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Principals Path to Leadership

COMPENDIUM OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES







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FOREWORD

At American Express, we appreciate the impact that strong leaders can have on society. As such, we have invested in leadership training for more than 25,000 nonprofit and social purpose leaders. Because schools are one of the places where talented individuals are always needed, we created the American Express Principals Path to Leadership in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). One of our largest investments in education leadership training to date, the program builds upon our decade-long legacy of supporting experiential leadership development programs.



Principals are expected to motivate their teachers and create stimulating learning environments for their students. Yet, they themselves do not always receive the essential resources and support needed to ensure their success as leaders. Too often, principals must learn how to address the unexpected challenges of their job simply through experience.

In 2015, driven by the growing research detailing the high cost of principal turnover and the need for school districts to effectively develop the principal pipeline, we selected five diverse principal leadership programs to receive \$2.5 million in grants over a three-year period, with an eye toward lasting sustainability. This funding is currently being used to increase the capacity and overall impact of these programs.

By expanding principal and emerging principal preparation programs, and ultimately sharing best practices broadly through this compendium and additional upcoming works, we aspire to have a positive impact on public education. We hope you will join us in ensuring a new generation of principals is equipped for the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. McClimon
President
American Express Foundation

FOREWORD

Over the years, our collective awareness of the principal's crucial role in student learning has grown. More recently, conversations have emerged about the most effective ways to remodel principal preparation programs—not just at universities but also at state education agencies, school districts, and nonprofits—so they identify and cultivate the best leadership talent, which will in turn cultivate the talent of each student.

In 2015, NASSP was honored to welcome American Express into that conversation. Through its generosity, the Principals Path to Leadership grant program identified five models of principal preparation that are not only sustainable but replicable and scalable to broader populations. To its credit, American Express quickly recognized the limitations of supporting a program for the sake of only the current participants. Its deeper commitment was to carefully track progress and capture lessons to be shared with the larger educational leadership community. This report represents the first iteration of early lessons learned.

Just over one year into the three-year grant program, common lessons are beginning to emerge: that preparation begins with thoughtful identification of the most talented principal prospects; that aspiring principals need a safe environment where they can make mistakes, reboot, and try again; and that the most promising aspirants to the principalship readily acquire a habit of reflective practice, during which they consider their behavior in the context of their priorities.

These models are very much a work in progress, but I encourage all school leaders to consider the content of this report as a launchpad for reflection on your own principal development and a source of inspiration for how you might participate in developing your successor and the next generation of leaders.

Sincerely,

JoAnn D. Bartoletti
Executive Director
National Association of Secondary School Principals



OVERVIEW

In partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), American Express launched the American Express Principals Path to Leadership Initiative, a giving program created to expand effective principal preparation programs. In October 2015, American Express and NASSP announced the five winners of the Principals Path to Leadership grant. The winners—selected from more than 70 applicants—received a total of approximately \$2.5 million to increase their capacity and impact over a three-year period, with an eye toward long-term sustainability.

Now in its second year, Principals Path to Leadership represents one of American Express' largest investments in education leadership training to date, and it continues the company's commitment to leadership development across the social sector.

In June 2015, the grant program launched with a call for applications among districts, states, and U.S.-based 501(c)(3) organizations that manage programs to train new and emerging K–12 principals. The selection committee included American Express employees, NASSP professional development staff, NASSP-recognized principals, and education leadership experts. Applicants were evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Program description, nature of the problem, and challenges addressed.
- Clear vision and direction for the program and comprehensive program goals.
- Well-defined initial outcomes for the program.
- Comprehensive delineation of expected future outcomes, defined success metrics, and methods for measuring success.
- Detailed timeline and budget demonstrating the ability to achieve increased impact, scalability, and replicability with grant support.

This compendium highlights each grantee's work, effective practices, and successes to date. By sharing each grantee's achievements, Principals Path to Leadership strives to have a collective impact on public education across the country.



Alabama State Department of Education

ALABAMA STRONG

Organization Overview

In Alabama, 76 percent of students served by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) qualify for free and reduced-price school meals, and 64 percent of schools receive Title I funding. A diverse student population attends Alabama public schools: 55 percent of students are White/Caucasian, 33 percent Black/African American, 7 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian, 2 percent multiracial, and 1 percent other. Many efforts to address barriers to learning, teaching, and re-engaging disconnected students were spread across different initiatives. In response to this, the department implemented PLAN 2020, which includes an integrated, systemic approach to strategically address four areas of school improvement: learners, support systems, professionals, and schools/systems. For ALSDE, their ability to support principals and school leaders in the use of a strength-based framework was essential to demonstrating that economic disadvantage is not an impediment to student achievement.

Through the Office of Learning Supports, ALSDE embarked on the statewide Learning Supports Initiative in Fall 2012 to increase student learning and engagement in the teaching and learning process and to eliminate barriers to student success. In the course of this work, ALSDE also targeted the leadership capacity of its principals to drive change. Utilizing the Learning Supports Framework, the initiative was designed to create a distributed leadership model focused on the challenges of achieving positive learning outcomes. Based on the work of Dr. Linda Taylor and Dr. Howard Adelman at the University of California, Los Angeles, the Learning Supports Framework addresses student support services that are fragmented or marginalized—bringing instruction, learning supports, and school management under one leadership team. To create change, the framework helps principals assess overlapping roles and resources and develop an integrated organizational and operational school structure focused on improving schools. Since the 2013–14 school year, 50 districts and approximately 300 principals have implemented the Learning Supports Framework to address barriers to student achievement, learning, and graduation at their schools.

