



School Leadership in Oregon: A Framework for Action

*Recommendations from the
Distinguished Leaders Council*

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS COUNCIL
SUMMER 2014 RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of the Distinguished Leaders Council gratefully acknowledge the team effort and hard work from these collaborators who contributed to the development of our recommendations and report.

- Kira Higgs of Kira Higgs Consulting, facilitated our meetings.
- Perla Sitcov of Chalkboard Project, provided administrative support and helped keep us organized.
- Pooja Blatt, of Chalkboard Project, conducted and organized the extensive research into school leadership.
- Marc Frazer and Chad Rubalcaba of Education First, synthesized the research findings and helped write the report.
- Tonia Holowetzki of Chalkboard Project, acted as report editor-in-chief and production manager.
- Sue Hildick and Dan Jamison of Chalkboard Project, provided insightful feedback and advice throughout the initiative.
- Kris Travis of Firesign Design, designed the report.

ABOUT CHALKBOARD PROJECT

Chalkboard Project is an independent education transformation organization dedicated to making Oregon's K-12 public schools among the best in the country. We are funded by a consortium of Oregon's leading philanthropic foundations that share a central belief that research and on-the-ground expert knowledge is essential to identifying policies and practices that improve outcomes for students. In 2011, Chalkboard was awarded \$24.4M in federal funding to accelerate CLASS, a revolutionary initiative that is transforming the teaching profession by creating new career pathways that lead to higher achievement in the classroom.

Launched in 2004, Chalkboard is the first initiative of Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO). FBO partners include: Meyer Memorial Trust, The Oregon Community Foundation, The Collins Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, JELD-WEN Foundation, and The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research indicates that school leaders play an essential role in raising student achievement in their schools.¹ Despite this, relatively little emphasis has been placed on improving school leader preparation and support, especially in Oregon, where only a small percentage of the \$41.5 million allocated in the Network for Quality Teaching and Learning grant has been earmarked for improving supports to existing school administrators.² This is a critical missing link in our state's education improvement strategy. Strong and effective leadership from principals, assistant principals, central office administrators, and superintendents will be needed to transform our education system and produce fundamentally better results.

Principals can account for up to 25 percent of a school's total impact on student achievement, and students at schools led by above-average principals perform substantially better than students at schools with average or below-average principals.³ Effective school leaders prioritize their work differently than their lower-performing peers. They push beyond traditional administrative tasks such as student discipline to focus more deeply on improving student achievement, observing teachers in the classroom, and managing human capital. They provide useful feedback, plan and oversee high-quality professional development, and maintain a laser-like focus on improving outcomes across *all* student populations. Effective leaders build strong school cultures of support, trust, and continuous improvement.⁴

Across the nation, effective principals are not equitably distributed across all schools and districts. Students of color and students who grow up in poverty are more likely to attend schools led by weak or ineffective school leaders. These same students are more likely to attend schools where principal turnover is higher than average making it virtually impossible to sustain momentum and improvement over time.⁵ The lack of an academically strong principal training program—one that includes a rigorous selection process and solid connections to school realities—has resulted in a shortage of highly effective principals in many schools, particularly in urban and rural school districts.⁶

All schools and districts in Oregon need effective leadership. Financial and human resource decisions, setting a vision and tone, interacting with the public, inspiring new levels of achievement—these things only occur with an intentional focus on leadership. They happen because leaders



have been given training, support, and experiences that deepen their knowledge and skills.

Oregon needs an ambitious and thoughtfully designed plan of action to meet the demand for excellent school leadership. We need new leaders entering the school system to come with different skills than they currently bring, and those currently in leadership positions need to focus their attention in new ways. From recruitment to retention, we need an explicit strategy on how to identify, recruit, and retain high-quality school leaders. The role of principal is demanding and complex—many burn out and leave their positions, while others refrain from pursuing it at all. The same holds true for superintendents. Many leaders stay with a school or district for two to four years, moving often from smaller to larger roles, thus disrupting continuity in leadership where it is most needed.

Recognizing these needs, we have come together to articulate a path forward based on our diverse experience, extensive study of national research, and a candid appraisal of Oregon's current practices in leader preparation. We are teacher-leaders, principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and central office administrators representing the economic and geographic diversity—urban, suburban, and rural—of Oregon. Our goal is to stimulate the policies and practices needed to improve the quality of school leadership in our state. Specifically, we aspire to:

1. Provide extended internships and mentor supports that strengthen the connections between coursework preparation and the realities of practice.
2. Provide candidates with coursework grounded in rigorous standards and relevant to the practical realities of the leader's assignment.
3. Create clear and selective criteria to recruit the top 25 percent of leader candidates with the highest potential to improve student achievement.
4. Implement systems to prioritize instructional leadership time, efforts, and resources that focus directly on improving student learning.
5. Develop a regionalized network of highly skilled coaches and mentors to support school leaders at all stages of their careers.
6. Develop articulated career pathways for Oregon leaders aligned with preparation and licensure that recruit and retain highly effective school leaders.

We recognize that school leadership is a continuum and requires a tiered approach, starting with teachers and moving to teacher-leaders, principals, and administrators. Any system should provide a clear career progression for educators and create a strong infrastructure for meeting school leadership challenges at all levels. The timing of our recommendations aligns well with recent work at the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC). The commission is currently reviewing and updating licensing requirements for teachers, with a redesign of administrator licensure to follow. We hope our recommendations will help inform TSPC's redesign process.

