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ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ADVANCEMENT TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS



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INTRODUCTION

About This Guide

Current national estimates of the turnover rate of principals are approaching 20 percent, with even higher rates in high-poverty schools (Goldring, et al., 2018; Taie, et al., 2017). Given the importance of principals to student and school success (Gates, et al., 2019; Grissom, et al., 2021), many districts face a critical need to identify, train, place, and support new principals. A logical place for districts to turn is to the cadre of assistant principals in their schools (Bierly & Shy, 2013; Turnbull, et al., 2016). The role of the assistant principal is often viewed as a precursor to the principalship (Bierly & Shy, 2013; Turnbull, et al., 2016; Goldring, et al., 2021). Over the last 25 years, it is estimated that the number of assistant principals increased from approximately 40,000 to over 80,000 (Goldring, et al., 2021). The number of principals with previous experience as an assistant principal also increased from approximately 39,000 to over 69,000 (Goldring, et al., 2021). There is opportunity to strengthen the leadership pipeline in your school district by preparing assistant principals for the principalship.

We created this guide to support district leadership in preparing assistant principals for promotion to and success in the principalship. In particular, we intend the guide for use by those who regularly plan for, create, lead, and develop principal leadership training opportunities; those who have responsibilities in pipeline development and hiring or placement of school administrators; and those who supervise, evaluate, and lead succession planning for school leadership.

The research base for the preparation of assistant principals for the principalship is emerging. This guide draws available evidence for

- forecasting principal vacancies (Anderson, et. al, 2017; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019),
- identifying assistant principals for the principalship (Herman, 2022; Khalifa, 2018; Goldhaber, et al., 2019; Goldring, et al., 2020; Grissom, et al., 2017; Grissom, et al., 2020), and
- implementing professional learning pathways to prepare identified assistant principals for the principalship (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lipke, 2020; Master, et al. 2020; Khalifa, 2018).

In addition to research, input from school district leaders informed the content and tools in this guide. Leaders responsible for principal pipelines in diverse school districts that vary in size (small, medium, and large), locale (urban, rural, and suburban), and demographics participated in an affinity group to inform the guide's design and content and then in a systematic review of a full draft. The Preparing Assistant Principals for the Principalship Affinity Group provided the opportunity for district leaders to discuss promising practices, challenges, and solutions to strengthening the principal pipeline through the identification and preparation of assistant principals. A detailed interview protocol provided the opportunity for district leaders to share feedback on guide content and implementation strategies, with particular attention to the clarity and usability of the guide.

This guide builds on the prior work of Policy Studies Associates in developing the *Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide*, which helps districts reflect on their policies, processes, and infrastructures related to school leadership more broadly and plan for improvement in all aspects of their principal pipelines. Like that guide, this one draws on Policy Studies Associates' evaluation of the implementation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, an effort supported by The Wallace Foundation to strengthen school leadership. The evaluation analyzed in detail the implementation practices of the six large participating districts and the sustainability of their results (Anderson & Turnbull, 2019; Turnbull, et al., 2016). Districts can use this guide for assistant principal advancement without engaging in a full-scale self-study of their principal pipeline, although some familiarity with the *Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide* will be helpful.

Key takeaways

- The number of assistant principals has increased.
- The number of principals with previous experience as an assistant principal has increased.
- There is opportunity to strengthen and diversify the principal pipeline through the **deliberate preparation of assistant principals for principal positions**.

