

Technical Note: School Leadership Development & Credentialing Systems

How Do Top-Performing Education Systems Develop School Leaders Over the Course of Their Careers?

The global top performers all prioritize developing school leaders who can ensure that their schools offer high quality and equitable learning opportunities to their students. They see school leaders not simply as skilled managers and administrators, but as the spear of their strategies to implement a highly effective, complex and integrated education system that improves student performance and closes gaps at scale. Perhaps most important, they see their principals as crucial to the selection, development and effective support of highly qualified professional teachers. In the top-performing systems, it is the principal who is responsible for setting very high expectations for both students and staff, recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, and organizing the work of teachers collaboratively so that they are responsible for constantly working together to improve their own effectiveness and student performance using applied research.

The top performers worldwide see school leaders as responsible for designing and leading school organizations to also meet local needs. This requires principals to have a combination of wide-ranging knowledge and skills including instructional knowledge, patience, drive, management skill, ethical roots, moral qualities, and a strong command of what is known worldwide about managing professionals for high performance.

Successful systems design policies to ensure that school leaders are effective by:

- 1) Attracting high-quality candidates into leadership;
- 2) Training candidates to meet rigorous standards; and,
- 3) Retaining leaders and helping them to get better and better over the course of their careers through:
 - a. Professional development and peer-to-peer mentoring in professional networks and
 - b. A defined career ladder in education that incentivizes principals as well as teachers to take on more advanced and differentiated roles, including the opportunity to mentor their peers.

This technical note describes these component policies in more detail, giving examples from top-performing education systems for each system component. It will conclude with a brief overview of the research literature on the potential for professionalized credentialing and career ladder systems to retain and develop school leaders.

Attracting High-Quality Candidates into School Leadership

Top-performing systems work hard to build a deep pool of candidates for principal positions by identifying early and grooming capable teachers who appear to have strong leadership potential. These candidates are purposefully recruited and may be offered a succession of progressively demanding opportunities to lead teacher teams in the school to build their skills. In general, future principals are not self-selecting like they typically are in the United States. In almost all cases, principals must have been teachers themselves.

In *Hong Kong*, for example, all principals must be highly effective teachers with five years of teaching experience before they can begin additional education and training. They apply to university preparation programs directly, and the application process requires recommendations from their principals which evaluates their success as teachers. Before admission to preparation, they undergo a needs assessment diagnostic, which lasts a full-day and evaluates their readiness for the principalship. The results of the needs assessment not only determine fitness for the principalship, but also help programs to differentiate program offerings to admitted candidates based on the skills they need to acquire. Candidates can choose some of their courses based on the skills the needs assessment indicates they most need to develop.

In *Singapore*, aspiring principals are carefully selected and groomed by senior leaders in the Ministry of Education. A teacher who aspires to be a principal must be promoted along the leadership track of the career ladder (described in more detail below) to subject or level head, head of department and vice principal. Criteria used to promote a teacher along the track include annual performance appraisal, a professional portfolio, a district level panel review, recommendations from colleagues and supervisors as well as the results of a tool called “current estimated potential,” which estimates the leadership potential and which is created early in an educator’s career and used in continuous professional development to guide training.

Initial Training Based on Rigorous Leadership Standards

In most of the top performing jurisdictions, aspiring principals are provided initial training based on well-defined leadership competencies, such as [Ontario’s Leadership Framework](#). These standards provide a framework to guide leadership development training that encompasses a broad range of skills and competencies, including school management; strategic planning; teacher professional development; the improvement of instruction; accountability and quality assurance; and stakeholder relations.

The top performers differ in the extent to which they believe that principals must be primarily prepared as instructional leaders. Many are moving toward focusing on how to build leaders’ skills as managers of professionals, delegating instructional leadership roles to teachers. In order to build these skills in school leaders, initial preparation always involves a clinical experience and mentoring by a successful school leader.