Program Description

ALSDE is especially challenged in attracting, developing, and retaining effective school leaders in rural and high-poverty school districts. For principals working in these districts, a critical area for leadership development is the ability to use a systematic process to implement high academic standards while simultaneously addressing the particular challenges that rural and high-poverty schools face, including a high level of student mobility, a low number of community support services, and a lack of certified teachers.

Through the support of the American Express Principals Path to Leadership grant, ALSDE developed the Alabama Strong program to expand the work of the Learning Supports Initiative to six districts that serve high-poverty and/or rural students: Lawrence County, Birmingham City, Selma City, Perry County, Escambia County, and Bullock County School Districts. The Alabama Strong program customizes the Learning Supports Initiative to meet the needs of these principals and aims to:

- Strengthen effective principal leadership.
- Build capacity for leading change.
- Develop a pipeline of effective leadership for schools through a three-year, job-embedded, personalized peer-coaching professional development model using the Learning Supports Framework.

Originally designed to serve 71 principals and their leadership teams, the Alabama Strong program is currently serving 131 principals and aspiring principals and 21 district office leaders, including six superintendents working alongside their principals, at the request of the participating districts and with their financial support.

The Alabama Strong program is focused on:

- Using the organization's mission, vision, and belief to integrate administrative and instructional practices.
- Leading transformational change efforts at the intersection of administrative and instructional practice.
- Assisting in the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective practices for teaching and learning for adults and students.

“As a school leader, I have been able to see firsthand through the Alabama Strong program how curriculum initiatives and academic modeling take on a new identity. Furthermore, understanding how to improve the processes of teaching and learning gives me a broader perspective on leadership in particular and on education in general.”

- Modeling effective communication skills with all stakeholder groups.
- Assisting in the access, analysis, and use of data that results in improved student and adult performance.
- Assisting in decision making for the strategic use of resources (time, money, and people) to improve student and adult performance.

The program will enable principals to implement the Learning Supports Framework and receive additional leadership development to:

- Implement a comprehensive framework for school improvement that enables him/her to be the catalyst for sustained school improvement.
- Collaboratively develop and lead a strong vision and mission that is supported by strategic action plans.
- Identify and implement actions and strategies that will foster family and community ties, professional capacity of teachers and staff, a student-centered learning environment, and high-quality instruction for all students.
- Address the barriers of poverty and rural isolation through a strength-based approach.
- Build capacity of school leadership to use a distributive leadership model.
- Utilize a systematic approach to align financial and human resources.
- Improve the learning outcomes of children in high-poverty school districts in Alabama.
- Develop the necessary leadership and change management skills to bring the project to scale through collaboration with the Alabama State Department of Education.

Participants receive job-embedded leadership development, applying what they learn directly to their Continuous Improvement Plan. The Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan is developed annually at each school from academic achievement, discipline, attendance, participation rate, and survey and focus group data. The Learning Supports Framework is used to strengthen the process of developing Continuous Improvement Plans to ensure that strategies are included to address the most critical challenges of each school.

On-site workshops, conducted three times a year at the district level, focus on making leadership decisions, managing leadership teams, coaching, and developing “products” (such as meeting structures and meeting agendas that align with Continuous Improvement Plans) that principals can immediately use and apply in their schools. With the participation of superintendents in the workshops, principals can work collaboratively with their superintendents to identify their districts’ needs and solutions. The workshops have proven especially valuable in allowing vertical teams to work together.

Participants receive coaching, typically conducted through guided phone and email discussions, from highly effective veteran principals to help them develop their own solutions to challenges. One district in the Alabama Strong program requested on-site peer coaching to enable district participants to look at their leadership teams and demonstrate how their work is impacting their school and students. A book study, with books selected by each district to meet its individual needs, offers participants another opportunity to discuss and reflect on their practice.

Effective Practices

- **Job-embedded leadership development:** Participants apply what they learn from the Alabama Strong program directly to the development and implementation of their Continuous Improvement Plan. Participants analyze their school, identify some of the biggest challenges, and, through on-site workshops and the support of their coaches, determine the applied leadership strategies to use to tackle the issues.
- **Use of the Learning Supports Framework to organize and align resources:** The framework guides principals in leading change by using a coherent organizational and operational structure that addresses overlapping roles and functions. One aspect of the framework involves mapping, where principals assess the resources currently available at their school, determine the utilization and value of each, and coordinate and integrate resources that are creating change at their school to give principals greater capacity to lead.
- **On-site workshops customized at the district level:** Workshops focus on leadership decisions and management of leadership teams; development of products that principals can immediately use in their schools; and group time that allows superintendents and principals to work together in vertical teams to align their needs, objectives, and initiatives.