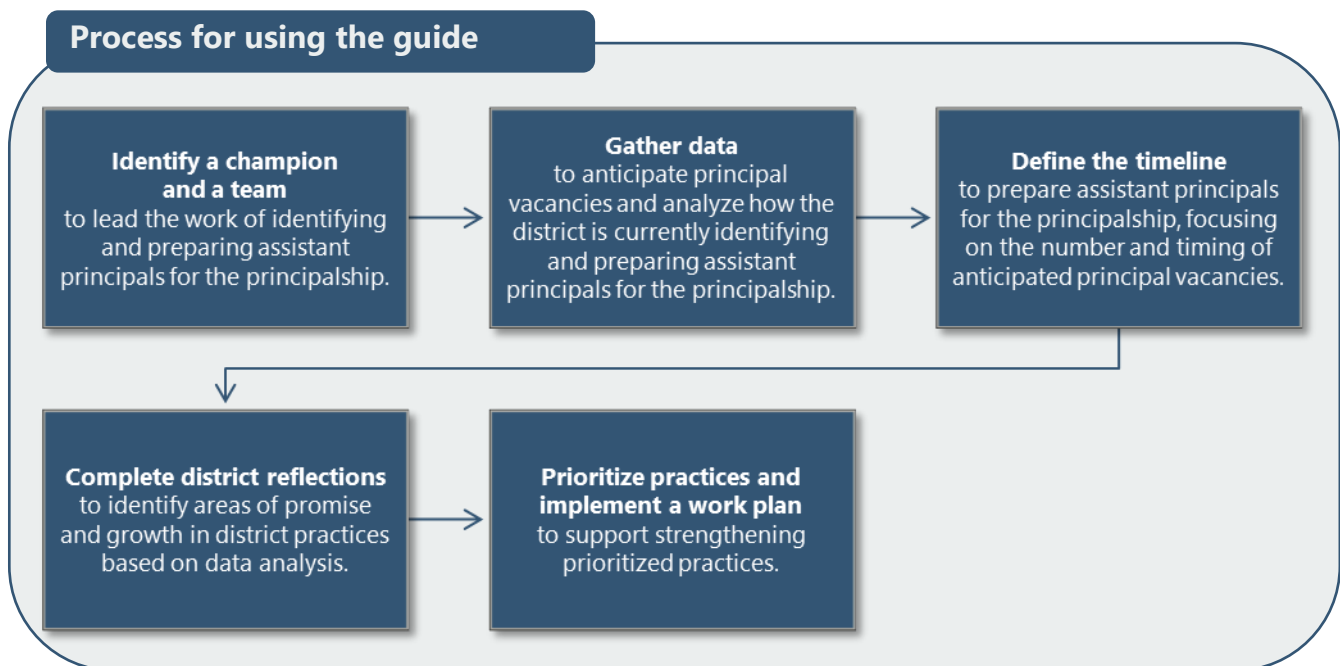
How to Use the Guide

This guide is intended for use by a district team consisting of those who are responsible for principal pipelines. This team will have a unique focus on identifying and preparing assistant principals for the principalship. An assistant principal (AP) advancement team can be formed as its own entity or as a subset of a larger principal pipeline team. It is recommended that the AP advancement team be led by an administrator who will champion and manage the work across the district with the full support of senior leadership. Suggested team members include the superintendent, chief of human resources, principal supervisors, principals, assistant principals, principal coaches, equity officer, and others engaged with leadership pipelines in the district (Aladjem, et al., 2021).

Assistance from an experienced facilitator can be helpful to structure meetings, guide discussions, broker resources, ensure equity of voice, and support alignment to a comprehensive principal pipeline. The facilitator should have experience helping school district leaders navigate through the change management process and should have an understanding of district operations and the internal and external politics that could affect the work. With or without facilitation, however, this guide supports districts in implementing the following process:

- **Identify a champion and an assistant principal advancement team.** Essential to this work is the identification of a district administrator charged with leading the work of preparing assistant principals for the principalship. The district champion does not work in isolation. A district AP advancement team consisting of representatives from a variety of departments should be identified to support effective use of the assistant principal advancement guide. Each member of the AP advancement team should have defined roles for supporting the advancement of assistant principals. For example, the equity officer could be charged with ensuring equitable practices are implemented in the identification of assistant principals to prepare for the principalship.
- **Gather data.** Data should be available for the AP advancement team to anticipate principal vacancies and analyze current assistant principal identification and preparation practices.
- **Define the timeline.** District leaders should begin with the end in mind, focusing on the number and timing of anticipated principal vacancies. The [Forecasting Principal Vacancies](#) section of this guide supports the team in identifying data to review to predict vacancies. The AP advancement team can use the number and timing of anticipated vacancies to identify how many assistant principals to prepare for the principalship and how much time to devote to the identification and preparation process. Each year, the AP advancement team should review data and continuously improve the process for anticipating vacancies, identifying potential principal candidates, and preparing assistant principals for the principalship.

- **Complete district reflections.** This guide invites the AP advancement team, led by a district champion, to analyze practices that the district currently implements and identify what is working well and what needs to be improved. Reflection tables in the guide display research-informed practices for anticipating principal vacancies, identifying assistant principals for promotion, and preparing assistant principals for the principalship. For each district reflection, the AP advancement team should:
 - review practices listed in the table,
 - analyze district data and determine if the district is fully implementing each practice,
 - record the status of practice implementation in the table, and
 - identify practices to strengthen.
- **Prioritize practices and implement a work plan.** After reviewing evidence and completing reflection tables, the team should prioritize practices to include in the work plan. The work plan serves as a guide to support strengthening identified practices. It may not be practical to address all identified practices within a year. The team should look holistically at all reflection tables, prioritize practices based on the context of the school district (time, capacity, resources, etc.), and define a timeline. The Developing Work Plans section and work plan template in this guide provide a roadmap for this part of the process.



Organization of the Guide

Districts can effectively move assistant principals into the principalship by intentionally strengthening their systems and practices in the three areas of district responsibility described in this guide: (1) forecasting principal vacancies, (2) identifying assistant principals for the principalship, and (3) establishing and implementing a professional learning pathway to prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

For each area of district responsibility, the guide

- shares effective practices for assistant principal advancement, citing the best available research,
- defines why the practice is important,
- shares district examples on how to apply the practice, and
- includes a district reflection table to guide the AP advancement team in the review of district practices.

The AP advancement team does not have to address the three areas of district responsibility in a linear or sequential way. Work in two or more areas may (and perhaps must) occur concurrently. For example, a team could simultaneously be forecasting principal vacancies and identifying assistant principals for the principalship.

Areas of district responsibility

Forecasting Principal Vacancies

Guiding Question: How many assistant principals need to be prepared to fill principal vacancies, and by when do they need to be prepared?

Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship

Guiding Question: Which assistant principals demonstrate potential for the principalship?

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway

Guiding Question: Does the district have a professional learning pathway with essential components that support preparing assistant principals for promotion to the principalship?

FORECASTING PRINCIPAL VACANCIES

How many assistant principals need to be prepared to fill principal vacancies, and by when do they need to be prepared?

