitator coach.

**SUPPORT FOR NEW PRINCIPALS**

After completing the APP, new principals in Gwinnett County Public Schools receive two years of personalized mentoring from a retired principal in Gwinnett County Public Schools. Mentoring is more intensive at the beginning of a new principal’s role, and gradually becomes less intensive as principals gain experience and develop independence. A 2015 newspaper article about the principal mentoring program in Gwinnett County Public Schools notes that in some cases, mentors continue to provide informal support to their mentees after the conclusion of the formal mentoring program. Mentoring activities include individual meetings and group support sessions. In addition, mentors can provide training on specific leadership issues as needed.

As of 2015, Gwinnett County Public Schools employed 12 mentors, each of whom supported between 13 and 15 principals. Mentors are paid for 20 hours of work with their mentees each week, and attend the same professional development activities related to technology and district programs as the district’s in-service principals. Gwinnett County Public Schools tracks data on the mentoring process in order to evaluate mentoring needs. In addition, mentors take notes during meetings with mentees to identify areas for future guidance.

In addition to mentorship, new principals receive peer support from the other members of their APP cohort, as well as the other principals within their cluster of schools. Each cluster consists of one high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. Principals within clusters meet with assistant superintendents to coordinate curricula across grade levels, and provide one another with informal support as needed. In addition, assistant

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superintendents provide ongoing coaching support and serve as liaisons between principals and central office staff.64

OUTCOMES

As of 2015, around 80 percent of school leaders in Gwinnett County Public Schools have been trained through the APP.65 Gwinnett County Public Schools has established two strategic goals for the Quality-Plus Leader Academy:

- **Goal 1:** 70 percent or more of APP graduates will be appointed as principals within three years of completing the program;
- **Goal 2:** 100 percent of program graduates appointed to the principalship will remain for a minimum of two years.66

In recent years, Gwinnett County Public Schools has made substantial progress towards meeting these goals. Graduates of the APP serve as principals for an average of eight years. In addition, a 2009 study conducted by Gwinnett County Public Schools found that students in schools led by a principal who had graduated from the Quality-Plus Leader Academy earned higher average scores in statewide standardized tests of mathematics and science than other students in the district. However, this evaluation was unable to establish a direct causal relationship between participation in the Quality Plus Leader Academy and student achievement.67

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Hillsborough County Public Schools, located in Florida, is a participant in The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative. The district has developed a comprehensive succession planning and leadership development process.68 The district’s principal pipeline process includes the following programs:

- **Future Leaders Academy (FLA):** A six-month program to prepare aspiring leaders for roles as assistant principals;
- **Assistant Principal Induction Program (APIP):** A two-year induction program for new assistant principals, including mentoring and course work focused on instructional leadership, human capital management, organizational leadership, and operational leadership;
- **Preparing New Principals Program (PNP):** A two-year program to prepare assistant principals for roles as principals, including monthly coaching sessions focused on entry planning and coursework that includes applied experiences related to the principalship;

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65 Ibid., p. 19.  
66 Bulleted text taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 31.  
67 Ibid., pp. 31–33.  
- **Principal Induction Program (PIP):** A two-year induction program for new principals, including weekly coaching and professional development focused on effective leadership.⁶⁹

**SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT**

Candidates for the PNP program must be currently employed as an assistant principal in Hillsborough County Public Schools and have completed both the FLA and APIP.⁷⁰ Figure 2.4 shows the application process for the PNP program.

**Figure 2.4: Hillsborough County Public Schools Preparing New Principals Program Application Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>APPLICATION STEPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall/Winter</td>
<td>Hillsborough County Public Schools discusses competencies, program requirements, and the application process with interested candidates at information sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Winter</td>
<td>Candidates submit application, including an Assistant Principal Evaluation Summary, two professional references, and essay responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Candidates participate in 120 minute in-person selection activities, which include an initial interview, two to three performance tasks or scenarios, and a concluding 20 minute interview with Area Leadership Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Spring</td>
<td>Selected candidates are announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>The PNP program begins at the start of the school year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hillsborough County Public Schools⁷²

Applications are evaluated based on demonstration of Hillsborough County Public Schools’ core leadership competencies.⁷² These competencies are also used to inform the curriculum of the PNP program and to assess participants’ progress through the program and preparedness to serve as a school principal at the conclusion of the program.⁷³ Hillsborough County Public Schools’ core leadership competencies include:

- Achievement Focus and Results Orientation,
- Instructional Expertise,
- Managing and Developing People,
- Culture and Relationship Building, and
- Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management.⁷⁴

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⁷¹ Chart contents taken with minor alterations from: Ibid.
⁷² Ibid.
These competencies were developed by a committee of 20 principals and assistant principals, and incorporate Florida’s state leadership standards. After finalizing competencies, this committee reviewed each step of the principal pipeline and made needed revisions to ensure that preparation programs and evaluations aligned with leadership competencies, and that the FLA and PNP provided progressive, rather than redundant, development of these competencies. Individual candidates’ performance and development related to each competency is tracked from their initial application to the FLA to inform final hiring decisions.  