Measuring Success

Currently, the Learning Supports Initiative is reaching leadership teams in 50 districts in Alabama, including the American Express Alabama Strong cohort. Thus far, the initiative has seen results that have gained the attention of a third-party organization, the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA). PARCA recognized the initiative as a major factor in statewide improvements in the graduation rate, which increased from 72 percent to 86 percent in four years. In addition, the districts and schools involved in the first two cohorts of the applied Learning Supports Framework have shown remarkable improvement in student engagement, reflected by a decrease in student absences. In the second

year of using the Learning Supports Framework, the first two cohorts combined saw an average decrease of 10,000 days of student absences per district.

In a survey of Alabama Strong participants supported by the Principals Path to Leadership grant, a majority of participants have found that the program provides great value to their work, with over 80 percent of participants somewhat to very satisfied with the Alabama Strong program and 78 percent of participants finding the program somewhat to very effective at providing knowledge, resources, and tools they can apply to their day-to-day work as a school leader. Participants identified the face-to-face trainings and the opportunity to work with other principals as particularly valuable components of the Alabama Strong program.

ALSDE will evaluate Alabama Strong participants using the rubrics from LEADAlabama, a formative, online evaluation system for educational leaders that consists of a self-assessment, collaborative dialogue, professional development plan, and evidence collection. LEADAlabama data from the 2016 evaluation of participants will serve as formal baseline data for the three-year grant, with formative evaluations of participants in the areas of managing the learning organization, community and student relationships, and ethics. In 2017 and 2018, a pre- and post-survey of leadership effectiveness will be distributed at the beginning and end of the year to quantify improvement over the course of a calendar year. Participants will also provide feedback at the end of each workshop, including narrative feedback.

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Arlington Independent School District

EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM

Organization Overview

Arlington Independent School District (AISD) educates approximately 64,000 students on 75 campuses in Arlington, Texas. The mission of AISD is to empower and engage all students to be contributing, responsible citizens reaching their maximum potential through relevant, innovative, and rigorous learning experiences. The AISD student demographics reflect a diverse population (45 percent Hispanic, 24 percent Black/African American, 22 percent White/Caucasian, 6 percent Asian, and 3 percent identifying as multiracial). These demographics have steadily changed over the past decades. Particularly dramatic has been the increase in the percentage of students who are designated economically disadvantaged (from 43 percent in 2003 to 69 percent in 2016). Sixty-nine percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch, and 64 percent of AISD campuses receive Title I funding. In addition to changing student demographics, the AISD student achievement results have fallen below the state on various assessments.

Effective teaching and leadership are essential for ensuring students achieve at their highest level. As a school district with changing demographics and students struggling academically, AISD has identified a need for campus and district leaders to be equipped with the skills to inspire students to succeed. The AISD 2012–15 Strategic Plan identified strategies to create inspired learners by cultivating an environment that builds great leaders, including recruiting and retaining the most effective staff and principals. AISD is committed to ensuring that emerging leaders receive the support necessary to become effective leaders for their campus.


Program Description

Launched during the 2014–15 school year, the AISD Emerging Leaders Program is a comprehensive program managed by the district, in partnership with New Leaders (a national nonprofit that develops transformational school leaders across the country), to train emerging K–12 principals and support leadership development beyond pipeline investments. Through the partnership with New Leaders and funding from American Express, Raise Your Hand Texas, The Meadows Foundation, and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, selected AISD assistant principals and teacher-leaders interested in future campus leadership positions participate in a yearlong cohort leadership training program designed to build a pipeline of emerging leaders and provide support to develop high-performing teams at school campuses. The program is currently working with its third cohort of program participants.

The AISD Emerging Leaders Program is a systematic method of leadership development that helps to drive gains at the campus level, improve leadership skills of participants, and set future leaders on a pathway to the principalship. To build leadership capacity and truly move instruction at the campus level, participants build upon their strengths to lead effective teams and drive change. Program participants learn powerful skill sets that enable them to lead a team in raising student achievement levels, and they join an inspiring community of like-minded educators dedicated to academic success for all students. At the end of each cohort year, AISD Emerging Leaders participants are better prepared to succeed in their path toward greater leadership roles, as evidenced through student achievement gains made in math and English Language Arts (ELA) state test scores in grades and subjects affected by Emerging Leaders participants.

The AISD Emerging Leaders Program is focused on developing skills and knowledge in four leadership domains:

- **Adult leadership:** Principals cultivate a culture of universal achievement, build trusting relationships, give constructive feedback, and lead effective meetings.

- 
- **Instructional leadership:** Principals set expectations for college success, guide teams through a full data analysis cycle, and observe and coach teachers to improve instruction.
 - **Cultural leadership:** Principals build a learning orientation among team members and students who are focused on hard work and personal responsibility for their own development.
 - **Personal leadership:** Principals receive feedback and self-reflection tools to continuously improve.

Participants in the program:

- Attend a summer induction session.
- Attend monthly local in-person sessions.
- Attend monthly national webinars.
- Complete four applied learning assignments.
- Participate in ongoing videotaping of their leadership practice in action for sharing and feedback.
- Participate in ongoing formal and informal learning meetings to gauge progress.