Although many districts routinely complete at least a simple forecasting exercise, refining the forecast of vacant positions can help clarify the scope of the need for preparing assistant principals for promotion. School districts that have implemented a leader tracking system can use their established system to forecast vacancies. A fully developed leader tracking system is a database containing information about demographics, qualifications, experiences, achievements, professional training, competencies, and/or performance of aspiring and current school leaders. It also contains school and community data that can support vacancy matching and succession planning (Anderson, et al., 2017). Even without all of these types of data, a leader tracking system may be helpful in forecasting. Leader tracking systems need not be elaborate data warehouses; trend data stored in spreadsheets can work well to forecast vacancies.

A district can collect and analyze data on topics such as the following to support forecasting:

- **Attrition** – Each year, principals leave their position due to retirement, resignation, or termination. Collecting attrition data, specifically focusing on why school leaders leave, can help school district leaders plan for and address unwanted attrition.
- **Mobility** – Principals voluntarily or involuntarily move to other schools and positions within the district. Collecting data on the number of principals who were promoted, demoted, or reassigned to other schools and information on why principals move can inform areas to target to improve principal retention. Data disaggregated into voluntary and involuntary movement can better support vacancy predictions.
- **Tenure Data** – The duration of time principals stay in their position can serve as a predictive measure for future vacancies.
- **Job Satisfaction** - Unsurprisingly, principal job satisfaction and principal retention have been linked in the research literature (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Job satisfaction data can be a predictor of future vacancies and can inform ways of supporting principals to bolster retention.
- **Career Plans** – The simple act of asking a principal about their career plans over the next one to four years can provide insight into future vacancies. Implementing a process that annually surveys or interviews principals regarding their intentions to stay in their current role, change positions, move schools, or leave the district can support the refinement of forecast projections.
- **School and Candidate Profiles** – It is not enough to only forecast vacancy numbers. A comprehensive forecast should also include data on types of principals needed for the schools that are anticipated to have vacancies. This begins with an analysis of these schools' profiles, considering student achievement data, staff data, student and staff demographics, school performance, and programs offered in the school. Profiles of the types of candidates needed would include the competencies, dispositions, experience, characteristics, and other data points that support matching a principal to a school (Anderson, et al., 2017).

- **Student Enrollment** – Significant shifts in student enrollment or enrollment that is steadily growing or declining can serve as indicators of future leadership vacancies. It is important to track student enrollment data to anticipate potential expansions or decreases in the number of school leadership positions. Student enrollment data can also inform judgment about the competencies, characteristics, and experience of principals needed to fill future vacancies. For example, district leaders may require that schools with growing populations of families with low incomes have principals with Title I experience.
- **Competitive Intelligence** – Understanding the employment landscape (salaries, working conditions, employment trends, etc.) in surrounding districts allows district leaders to anticipate and address challenges that may arise in the future. Knowing the competitive environment, the district may proactively implement measures to retain and recruit principals.

The AP advancement team can gain insight into the number and types of anticipated principal vacancies by annually reviewing data on attrition, mobility, tenure, job satisfaction, career plans, student enrollment, and competitive intelligence. School profile data provide insight into the qualifications and characteristics of principals who are needed to fill anticipated vacancies. Understanding how many vacancies are anticipated, which schools will have vacancies, when vacancies are expected, and what types of principals are needed to fill vacancies can support a comprehensive forecast analysis. It is recommended that the AP advancement team collaborate with district staff responsible for data collection to identify a timeline to receive and review data.

District leaders can use forecast data to refine estimates of the number of assistant principals needed to fill upcoming vacancies and the number of assistant principals they should engage in training for the principalship. There is delicate balance between training too many assistant principals for principalships that may not immediately materialize and training too few assistant principals for vacant principal positions. However, by preparing more assistant principals for the principalship than the number of predicted vacancies, a district can support the creation of a robust talent pool. Assistant principals who aspire to become principals and have been prepared for the principalship but not yet placed should have continued growth experiences or bridge opportunities to maintain their skills in preparation for future principal opportunities. For example, Denver Public Schools in Colorado offers a second year of its principal residency program with expanded content to support continued growth of aspiring principals. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools in North Carolina is defining a leadership pathway with targeted curriculum for assistant principals to bolster their skill set while they are in the principal hiring pool (Anderson & Turnbull, 2019).

PRACTICE IN ACTION: USING DATA TO PREDICT PRINCIPAL HIRING NEEDS

Denver, Colorado Public Schools

Through the Principal Pipeline Initiative, Denver Public Schools established a robust leader tracking system. The leader tracking system developed by the school district includes:

- **Growth and performance reviews** of school leaders to support the district in identifying areas of strength and growth in leader practice. Outcomes of performance reviews inform targeted support to school leaders.
- **Body of evidence dashboard** that provides school-level data aligned to the district's School Leadership Framework to inform performance evaluations.
- **School leader talent reports** that support vacancy matching of principal candidates to available positions. Candidate profiles consisting of professional experience, education background, language proficiency, and evaluation outcomes are paired with school profiles to support effective candidate-school matches.
- **Hiring placement dashboard** that provides applicant data in real time to ensure a diverse hiring pool with the talents to meet school vacancy needs.
- **School leader forecast** that leverages supply data and assumptions and current principal talent demand to anticipate hiring needs for the next four years.

