

STATE *of the* STATES

The search for ways to improve instructional leadership zeroes in on 6 policy areas

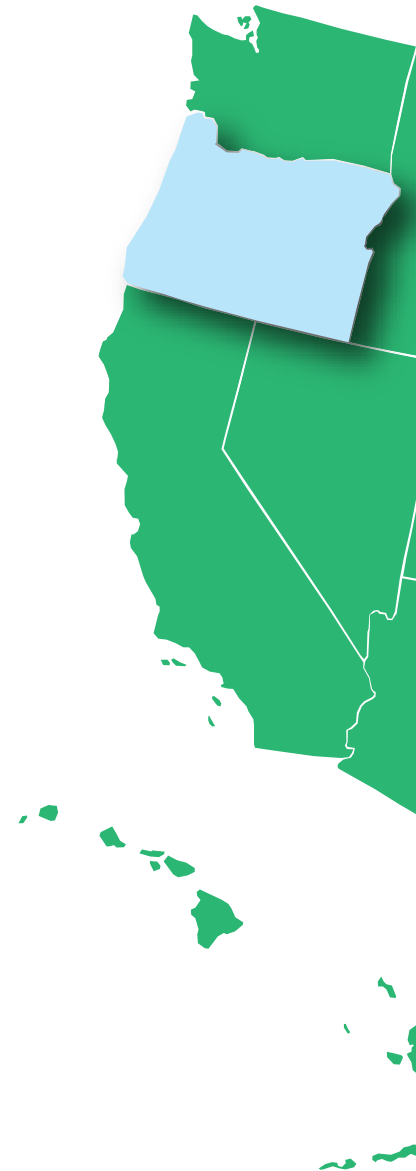
By Catherine Augustine
and Jennifer Russell

The recognition of the importance of effective school leadership is not limited to district-level leaders and academic researchers. State educational leaders have increasingly taken up improving school leadership as part of a general shift toward greater involvement in school reform efforts. The power of states in education matters has grown since the time of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), when states were required to assume responsibility for ensuring equity for students. Since that time, federal and state roles in education have changed and increased. The reform movements of the

1980s and 1990s brought more state involvement, as did increases in states' share of education funding.

By 2000, the emerging connection between strong instructional leaders and school improvement was making its way into state education policy discussions. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) had produced its first set of standards for school leaders in 1996 (CCSSO, 1996). Several national and state-based policy organizations then turned their attention to recruiting, training, and retaining instructional leaders (see Crews & Weakley, 1996; Murphy, Martin, & Muth, 1997; Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1998).

Through its engagement with grantees on initiatives to improve school leadership, The Wallace Foundation



WHAT STATES FOCUSED ON

State-level organizations sought to improve school leadership in six policy arenas:

1. Leadership standards

All 10 states had statewide leadership standards that were aligned with national standards.

2. Licensure policies

Respondents highlighted changing licensure policies as an approach for improving the quality of school leaders and providing alternative pathways to leadership positions.

3. Preservice programs

Many states and districts were reforming their preservice programs to better align them with districts' needs and state standards for leadership.

4. Professional development

States provided professional development for practicing leaders, including programs, mentors, coaches, and networks to support professional growth.

5. Leader evaluations

Some states were pursuing policies and initiatives for evaluating leaders.

6. Improving conditions

States were working to improve the conditions facing school leaders in several key ways: by providing timely data to inform leaders' decision making; by allowing sufficient authority to reallocate people, time, and money; and by targeting resources according to students' needs.

Research included 10 Wallace-funded states, highlighted in blue:

Oregon, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Massachusetts, Delaware, and Rhode Island.

This article is informed in part by research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation.

came to recognize the important role that state organizations play in advancing effective leadership in districts and schools as well as the importance of coordination among state- and district-level policies. The foundation asked RAND to examine which state-level entities were involved in this work and how they attempted to improve school leadership. We studied 10 Wallace-funded states: Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, and Rhode Island.

We analyzed documents describing state-led efforts to improve school leadership and interviewed more than 120 state-level representatives about this work. We also

interviewed almost 200 district officials from 17 (mainly large urban) districts, in part to understand their response to state efforts to improve school leadership. Here, we describe the actions they took and provide recommendations to states endeavoring to improve school leadership.

We have recently concluded a study for The Wallace Foundation on the role of cohesive leadership systems — that is, policies and initiatives that are well coordinated across the state and between the state and its districts (Augustine et al., 2009). The actions and recommendations we describe here are informed by that work.