Singapore is an example of a system that focuses on the development of leaders as managers of professional teachers who can themselves develop stronger teaching and learning in the school. Therefore, the quality of Singapore school leaders is a function of the high standards that applicants meet to become a teacher and then a teacher leader. The Ministry of Education offers two training programs to develop teachers into leaders. Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) is designed to train teacher leaders who may one day become principals. The program develops teacher leaders’ curriculum expertise, leadership and management skills. A second program, Leaders in Education (LIE) is designed to give principals and Ministry personnel the skills and capabilities required to lead school improvement and teacher development. In addition to six months of coursework, each participant is assigned a mentor, completes a Creative Action Project (CAP), keeps a personal learning journal, and participates in a two-week overseas visit to learn from another education system. Most of the coursework is organized around case studies. MLS and LIE share philosophies and adult learning principles (such as learning by doing), and can be thought of as two

halves of one overarching school leadership development program that spans a teacher's trajectory from departmental leadership to the principal's office. Most principals complete both programs.

In *Hong Kong*, all aspiring principals are required to complete a Certification for Principalship (CFP). This involves three components that must be completed within a two- year period:

1. Needs-analysis program;
2. Preparation for Principalship program (PFP); and
3. Professional development portfolio

The needs-analysis program is the first step of becoming a principal. During this program, candidates are assessed by a mentor and benchmark their leadership capacities against a set of systemwide capacities. This analysis is used to prepare a leadership development plan. The needs-analysis serves simultaneously as a screening for candidates, and as an opportunity to identify specific courses candidates will take based on their needs. The Preparation for Principalship (PFP) program aims to "...build the capacity of aspiring principals to develop strategic, instructional and organizational and community leadership, as well as to establish sound beliefs and values that Hong Kong school principals should hold." PFP consists of six core modules as well as a series of additional workshops, and also includes a core action research component. Participants undertake a school-based action research project based on a fact-based "problematic aspect" of teaching and learning in the school. They then go through the processes of "planning, acting, observing and reflecting" on their project for improving the situation. Principal preparation concludes with submission of a portfolio. This is a series of reflective journals chronicling where the candidate began, how the action research and their coursework helped them to grow, and where they are now, tied to the leadership development plan constructed during the needs-analysis. The portfolio is assessed by experienced leaders at the Hong Kong equivalent of an SEA (the Education Department Bureau), not by individual program professors.¹

Retaining and Developing School Leaders Through Mentoring and Ongoing Training

Beyond initial training, top-performing systems provide a range of supports to school leaders to ensure that they are continuously developing their skills and have opportunities to grow into new and more challenging roles. This often starts with giving new school principals access to a group of experienced peers and mentors who support them in their career growth, guide them toward professional learning opportunities aligned to their aspirations, and help them realize their personal goals and goals for the growth of their students and faculty. Principals are regularly given opportunities to visit other schools in their district, state or province, and even abroad in order to learn about successful practices and adapt their own leadership practices accordingly. This practice is intended to keep leaders learning continuously and to promote a benchmarking culture.

¹ These two program descriptions adapted from Jensen, et al, NCEE, 2017.

One model of leadership development is the Principal’s Development Course regulated by the College of Teachers in *Ontario*. Principals in Ontario must earn a Principals’ Qualification Certificate and serve for two years as leaders in good standing before applying for this advanced form of professional development. The Course is one of hundreds of Additional Qualifications (AQs) offered in Ontario, a form of semester-long micro-credential that educators can earn to develop their skills, apply for recertification, and distinguish themselves as leaders in specific content areas. The Principal’s Development Course is application-only. The course includes eight modules, illustrated below. The overarching emphasis is on “critical inquiry and the co-construction of knowledge and learning as it applies to complex issues related to creating and sustaining vibrant school and system cultures that enhance student learning and well-being.”²