Through the leader tracking system, Denver Public Schools is able to access valid and reliable data in real time to inform hiring decisions and prepare for future vacancies.

District Reflection: Forecasting Principal Vacancies

The reflection table below allows the AP advancement team to capture its reflections on the district's current practices for vacancy forecasting, focusing on principal, school, student enrollment, and competitive intelligence data. The team should gather and review evidence to assess the status of the district's implementation of each practice shown in the table. In particular, the team should review the availability, quality, and use of the following sources of evidence for forecasting: years of service for current principals; career plans; school and candidate profile data; principal effectiveness data; student enrollment data; and other data the district collects to predict principal vacancies.

Place an "X" in the box next to practices the district fully implements as evident by review of data. For example, if the AP advancement team determines that data is disaggregated by race, gender, effectiveness, years of service and school profile, then place an "X" in the box next to that practice. If data is disaggregated by select categories, such as race and gender only, then do not place an "X" in the box. The table includes a "Reflection Notes" column for the AP advancement team to capture observations, record information, write questions, or identify next steps for practice implementation.

How the AP advancement team uses the completed reflection table is up to the discretion of its champion and team members. We suggest using the results of the reflection process, especially the identification of practices without an "X", as a starting point for the development of a work plan. In setting priorities for the work plan, however, the team should also consider district strategic priorities, values, and practicalities.

Forecasting Principal Vacancies		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Principal and school data	☐ Collected valid and reliable data on principal attrition, mobility, tenure, job satisfaction, effectiveness, and career plans annually. ☐ Disaggregated data by principal race, gender, effectiveness, years of service, and by school profile. ☐ Used data to predict future principal hiring needs focusing on which schools will have vacancies and candidate profiles of principals needed to fill vacancies.	

Forecasting Principal Vacancies		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Student enrollment data	☐ Collected student enrollment data annually. ☐ Disaggregated data by race, gender, and student group (English learners, advanced learners, etc.). ☐ Used current and projected disaggregated student enrollment data to predict principal hiring needs.	
Competitive intelligence data	☐ Collected competitive intelligence data (salaries, working conditions, employment trends, etc.) from neighboring school districts. ☐ Used competitive intelligence data to inform recruitment practices (hiring bonus, salary incentives, etc.). ☐ Used competitive intelligence data as part of the overall forecast analysis.	

IDENTIFYING ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Which assistant principals demonstrate potential for the principalship?

Identifying a pool of promising assistant principals involves defined selection and talent spotting processes. Data collected through a leader tracking system or other data collection process could support fair and unbiased identification of talent. A designated person from the district office, such as a member of the human resources team or a principal supervisor, should have formal conversations with assistant principals about their aspiration to become principals and the timeframe for their aspiration. These conversations make assistant principals active partners in mapping their own careers and can reveal potential applicants for the principal talent pool. Human resources data can also identify assistant principals who have completed state and local licensure requirements for the principalship. However, earning a principal or administrator license alone is not necessarily a predictor of future principal performance (Grissom et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2020) and not everyone who earns a license necessarily wants to become a principal, which further supports the need to prioritize conversations with assistant principals about their career aspirations.

A district can engage in talent spotting by leveraging the observations of principal supervisors and principals as they notice ways in which particular assistant principals demonstrate potential for the principalship. They have opportunities to do this. For example, in the Principal Supervisor Initiative, supported by The Wallace Foundation, six school districts sought to improve principal effectiveness by redefining the role and duties of principal supervisors. In several Principal Supervisor Initiative districts, principal supervisors worked directly with assistant principals or led professional learning experiences for assistant principals (Goldring, et al., 2020). This can provide a valuable opportunity for principal supervisors to engage in talent spotting of assistant principals for future principal positions. Principals interact daily with assistant principals and have frequent opportunities to discuss career goals and aspirations with them.

Specific attributes can be used to identify those individuals who may be likely to experience success as a principal. The list of attributes provided in this guide assumes that the district implements fair and equitable placement, evaluation, and support processes. Attributes to look for in identifying assistant principals to prepare for the principalship include:

1. **Alignment of career goals with the mission of the district.** The University Principal Preparation Initiative, supported by The Wallace Foundation, invested in the redesign of principal preparation programs to align with research-based practices to better prepare candidates for the principalship (Herman, 2022). A factor contributing to the success of the initiative was intentional selection of principal candidates whose career goal was to become a principal and who demonstrated alignment with the mission of the district. This is important because a key role of principals is to advance district priorities at the school level. For example, if the district has a goal of achieving more equitable outcomes for students, then future principal candidates should reflect that in their actions and values.

