

# SREB

## Schools Need Good Leaders Now:

*State Progress in Creating  
a Learning-Centered  
School Leadership System*

2007

Southern  
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Board

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*CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES*

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## ***A Leadership Imperative: A Special Message to Policy-Makers from the President of SREB***

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**T**he first decade of the 21st century will soon be over. Do we have enough learning-centered school leaders to ensure that our schools — and our next generation of workers and citizens — will succeed in a fiercely competitive, knowledge-based global economy?

Despite the time and attention SREB states have devoted to this question, the answer continues to be:

“No, we do not.”

Since 2002, SREB has used six indicators to track the progress of states in creating a leadership system that produces cutting-edge school principals. At best, the advances have been modest. Only three states — Alabama, Louisiana and Maryland — have made “promising” progress on several indicators, with Louisiana as the pacesetter. No SREB state has earned the top designation of making “substantial progress” on any indicator. (See pages 4-6.)

Why should state leaders and policy-makers care about these indicators? They grow out of SREB’s deep understanding of effective school leadership — gleaned over two decades of on-the-ground work with many hundreds of schools in our region. These indicators tell us whether states are creating a school leadership system that can improve student performance in every school — or whether, in the midst of unprecedented 21st century challenges, we are continuing to rely on the luck of the draw to find the leaders our schools need.

### **Learning-Centered School Leadership**

What do we mean by a learning-centered school leader? With some notable exceptions, “this is not your father’s principal.” The demands of 21st century life and work call for principals with a deep understanding of how students learn and at what levels they need to learn. Our schools must have principals who can provide teachers with the leadership and support they need to help students gain the skills and knowledge now identified as important for success in a “flat” world filled with uncertainty and constant change.

A learning-centered school leader puts curriculum and instruction first. He or she understands what students should be learning, how today’s students learn best, and how to assess and develop the capacity of teachers to use proven instructional methods. Learning-centered school leaders know how to create a professional environment where all the adults in the school are constantly improving their own skills and knowledge, and helping and challenging each other to serve the particular needs of every learner.

To achieve and maintain a high level of learning-centered leadership, school principals require support from school system, university and state education leaders who also have a good understanding of what the 21st century demands of every school and classroom.

Policy-makers must ask themselves: **What policy changes are needed to guarantee that every public school has learning-centered leaders? How can policies and procedures be carefully crafted to ensure that state agencies, higher education and school districts are held accountable for improved school leadership development?**

Based on years of concerted work with state policy-makers and education agencies, universities and school systems, these are the strategies that SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program identifies as most crucial to help each state build a dynamic, high-functioning system of learning-centered leadership development.

## **Say What You Mean About School Leadership**

Make sure your state's leadership standards say exactly what you expect of a school leader. What are the principal's responsibilities, and what must he or she know and be able to do to meet those responsibilities? These leadership standards not only lay the foundation for principal preparation programs and principal evaluations; they make a powerful statement about what we want our schools to be and what we expect our school systems and universities to accomplish.

Do not be satisfied with simply adopting the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, as many states have. They place too little emphasis on the responsibilities today's school leaders have for improving schools and student learning. They are vague about what principals must know and do to lead successful schools. To make sure your state's students are ready for tomorrow's challenges, tell every stakeholder in the leadership development system precisely what you expect of principals. (See pages 7-10.)

## **Choose the Right People for the Job**

Only the most promising individuals should be prepared as school leaders. Yet many states and districts still draw primarily on a volunteer pool that includes many untested and often poorly qualified would-be principals. We can develop a ready supply of well-prepared school leaders if universities and districts work together to recruit, select and prepare future principals with the most promise of improving classroom practices and student achievement.

In our experience, this working partnership rarely emerges without clear state mandates and support. States should expect districts and universities to jointly develop rigorous selection criteria for principal preparation programs — including candidates' evidence of expertise in curriculum and instruction, a record of improving student achievement, and proven leadership abilities.

States then can provide guidelines to assist universities and districts in recruiting and preparing a high-quality pool of potential principals to meet current and projected needs. A key element in this design is the "leadership succession plan," in which districts regularly identify promising teachers and other candidates and create early opportunities for them to develop leadership skills. States can offer incentives to universities that create degree programs emphasizing teacher leadership of school improvement — providing an advanced degree for leaders not interested in working as principals. (See pages 11-12.)