We appreciate the support of the Chalkboard Project in helping us develop these ideas and hope that policy, philanthropic, business, and community leaders across our state will join us in making these ideas a reality. They are essential if we are to achieve Oregon's ambitious goals for student learning.

Sincerely,
the Distinguished Leaders Council (DLC)

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HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS REPORT

The DLC was convened by the Chalkboard Project to address the following questions:

How can we address the gaps in our leader preparation practices in order to transform Oregon schools into one of the top ten highest-performing states in the nation?

How can we best support existing leaders to strengthen their practice?

To answer these questions we followed a traditional research and development process, beginning with a thorough review of academic literature on the subject of school leader effectiveness. We reached out to national partners and thought leaders for their input. We interviewed faculty and staff at university preparation programs to learn about the coursework used to prepare future school leaders, and we sought out data wherever available. Then, we convened numerous times to examine the information, reflect on our own experience, and distill our findings.

What is Instructional Leadership?

Instructional leaders prioritize improvement of teaching and learning first. They prioritize time for these endeavors over their other non-instructional duties, such as managing facilities and budgets. Instructional leadership includes coaching teachers, providing meaningful and relevant professional development, and skilled and rigorous performance evaluation, all while creating a culture of high expectations of academic success for all students, especially those from underserved groups.

We established and applied focused criteria to guide our efforts. First and foremost, each recommendation centers on student achievement, particularly among students of color and students growing up in poverty. Second, each recommendation is research based and reflects the most promising practices in the field. Early in this work, we learned that research on school leadership is limited, inconsistent, and hindered by lack of data collection to support rigorous quantitative analysis. For example, while the impact of school leaders on student achievement and the qualities of effective school leaders are well understood, comparatively few evidence-based practices exist for supporting current leaders. When we encountered these obstacles, we consulted the best available information to draft these recommendations. Third, each recommendation is ambitious, and conveys the sense of urgency we feel to improve the quality of school leadership in Oregon in order to meet the state's goals for student achievement. Fourth, each recommendation is relevant to school leaders' practices.

Importantly, we gave special priority to recommendations that emphasize instructional leadership (see sidebar), and how those skills can be developed in future and existing school leaders. We also considered the contexts in which school leaders work in Oregon, and avoided "one-size-fits-all" approaches that would, for example, fail to distinguish the needs of urban schools from rural and remote schools. Each recommendation aligns with our strong commitment to collaborate with partners in school districts, university preparation programs, foundations, and other organizations that work with school leaders. Finally, we expect each recommendation to be practical and sustainable. We carefully considered budget, time, and capacity constraints.

Our recommendations focus on school leaders in two distinct but inter-related categories:

Preparing **new leaders** so that we can identify and cultivate the right pipeline of talent going into our school system

Helping **leaders currently in the system** grow as instructional leaders

These recommendations reflect the consensus of the DLC members and represent a framework for action for legislators, policymakers, and other stakeholders who care about the quality of education in Oregon.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

New Leaders

We believe that school leadership preparation programs should identify and recruit the best candidates, apply rigorous selection criteria to the applicant pool, and provide future school leaders with relevant and meaningful coursework and internship experiences that reflect the challenges they will face on the job.

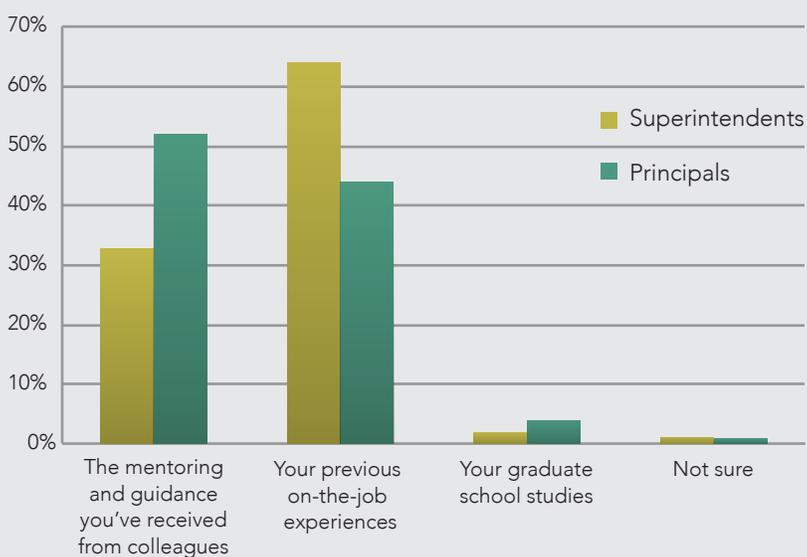
From interviews with faculty and staff at five of Oregon's eight school leadership preparation programs,⁷ we learned that these programs are not selective and the vast majority of applicants are admitted. A similar trend exists nationwide.⁸ Once enrolled, many leaders-in-training don't receive the preparation they need. Rather than learning how to be instructional leaders and improve student achievement, school leader candidates are primarily taught how to perform administrative duties. According to a national survey, significant majorities of principals (67 percent) and superintendents (72 percent) reported that their preparation programs were "out of touch" with the skills needed to run today's schools.⁹ In the same survey, principals and superintendents reported that mentoring and previous on-the-job experiences better prepared them to lead their own schools than their graduate school studies.¹⁰ The following recommendations, presented in order of priority, will strengthen the pipeline of talent going into Oregon's school system.