2. **Alignment of skills, competencies, and performance expectations with leadership standards.** Leadership standards provide a foundation for school districts to define expectations of school leaders. Several school districts use the same standards for assistant principals and principals. However, there may be misalignment between the standards and the actual duties performed by assistant principals (Goldring, et al., 2021; Turnbull, et al., 2016). Assistant principals who aspire to become principals should have the opportunity and support to demonstrate skills, competencies, and performance expectations in alignment with established principal standards. An observation and feedback cycle that is grounded in principal standards should be implemented with assistant principals to support their growth towards the principalship. Assistant principals who readily demonstrate behaviors in alignment with principal standards should be considered for the principalship. For example, an essential function of principals is to implement high-leverage instructional leadership practices that improve classroom instruction. Assistant principals who readily demonstrate competencies aligned with high-leverage instructional leadership practices, such as providing teachers actionable feedback to improve instruction, providing individualized coaching to teachers, and utilizing data to inform improvement to instruction (Goldring, et al., 2021; Grissom, et al., 2021), may be candidates to consider for the principalship.
3. **Diversity.** Research suggests that students have better outcomes, such as higher mathematics scores, higher attendance rates, and increased likelihood of placement into advanced programs, in schools led by principals of the same race as students (Grissom et al., 2021). Diversity encompasses the full breadth of a person's identity. While race is one attribute to support diverse leadership, it should not be the only factor considered. School districts should implement identification and selection processes that value and reflect the variety of cultures, languages, and demographics of the principal candidates who can most effectively serve the district's students.
4. **Culturally responsive leadership.** Public schools are growing in diversity (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Assistant principals who demonstrate cultural responsiveness in their leadership practices can support inclusive learning environments for the increasingly diverse student population (Madhlangobe, et al., 2012; Khalifa, et al., 2016). There are behaviors that define cultural responsiveness that may or may not be explicitly included in leadership standards adopted by a school district. As a result, culturally responsive leadership is included in this guide as its own attribute. Behaviors demonstrated by culturally responsive leaders include using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, using school data to address cultural gaps in achievement, challenging exclusionary policies, and promoting a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Khalifa, 2018).
5. **Performance in current and previous positions.** There is a positive relationship between previous performance as an assistant principal and the performance of new principals (Grissom, et al., 2020). There may also be a positive connection between principals' performance as teachers and student achievement in the schools they lead (Goldhaber, et al., 2019). Performance in previous teaching positions and current performance as an assistant principal can be measured by student achievement and/or formal evaluation outcomes. The research is limited on the predictive ability of performance metrics, such as evaluations, to identify the likelihood of principal success. Nonetheless, evaluation

measures should be considered as part of the holistic assessment of qualifications for principal candidates as these outcomes can provide insight into the additional support needed to foster success of future principals.

6. **Experience working for effective principals.** Assistant principals who worked under the guidance of effective principals have a greater likelihood of effectiveness when beginning the principalship (Grissom, et al., 2020). District leaders should ensure, however, that they do not overlook talented assistant principals with strong potential for the principalship who are assigned to low performing schools. Low performing schools often have a higher rate of principal turnover than other schools (Levin & Bradley, 2019). This can mean that talented future leaders in those schools go unnoticed by district leaders.

Ultimately, all assistant principals who aspire to become principals should have the opportunity to engage in experiences that will support them on their career journey.

PRACTICE IN ACTION: ALIGNMENT OF SKILLS, COMPETENCIES AND DISPOSITIONS WITH LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

Hillsborough County, Florida, Public Schools

Hillsborough County Public Schools established a Preparing New Principals Program, that is grounded in leadership standards and designed to prepare current assistant principals for the principalship. Participants engage in a yearlong professional learning experience that supports them in demonstrating the actions and behaviors defined in the district's leadership standards.

An essential criterion for selection into the program is for assistant principals to demonstrate and exemplify achievement in the five core competencies for school leaders that are part of the district's comprehensive School Leadership Framework. Core competencies include:

1. Achievement focus and results orientation,
2. Instructional expertise,
3. Managing and developing people,
4. Culture and relationship building, and
5. Problem-solving and strategic change management.

Each core competency consists of key elements that further define skills and dispositions that support demonstration of the competency. A Preparing New Principals Competency Rubric disaggregates each key element on a scale with ratings called: requires action, progressing, accomplished, and exemplary. The district uses this rubric as part of the candidate screening process. Candidates must respond to questions, engage in role play to demonstrate proficiency in competencies, and score at the accomplished level on the rubric to advance in the identification and selection process for entry into the Preparing New Principals Program. Upon successful completion of the program, assistant principals enter the principal talent pool.

District Reflection: Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship

The reflection table allows the AP advancement team to record its assessment of the district's current practices in the identification of assistant principals for the principalship focusing on career goals, competencies, diversity, cultural responsiveness, performance, and experience. The team should gather and review evidence to assess the status of the district's practices in this area. For each practice shown in the table, the team should determine the extent to which the district has implemented that practice.

If the district is fully implementing all components of the practice, then place an "X" in box next to the practice. Practices without an "X" can serve as a starting point for the development of a work plan. Use the reflection notes column to capture observations, record information, write questions, or identify next steps for practice implementation.

Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Career goals	☐ Identified assistant principals who have a career goal of becoming a principal within the next year. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate actions and values in alignment with the mission for the district.	
Skills, competencies, and performance expectations	☐ Defined behaviors, competencies, and performance expectations of principals in leadership standards. ☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals who aspire to become principals to learn and demonstrate behaviors and performance expectations defined in principal leadership standards. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate skills, competencies, and dispositions in alignment with established standards for principals.	
Diversity	☐ Collected data on the diversity of the community, staff, and student population. ☐ Identified assistant principals who value and reflect the diversity of the community and student population in the district.	

Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Culturally responsive leadership	☐ Defined the actions or behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate actions or behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader.	
Performance in current and previous positions	☐ Identified assistant principals who earn high performance ratings and/or are identified as highly effective. ☐ Identified assistant principals who earned high performance ratings and/or were identified as highly effective in their role as teachers.	
Experience working for effective principals	☐ Identified assistant principals who currently work or previously worked under the guidance of an experienced principal who earned high performance ratings and/or was identified as highly effective.	