## Get University Leadership Programs on Track

In an age of high-stakes accountability, too many university-based principal preparation programs still are offering a last-century curriculum overloaded with courses on management and administration. These programs do not spend enough time helping aspiring principals develop the competencies they need to lead a team of highly skilled and motivated teachers.

The know-how is out there to build a better system. But SREB's research suggests that state policies and strategies intended to promote the redesign of principal preparation programs have produced only marginal improvements. Policy-makers can accelerate change by making program development and delivery the joint responsibility of universities and districts — and holding them accountable for providing relevant content, quality school-based internships, and strong support for candidates, including released time, tuition assistance and access to district staff.

Every action taken in these programs should be driven by one essential question: *What do principals need to know and do to improve teaching and learning in their schools?* (See pages 13-16.)

## Make Sure Aspiring Principals Learn on the Job

You don't learn to be an effective school leader in today's high-demand school environment from textbooks and lectures alone. Today's principals are constantly solving problems and analyzing issues in a complex environment with many competing interests. To develop and test these skills, aspiring principals need on-the-job training that requires them to grapple with real dilemmas, under the guidance of a fully engaged mentor, before they are licensed to lead.

Few aspiring principals are getting this kind of experience today. Many current programs provide internships in name only. They allow interns to choose their own mentors and internship sites, or fail to ensure that all interns are guided by trained principal-mentors who can expertly demonstrate the state's leadership standards — and have the time to do so.

Quality, school-based experiences and internships do not happen by chance. In our view, state leaders (and universities and districts) have three choices:

- Invest at the level necessary to provide quality internships and mentoring for all principal-candidates in all state preparation programs.
- Reduce program enrollments and allow university faculties, mentor principals and district staffs to concentrate on preparing candidates with the most potential.
- Reduce the total number of university programs approved to prepare leaders, and invest the savings in high-quality, fully supported programs with strong internship components. (See pages 17-19.)

## Use Your Licensing Power to Drive Reform

The state's power to license principals can be an effective tool to ensure schools have learning-centered principals. Through their ability to determine licensing standards, policy-makers can directly influence the size and nature of the applicant pool and mandate a de facto "screen" for minimum competencies.

Learning-centered licensure requirements go far beyond background checks or academic degrees that tell us little about a candidate's capacity for school leadership. A quality system will include performance criteria and evaluation measures for entry, professional and advanced levels of licensure. Such a system will offer the assurance that a licensed principal has mastered the knowledge and skills — and demonstrated the leadership ability — to serve effectively. License renewal should be contingent on continuing evidence of work to improve student achievement. And the principal who earns the highest professional license will be expected to provide plentiful evidence of significant accomplishment.

Developing a new licensure system will require persuasion, fortitude and persistence. State policy-makers should be clear about purpose and should work to build support among educator groups. Policy-makers also will need to create and support high-quality induction programs for new principals (most states don't have them). To drive these reforms, states will need new performance-based assessments, tests of knowledge for entry-level licensure, and tools for evaluating on-the-job performance, all aligned with a state's learning-centered leadership standards. (See pages 20-21.)

### **Cast a Wider Leadership Net**

Former teachers make up the vast majority of today's school leadership workforce. While good teachers with a talent for leadership will continue to become effective principals, research shows that leaders in fields other than education often have the skills that good principals need. These skills include organizational development, entrepreneurship, experience in leading change, team building, problem-solving and working with communities.

Policy-makers need to consider individuals who hold a master's degree in a field other than education administration as potential principal leaders. These may include not only leaders from other professions, but persons who have been guidance counselors, leaders of youth-oriented programs, or those who have earned graduate degrees in teacher leadership. Alternative candidates who show the most potential for becoming effective school principals should be allowed to prove themselves on the job, while completing training that develops their capacity to provide instructional leadership and improve schools. (See pages 22-23.)

### **Make Low-Performing Schools a Top Priority**

Every SREB state has a sharp accountability focus on low-performing schools. Yet policy-makers have not always given sufficient attention to building leadership capacity in these high-demand work environments. In a learning-centered leadership system, principals of low-performing schools will not have to turn schools around on their own. State policy-makers need to ensure that districts build effective leadership teams in low-performing schools who can work alongside principals to promote school improvement.

The right state policies will require teams of principals, teachers and aspiring leaders in low-performing schools — along with representatives from the school district — to participate in leadership training that involves them in using new knowledge and skills to solve school problems. These state policies also will ensure that the training is of high quality and targeted at schools' specific needs — and that there are processes in place to monitor and evaluate the progress of the leadership teams in using their new skills and knowledge to improve classroom practices and student achievement. (See pages 24-26.)