WHAT ACTIONS WERE STATES TAKING TO IMPROVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

State-level organizations sought to improve school leadership in six policy arenas:

1. Leadership standards;
2. Licensure policies;
3. Preservice programs;
4. Professional development;
5. Leader evaluations; and
6. Improvement of conditions for school leaders (e.g. access to data, autonomy, and resources).

Not surprisingly, there was variation across the states. Actions varied in terms of range of positions targeted, comprehensiveness of actions, number of people served, magnitude of change, and the stage of the initiative. States also varied in terms of how active they were in improving school leadership in general. Although some states were clearly driving change, others allowed their large urban districts to take the lead in improving school leadership. In these cases, some states were adept at identifying and spreading good practices that started in their districts.

1 LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

All 10 states had statewide leadership standards that were aligned with national standards. Some states, including Delaware and Rhode Island, simply adopted the ISLLC standards. Most others created their own standards based on the ISLLC or other national standards. Some states were updating their standards to align with the new 2008 ISLLC standards (CCSSO, 2008).

Others were broadening the positions addressed by standards. For example, the standards sent to the Rhode Island Board of Regents in November 2008 for approval covered a continuum of school leaders, including principals, central office administrators, building administrators, teacher leaders, department chairs, and any educator with leadership responsibilities. A consortium of states, including Delaware and Kentucky, was engaged in an effort to develop standards and training programs for teacher leadership.

2 LICENSURE POLICIES

Our respondents also highlighted changing licensure policies as an approach for improving the quality of school leaders and providing alternative pathways to leadership positions. Some states had changed their licensing structure. For example, Indiana eliminated the elementary and secondary school distinction. Oregon reduced the number of levels of administrative licenses from three to two and increased the experience requirements for the second level. Delaware instituted a three-tier system that provided initial, continuing, and advanced licenses. Kentucky provided a teacher leader endorsement, and Illinois

provided a teacher leader license and a master principal license. Indiana, Iowa, and Oregon revised their requirements to align with the new ISLLC leadership standards.

3 PRESERVICE PROGRAMS

Many states and districts were reforming their preservice programs to better align them with districts' needs and state standards for leadership. Among the changes were: ending existing preservice programs and requiring programs to reapply for accreditation; collaboratively redesigning preservice programs; creating alternative preparation programs; offering training and experiences aimed at increasing interest and knowledge about the principal position; and improving recruitment efforts. For example, the Iowa Department of Education and State Board of Education jointly decided to terminate all leadership programs in 2004 after a task force determined that the programs were not producing high-quality leaders. Programs would not be reinstated until program administrators demonstrated alignment with leadership standards and district needs.

4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

States provided professional development for practicing leaders, including programs, mentors, coaches, and networks to support professional growth. Massachusetts, for example, made a national instructional leadership program, the National Institute for School Leadership, available to all principals in the state. This intensive program required participants to attend two days of professional development every month for a year and a half. The program primarily targeted principals, but districts were encouraged to attend as leadership teams that included central office staff. At the time of our study, the National Institute for School Leadership program in Massachusetts had trained more than 790 educators. Indiana supported sustained cohort-based professional learning opportunities through a state principal academy.

5 LEADER EVALUATIONS

Some states were pursuing policies and initiatives for evaluating leaders, which is not typical — principals tend to be evaluated infrequently or not at all (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). Delaware, for example, developed the Delaware Performance Appraisal System for administrators, which is designed to measure progress according to the ISLLC standards. To rate principals, evaluators review evidence submitted by the principal; outcomes of three conferences between the principal and the evaluator; survey data from principals, teachers, and evaluators; and student achievement and growth data from state and local assessments. This evaluation system is now mandatory for all districts in the state.

6

IMPROVING
CONDITIONS

States were working to improve the conditions facing school leaders in several key ways: by providing timely data to inform leaders' decision making; by allowing sufficient authority to reallocate people, time, and money; and by targeting resources according to students' needs. Iowa was in the process of developing an end-of-course assessment aligned with the new state curriculum and had recently started to provide state assessment results at the individual student level.

Oregon had created an online adaptive state student assessment system that would provide teachers with instant results. Other sites were allocating resources for additional leadership personnel, such as school administration managers (SAMs), who assume traditional managerial responsibilities so that principals can reallocate their time in ways that better meet students' learning needs. For example, Kentucky was working with the Jefferson County Public Schools to scale-up the use of this practice throughout the state by providing specialized training for SAMs.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

States' actions across the six policy areas demonstrate that the

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state can play a critical role in improving school leadership. Also, some states are taking actions in arenas once dominated by districts. For example, states are mandating school leader mentoring and evaluations. In the states undertaking the most comprehensive actions to improve school leadership, study district respondents reported three types of benefits: more sophisticated support, increased funding, and, in those states where specific improvement actions were mandated, an "excuse" to direct energy toward leadership improvement. In other words, district leaders could invoke state law to support efforts to improve school leadership, which saved time and resources that would have otherwise gone toward motivating support for change.