ESTABLISHING AND IMPLEMENTING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PATHWAY TO PREPARE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Does the district have a professional learning pathway with essential components that support preparing assistant principals for promotion to the principalship?

University-based training programs typically serve as the foundation for preparing future principals. While there have been many improvements in the training of future principals through university-based programs, critical components such as active pedagogy, mentoring, and clinical experiences may still be lacking (Herman et al., 2022). Professional learning experiences provided by school districts to prepare assistant principals for the principalship serve to bridge a gap between core content assistant principals learned through university preparation programs and the actual roles and responsibilities of principals. If your timeline allows, your district can partner with one or more universities to develop and implement a continuum of learning experiences specifically designed to meet the unique needs of preparing assistant principals to transition to the principalship. If your timeline does not allow for a formal partnership with a university, then your district can implement key components of professional learning experiences within the district. These include:

- High-quality mentoring and coaching from experienced and effective principals who have received training on how to coach and mentor (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lipke, 2020).
- Structured job shadow experiences with a variety of principals who demonstrate effectiveness in specific areas such as instructional leadership, change management, school culture and climate.
- Organized collegial learning networks that provide the opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and reflection (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Master, et al. 2020).
- Job-embedded applied learning that is directly connected to the duties and responsibilities of the principal (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022).
- Targeted training on addressing the needs of diverse learners (Chambers, 2022; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Khalifa, 2018; Madhlangobe, et al., 2012).

Reviewing school-level data and listening to the perspectives of principals and principal supervisors on the learning needs of recent novice principals in your district may also yield important insights into areas of strength and growth in the specific context of your district. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with principal supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and teachers can reveal areas of focus for professional learning experiences. Your district's professional learning pathway can capitalize on identified strengths and nurture areas of growth. For example, if your district finds that novice principals face challenges with fiscal management, then the district can add targeted learning that focuses on budgeting and sound fiscal practices to the professional learning pathway.

PRACTICE IN ACTION: MENTORING, COACHING, COLLEGIAL NETWORKS, AND STRUCTURED JOB SHADOWING EXPERIENCES

School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The School District of Philadelphia established a Principal Residency Program to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. Principal Residents selected for the program are relocated to new school sites to work under the close guidance of a principal mentor. Mentor principals are selected based on student performance, success in developing leadership team members for career advancement, and experience in applying an equity lens to leadership situations and interactions. Mentors engage in training focused on mentorship expectations and supporting growth areas for Principal Residents.

Mentors foster the growth of Residents by providing guidance and school-based experiences that prepare them for the principalship. All content for the Principal Residency Program is aligned to the school district's Leadership Pathways Framework. In addition to mentorship, residency components include:

- **Leadership coaching** by experienced and trained coaches twice a month focused on competencies identified in the school district's Leadership Pathways Framework.
- **Collegial learning networks** through monthly professional learning communities where cohorts of Residents learn from their peers by participating in simulations and discussions, and formally presenting their learning and experiences to colleagues.
- **Reflective journaling** to provide the opportunity for Residents to document their experiences and respond to probing questions to examine their learnings.
- **Targeted professional development** grounded in the Leadership Pathways Framework.
- **School visits and shadowing experiences** with a variety of principals, students, teachers, and other staff members throughout the year to learn effective practices and gain applied learning experiences that are directly connected to the duties that Residents will perform as principals.

Throughout the residency experience, participants create a portfolio that captures artifacts and communicates their leadership development in alignment with competencies defined in the Leadership Pathways Framework.

District Reflection: Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship

The reflection table allows the AP advancement team to record its assessment of the district's current practices in the establishment and implementation of a professional learning pathway to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. The reflection table focuses on mentoring and coaching from principals, job shadowing experiences, collegial learning networks, job-embedded learning experiences, and diverse learners. The AP advancement team should gather and review evidence to assess the status of the district's practices in this area. For each practice shown in the table, the team should determine the extent to which the district has implemented that practice.

If the district is fully implementing all components of the practice, then place an "X" in box next to the practice. Practices without an "X" can serve as a starting point for the development of a work plan. Use the reflection notes column to capture observations, record information, write questions, or identify next steps for practice implementation.

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
High-quality mentoring and coaching from experienced and effective principals	☐ Defined criteria to become a coach or mentor of an assistant principal. ☐ Included principal experience, effectiveness, and demonstration of specific coaching or mentoring competencies in the coaching or mentoring criteria. ☐ Defined requirements for coaching or mentoring assistant principals in the job description of the principal. ☐ Trained principals on coaching and mentoring assistant principals. ☐ Provided actionable feedback to principals to continuously improve the quality of their coaching or mentoring. ☐ Implemented coaching or mentoring content that focuses on building capacity of assistant principals to become principals.	