Figure 1: Principals Development Course Modules in Ontario



In *Shanghai*, effective principals serve as mentors to weaker peers. Through the Empowered Management Program, school districts identify low-performing schools in need of additional help, and then match these schools with a demographically similar high-performing school. For two years, the principal of the high-performing school is charged with providing on-site mentoring and support to his or her lower-performing peer. The mentor gives coaching, helps to facilitate strategic planning, conducts on-site walkthroughs and classroom visits, and suggests improvements. Typically the mentor will work on-site at the lower-performing school for two days per week. At the end of the two-year period, both mentee and mentor are held accountable for the improvement of school.³ This experience benefits both parties—giving skilled leaders the opportunity to guide and mentor others, while helping to build the capacity of the less effective leader. This type of mentorship is part of Shanghai’s career ladder structure for teachers and school leaders, which requires that principal mentors are carefully selected and have the skills and competencies needed to help their mentees improve. Career ladders, and their utility for supporting strong mentorship, professional growth, and job satisfaction and retention, are discussed in more detail below.

² Ontario College of Teachers (2016), p. 2.

³ Adapted from Jensen, et al, NCEE, 2016 and observations from CIEB benchmarking visit to Shanghai, 2016.

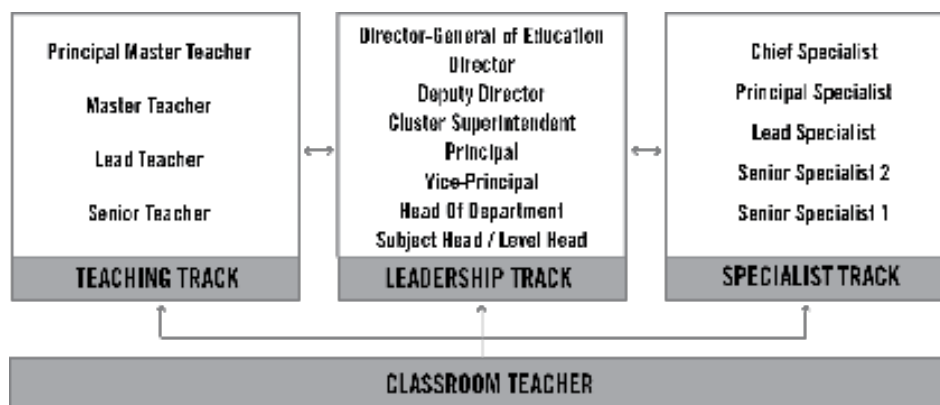
Retaining and Developing School Leaders Through a Career Ladder System

Many top performers also have career ladders for educators, including school leaders, that provide incentives for educators to expand their roles and responsibilities within their district, state or province. In these systems, teachers, principals and other school leaders advance along a ladder over time – although time is only one factor that determines promotion. Positive performance on evaluations and the amount, quality, and relevance of professional development completed are factors along with successfully mentoring their peers, developing and implementing innovative research-based programming and in some cases, working on education policy in the Education Ministry. Therefore, participation in continuous learning results in school leaders getting promotions more quickly, which in turn helps them earn additional pay and take on more advanced responsibilities.

At the core of this system is the idea that it is a key responsibility of management to identify people with real leadership potential, to give them many or opportunities to develop that potential by giving them a planned variety of assignments and, at the same time, the mentoring and skill building support needed to be successful in those assignments. When the current level of certification for principals becomes the first step on a real career ladder and that ladder is used to restructure the whole organization of the schools and the work that educators do, school systems will not only have a way to motivate their teachers to get better and better at the work; they will also have a way to make sure that their most accomplished teachers and leaders are used strategically to lead other teachers and leaders in improvement of the performance of the school and the whole district. The induction, mentoring, collaboration and networking system therefore becomes a driver of how work is organized in schools by school leaders and how work is organized in the school district by administrators.