**CURRICULUM**

The PNP curriculum includes 12 classroom training sessions, which take place on Saturdays over two school years (Figure 2.5). These classes include applied activities that take place during and outside of the Saturday sessions. In addition, participants complete three key topic sessions each year, which focus on the operational aspects of school leadership and four required courses that reflect Hillsborough County Public Schools’ core leadership competencies.

**Figure 2.5: Hillsborough County Public Schools Preparing New Principals Program Saturday Course Topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Through Vision</td>
<td>Identifying a personal vision for leadership, creating a shared school vision, communicating and articulating both a personal and a school vision and getting buy-in from staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Positive School Culture</td>
<td>Assessing current school culture and developing strategies for building and sustaining a positive school culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Management that Leads to Effective Implementation and Buy-In from Stakeholders</td>
<td>Eight steps for effective change management, guidelines to getting others on board with any changes and the best ways to sustain change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting and Hiring Teacher Talent</td>
<td>Strategies for recruiting teachers and effective hiring practices, behavior-based interview questions and steps to follow before, during and after an interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Leadership Teams</td>
<td>Characteristics of effective leadership teams, planning productive meetings and distributing leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Leaders Through Job-Embedded Professional Development</td>
<td>Characteristics of quality, job-embedded professional development and using data to create professional development activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading for Instructional Improvement... Effective Observation and Feedback Practices</td>
<td>The steps to effective feedback practices, ways to improve student learning and how to coach teachers toward greatness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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76 “Preparing New Principals Program Courses of Study.” Hillsborough County Public Schools. p. 1. [http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/docs/00/00/06/01/HPP_PNP_CoursesOfStudyYr1andYr2_Final.pdf](http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/docs/00/00/06/01/HPP_PNP_CoursesOfStudyYr1andYr2_Final.pdf)
As the culminating exercise of the PNP program, participants create a Principal Entry Plan, outlining a proposed plan for their first 90 days as principal of a fictional school. This plan is evaluated based on demonstration of Hillsborough County Public Schools’ core competencies for school leaders, best practices in school leadership developed through the PNP program, demonstration of the participant’s awareness of the principal’s role in student achievement and teacher performance, and ability to plan strategically.  

After completing the PNP program, candidates must serve for one additional year as an assistant principal before entering the selection pool for principals. Candidates may remain in the selection pool for up to five years. Once selected as school principals, candidates immediately begin participating in the PIP.  

The PIP consists of a two year course of study beginning with a transition meeting that includes the new and outgoing principal, a principal coach, a District Area Leadership Director, and a member of Hillsborough County Public Schools’ human resources staff. After this meeting, new principals prepare their 90-day entry plan and attend a two-day New Principal Session. During the following two years, new principals participate in 11 day-long professional development sessions that address the core functions and daily responsibilities of a principal. In addition, new principals complete professional development courses focused on applied, job-embedded learning opportunities, and participate in afterschool professional development sessions focused on key topics.
MENTORING

Participants in the PNP program receive daily mentoring from their school principal focused on applied coursework activities. In addition, participants in the second year of the PNP program meet monthly with a principal coach to develop their Principal Entry Plan, and shadow a highly effective principal at another school.81

During the first year of the PIP program, new principals meet weekly with a principal coach, trained by Hillsborough County Public Schools, who provides support and feedback on new principals’ action plans to improve student achievement. In addition, new principals and coaches conduct site visits to other schools to provide opportunities for peer collaboration and improvements in leadership practices.82

NEW LEADERS

New Leaders is a national nonprofit organization that provides training and professional development for aspiring and current principals, and supports research and policy advocacy related to effective school leadership. New Leaders works with partner school districts to create a comprehensive principal pipeline that includes the following programs:

- **Emerging Leaders Program**: Provides initial leadership training to teachers and other instructional leaders;
- **Aspiring Principals Program**: Provides classroom training and year-long residency to aspiring principals.
- **Principal Institute**: Provides a professional learning community for new principals, including all first-year principals and second-year principals at the secondary level.83

SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

Application requirements for the Aspiring Principals Program vary somewhat across the geographic regions in which New Leaders operate. In general, candidates must have a master’s degree and five years of teaching or other instructional experience.84 Applications for the Aspiring Principals Program, as well as the Emerging Leaders Program are evaluated based on the selection criteria outlined in Figure 2.6.