1: Provide extended internships and mentor supports that strengthen the connections between coursework preparation and the realities of practice.

School leaders need to be ready for challenges they will encounter in Oregon schools today. Preparation programs should include opportunities for candidates to hold semester- or year-long internships at schools, alongside the principal, and learn first-hand how to run a school. These extended internships will ensure that new school leaders spend enough time in schools to have a meaningful and relevant training experience. New school leaders should be matched with mentors to help them navigate the steep learning curve they will experience.

Why is this important? Candidates who complete these internships will be better prepared to address the challenges they

Which was the most valuable in preparing you for your current position?



encounter in their own schools, and they will be better situated to have an immediate impact on student achievement. Both the university officials who were interviewed and current school leaders agree that existing internships do not provide future school leaders with authentic experiences that prepare them for the challenges they face. And many aspiring school leaders are also full-time teachers, working 50 to 60 hours per week without extended release time. This greatly limits their ability to fully engage in meaningful school leadership internships. The DLC's recommendations will help address these shortcomings of existing internship programs.

“Here is what I know about principals: Next to teachers they have the greatest impact on student achievement. I also believe if you include their substantial influence on teachers in terms of recruitment, hiring, motivation, evaluation, and professional development, a principal’s impact on student achievement increases exponentially. That impact can be negative or positive. School boards and superintendents must take purposeful action to equip their schools with powerful instructional leaders or they simply trust in the luck of the draw for the future success of their students. Implementing meaningful internship and mentorship programs can ensure that beginning principals get the support they need to positively impact student outcomes from their rookie year to their retirement year.”

—Colt Gill, DLC member and superintendent of Bethel School District in Eugene, Oregon.

New school leaders who receive ongoing mentoring and support will be able to draw on the experience of veteran colleagues and avoid re-inventing the wheel every time they encounter a new challenge. Retention data

for Oregon school leaders is not available, but retention data from districts and states around the country shows that turnover rates during a principal’s first 3-6 years at a school are as high as 50 percent to 79 percent.¹¹ In one study of six urban school districts, more than 20 percent of principals new to a school leave within two years.¹² We believe that with a better prepared and supported cadre of new leaders, Oregon can reduce the likelihood of burn out, retain effective school leaders, and reverse the decline in student achievement associated with high turnover.

Key policy and practice change needed to implement this recommendation:

Revise administrative licensure content and applicable Oregon statutes to emphasize student achievement and instructional leadership by increasing the focus on instructional leadership training in current preparatory programs. This strategy aligns licensure expectations with school leadership research, which suggests that effective school leaders articulate clear visions for student achievement and prioritize instructional leadership over other administrative tasks.

Provide administrators who have four years or less experience with regionally based mentors.

Provide resources to districts to offer extended release from teaching duties for up to 50 rigorously selected leader candidates. This strategy enables Oregon to fill out their school leader pipeline by partnering closely with school districts to identify and select potential school leaders from their pool of teachers. Using rigorous selection criteria signals to potential candidates—and the broader public—that school leaders should be chosen from our best and brightest teachers.

Other policies and practices important to implement this recommendation include: ensure the success and retention of diverse candidates by providing internships with intentional support; integrate coursework on the realities of practice into leader preparation programs; and provide districts with tuition support to place aspiring administrators in leadership preparation programs.

What is **Adaptive Leadership**?

Adaptive leaders mobilize people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.¹ Adaptive leadership creates a strong alignment with living systems theory:

- Embraces change that enables the capacity to thrive
- Builds upon the past rather than jettisons it
- Adapts through experimentation
- Relies on diversity of talent and thought
- Displaces and rearranges the old order
- Understands that adaptation takes time

¹Heifetz, R., Linsky, M., Grashow, A. (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Cambridge Leadership Associates.]

What is **Emotional Intelligence**?

Effective school leaders must understand and be prepared in core emotional intelligence skills that allow a school community to thrive. Emotional intelligence is the study of how we manage ourselves and our relationships.¹

- Core Skills
- Self awareness
- Managing your emotions
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skill

¹Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

2: Provide candidates with coursework grounded in standards and relevant to the administrator’s assignment. The coursework must be heavily weighted toward instructional and adaptive leadership, equity, and emotional intelligence. School leaders need to be instructional leaders, not just building administrators. Currently, school leadership coursework in Oregon focuses on tasks like financial management, policy, school law, and student discipline. Though these tasks are important, Oregon’s principals must also have deep expertise on effective teaching practices, an ability to coach and motivate their teachers, and be able to set a clear vision for student achievement in their building.

Why is this important? Research shows that effective school leaders have a high level of emotional intelligence and strong instructional leadership.¹³ As the field learns more about what effective leaders do and expectations for effective school leaders evolve, preparation programs must ensure that they are setting their candidates up for success in their future careers. With expertise in instructional leadership, school leaders will have the skills needed to improve their teachers’ instructional practices and, ultimately, raise student achievement and close achievement gaps.