Emerging Leaders candidates lead a teacher team at their school, with program work almost fully embedded into their day-to-day work on their own campus. Working collaboratively with their teacher team, participants research and analyze a problem of practice around student outcomes and design and implement corrective action plans. The work with the teacher teams allows participants to apply their learning directly to their schools.

Effective Practices

- **Job-embeddedness:** Each Emerging Leaders participant leads a teacher team at their school, working and collaborating around a problem of practice centered on student outcomes. Participants have ample opportunity to work both with peers and in their actual schools, and they regularly capture real-world leadership interactions on video so they can observe their leadership practice in action while receiving feedback about performance.

- **A focus on instructional development that affects student outcomes:** Emerging Leaders participants work with their assigned teacher teams throughout the school year, beginning with a focus on data-driven instruction to set ambitious SMART goals around student learning—goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound. They then work with their teacher-team to use data to diagnose where students are starting and set student growth goals. Participants then learn how to coach, motivate, and give feedback to their teacher team through training sessions and coaching by an Emerging Leaders expert advisor.
- **Development of leadership skills around four leadership competencies:** The program centers on four leadership competencies designed to create school leaders that take a well-rounded, comprehensive approach to leading their school teams and their schools: 1) adult leadership, 2) instructional leadership, 3) cultural leadership, and 4) personal leadership.
- **One-on-one coaching:** Participants work closely with their program director and Emerging Leaders facilitator throughout the program to assess their work and progress and obtain feedback on their leadership practice. Coaching sessions are delivered on-site, by phone, and through feedback of videotaped leadership practice in action.

Measuring Success

Since the start of the program in the 2014–15 school year, AISD has trained 64 participants and impacted over 200 teachers and 17,500 students in the district. During the 2016–17 school year, 35 AISD Emerging Leaders are participating in the program. A survey conducted with participants supported by the Principals Path to Leadership grant found that over 90 percent have gained applicable knowledge in leading continuous school improvement, and 75 percent have found the Emerging Leaders Program to be somewhat to very effective at providing knowledge, resources, and tools that they can apply to their day-to-day work as aspiring principals.

“Through Emerging Leaders, I have learned how to dig deeply into the data and work with teachers to utilize that data to create detailed corrective instruction plans that improve student achievement.”

Short-term assessments for the AISD Emerging Leaders Program are focused on participant retention, full program participation, effects of Emerging Leaders teacher teams on student outcomes, participant and principal feedback, and promotion of program participants into leadership roles within the district. Longer-term assessments will include a study comparing a control group of Emerging Leaders (those who have been accepted into the program but will not participate until the following school year) with current program participants.

■ **Program participation:** In Cohort 2, the 2015–16 school year ended with 30 participants, a 91 percent retention rate. Of those completing the program, 100 percent participated in each element of the program.

■ **Cultivating an environment to build great leaders:** Seventy-four percent of Cohort 1 program participants were promoted into leadership roles for school year 2015–16, with 100 percent of those remaining this school year.

■ **Campus support and leadership readiness:** During the two completed cohort years of the program, student achievement has increased along with district results at large:

- 61 percent of all grades/subjects impacted by Emerging Leaders teacher teams saw increased achievement.
- 54 percent of grades saw increased achievement in ELA.
- 66 percent of grades saw increased achievement in math.

■ **Participant and principal feedback:** Participants and principals have found the Emerging Leaders Program to be relevant and effective in the following ways:

- 97 percent of participants find Emerging Leaders content relevant to their needs as a team leader in their schools.
- 100 percent of participants say their skills improved in building team culture around student achievement.
- 100 percent say their skills improved in providing instructional strategies to teachers.
- 100 percent say Emerging Leaders helped improve student achievement at their school.
- 100 percent of supervisors reported that having an Emerging Leader was beneficial at their campus and would like one again.
- 69 percent of participants oversaw student learning gains of at least five percentage points against their SMART goals.

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Learning Forward

LEARNING LEADERS FOR LEARNING SCHOOLS

Organization Overview

Learning Forward began in 1969 and is one of the nation's largest nonprofit membership associations focused solely on ensuring success for all students through effective professional learning and school improvement. It advocates for every educator having access to professional learning that is results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded. Learning Forward publishes research, designs practical tools for educational leaders, and organizes large-scale learning experiences to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning.

Learning Forward's recently revised Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. Learning Forward, with the contribution of 40 professional associations and education organizations, including the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, developed the Standards for Professional Learning. The Standards for Professional Learning are aligned around learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment; resources for educator learning; learning designs that integrate theories, research, and models of human learning; outcomes that align with educator performance and student curriculum standards; leadership that creates support systems for professional learning; data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning; and implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

The Standards for Professional Learning are the foundation of all of Learning Forward's programs and work.