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## Figure 2.6: New Leaders Selection Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Personal Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice and Continuous</td>
<td>▪ Demonstrate urgency, relentless drive, confidence, and belief in students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>despite adversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Continuously reflect on performance, seek feedback, and pursue opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to improve personal leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Interpersonal</td>
<td>▪ Model appropriate communication strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>▪ Build strong and trusting relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and Mission</td>
<td>▪ Create and articulate a compelling vision and mission focused on academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>success for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Inspire teachers to champion a vision and mission for academic success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Management</td>
<td>▪ Effectively manage change to support the vision and mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Instructional Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>▪ Accurately assess instructional quality and demonstrate excellence in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>planning for and delivering instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Driven Instruction</td>
<td>▪ Utilize multiple forms of student-level data to drive sustained gains in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to lead a team through the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>driven instruction cycle and adjust instructional practice to meet the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needs of all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation and Supervision of</td>
<td>▪ Observe and provide timely and on-target feedback to staff on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>effectiveness of instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 3: Culture Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgency and Efficacy</td>
<td>▪ Set high and achievable goals for teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Create and maintain a culture of urgency and commitment to high academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>achievement for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrate deep understanding of efficacy concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 4: Adult and Time Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Management</td>
<td>▪ Strategically monitor and hold staff accountable for performance expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>▪ Cultivate leadership in other adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrate the skills needed to lead a high-performing instructional team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 5: Operational Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic and Strategic Planning</td>
<td>▪ Diagnose complex issues and identify challenges to inform the strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Implement data collection systems to monitor and track progress against a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Facilitate collaborative development of strategic plans in service of goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New Leaders

New Leaders evaluates these standards for most candidates at the national level using a multi-step process. After verifying applicants’ eligibility, New Leaders conducts two rounds of admissions activities designed to assess applicants’ ability to plan strategically, lead adults, use data to inform decision making, and assess human capital. Finalist candidates participate in a full day session of interviews, case scenarios, and group observation activities. In addition to candidates who apply through this process, some candidates may be recruited directly to the Aspiring Principals Program as the result of evaluation at the end of the Emerging Leaders Program, which was created in 2012 to increase the available pool of potential principals within partner districts.86

**CURRICULUM**

The curriculum for New Leaders’ Aspiring Principals Program is based on the Urban Excellence Framework (UEF), a framework for effective school leadership based on research and case studies conducted by New Leaders.87 The UEF identifies effective leadership practices, referred to as Key Levers, within the following categories:

- Learning and Teaching,
- School Culture
- Aligned Staff,
- Operations and Systems, and
- Personal Leadership.88

The Aspiring Principals Program begins with a two-week Summer Foundations course, at which an entire annual cohort of resident principals meets in-person for coursework focused on the Key Levers of the UEF, along with cultural competence and leadership focused on mathematics and literacy.89

The Aspiring Principals Program curriculum focuses on the residency, which includes role-play activities, simulations, and formative evaluation and reflection. The curriculum also includes a placement as an assistant principal in a high need school. New Leaders works with districts to place residents in schools led by high-achieving principals, who serve as mentors for the residents. Where possible, New Leaders tries to place residents in schools led by principals who were themselves trained through the Aspiring Principals Program, in response to feedback suggesting variability in the quality of mentor principals. Each resident also receives personal coaching from a retired principal employed by New Leaders. Coaches are selected for a record of high student achievement.90 In addition, residents participate in

90 Ibid., pp. 24–25, 30.
self-paced online trainings, and attend one to two week national seminars three times a year.91

After completing the Aspiring Principals Program, graduates placed as principals receive ongoing support through the Principal Institute, which serves first-year principals in schools serving Grades K-8 and first- and second-year high school principals. Participants work with a New Leaders coach to develop an Entry Plan before beginning their first school year. The plan includes strategies for collecting data, generating staff support for a common vision, and setting high standards and student achievement goals.92 New principals in their first year typically meet with their coaches once a week for around two hours to discuss and obtain feedback on particular leadership strategies. In addition, in a survey conducted as part of a program evaluation of New Leaders, some principals reported that they kept in contact with coaches by phone or email in order to address urgent issues as needed. The same survey found that the intensity of coaching varied more for principals receiving a second year of support through the Principal Institute. These principals averaged around two hours per month of in-person contact with their coaches.93