Key policy and practice changes needed to implement this recommendation:

Coursework should provide opportunities to learn and practice instructional leadership skills, such as observing teachers in the classroom, providing them with actionable feedback that improves practice, and leading professional development. For example, the “Stand by Me” Leadership Program at the University of Washington requires school leader candidates to document a minimum of 400 hours of instructional leadership on the following core competencies: (1) shaping and attaining

a vision; (2) improving instructional quality through collaborative professional practice; (3) engaging families and communities; (4) navigating system-wide data use; and (5) creating systems of accountability and support.¹⁴ Because research shows such a compelling connection between instructional leadership and student achievement, we believe all school leader preparation programs in Oregon should prioritize instructional leadership in their coursework as well.

Coursework should develop differentiated skills specific to a variety of leadership roles. School leaders can be principals,

“Our experience and reflection on research has helped us consider possibilities for enhancing the integration of learners, coursework, and the practical experiences of leader preparation programs as they ready future leaders for the diverse realities of leading in today’s schools. To the extent possible, coursework should be delivered in the context of the leader’s real work, well grounded in standards, and with a focus on instructional, adaptive, and transformational leadership. It will be important to create equitable access to quality regional models in which programs support the leadership needs of the variety of school settings found in Oregon. Coursework should be designed in ways that provide highly relevant experiences, allowing leaders to develop skills specific to a variety of administrative roles and levels. Importantly, coursework must give leaders the opportunity to learn to lead through lenses of equity and to develop and advance culturally responsive practices in their schools.”

—Bill Rhodes, DLC member and superintendent of West Linn-Wilsonville School District.

assistant principals, superintendents, and central office staff. Each of these leadership positions has a different set of roles and responsibilities, and coursework should be differentiated accordingly. Superintendents and principals should not receive the same training, but preparation programs should identify the common themes that cut across all leadership roles. For example, how does instructional leadership differ for a principal and superintendent? How is goal setting at the school level different than setting district-wide goals?

Regional models for preparation must be available and flexible enough to accommodate the many school setting and contexts in Oregon. In the same way preparation programs differentiate coursework for different school leadership positions, they should also address the different school settings (e.g., elementary, middle, high, alternative, traditional, charter, alternative, special education, and so forth) and contexts (e.g., urban, rural, suburban, high-poverty, multicultural, homogenous, high- and low-performing, and so forth).

Other policies and practices important to implement this recommendation include: create and publish a field review of leadership preparation programs every four years; and embed the lenses of equity and cultural competency into school leader preparation coursework. The Oregon Education Investment Board has developed an equity lens that promises educational equity and excellence for every child and learner in Oregon.¹⁵ We applaud and support this vision and seek to ensure that equity and cultural competency are central to school leader preparation.

3: Create clear and selective criteria to recruit the top 25 percent of administrative candidates with the highest potential to improve student achievement. School districts in Oregon should select school leaders from a pool of the best and brightest candidates. By proactively recruiting talented teachers into leadership preparation programs and using rigorous hiring criteria, Oregon will increase the number of effective school leaders throughout the state.

Why is this important? A more selective system gives school districts a greater voice in hiring, and helps ensure that schools are led by principals with the skills correlated with student achievement gains and improved teaching practices. Increasing the selectivity of school leader preparation programs also sends an important message to educators and the public about the importance of school leadership.

Key policy and practice changes needed to implement this recommendation:

Require a minimum of five years of teaching experience including two years of demonstrated leadership capacity before being admitted into a leader preparation program. This strategy reinforces the expectation that school leaders are, first and foremost, instructional leaders. Expertise builds over time, and by requiring five years of teaching experience, preparation programs will be more likely to attract applicants with a solid knowledge base on effective teaching practices.

Formalize explicit partnerships between preparation programs and districts to identify and select the highest quality candidates. This strategy encourages districts to partner with universities and other organizations—such as New

Leaders—to identify potential school leaders and build a principal pipeline. For example, New Leaders' *Emerging Leaders Program* targets educators interested in becoming administrators and provides them with professional development on adult, instructional, and cultural leadership skills. Twenty percent of the participants in the *Emerging Leaders Program* are selected to join the *Aspiring Principal Training Program*, during which they complete a year-long residency at a school in their placement city. RAND Corporation has found that "students in K-8 schools where a New Leader has been principal for three or more years outpace the district in academic achievement gains over the course of their principalship by statistically significant margins."¹⁶ These results suggest that a similar partnership with an organization like New Leaders could benefit students and schools in Oregon as well.

Provide resource incentives for preparation programs that establish more rigorous admission requirements and link this approach to underserved positions and underrepresented groups.

Other policies and practices important to implement this recommendation include: identify "non-negotiable" core instructional leadership skills and strategies required for entry into school leadership roles; establish the expectation that school leaders are instructional leaders first and foremost; create a uniform, statewide data system to track the rigor of admission, demand for future vacancies, and rate of successful placement within two years of program completion; require a recommendation from the superintendent or designee that speaks to the candidate's leadership skills and instructional effectiveness prior to admission into a leadership preparation program.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Leaders Currently in the School System

Expectations for principals have evolved over time, with a greater focus on student achievement and a higher demand for instructional rigor. As a result, principals are required to make a dramatic shift away from building administration and towards instructional leadership. Much of the training and professional development veteran school leaders receive has remained the same and has not shifted to reflect this new reality. In addition, many school leaders simply have too many responsibilities on their plates. They find it impossible to be both managing building administrators and serving as instructional leaders. Finally, many districts do not have the structures and resources in place to develop existing school leaders into instructional leaders.