Although we were unable to determine which state actions were most promising, some may prove to be quite significant. Requiring regular school leader evaluations, reforming preservice

programs, and mandating coaching for all principals in a state have the potential to result in significant professional growth. And because the large urban districts in our study reported benefits from state involvement, we suspect that smaller, less-resourced districts would also benefit from it.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS

Our interviewees credited both contextual factors and implementation strategies for their success in implementing policies and initiatives to improve school leadership. These recommendations are based on our analyses of these interview data. We target our recommendations to any organizations with state-level responsibilities, given the important roles that many nontraditional state organizations played, including universities, professional associations, and unions.

Make strategic decisions about lead agencies and cultivate broad engagement.

Across the 10 states, we observed significant variation in terms of which organizations took the lead on school leadership improvement. Organizational configurations that work in one state may not work in another. State officials spent time determining best organizational and individual leads given their state context, and leads often rotated across offices and people. In most states, the chief state school officer played a key role in promoting the importance of leadership development, as did state boards of ed-

ucation. Education agencies were involved in all 10 states — sometimes in the lead role and sometimes, particularly in cases where the education agency had limited capacity (a problem that has been exacerbated by recent budget crises), as a key partner in the work. Some states intentionally involved universities, leadership academies, professional associations, and teacher and administrative unions. In Kentucky, the work was jointly led by the state education agency and the Jefferson County Public Schools.

What seems most important is not which state-level agency coordinates leadership improvement work, but that decisions about lead agencies are driven by the context, structures, and capacity of the state, and that leadership improvement strategies promote engagement across all participating organizations.

Build trust between the state and its districts.

Our interviewees reported the importance of improving relationships between state agencies and local education agencies before the state could launch leadership improvement efforts, which most often necessitate district buy-in. Trust building often involved recognizing innovative districts as “lead learners” and scaling district-developed practices to other districts in the state.

Trust also increased when state agencies shifted from acting as compliance monitors to also become support providers. Opportunities for state and district officials to participate in joint work and professional development, in forums such as the exec-

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utive training programs offered by Harvard and the University of Virginia, also facilitated trust.

Engage in continuous learning and improvement.

Our interviewees reported the importance of continuing to learn about what works to improve school leadership in their states. State leaders involved individual and organizational experts on school leadership (e.g. Southern Regional Education Board, The Wallace Foundation) in critiquing their work and providing ongoing feedback. Study states also appreciated participation in the Wallace network, where they benefited from the exchange of promising practices and the opportunity to work with other states launching leadership improvement efforts.

Monitor districts and provide them with support.

With the advent of standards-based accountability and No Child Left Behind, states have had to shift their focus to supporting districts and providing resources for school improvement. This is a new role that is outside many states' core competencies. Indeed, many initiatives began by focusing on building better relationships between state agencies and districts, as well as on developing ways to encourage districts to change while also providing technical assistance to support the change process. Study states also faced challenges in holding universities accountable for the quality of their school leadership preservice preparation programs. Those that were able to exercise their authority to influence change while providing support for the change process reported that they were able to implement new policies and initiatives to improve school leadership. Ongoing professional development and technical assistance from the state increased the likelihood that the state's intentions would be fulfilled as districts implemented policies and initiatives tailored to their contexts.

Structure leadership improvement work to have a lasting impact.

Interviewees reported a number of actions they were taking to ensure that their leadership improvement efforts would have lasting impact. Many states established distributed leadership models for this work, vesting leadership of the initiatives in many different organizations, including some outside of government to help shield the work from future political changes. Most states ensured that there was a connection between their leadership efforts and their leadership standards. For example, mandated evaluation tools were based on leadership standards. Connecting leadership improvement reforms to other education reforms in the state was also a strategy that helped ensure sustainability. States also reported providing ongoing incentives to districts for implementing demonstration or pilot programs to improve leadership, to ensure continued buy-in, and to develop programs that other districts could adopt when appropriate. Legislation and regulations that solidified programs and their funding also encouraged buy-in from districts and schools.

LOOKING FORWARD

State organizations are in a strong position to improve school leadership, given their ability to set education reform agendas, legislate change, fund implementation efforts, and spread promising practices across districts. As they anticipate the future, interviewees stressed the importance of knowing that their leadership improvement efforts are actually improving leadership and, ultimately, student achievement.

This will be an important next step to attract additional funding and motivate ongoing participation.

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