During their participation in the Principal Institute, new principals meet for several hours each month with a Local Principal Institute Network composed of other new principals in the Principal Institute Leadership. These meetings provide new principals with opportunities for support, feedback, and actionable strategies to improve student achievement in their schools. Although the Principals Institute does not contain a formal mentoring component, New Leaders claims that the program provides participants with “the chance to mentor and learn from one another.”94

Following their participation in the Principal Institute, New Leaders provides participants with ongoing professional development and technical assistance. This support includes school-wide tools and planning frameworks, as well as local and national professional development workshops. All participants also have access to New Leaders’ Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) Knowledge System.95 This database compiles best practices identified by New Leaders and contains around 260 case studies and profiles of effective schools.96

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95 Ibid.
OUTCOMES

New Leaders has trained approximately 850 principals and assistant principals through the Aspiring Principals Program. New Leaders claims that schools led by principals trained in the Aspiring Principals Program outperform similar schools led by other principals. For example, students in schools led by Aspiring Principals Program graduates in the New Orleans area gained an average of 7.6 percentage points in statewide reading tests and an average of 12.3 percentage points in statewide mathematics tests for the 2012-2013 school year. This is compared to an average gain of 1.4 percentage points in reading and an average loss of 0.3 percentage points in mathematics for all students in Louisiana.

New Leaders contracted the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research institution, to conduct an independent assessment of the New Leaders program from 2006 to 2013. This evaluation compared student-level achievement data for schools led by principals trained through the Aspiring Principals Program to a comparison group of similar schools. The study found that students who attended elementary schools led by a principal trained through the Aspiring Principals Program for three years experienced a statistically significant increase of 1.3 percentile points in mathematics achievement and 0.7 percentile points in reading achievement compared to their control group peers. Students who attended high schools led by a principal trained through the Aspiring Principals Program experienced a significant increase of 3.0 percentile points in reading, but an insignificant decrease of 0.5 percentile points in mathematics compared to their peers in the control group. However, this study found substantial variation of effects across schools, with some schools reporting significantly negative effects on both mathematics and reading scores.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY

San Diego Unified School District (USD) created the Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) through a partnership with the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) at the University of San Diego in 2000, with grant funding from the Eli Broad Foundation. The program initially consisted of a one-year residency for aspiring principals, the Aspiring Principals Program. This transitioned into a two-year program and was renamed the Aspiring Leaders Program in 2005.

ELDA created the New Leaders Program in 2002 to support principals in their first or second year of school administration and the Leaders Exploring Administrative Possibilities (LEAP) program in 2005 to support highly qualified teachers interested in exploring administrative roles. In 2006, ELDA began offering summer professional development institutes and a speaker series to provide ongoing professional development for school leaders. In 2007,
ELDA was identified as an exemplary program in the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute’s (SELI) report on principal development programs.103 In recent years, ELDA has expanded to serve additional school districts outside of San Diego USD.104

**Selection and Recruitment**

Admission to each program is selective. Candidates must submit college transcripts, professional recommendations, a current resume, and a written narrative. In addition, candidates for the Aspiring Leaders Program – that leads to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing’s Preliminary Administrative Services Credential – or the Aspiring Principals Program – that leads to the full Administrative Services Credential – must have at least five years of experience teaching or working in schools.105 The selection process focuses on direct observations of candidates’ leading instruction.106 The final selection of candidates is made in partnership with each candidate’s home district.107

**Curriculum**

The Aspiring Leaders Program curriculum focuses on problem-based learning that applies course content to real-world problems through a practicum. For example, one assignment described in the SELI report had students develop a work plan to analyze and improve their school’s professional development structures. The students also had to integrate professional development into a plan for increasing staff capacity and monitoring student achievement.108 Figure 2.7 shows the basic curriculum for the Aspiring Leaders Program, which also leads to a Preliminary Administrative Services Credential in California. Students can complete additional coursework for an MA or PhD in Leadership Studies from the University of San Diego.109