For example, *Singapore's* three-part educator career ladder includes a “Leadership Track” that progresses from subject head, to school leadership, and then to district leadership, as shown in the chart below:

Figure 2. Career Ladder in Singapore



¹ Academy of Principals Singapore (2014). Sabbaticals. Retrieved from http://www.aps.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=96

Each stage of the career ladder is not tied to length of time served, but rather to meeting competencies that the principal and his or her supervisor have agreed upon, and that are aligned with the Ministry's goals. Principals set personal performance and competency goals and review them with supervisors twice throughout the year. The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS) is the evaluation tool used to track those competencies and determine movement along the ladder. It is an annual evaluation of all teachers and principals in three areas: Professional Practice, Leadership Management and Personal Effectiveness. Principals who score highly may move along the ladder more quickly; principals in need of improvement do not move along and are required to develop professional development plans with oversight from their cluster superintendent.⁵ Therefore, there is no set minimum length of time that those on the leadership track must be employed in order to progress to the next rung of the ladder, although estimates peg the average time served at each rung at about four years. A committee of district officials meets at the end of the year to review those that have met their goals and determines those that are eligible for bonuses and movement along the career ladder.

The concept of a system that offers educators additional credentials over the course of their entire careers is unfamiliar to many Americans. Therefore, the evidence base for this structure is discussed in more detail below.

Research on Educator Career Ladders⁶

Within the elementary and secondary education system in the United States, there are limited professional opportunities to take on greater responsibility, move between different roles, including between classroom teaching, school and district leadership and state administration, earn higher salaries, and access higher status positions. Classroom teaching has historically been viewed as a flat career because new teachers and veteran teachers are generally expected to perform the same tasks and have similar responsibilities. The lack of career staging and advancement opportunities makes it challenging to recruit, develop, and retain talented teachers.⁷ Furthermore, career advancement typically entails teachers leaving the classroom, providing a disincentive for those who want to continue to teach and to explore school leadership.⁸ A career ladder system, on the other hand, promotes ongoing learning, professional growth, mentorship, and the opportunity to lead schools with different challenges, cultures and contexts and in top performing systems, puts high quality teaching and learning at the center.

A career ladder system that includes both classroom teachers and school leaders provides a number of benefits. It:

- attracts talented teachers and leaders into the profession⁹,

⁵ Steiner, L. (2010). "Using Competency Based Evaluation to Drive Teacher Excellence: Lessons from Singapore." Public Impact. Accessed March 11, 2015 from http://opportunityculture.org/images/stories/singapore_lessons_2010.pdf

⁶ Adapted from Keo, 2016

⁷ Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001; Hess, 2009

⁸ Lortie, 1975; Danielson, 2007; Goodlad & McMannon, 2004

⁹ Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013; Goodwin, Low, & Ng, 2015

- offers opportunities for differentiated roles and greater responsibility and, potentially, autonomy, for leaders and teachers¹⁰,
- establishes criteria for advancement from one level on the ladder to the next, with differentiated pay and titles at each level to correspond with different career stages and their shifting knowledge, skills, and performance¹¹,
- recognizes and rewards educators in exchange for increasing degrees of expertise¹²
- improves teacher and leader retention, performance, and morale¹³; and
- incentivizes desired behaviors in teachers and leaders, such as requiring that expert educators serve in low-income or high-need schools as a precondition of advancement.

A career ladder and credentialing system offers teachers and principals a structured path for professional growth. Leaders are motivated by career ladder rewards and status gains. They may be more willing to develop their expertise, engage in professional decision-making, collaborate with other colleagues, coach and mentor less experienced teachers, and exert influence as they see their professional roles and responsibilities develop. In other words, career ladders reinforce the importance of professional learning and mentorship amongst leaders. Because career pathways center on teaching expertise and professional judgment, they can help build public trust for education and shift the mindsets and culture of teaching over time.

Career ladders can also be used strategically to create talent pipelines and to promote equity. By creating pathways for expert teachers to receive training, coaching, and mentorship in preparation for principal or curriculum specialist roles, career ladder systems provide a pathway into school leadership.¹⁴ School systems can use career ladders to identify and groom potential leaders by drawing from the top ranks of teachers, knowing that they have demonstrated instructional expertise, led collaborative professional learning, and mentored peers to improve their practice. Furthermore, school systems can tailor career ladder systems to encourage expert teachers and leaders to move into positions where they are most needed and build more equitable systems. With the right structures and incentives, more senior educators and school leaders will spend some or all of their career working in high-needs and low-income schools, promoting equity for all students.¹⁵