Program Description

Learning Leaders for Learning Schools (LLLS) is an intensive three-year professional learning experience developed in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education. The Arizona Department of Education serves over 1.1 million students, with 42 percent of students being White/Caucasian, 43 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Black/African American, 5 percent Native American/American Indian, 3 percent Asian, and 1 percent other. Sixty-seven percent of schools receive Title I funding, and 56 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

LLLS engages principals and district office personnel in learning designs, including seminars; small communities of practice; personalized coaching; collective problem solving; application of new knowledge to daily work; and goal attainment. The content of LLLS is grounded in the Standards for Professional Learning and is based on the development, piloting, and institutionalization of a systemic and sustainable leadership development system to prepare and retain highly effective school and central office leaders. LLLS focuses on professional learning as the key thread throughout the entire experience and works with principals and central office leaders to understand, recognize, and apply high-quality professional learning and to assist district offices in replicating a professional learning model across the state.

Throughout 2015–16, Learning Forward held planning meetings with the Arizona Department of Education, studied Arizona's rules and resources, and connected with providers of leadership development programs across the state. Working with the department, 51 participants were recruited from 12 districts, primarily from Title I eligible school districts and charter schools. While principals make up the majority of the participants, the cohort includes 11 assistant principals.

The three-year program runs on a four-month cycle, with each cycle focusing on problems of practice identified by participants, and communities of practice created to solve

these identified problems of practice. Each four-month cycle consists of:

- **Month 1:** A one-day large group seminar to explore problems of practice affecting individual participants, aggregate individual problems of practice into communities of practice, and explore professional learning as a vehicle for solving problems of practice.
- **Month 2:** A one-day community of practice session, with participants refining their collective problems of practice while gaining insights into their specific individual challenges.
- **Months 3 and 4:** Personalized coaching calls with individual participants and teams of participants to think through their problems of practice and apply solutions targeted to each of their schools.

The four-month cycle repeats nine times, with different problems of practice and themes explored. In the first year, three communities of practice are explored:

- Leading Instruction
- Leading Professional Development
- Leading a Culture of Learning

Members of each community of practice engage in active learning guided by a process of inquiry to gain clear understanding of the issues, challenges, barriers, and potential solutions. For instance, participants in the Leading a Culture of Learning community of practice focus on challenges around creating an environment of excellence; changing the perception that teachers, students, and families have about their roles and responsibilities in a school; and developing student motivation and focus. As members of each community of practice work to refine their collective problems of practice, individual participants also gain insights into the specific challenges affecting their school.

The second year of the program explores effective teaching and learning practice, instructional design and feedback, and coaching techniques to help teachers evaluate feedback and create effective results for students. Topics for the communities of practice in the third year are informed by the issues raised during the first two years of the program and the needs of the cohort.

“LLLS has provided me with the opportunity to continue to lead the change process to positively impact student learning and success. The tools that I have learned through LLLS allowed our school team to move forward in a positive and productive direction.”

Three facilitators and coaches guide the program: the education program specialist at the Arizona Department of Education; a former superintendent in the Isaac School District in Phoenix, AZ; and a senior Learning Forward consultant. The participation of a senior Arizona Department of Education administrator and a former district superintendent as facilitators and coaches supports the program's sustainability and scalability plans in the state, which include the development of a professional learning curriculum that will be accessible and adaptable for Arizona and the education field.

Effective Practices

- **Emphasis on professional learning as the vehicle for school improvement:** Participants model and learn skills for leading high-achieving professional learning communities with their own staff to engage in a cycle of continuous improvement; work collaboratively to design units of study, assessments, and instruction aligned to state standards; and analyze student work and understand the connection between student work and student achievement.
- **Use of communities of practice to develop a community of learning educators:** By aggregating individual problems of practice identified by participants into three communities of practice, LLLS participants are supported in developing solutions to their individual problems of practice as they work collectively with other participants on the broader problems identified by their community of practice.
- **Customization of the Learning Leaders program to meet the needs of the Arizona Department of Education:** Through planning meetings with the Arizona Department

of Education, Learning Forward learned that Arizona principals wanted to understand how to assess effective teaching practice and provide precise learning-focused feedback to teachers. Based on this input, Learning Forward integrated this need into the LLLS experience for Arizona participants.

- **Participant coaching:** Coaches continuously monitor participants' progress toward achieving the goals they have set for themselves, offer feedback, and guide participants in developing and applying solutions to their individual problems of practice. Coaching occurs by phone and occasionally in person.

Measuring Success

After each group and community of practice session, individual reflections are captured to learn what participants and district teams are learning and how they are applying what they learn in their schools. Coaches also follow up with each participant to help Learning Forward gain detail into how LLLS is helping to inform practice. At the end of the first cohort year, Learning Forward's goals are to achieve the following:

- At least 85 percent of participants reporting close alignment between LLLS and their needs and priorities, leadership development tools, resources, and protocols.
- At least 80 percent indicating that the curricular resources and learning processes are of high quality and relevant to their roles as principals.
- At least 90 percent reporting satisfaction with the training and support provided through the LLLS program.
- 100 percent of schools led by participants demonstrating increases in teacher perceptions regarding the quality and effectiveness of professional learning.
- A 10 percent annual increase in requests for information about LLLS.
- Use of results of formative evaluations to monitor progress and promote LLLS program improvement.