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105 “Admission Requirements – Aspiring Leaders Program: Preliminary Administrative Services Credential.” School of Leadership and Education Sciences, University of San Diego. https://www.sandiego.edu/soles/academics/preliminary-administrative-services-credential/admission-requirements.php
### Figure 2.7: ELDA Aspiring Leaders Program Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Course Title</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Framework for School Leadership</td>
<td>Students learn about issues concerning the authority, power and liabilities of administrators as well as the legal status of teachers, students, and others involved in the educational program. Course provides prospective school leaders with understanding of how law guides day-to-day decision making in key areas and the consequences for violating policies.</td>
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<td>Instructional Leadership and Supervision I</td>
<td>Focuses on the role of school leaders in shaping a school culture that values teaching and learning as the center of the school’s work. Attention is given to the resources and skills needed to lead instructional improvement. Students are required to analyze data through classroom observations and develop an action plan to improve teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>Instructional Leadership and Supervision II</td>
<td>This course continues the work of Instructional Leadership and Supervision I, focusing on the development of students’ capacity to analyze instructional practice and lead improvement of teaching and learning. Students are required to analyze data through classroom observations and develop an action plan to improve teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>Leadership and the Dynamics of School Organization</td>
<td>Prepares students to plan, organize, manage, and evaluate the day-to-day operations of a school, focusing on the development of a safe and productive school culture that supports learning for teachers and students. Candidates learn strategies for working with school stakeholders, sharing decision-making and providing sufficient resources for the diverse needs of students. In developing the instructional leadership capacity of students, the course builds candidates understanding of, and skill in, responding to the complex political forces that shape organizational life.</td>
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<td>Special Topics: The Principalship I and II</td>
<td>This series of seminars address the critical operational issues of school leadership, providing candidates with the opportunity to develop their understanding of such areas as school counseling, teacher evaluations, conflict management, school site-based budgeting and personnel policies and procedures.</td>
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<td>Diversity and Community of School Leaders</td>
<td>This course examines the concept of diversity from multiple perspectives, investigating the impact of issues of power and privilege in relation to candidates’ work as instructional leaders, and developing candidates’ knowledge, skills and self-reflective practice.</td>
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<td>Curriculum Development: Access, Assessment, and School Improvement I</td>
<td>This course is intended to provide students with both the practical and theoretical understanding of basic principles and issues in curriculum theory, content, planning, and the role of technology in accomplishing those tasks. Candidates must be confident in their ability to examine, explore, analyze, common core standards and results of student level data to guide decision making and reform efforts in the school building. This ability is guided by their knowledge and understanding of student assessment and data management.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Development: Access, Assessment, and School Improvement II</td>
<td>This course will increase candidates’ ability to strategically implement appropriate and effective school improvement theories and strategies. Candidates will use school data to identify what is working, diagnosing needs, and identifying opportunities for growth and change. Candidates will develop capacity to communicate and lead others in continuous improvement and monitoring of these efforts based on student and school outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practicum in School Administration I and II</td>
<td>This intensive field-based residency experience integrates the theory and knowledge of the program coursework with the experiential learning through practice. The practicum supports the development of candidates’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions through practical experience with instructional leadership, operational management, and work with community stakeholders. Candidates meet routinely in triads with their supervising principal and university supervisor to discuss the candidate’s progress toward achieving leadership standards. Placements will be selected to ensure a learning environment that supports candidate learning in the critical areas of site leadership with their supervising/mentor principal.</td>
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Source: School of Leadership and Education Sciences, University of San Diego

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110 Chart content taken directly from: Ibid.
PRACTICUM IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The curriculum for the Aspiring Leaders Program includes a two-part Practicum in School Administration, which supports the in-class curriculum. Each student develops a written plan that outlines their approach to conducting fieldwork based on the six California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and a seventh standard for technology.

Students are placed with mentors “to ensure a learning environment that supports candidate learning in the critical areas of leadership.” They meet regularly with their mentor principal and university supervisor to discuss their progress towards meeting the program’s leadership standards. In addition to the practicum, students attend seminar discussions during which they discuss leadership successes and concerns that they have encountered during the practicum.

The program culminates in a series of assessments, including a problem-based learning project, a professional platform statement, and a portfolio based on the practicum. Students collect artifacts demonstrating their leadership role relating to each leadership standard in the culminating portfolio. This portfolio is responsible for 25 percent of students’ final course grades and also includes a detailed description of students’ leadership experiences during the practicum.

OUTCOMES

ELDA graduated 65 students from the Aspiring Principals Program from 2000-2005, and 94 students from the Aspiring Leaders Program since 2005. In addition, ELDA has graduated 80 students from the New Leaders Program and 43 students from the LEAP program. According to ELDA’s website, 83 schools in San Diego County are currently led by ELDA graduates. Fifty-six percent of these schools showed growth on the Academic Performance Index, California’s measure of student achievement, during the 2012-2013 school year.
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