



Policy Brief 2019 – 1: P-12 Leadership and University Partnerships

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“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”—John F. Kennedy

There is an urgent need for state-level policies to support the creation of sustainable school district and university principal preparation partnerships. When compared to traditional preparation models, partnerships improve workforce outcomes for principals and provide schools and districts with more effective leaders. Increasing support for a partnership model is a key component toward addressing high rates of principal turnover in our nation’s K-12 public schools. We know strong partnerships between universities and school districts lead to more effective principal preparation programs, yet nearly 90% of superintendents nationally report that such partnerships develop infrequently at best within their districts. States can play a critical role in encouraging these partnerships with the creation of legislation that incentivizes the growth and support of new and existing models.

candidate diversity, 4) higher principal retention rates, and 5) a more cost-effective model.

In this brief, we highlight specific state policy goals for the funding and development of stronger university leadership and school district partnerships. We note that legislative efforts should support evidence-based practices and, where appropriate, we draw on recent research to support the components of highlighted partnerships.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

- 1. Create financial incentives. Incentives promote and support programs to recruit and prepare future principals for districts in or near high need geographic contexts of both urban and rural university campuses.
2. Leverage funding mechanisms. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes funding that states can utilize to invest in high-quality partnership models through Title I, Title II Part A, Part A School Improvement, or Competitive Federal Grants (cf. Sutcher et al., 2017).
3. Reform accreditation and licensure requirements. Explore policies that facilitate university program-district collaboration as a component of program accreditation and principal licensure. Financial incentives can be applied to these reforms.
4. Support development of new data systems. Data systems should analyze and track outcomes for principal candidates during their preparation, credentialing, and upon entering the workforce to ensure effective model implementation and assess partnership progress (cf. Wang et al., 2018).

Table with 2 columns: P-12 University Partnership, Traditional. Rows compare roles (visionary leader vs middle manager), training (different kinds vs one-size fits all), leadership integration (integrated into training vs siloed), and engagement (actively engaged vs isolated).

There are five reasons state policy-makers should consider legislation to support preparation programs that partner with school districts. Compared to traditional models, partnerships offer: 1) higher quality coursework and professional development alongside effective current principals, 2) increased rates of job placement, 3) increased

Evidence: Partnerships Support Multiple Markers of Effective Leadership

- A. Higher quality leadership. Partnerships often provide overall higher quality leadership

development programs as well as [continued mentoring through professional development](#) once leaders transition to the workforce. This increase in quality comes from research-based coursework and field placements in which future principals are able to shadow a district's most effective current school leaders.

- B. Increased job-placement.** Research related to successful models of leadership preparation partnerships finds that such programs communicate closely with districts to recruit qualified principal candidates. [This effort leads to higher placement rates for candidates into leadership positions.](#)
- C. Candidate diversity.** Partnerships often lead to the [recruitment of a more diverse cohort](#) in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics that are more reflective of the communities served.
- D. Retention.** Partnerships reduce principal turnover and [increase the overall leadership sustainability of programs.](#) University program partners sustain consistent program implementation through a district leadership transition through supportive networks and resources.
- E. Cost-effective model.** In terms of costs, partnerships tackle funding challenges by [drawing on the expertise of both district and university personnel.](#) Districts can leverage state and federal funds for leadership development while universities can target grant opportunities to offset tuition and field placement costs.

## Conclusion

To summarize, partnership models prepare stronger leaders and offer states a path towards more sustainable systems of leadership development. University principal preparation program partnerships have a record of producing leaders who [bring positive achievement results for students.](#) Partnerships recruit candidates efficiently, preparing principals who go on to have higher workforce retention rates, and effectively [saving costs for states and districts in the long run.](#) The development of strong partnerships that remain through shifts in district and university personnel will require the support of long-term policy measures originating in state governments. Partnerships will succeed when they become sustained programs that gain powerful reputations for providing principals with quality training and districts with effective leadership personnel.

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Figure adapted from Darling-Hammond et al., 2007.