¹⁰ Darling-Hammond, 2010; CIEB, n.d.; Brandt, 1990; Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013

¹¹ CIEB, n.d.; Brandt, 1990; Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013; Accomplished California Teachers, 2012

¹² Darling-Hammond, 2010; CIEB, n.d.; Brandt, 1990; Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013

¹³ AFT, 2012

¹⁴ Darling-Hammond, 2010; Tucker, 2014

¹⁵ Darling-Hammond, 2010; Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013

Appendix: Additional Reading on School Leader Development

Over the last ten years, the field of principal recruitment, preparation and continuous development has established a clear set of features that is included in exemplary programs, methods for delivering program content, the structure of internships, and what is needed to formulate effective partnerships between universities and districts in order to assure strong outcomes. We provide several research resources, as well as tools and case studies to help NISL facilitators and clients learn from these top performing systems. As NISL participants have learned, a system for recruiting, training, and continuously developing school leaders who can drive the system's agenda is one of the Nine Building Blocks of top performing systems identified by NCEE's Center on International Education Benchmarking.

Preparing to Lead: Lessons in Principal Development from High-Performing Education Systems by Ben Jensen, Phoebe Downing, and Anna Clark
(NCEE, available October 19, 2017)

This report, designed and funded by NCEE's Center on International Education Benchmarking, examines leadership development programs in four top performing education jurisdictions around the world and describes the key elements that make them effective. Three of these (Hong Kong, Ontario, and Singapore) have established mandatory pre-service preparation programs for aspiring school leaders. The report also discusses how leadership development in top systems is incentivized by career ladders that reward participants for continuous professional learning and taking on greater responsibilities.

Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy by Paul Manna
(The Wallace Foundation, 2015)

This report examines state policy levers, including approving and overseeing principal preparation, and offers guidance to states that want to take action.

Supporting Principals' Learning: Key Features of Effective Programs by Leib Sutcher, Anne Pokolsky, and Danny Espinoza
(Learning Policy Institute, 2017)

This paper reviews research evidence to determine which components of principal preparation and professional development connect to improved school outcomes. It argues that principal preparation programs should incorporate strong partnerships; purposeful and targeted recruitment; cohort and network learning; problem-based learning methods; internships and on-the-job coaching by an expert; and curriculum focused on improving instruction, creating collegial organizations, and using data to improve student achievement.

Effective Preparation Program Features: A Literature Review by Gary M. Crow and Rodney S. Whiteman
(University Council for Educational Administration, 2016)

This journal article explores the research base on specific program elements of educational leadership preparation programs, including context, candidates, faculty, curriculum, design, delivery, pedagogy, internships, student assessment, mentoring and coaching, comprehensive leadership development, and program evaluation.

Principal Preparation Program Self-Assessment Toolkit
(Education Development Center, 2013)

A tool to help principal preparation programs assess the quality of the training they provide, including candidate recruitment, course content and internships, and outcomes. The evaluation criteria are based on research that identifies the characteristics of effective principal preparation and standards for principal job performance.

Navigating the Shift to Intensive Principal Preparation in Illinois: An In-Depth Look at Stakeholder Perspectives by Bradford White, et. al.
(Illinois Education Research Council, 2016)

Illinois passed sweeping legislation to redesign its principal preparation programs in 2010 with the goal of improving schools statewide through higher quality leadership. This study assesses the progress of those reforms and describes the changes that occurred as a result of the new policy.

Redesigning Principal Preparation: A Work in Progress at the University of Missouri St Louis
by Matthew Kelemen and Benjamin Fenton
(New Leaders and UMSL Education, 2016)

This case study describes the process that UMSL has undertaken to change its approach to principal preparation, embracing key improvements such as rigorous selection and aligned assessment; updated content based on current understandings of effective leadership practices; greater opportunities to practice leadership in a school context during preparation; and closer partnerships with hiring school districts. It is intended to help other colleges of education and their partners who are considering a more rigorous approach.

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