“Great school leaders keep a laser-like focus on teaching and learning. They are grounded in what is going on in the classroom and they can give their teachers effective feedback about how to improve their instruction. Prioritizing tasks and activities that put quality instruction first is how great school leaders organize their day. Leaders have the ability to impact all students and staff in their school, so if they are supporting and developing quality instruction, there can be a positive impact on student achievement. We just won’t get to quality instruction in every classroom, every day without high quality school and district leadership. Show me a school where all students are achieving and I’ll show you a strong school leader.”

*—Krista Parent, DLC member and superintendent,
 South Lane School District*

The following recommendations will strengthen Oregon’s corps of existing school leaders.

4: Implement systems to prioritize administrative leader time, efforts, and resources that focus directly on improving student learning. Instructional leadership tasks such as observing teachers, providing timely and actionable feedback, and leading school-based professional development take time and resources—but these are essential to improving the quality of teaching and learning. While there are pockets of exceptions, district structures and resources are constrained and do not offer widespread supports for existing administrators.

Why is this important? School leaders need time, space, and resources to be successful instructional leaders. Many state and district reforms are currently jeopardized because principals do not have enough time to assume instructional leadership tasks on top of their other responsibilities. Instead of asking principals to do more, certain administrative and business tasks can be deprioritized or delegated to other building staff, thereby enabling school leaders to focus more deeply on instructional leadership.

Key policy and practice changes needed to implement this recommendation:

Create and implement a protocol to identify and support leadership priorities tied directly to high-impact student outcomes.

Identify and reassign non-instructional leadership duties to other professionals in order to protect instructional leadership time. Studies show that most principals spend only 8 percent to 17 percent of their time on daily activities related to instructional leadership.¹⁷ But these studies also show that student achievement is higher in schools where principals spend

Iton Udosenata, DLC member and principal of Cottage Grove High School in South Lane School District, reflects on his role as an instructional leader, and how he spends his time during a typical day.

“The unpredictable nature of high school administration is a major perk of the job. But the responsibility of tending to endless issues can easily encroach on our primary responsibility, which is to support instruction that promotes student achievement.

“The days of a high school administrator are long and require a principal to wear several different hats that range from disciplinarian, to accountant, to community organizer. The seven hours that students are on campus are distributed fairly evenly communicating with staff, working with students, observing instruction, maintaining community partnerships, working with parents, and normally concludes with an evening event. This broad array of commitments can overshadow an intense focus on school vision. The greatest challenge of being a principal is fulfilling the aforementioned responsibilities without forgetting to be a visionary.

Here’s what a typical day in my life looks like:

- Answer emails before I leave my home around 6:45
- Twice a week I set up for a 7:15 meeting
- 8:00 check in with support staff
- 1-2 hours of communicating with staff
- 1-2 hours of triage help (discipline, parents, etc.)
- 3-4 classroom observations a day
- I typically eat while speaking with a staff member about a school related issue.
- 3:45-5:45 catch up on paper work and emails
- 6:00 dinner with family
- 7:00 game or event
- 9:00 home
- 9:45-10:30 email, paperwork.”

more time on day-to-day instructional leadership activities.¹⁸ This strategy will encourage all school leaders to manage their time in a way consistent with the promising practices of effective principals. Nationally, more than 500 school districts have embraced the school administrative manager (SAM) model, which helps relieve principals of administrative duties by assigning them to other staff, such as secretaries, assistant principals, or teacher-leaders. On average, principals participating in the SAM model increase their instructional time from 32 percent to 46 percent after one year in the program.¹⁹

Align initiatives to prevent competing demands. Many school leaders find themselves juggling multiple—and often competing—priorities. For example, a new principal may be focusing on turning around a low-performing school at the same time she is implementing new Common Core curricula and conducting new, more rigorous teacher evaluations. Even highly effective school leaders can be overwhelmed with the pace and volume of education reform. Accordingly, Oregon should consider rolling out reform initiatives over time, rather than all at once, and help school leaders connect the dots between initiatives that seem unrelated.

Other policies and practices important to implement this recommendation include: provide professional development on deficits identified by the protocol mentioned above; standardize statewide expectations for instructional leader evaluation; and hold leaders accountable for implementation and results.

5: Develop a regionalized network of highly skilled coaches and mentors to support school leaders at all stages of their careers. All school leaders—including those who are the most effective—can continuously improve with coaching and

support. During coaching sessions, school leaders and their mentors can discuss common problems of practice, brainstorm solutions to challenges, review student data and set achievement goals, provide critical thought partnership, and plan professional development for teachers.

Why is this important? Like teachers, school leaders can improve if they are observed and provided with timely, actionable feedback. Highly skilled mentors and coaches, who are also instructional leaders, can coach school leaders the same way principals coach teachers in their building.