A survey conducted with participants supported by Principals Path to Leadership found that 80 percent of participants gained applicable knowledge about developing a professional community for teachers and staff, and 70 percent gained knowledge in continuous school improvement. Survey

respondents identified the ability to work with other principals through LLLS as a particularly valuable component of the program.

An evaluation of the entire program will also be undertaken to review the implementation of LLLS, whether or not LLLS is meeting the needs of participants, and the impact of the program. Participant interviews and surveys, data from coaching logs, end-of-session evaluations, and anecdotal data will be used to determine how principals are changing their practice and how principals are supporting teachers and helping them change their teaching practice as a result of LLLS.

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North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals' Association

DISTINGUISHED LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Organization Overview

In existence since 1976, the North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals' Association (NCPAPA) is the preeminent organization and state voice for principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders. NCPAPA was established with the firm belief that strong positive administrative leadership is the determining factor in the quality of a child's public education in North Carolina. Today, NCPAPA represents 5,000 members from across the state and is the state's primary provider of leadership development for principals and assistant principals.

In 2010, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction awarded a grant to NCPAPA to create a leadership development program for school leaders aligned with the statewide principal evaluation framework. NCPAPA led a group of highly experienced thought partners in the field of school leadership development through a design and field-testing process to create the Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP) program. NCPAPA was subsequently awarded a four-year Race to the Top grant to provide the program throughout the state.

Statewide, 55 percent of public schools receive Title I funding, and 52 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Fifty percent of students are White/Caucasian, 26 percent Black/African American, 17 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, 1 percent Native American/American Indian, and 4 percent other.

Program Description


DLP is delivered through a yearlong series of structured leadership development experiences for regional cohorts of school leaders across the state. Modeled after the NYC Leadership Academy (also featured in *Principals Path to Leadership: Compendium of Effective Practices*), the DLP experiential approach is designed to be problem- and application-based, translating proven research-based practices and leadership competencies into transformational improvement. As participating school leaders are led and

coached through a proven capacity-building process for their own schools, they also develop their capacity as exemplary leaders. Key attributes of DLP include the following:

- Direct alignment to the North Carolina evaluation standards and leadership competencies for school leaders.
- The coaching of participants through a proven continuous-improvement model for their schools using a real-world, application-based approach.
- The use of a blended approach combined with face-to-face, online, and small-group sharing sessions.

With early career principals (defined by NCPAPA as principals with under five years of experience) making up approximately 60 percent of all principals in North Carolina, NCPAPA has been increasingly focusing DLP on the needs of these early career leaders. Through the support of the American Express Principals Path to Leadership grant, NCPAPA is updating and enhancing its face-to-face and online curriculum to meet the specific needs of early career principals and engage them as a peer group that can work together. Fifty early career principals and exemplary assistant principals from 43 districts are participating as a DLP cohort this year. Participants were selected based on superintendent recommendations, with greater consideration given to low-wealth districts and an attempt at representation from all eight regions of the state.

DLP maximizes the professional development experience for principals while protecting time spent in their schools. The blended program is delivered in six components over the course of the year, with two facilitators per component. Principals attend a one-and-a-half-day, face-to-face session every other month. The face-to-face session is followed and reinforced by a six-week online experience. Through carefully designed modules, principals access additional resources and perform real-world activities associated with research-based effective leadership and school improvement practices as they receive feedback from their cohort-peers and facilitators. To allow early career principals to more actively engage with each other throughout the online experience, NCPAPA has moved from individual online assignments to a guided



discussion format to offer more peer interaction. The online curriculum also allows for research through videos, articles, and other resources.

Facilitators are an integral component of the blended model. While they were originally intended and trained to be online facilitators only, they now also work with principals individually, offering personalized coaching, facilitation, and journaling to meet the specific needs of each principal participating in DLP. With the support of the Principals Path to Leadership grant, four facilitators are also dedicated to enhancing and adapting the DLP curriculum to best serve early career principals and high-achieving assistant principals.

In previous years, DLP alumni networked with each other at an annual conference. This year, NCPAPA incorporated principal advisers into the leadership program, with selected alumni working with early career principals to guide them through their roles, including delegating responsibilities, organizing their main office, working with teachers on instructional development, and engaging with parents.

Effective Practices

■ **Applicability of DLP to day-to-day work:** Participants are guided through six face-to-face and online components, which are sequenced in a logical order to mirror best practices of effective school improvement throughout the school year:

- ❑ Strategic Leadership for High-Performing Schools
- ❑ Maximizing Human Resources for Goal Accomplishment
- ❑ Building a Collaborative Culture with Distributed Leadership
- ❑ Improving Teaching and Learning for High-Performing Schools
- ❑ Creating a Strong Student and External Stakeholder Focus
- ❑ Leading Change to Drive Continuous Improvement

As participants learn each of these components, they can immediately apply them to their schools with their teachers, staff, and students.