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Structured job shadowing experiences	☐ Established and implemented protocols for job shadowing experiences for assistant principals. ☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals to shadow principals who demonstrate proficiency in a variety of leadership areas (fiscal management, culture and climate, instructional leadership, etc.).	
Organized collegial learning networks	☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals to regularly meet as a cohort to learn from each other, engage in reflection, and enhance their leadership practice in preparation for the principalship.	
Job-embedded applied learning experiences	☐ Implemented professional learning content that addresses critical skills that have posed challenges to novice principals, as informed by data and input of principals, principal supervisors, teachers, and other stakeholders. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences that allow them to actively apply research-based practices to support the professional growth of staff, analyze and apply data to inform decisions, enhance school culture and climate, and complete tasks in alignment with the day-to-day duties performed by principals.	

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Addressing the needs of diverse learners	☐ Engaged assistant principals in applied learning experiences focused on equity-centered and culturally responsive leadership practices. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences focused on providing actionable feedback to teachers to enhance their professional practice. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences grounded in effective practices to improve student achievement and social emotional well-being.	

DEVELOPING WORK PLANS

As a district AP advancement team, you have reviewed data and completed district reflections. The next step is to develop an actionable strategy, through work plans, to support preparing assistant principals for promotion to and success in the principalship. Work plans can be developed for any practice identified in the reflection table. The AP advancement team can look holistically at all completed reflection tables and prioritize practices to include in work plans based on the context of the school district (time, capacity, resources, willingness, etc.). The team may decide to work on multiple practices at once or only a select few to address each year. The timeframe to address practices can be collectively decided by the AP advancement team. The work plan provides a road map for your district to progressively strengthen and implement identified practices in a timeframe that is practical for the district.

Work plans consist of the following components:

- Goal – What does your team want to accomplish?
- Lead Person – Who is responsible for ensuring the work gets done?
- Team Members – Who is responsible for doing the work?
- Action Steps – How will the team accomplish the goal?
- Timeframe – How long will it take to complete?
- Progress Checks – How will the team know if they are on track to complete the goal?
- Measure(s) of Success – How will the team know if they have accomplished the goal?
- Cost Elements – What resources are needed to accomplish the goal?
- Funding Source – Where will funds come from?

Appendix II contains a blank work plan template that can be used to develop your district's plan.

SUPPORTING SUCCESS

After preparing assistant principals for the principalship, the district should continue to implement practices that support their success, including selective hiring and placement practices as well as on-the-job support and evaluation. We briefly describe these practices here. More complete descriptions and rubrics for implementation appear in the *Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide*.

Selective Hiring and Placement

In preparing assistant principals for the principalship, it may be tempting to take shortcuts in the selective hiring and placement process. Adhering to a rigorous process is essential, however. Districts have had success with the following features of a selective hiring and placement process:

1. **Standards-based Hiring.** Align job descriptions, performance tasks, hiring rubrics, and placement criteria, among others, to leader standards and competencies.
2. **Hiring Pool.** Select candidates for a hiring pool using a rigorous, equitable, and transparent process.
3. **Performance Tasks and Interpersonal Skills.** Require candidates to complete performance tasks and respond to scenario-based interview questions to demonstrate necessary leadership and interpersonal skills. For example, some Principal Pipeline Initiative districts required principal candidates to review school data and share data-informed recommendations to improve the school as part of the hiring process (Turnbull et al., 2016).
4. **Vacancy Matching.** Match candidate strengths with school needs using standardized candidate and school profiles. The routine use of a data-based process for matching candidates to schools using profiles of both should ensure longer-lasting benefits for the district, for candidates placed as principals, and ultimately for teachers and students.
5. **Bridge Opportunities.** Provide continued growth opportunities prior to placement as principals. Candidates not selected from the hiring pool should have ongoing professional learning to maintain their skill set in preparation for future principal vacancies.

Providing Continuous Support

Newly placed principals will likely need ongoing, job-embedded support to foster their continued growth. The district can use outcomes of scenario-based interviews and performance tasks to identify areas for additional professional growth. Principal Pipeline Initiative districts experienced success with the following features of a selective hiring and placement process (Gates et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2016):

1. **Standards-based Evaluation and Support.** Leader standards serve as a foundation for performance reviews and inform support to foster the professional growth of new leaders.
2. **Intensive, Individualized Support.** Leaders receive actionable feedback and customized support based on strengths and needs revealed through the evaluation process.
3. **Mentoring or Coaching in Induction.** Experienced and trained mentors or coaches are provided to novice principals through an established induction process.

NEXT STEPS

Congratulations on completing the *Assistant Principal Advancement to the Principalship: A Guide for School Districts*! We hope it has helped your district in addressing the problem of how to prepare and promote assistant principals into the principalship. While this document has a particular focus on a short-term process, long-term planning is needed to develop the assistant principal role as a true stepping stone toward the principalship. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals is a process that includes having specific professional standards and competencies that define practices of an effective assistant principal, evaluation criteria that are aligned to the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal position, and a job description that explicitly identifies functions of the assistant principal position and establishes it as a preparatory role for the principalship (Goldring, et al., 2021; Turnbull, et al., 2016).

Reflection questions to guide long-term planning include:

- How does your district view the role of the assistant principal—as a career destination or as a strategic step toward other school and district leadership positions?
- What is the job description for assistant principals, and how does the job description align with principal preparation?
- What are the standards and competencies used by the district to define actions of an effective assistant principal, and how do these standards and competencies support preparation for a principalship?
- How does your district define an equity-centered leader? What historical barriers (equity, leadership, implicit bias, hiring, support, etc.) have existed that you must discuss and unpack before addressing long-term planning?