“Serving as a principal can be a very lonely job. People look to you—they expect that you will know the “answer” and/or provide the vision and strategies to move the building in the right direction. I can only imagine how much difference it could have made in my career as a school leader if I could have easily accessed mentors with a variety of skills and expertise; mentors who had already transformed schools. School leadership matters; developing regionalized networks of skilled coaches and mentors to support leaders at all stages of their careers will impact student learning across the state. As a principal, this access to expertise and support for a laser focus on instructional leadership would have allowed me access to better “answers” and a more efficient and effective implementation of our school’s vision. Our students would have learned more, sooner.”

—Bob King, DLC member and principal, Crater Renaissance Academy, Central Point, Oregon.

Key policy and practice changes needed to implement this recommendation:

Develop robust, highly skilled regional mentor cadres with a variety of areas of expertise and experience. For example,

New Leaders connects “emerging leaders” in their residency year with a mentor principal and an “executive coach.”²⁰ Post-residency, principals become part of a professional learning community to network with one another and receive tools and resources to improve student achievement.

Provide high-performing mentors and coaches with resources and release time so they can participate in networks. During release time, coaches and mentors can focus exclusively on supporting principals in their network, rather than juggling mentorship and coaching on top of their other responsibilities. School districts should also select mentors and coaches from a pool of high-performing school leaders to ensure their promising practices are shared with peers.

Provide central office staff, such as assistant superintendents and mentors with professional development so that they can effectively support principals. Training may include how to effectively observe and evaluate teachers, and how to give teachers effective and actionable feedback.

Other policies and practices important to implement this recommendation include: provide specialized support and incentives to ensure success and retention of diverse leaders and mentors; provide state-sponsored sabbatical time for highly specialized professional development for mentors selected in the cadre; networks must address opportunities for small, remote, urban districts as well as focus and priority schools.

6: Develop articulated career pathways for Oregon leaders aligned with preparation and licensure that recruit and retain highly effective school leaders.

Career pathways can come in many shapes and forms. Some career pathways are structured to give new school leaders more

compensation earlier in their careers, based on performance. Other career pathways allow effective leaders to be promoted to new positions with progressively more responsibilities (e.g., effective assistant principals become principals or central office administrators). Still other career pathways allow effective school leaders to take on new roles and responsibilities—such as coaching or mentoring—without changing job titles.

Why is this important? Career pathways can be used to recruit, reward, and retain educators over time. Pathways provide school leaders with autonomy and choice over their career trajectory and can help school districts disseminate effective leadership practices by charging high-performing school leaders with designing and delivering professional development to their peers.



Key policy and practices changes needed to implement this recommendation:

Develop leadership career pathways that align with teacher-leader pathways. Leadership career pathways should build off the successes of Chalkboard Project's Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success (CLASS) initiative and teacher-leader pathways. CLASS has been used as a starting point along a *de facto* leadership career pathway, since many former CLASS teacher-leaders are now school leaders.

Differentiate principal and superintendent certificates, recognizing the critical element unique to each position. Principals and superintendents will share a common set of skills and knowledge, but the positions are fundamentally different and should require separate certifications.

Provide resources to offer exploratory leadership experiences as a first step in the transition from teacher-leader to leader preparation program. This strategy allows teacher-leaders to dabble in school leadership before committing fully to the career pathway.

NEXT STEPS

Oregon is taking important steps to ensure that all K-12 students graduate ready for college and work, and our public education system is more accountable and innovative than ever. Senate Bill 253, passed by the state legislature in 2011, calls for 40 percent of adult Oregonians to hold a bachelor's or advanced degree, 40 percent to have an associate's degree or a meaningful post-secondary certificate, and all adult Oregonians to hold a high school diploma or equivalent by the year 2025.

Our schools are rising to the challenge of meeting this 40-40-20-goal. To continue this momentum, we must expand our focus to school leadership. Oregon's high school graduation rate is on the rise and the achievement gap is closing between African American, Hispanic, and Native American students and their White and Asian peers.²¹ Equity and equitable opportunity to educational attainment must remain a priority to ensure that every student is successfully engaged. We cannot accomplish this without strong school leadership and active engagement of families and communities.

The recommendations in this report provide a framework for elevating school leadership in Oregon. Developed after reviewing the most compelling research and promising school leadership practices across the country, they have the potential to transform Oregon into a national model for reforming school leadership practices and policies. Existing leadership supports no longer meet the demands of our students, families, or communities. They no longer meet the needs of our educators. Oregon must invest deeper into building a solid infrastructure for school leadership—one that reflects leadership progression along an educator’s career pathway and one that supports school leaders in all of Oregon’s communities.

With the right supports and investments in school leadership, Oregon school districts can start adopting many of the policies and practices listed in this report; others will require action by policymakers.

The DLC looks forward to working with these stakeholders and others to develop a bold implementation plan coupled with better data about the placement, retention, and quality of school leaders in Oregon. The challenges are clear and practical solutions are within reach. Now is the time to reshape and redesign our education leadership framework, and to close a critical, missing link in our state’s education improvement strategy.