- **A blended, cohort-based approach:** DLP combines face-to-face, online, and small-group sharing sessions. To limit time away from school, participants attend a one-and-a-half-day, face-to-face session every other month. Each face-to-face session, which covers one of the six DLP components, is reinforced by a six-week online experience with resources, activities, and guided discussions in which principals work with each other in small groups.
- **Facilitators:** Each component of the DLP program is delivered by two facilitators during the face-to-face sessions and in the online curriculum. Facilitators work with participants online and by phone through individual coaching, facilitating, and journaling.
- **Principal advisers:** This year, NCPAPA selected 16 alumni to serve as advisers to DLP participants. Participants receive experienced advice and can visit their principal adviser's school virtually or in person. The principal adviser program also offers advisers the opportunity to learn from their advisees and develop skills to strengthen the skills of their own teachers and staff.

Measuring Success

A survey is administered after each face-to-face session and online component to assess participants' perception of the program. For the first five components of the face-to-face sessions during the 2016–17 school year:

- 98 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:
 - ❑ It was relevant to my professional development needs.
 - ❑ It was led by effective facilitators.
 - ❑ It provided me with useful resources.
 - ❑ It was engaging.
 - ❑ It included adequate opportunities for participants to share their knowledge and/or experiences.

“DLP has allowed me to grow as a new administrator and establish relationships with other administrators. It has been very beneficial to learn from others who have been in the educational system as well as to learn from other administrators who have one to five years of experience.”

- ☐ It included adequate opportunities for participants to consider applications to their own professional practice.
- 100 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the DLP face-to-face session was of high quality overall.

For the first four components of the online sessions during the 2016–17 school year:

- 95 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:
 - ☐ It had clear outcomes.
 - ☐ It was relevant to my professional development needs.
 - ☐ It was easy to access and use.
 - ☐ It was well organized.
 - ☐ It had effective facilitators.
 - ☐ It was engaging.
 - ☐ It provided opportunities for meaningful collaboration and/or social interaction.
 - ☐ It was of high quality overall.

A survey conducted with DLP participants supported by the American Express grant about their overall satisfaction with the program found that 80 percent were very satisfied with the program, and 86 percent thought the program was very effective at providing knowledge, resources, and tools that they can apply to their day-to-day work as a principal or aspiring principal. Over 90 percent of participants gained applicable knowledge about school mission, vision, and core values; 70 percent gained knowledge around curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and 68 percent gained knowledge around developing a supportive school community for students.

In previous years, approximately 20 percent of principals did not complete the DLP program. This year, with a cohort of early career principals, the dropout rate has been 8 percent, demonstrating the need of the program for early career principals.

NCPAPA will also conduct a third-party evaluation to see if there is a correlation between teacher working conditions and principals who have participated in DLP, and if there is more student growth in schools where principals have participated in DLP.

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NYC Leadership Academy ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM

Organization Overview

NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA) is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization with a clear vision: to support greater academic success for students across the nation—especially the most vulnerable—through high-quality school leadership. Founded in 2003, NYCLA is firmly committed to preparing and supporting educational leaders so they can catalyze and sustain effective change across their organizations and staff in order to educate students effectively. It works with education systems across the country to build their capacity in developing and supporting their own leaders through context-specific, experiential professional development grounded in research- and behavior-based standards, with a focus on racial equity and social justice.

Program Description

NYCLA's Aspiring Principals Program (APP) began in 2003 to develop school leaders who possess the disposition, skills, knowledge, and capacity to synthesize and implement strategies and policies associated with: monitoring student and school academic progress; aligning new academic standards and assessments; facilitating instructional improvement; conducting teacher evaluation; and addressing persistent racial, opportunity, and achievement gaps. Its nationally recognized leadership development model equips future leaders to create thriving schools that advance improved teaching and learning practices. NYCLA has brought this model to single district sites and has implemented it in geographically dispersed schools working together in conjunction with national and regional education organizations. The APP model is undergirded in research-based methods and is customized to meet the needs of aspiring leaders, their schools, and their school systems.

The APP model includes distinct yet complementary components:

- A summer intensive that engages participants in comprehensive simulations grounded in authentic school experiences.

- A yearlong school-based residency, allowing aspiring school leaders to gain theoretical ideas, apply them, and manage the consequences of those actions as they play out in school settings, with the support of trained mentor school leaders.
- Ongoing blended professional learning through face-to-face and online sessions during the yearlong residency.

Through the support of the American Express Principals Path to Leadership grant, NYCLA is expanding the APP model to Rochester City School District and Yonkers Public School District in New York through a two-year engagement to adapt and implement the APP model and build the districts' capacity to develop an emerging principals pipeline that meets each district's respective leadership pipeline needs. Both districts serve a diverse population of students from economically disadvantaged communities. In the Yonkers Public School District, 76 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, and 98 percent of schools receive Title I funding. Fifty-six percent of students are Hispanic, 19 percent Black/African American, 17 percent White/Caucasian, 7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent identify as multiracial. In Rochester City School District, 85 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and 100 percent of schools receive Title I funding. Fifty-seven percent of students are Black/African American, 28 percent Hispanic, 10 percent White/Caucasian, 4 percent Asian, and less than 1 percent other.

NYCLA is providing the following services through APP:

- Supporting the design and delivery of a sustainable aspiring principals program that will be fashioned after NYCLA's nationally recognized leadership development model. In each district, the program will serve 25 aspiring principals and train 25 mentor principals over two years (for a total of 50 aspiring principals and 50 mentor principals in the program).
- Training facilitators in each district to deliver a multi-week summer intensive, as well as ongoing professional learning sessions throughout the academic year.
- Drawing on NYCLA's APP curriculum to plan the summer and residency curriculum, participant recruitment and selection, and program sustainability.