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APPENDIX I: DISTRICT REFLECTION TABLES

District reflection tables allow the assistant principal advancement team to reflect on current practices in forecasting principal vacancies, identifying assistant principals for the principalship, and establishing and implementing a professional learning pathway to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. The team should gather and review evidence to assess the status of the district's practices in each area.

If the district is fully implementing all components of the practice, then place an "X" in box next to the practice. Practices without an "X" can serve as a starting point for the development of a work plan. A reflection notes column is included in the table for the AP advancement team to capture observations, record information, write questions, or identify next steps for practice implementation.

Forecasting Principal Vacancies		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Principal and school data	☐ Collected valid and reliable data on principal attrition, mobility, tenure, job satisfaction, effectiveness, and career plans annually. ☐ Disaggregated data by principal race, gender, effectiveness, years of service, and by school profile. ☐ Used data to predict future principal hiring needs focusing on which schools will have vacancies and candidate profiles of principals needed to fill vacancies.	
Student enrollment data	☐ Collected student enrollment data annually. ☐ Disaggregated data by race, gender, and student group (English learners, advanced learners, etc.). ☐ Used current and projected disaggregated student enrollment data to predict principal hiring needs.	

Forecasting Principal Vacancies		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Competitive intelligence data	☐ Collected competitive intelligence data (salaries, working conditions, employment trends, etc.) from neighboring school districts. ☐ Used competitive intelligence data to inform recruitment practices (hiring bonus, salary incentives, etc.). ☐ Used competitive intelligence data as part of the overall forecast analysis.	

Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Career goals	☐ Identified assistant principals who have a career goal of becoming a principal within the next year. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate actions and values in alignment with the mission for the district.	
Skills, competencies, and performance expectations	☐ Defined behaviors, competencies, and performance expectations of principals in leadership standards. ☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals who aspire to become principals to learn and demonstrate behaviors and performance expectations defined in principal leadership standards. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate skills, competencies, and dispositions in alignment with established standards for principals.	
Diversity	☐ Collected data on the diversity of the community, staff, and student population. ☐ Identified assistant principals who value and reflect the diversity of the community and student population in the district.	
Culturally responsive leadership	☐ Defined the actions or behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader. ☐ Identified assistant principals who demonstrate actions or behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader.	
Performance in current and previous positions	☐ Identified assistant principals who earn high performance ratings and/or are identified as highly effective. ☐ Identified assistant principals who earned high performance ratings and/or were identified as highly effective in their role as teachers.	

Identifying Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Experience working for effective principals	☐ Identified assistant principals who currently work or previously worked under the guidance of an experienced principal who earned high performance ratings and/or was identified as highly effective.	

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
High-quality mentoring and coaching from experienced and effective principals	☐ Defined criteria to become a coach or mentor of an assistant principal. ☐ Included principal experience, effectiveness, and demonstration of specific coaching or mentoring competencies in the coaching or mentoring criteria. ☐ Defined requirements for coaching or mentoring assistant principals in the job description of the principal. ☐ Trained principals on coaching and mentoring assistant principals. ☐ Provided actionable feedback to principals to continuously improve the quality of their coaching or mentoring. ☐ Implemented coaching or mentoring content that focuses on building capacity of assistant principals to become principals.	
Structured job shadowing experiences	☐ Established and implemented protocols and processes for job shadowing experiences for assistant principals. ☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals to shadow principals who demonstrate proficiency in a variety of leadership areas (fiscal management, culture and climate, instructional leadership, etc.).	
Organized collegial learning networks	☐ Provided opportunities for assistant principals to regularly meet as a cohort to learn from each other, engage in reflection, and enhance their leadership practice in preparation for the principalship.	

Establishing and Implementing a Professional Learning Pathway to Prepare Assistant Principals for the Principalship		
Area of Practice	Practice <i>District leadership has:</i>	Reflection Notes
Job-embedded applied learning experiences	☐ Implemented professional learning content that addresses critical skills that have posed challenges to novice principals, as informed by data and input of principals, principal supervisors, teachers, and other stakeholders. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences that allow them to actively apply research-based practices to support the professional growth of staff, analyze and apply data to inform decisions, enhance school culture and climate, and complete tasks in alignment with the day-to-day duties performed by principals.	
Addressing the needs of diverse learners	☐ Engaged assistant principals in applied learning experiences focused on equity-centered and culturally responsive leadership practices. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences focused on providing actionable feedback to teachers to enhance their professional practice. ☐ Engaged assistant principals in learning experiences grounded in effective practices to improve student achievement and social emotional well-being.	

APPENDIX II: WORK PLAN TEMPLATE

Work Plan Template					
Area of Practice:		Practice:			
Goal <i>(What does your team want to accomplish?):</i>					
Lead Person <i>(Who is responsible for ensuring the work gets done?):</i>					
Team Members <i>(Who is responsible for doing the work?):</i>					
Action Steps <i>(How will the team accomplish the goal?)</i>	Timeframe <i>(How long will it take?)</i>	Progress Checks <i>(How will the team know if they are on track to complete the goal?)</i>	Measures of Success <i>(How will the team know if they accomplished the goal?)</i>	Cost Elements <i>(What resources are needed?)</i>	Funding Source <i>(Where will funds come from?)</i>