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APPENDIX

STRENGTHENING OREGON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The Necessary Conditions for Success

We believe the stakes are increasingly high for guaranteeing effective educational leaders in Oregon. Never before have we demanded so much from our school leaders, with the recognition that so much is at stake for Oregon's students. This document summarizes the best initial thinking of the Distinguished Leaders Council to frame a highly leveraged initiative that will elevate educator professional effectiveness and thereby impact outcomes for Oregon students.¹

STATEMENT OF INTENT

We are committed to preparing and supporting a powerful new generation of highly effective Oregon school leaders through the **Oregon School Leaders Academy** and strengthening experienced leaders through **The Best Leading the Best**. Within four years of placement and ongoing rigorous support, our participants will demonstrate greater measurable levels of student growth while significantly closing ALL achievement gaps. In addition to a broad array of balanced measures, these new school leaders will be expected to improve school-wide performance by showing consistent and significant improvement in student outcomes on state and local measures and by decreasing the gap in performance between traditionally underserved populations and the whole school population. Further, our participant leaders will help develop, model, and lead other school leaders by implementing a new adaptive skill repertoire that will become a key leverage point for those who are committed to drastically improving outcomes for all Oregon students.

The following recommendations for strengthening leadership are based in four guiding beliefs advanced by the Distinguished Leaders Council:

1. **Our work must begin with a shared commitment to equity.** As Oregon's demographics are changing to provide rich diversity in race, ethnicity, and language there is a persistent achievement gap that must be addressed with urgency by a new generation of highly effective school leaders. An equitable education system requires providing our leaders with the skills and tools required to be highly effective for each and every student in our state.
2. **We must prioritize instructional leadership.** Indeed, this is the "litmus test" that should be the initial screening requirement for any consideration of potential leadership candidates. All preparation and training in instructional leadership must be directly aligned with an explicit commitment to equity, closing opportunity and achievement gaps, and directly measured by subsequent student outcomes. This effort is guided by the core commitment to elevate teaching and learning.
3. **Practical application must be highly leveraged.** Our leaders believe that an extended residency must be the cornerstone of leadership training complemented by sustained mentorship, while augmented with rigorous and supportive coursework. We believe the most meaningful preparation is more likely to unfold daily in school and district settings, rather than at a university on weekends.

¹ This document is a straw man proposal intended to jump start a discussion and generate a deeper conversation about how to address the challenge of strengthening school leadership in Oregon.

4. We maintain the time has come for a relentless commitment to results. All current leader preparation programs should be publicly measured for admissions, completion, placement, retention, ongoing support, and effectiveness as determined by student outcomes. Programs should also be scrutinized for total costs to the candidate measured against outcomes upon completion. These results should be reported annually in a public document. We expect to model this commitment with implementation of this pilot.

PROGRAM DESIGN

New Leaders

With these beliefs established by consensus with the Distinguished Leaders Council, we offer the following key design features for the proposed **Oregon School Leaders Academy** to prepare the next generation of Oregon school leaders. Our assumptions and architecture are based upon a minimum four-year commitment to successfully launch and sustain this new model.

Recruitment/Selection: We will seek highly qualified candidate applications, including those who have successfully engaged in career pathways, annually for the Oregon School Leaders Academy. Candidates will be recruited in collaboration with DLC members, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, Oregon Association of Latino Administrators, Portland Teachers Program, Oregon Education Association, and other partners. Preferred candidates will have a minimum five years of highly effective teaching experience including at least two years in demonstrated professional leadership roles. After screening, reference checks, observations,

and interviews, up to 30 individuals will be selected to form up to two leader cohorts per year. These high performance leader candidates will be selected based upon capacity for instructional leadership, team-building, interpersonal talent, and emotional intelligence. Through the work of a recruitment development coordinator, we will make a commitment to equity by intentionally engaging candidates from diverse and traditionally underserved groups. We will adopt research-based trait analysis tools to provide consistency in screening and selection.

Residency: The Academy will offer candidates a guaranteed residency supported with a .5 FTE commitment for one academic year. Candidates, in consultation with supervisors, will select either a full-time release for a half-year, or a half-time release for a full year, or a flexible equivalent, based upon the needs and interests of both the candidate and the educational setting. The residency will include a significant commitment of time and experience at both school and district levels. Residency supervisors will commit to required training and preparation to provide sustained, high-quality support for candidates. Funds for the residency, estimated at \$900,000 per year, will be provided by foundations, the State of Oregon, and participating districts. Mentors will be assigned at the beginning of the residency with an expected commitment of candidate support offered for up to four years. In turn candidates will commit to a preferred agreed upon placement for four years. Both supervisors and mentors will participate in required training and preparation.

Academic Coursework: Concurrent with residency, the Academy will feature regular and sustained coursework for initial candidates. In addition to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure, Educational

Leadership Constituent Council, and Oregon Administrator Standards, this delivery will emphasize equity, instructional leadership, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence. In combination with the residency experience, coursework will differentiate preparation in specialty areas, including but not limited to focus and priority schools, rural schools, district office leadership roles, special education, English language learners, early learning, the demanding and complex preparation needs for high school leaders, and other emerging leadership roles. Current practicing leaders who have demonstrated school and district level success will be recruited and supported to teach this coursework. Academic coursework will satisfy the requirements necessary for completion of the Initial Administrator License. Significantly, academic coursework will prioritize alignment and emphasis on student achievement outcomes. Candidates will be expected to commit to an intensive summer of coursework prior to residency, and a concluding summer of practical application capstone study following the residency.