- Adapting a comprehensive simulation school appropriate for each district.
- Providing training on APP facilitation and mentoring.
- Co-designing and delivering APP participant sessions and mentor training sessions during the summer intensive, providing ongoing support to facilitators as they deliver the residency curriculum, and supporting the on-site and blended learning of the participants and mentor principals.
- Providing consultation for the district's implementation of APP for a second cohort during Year Two.

Throughout 2016, NYCLA worked with the New York State Education Department to identify districts prepared to implement the APP model and adapt its regional leadership development model according to the needs of the districts. NYCLA began its capacity-building process with the two districts in January 2017. This process included engaging in a stakeholder analysis, co-developing a recruitment plan, customizing the summer intensive and residency program design and curriculum, and engaging in co-delivery of the summer intensive in July 2017 and then supporting delivery of the residency through May 2018. The APP logic model, curriculum, mentor training, and residency have been adapted with significant district input and reflection. The program delivery tools are:

- NYCLA's APP Program Model, which identifies the planned inputs and activities of APP as well as intended results, including short- and long-term impact.
- A stakeholder analysis, which gathers data from district staff and stakeholders to inform the program design and develop buy-in for the program among district staff and stakeholders.
- A summer intensive curriculum, which is a multiweek face-to-face session that consists of a mix of activities, mini-lessons, readings from research- and practice-based professional literature, and content-focused individual and group assignments for each weekly unit.
- Residency, which is field-based work complemented by blended professional learning through face-to-face sessions and online sessions and assignments. Conducted after the summer intensive, the residency allows participants to take the concepts learned through simulated experiences and apply them in a real school with students, teachers, and parents. Performed under the

guidance of a mentor principal, activities include a number of school leadership projects that enable participants to: 1) practice the skills necessary to be effective instructional and transformational leaders, 2) lead a school-based team, 3) work with a variety of school and community stakeholders, and 4) engage in reflective debriefs with mentor principals.

- Mentor training, with customized training to develop mentor principals who can provide feedback while aspiring principals try various approaches to complex problem solving, take risks in high-stakes decision making, and model leadership practices. By developing mentorship capacity with veteran principals in the district, mentors will also be able to become "developers" of school leadership talent through their own day-to-day work outside of APP.

Effective Practices

- **Customizable program model to meet the needs of each education system:** While APP has a standard and aligned curriculum with fundamental attributes, the curriculum is adapted to each education system's needs.
- **Learning through immersion:** Through role playing, data analysis, and inquiries into problems of practice, participants collaborate in project teams and small groups to work through problems that principals face in real life and then resolve them. A scenario school, based on actual data and student work from existing schools in their districts, allows participants to work on complex problems faced by principals in their districts. Participants also embark on a half-year to yearlong residency change project at their intern school or their own school.
- **Virtual learning platform:** An online platform complements face-to-face meetings with online assignments (e.g., readings, discussions, activities with peer-to-peer feedback, and blended virtual assignments such as videotaped role-played feedback conversations) but does not take the place of face-to-face work.
- **Mentoring program:** Mentor principals work with participants to help them self-identify their goals, experiences, and areas of improvement. Mentors are trained to guide participants in developing knowledge themselves, and not just to provide advice and feedback.



Measuring Success

The goal of the APP model is to build a district's capacity to develop its own emerging principals pipeline, with each district signing a memorandum of understanding indicating its commitment to building internal staff capacity so that the program, from participant recruitment to summer intensive to residency, can continue after NYCLA's engagement.

The first year of the APP launch in the Rochester City School District and Yonkers Public School District will be measured against the launch goals of the program as defined by each district (participant recruitment, co-development of the summer intensive and practicum, training of summer intensive facilitators, mentor principal recruitment and training, and participant retention). In addition, there will be three assessment points during the year to evaluate participants' readiness for a principal role and to track APP graduation rates and graduate satisfaction with the leadership training.

Longer-term assessment of the program will include: APP graduate placement in school leadership roles, principal retention after the first year and after five years, and school and student outcomes (ELA and math scores, as well as high school graduation rates).

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About American Express: Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow



One of American Express' three philanthropic platforms is **Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow**. Under this giving initiative, which recognizes the significance of strong leadership in the nonprofit and social purpose sectors, American Express makes grants focused on training high-potential emerging leaders to tackle important issues in the 21st century. More than 25,000 emerging nonprofit and social sector leaders worldwide have benefitted from American Express leadership programs, including the American Express Leadership Academy among others. Launched in 2008, the American Express Leadership Academy addresses the growing deficit of leadership talent in the nonprofit sector by bringing together emerging leaders from a diverse set of nonprofit, social-sector, and non-governmental organizations.

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About the National Association of Secondary School Principals



The **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)** is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student's potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the **National Honor Society**, **National Junior Honor Society**, **National Elementary Honor Society**, and **National Association of Student Councils**.

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