Higher Education Partnership: We will seek partnership with up to two private or public institutions, or professional organizations that demonstrate an explicit commitment to redesign leader preparation. We will first seek partnerships with Oregon universities that demonstrate the preferred traits of national accreditation, commitment to our content, the courage to implement quickly, the capacity to engage all settings in the state, and demonstrated success in technological leadership. Prospective higher education candidate institutions will be screened, interviewed, and selected by an advisory DLC team, Chalkboard staff, and select stakeholder partners. In addition to the academic coursework parameters delineated above, the university partner(s)

will be expected to provide support for instruction delivered primarily in the field with an eye for regional capacity building.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Existing Leaders

Academy Network: The Oregon School Leaders Academy (for current administrators) will design, sponsor, and deliver systems that support existing school leaders in up to 50 Oregon school districts each year for four consecutive years. At the end of four years, every district in Oregon will have a highly trained expert that has the knowledge and strategies to effectively support school principals in their respective districts. Supported principals will lead schools in Oregon to improved student outcomes and achievement on many critical learning indicators and will become models of academic excellence.

While it is widely understood that principals play a pivotal role in the improvement of teaching and learning, many districts have given little attention to creating the necessary conditions for principal success. These principal supervisors will help create the necessary conditions for principal success.

The following recommendations are based in three essential professional conditions advanced by the Distinguished Leaders Council:

- 5. District leaders must have a consensus understanding of the day-to-day work that principals should be engaged in to affect teaching practice at scale.** This elevated understanding will prioritize instructional leadership with the concurrent relinquishment of non-essential administrative functions.

6. Principals must receive the intensive, coordinated, and embedded professional development they need to improve their skills.

This professional learning will be differentiated to accommodate role, level, educational setting, and experience.

7. Districts need to provide principals the time on a daily basis to engage with teachers and students focusing on the improvement of teaching and learning. Protected time for learning must be viewed as a school leader's most precious resource.

This initiative aims to ensure that principals have clear expectations, supports and conditions necessary for principal effectiveness by having district leaders train and support principals in meaningful ways throughout the course of each year.

In year one, 50 districts will be selected to participate in the pilot project called **The Best Leading the Best**. Each district will identify one central office administrator (COA) who will participate in monthly trainings led by the Center for Educational Leadership staff. The COA's will become trainers in their district for leading principal development throughout the year. Topics for monthly trainings shall include, but are not limited to the following:

Defining clearly and in detail, what principals are expected to do as the instructional leaders of their schools.

Coaching and supporting principals throughout the year to maximize instruction.

Reducing or eliminating barriers from the central office so principals can focus on the right work.

Analyzing teacher evaluation data and using the data to get at inter-rater reliability and informing the professional development of principals in each district.

Training principals to give effective feedback based on classroom observations.

Developing and utilizing teacher-leaders and instructional coaches in schools to support student achievement.

Creating systems in schools that maximize and protect instructional time.

Decades of evidence have shown that school improvements tend not to deepen at single schools or spread across schools without substantial support from district central offices (Copland and Honig, 2010). Unless we address this gap, Oregon will continue to have pockets of excellence without a system in place to develop expertise in every district. **The Best Leading the Best** transforms the entire leadership system in Oregon over a four-year period of time.

Instructional Protocol: Foremost will be the creation of a recommended protocol to prioritize instructional leadership practices within schools and districts. Participants in **The Best Leading the Best** will plan, schedule, and host a multi-year sustained delivery of instructionally focused professional development offered at no charge to participants and partner districts. This delivery will incorporate national caliber instructional experts, equally balanced with specialized topics that address Oregon's unique needs, such as strategies for equity, early childhood partnerships, community and parental engagement, improving rural schools, focus and priority schools, chronic absenteeism, and other emerging demands. We anticipate an annual commitment of \$200,000 to guarantee sustained, high-quality delivery of these essential supports.

Regional Capacity Building: *The Best Leading the Best* will take a lead role in developing regional talent reservoirs to offer support for new and existing school leaders. Academy members will design a regionally based mentor program that incorporates deployment of existing highly effective leaders supported through paid sabbatical release time. Special attention will be given to currently under-served areas of need, including district office roles, rural, and remote settings. The regional model will intentionally include existing teacher leaders and cultivate career pathways adapted to the unique needs of the region. Exploratory leadership experiences will be provided to potential early leader candidates and supported with additional resources. We anticipate a commitment of \$50,000 per year to sustain this new delivery.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

1. All candidates who have successfully completed the Oregon School Leaders Academy will be offered a leadership position in a partner school district.
2. Leaders will be guaranteed ongoing professional mentorship and support for a minimum of four years after initial placement.
3. Districts will be guaranteed high caliber leaders or the academy will re-train the candidate.
4. Oregon will see 120 highly effective leaders placed in key positions by the 2018-19 school year.
5. After four years, each district in Oregon will have a highly trained central office administrator focused on supporting principals to enhance student learning in their districts.

SCHEDULE AND TIMELINES

The Distinguished Leaders Council, Chalkboard staff, and consultants will engage in deeper design from June through December 2014. By January 2015, program design with supporting financial detail will be completed. Financial commitments by partners will be in place by March 2015, with initial screening and selection of the first cohort of the **Oregon School Leaders Academy** completed by May 1, 2015.

The Distinguished Leaders Council, Chalkboard staff, and consultants will develop a plan by September 1, 2014, including a plan for recruiting the first 50 participants. **The Best Leading the Best** will kick off its first session by January 2015 and continue for approximately one year.