## Learn from the Pacesetters

SREB states are making progress in developing leadership systems to ensure that every school has leadership that improves student performance, but more work remains. States need to accelerate this work if they are to meet their student achievement goals.

Our examination of the region's pacesetter states has yielded five key lessons that can help policy-makers in every state build leadership development systems that produce successful learning-centered principals. (See pages 27-28.) The most important lesson is this: *State policy-makers and education leaders — from the state's governor and legislators, to superintendents, principals and teachers — need to designate school leadership as a visible state, district and school priority focused on the principal's role in leading schools toward higher student performance.*

SREB stands ready to help states, not only by providing tools and analyses for advocacy, policy development and implementation, but by helping states learn from one another, all with the goal of improving the educational opportunities and achievement of every student.



David S. Spence  
President



# Schools Need Good Leaders Now:

## *State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System*

*Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.*

SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goal

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**E**very state needs to provide public schools that help all students reach high academic standards and graduate well-prepared for college and careers. The *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education assert what research strongly confirms — an effective principal in every school is crucial to improved student performance. After two decades of depending mostly on state academic standards, classroom teachers and statewide tests to help raise student achievement, policy-makers now realize that schools are unlikely to show substantial improvements without *highly effective principals*.<sup>1</sup>

Schools need leaders who are passionate about helping students learn, who understand that quality teaching improves student learning more than any other school variable, and who keep a relentless focus on instructional improvement. Developing school leaders with these qualities for every school is especially urgent in SREB states, where student achievement generally lags behind the nation despite many gains in recent years and high school graduation rates remain too low.

Improving school leadership requires each state to create **a learning-centered school leadership system** with a sharp focus on improving the skills and abilities of principals to guide teaching and learning in schools. It means more targeted recruiting of promising candidates for principal preparation programs; developing new statewide standards and making the content and

*“There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders. While other factors contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst.”*

**Kenneth Leithwood**

*How Leadership Influences Student Learning*<sup>2</sup>

field experiences of graduate programs more relevant; changing the licensure and professional development policies at the state and district levels; and improving the conditions and circumstances within which principals work. It involves redesigning each of these components so that school leaders give priority to student learning instead of mainly budgets, schedules, personnel and student discipline.

You as a policy-maker or education leader should examine your state's school leadership system to determine how to increase the focus on student learning. Research and lessons from SREB's seven years of work on school leadership point to seven core components of a learning-centered system.

- **Leadership standards:** Learning-focused leadership standards emphasize the principal's role in curriculum, instruction and student achievement. These statewide standards should describe explicitly the practices of effective principals and how to measure them.
  - *Indicator of progress:* Has your state adopted learning-focused school leadership standards?
- **Recruitment:** Universities and school districts should work together to recruit, select and prepare candidates to lead schools effectively.
  - *Indicator of progress:* Has your state developed essential criteria for recruiting and selecting principal candidates who have the capacity to improve student learning?
- **Leadership preparation programs:** University-based, graduate-level principal preparation programs should provide both academic study and rich field experiences. These programs should emphasize student learning, including how to support grade-level achievement and college- and career-readiness for all students. They should also develop aspiring principals' abilities to solve problems and lead school improvement, including effective ways to support and assist teachers; and they should help leaders learn how to transform schools into high-performing, continuously improving organizations.
  - *Indicators of progress:* Has your state redesigned leadership programs to emphasize curriculum, instruction and student learning? Has your state developed preparation programs with school-based experiences that prepare participants to lead improvement of teaching and learning?
- **Tiered licensure:** A tiered licensure structure can ensure that both entry-level and experienced principals continually demonstrate the abilities to improve classroom practices and student learning.
  - *Indicators of progress:* Has your state begun to base *entry-level licensure* on evidence of performance that meets the state standards? Has your state begun to base *professional-level licensure* on evidence of improved school and classroom practices and student achievement?
- **Alternative licensure:** Alternative pathways to licensure should be available to provide high-performing teachers and other professionals with master's degrees in fields other than education administration with access to entry-level licensure and job-embedded training in school leadership.
  - *Indicator of progress:* Has your state created alternative pathways to entry-level licensure?

*You as a policy-maker or education leader should examine your state's school leadership system to determine how to increase the focus on student learning.*

- **Professional development:** Professional development should be available continually to strengthen principals' capacities to improve curriculum and instruction and create a highly effective organization. It should give special attention to building strong leadership teams, including teachers, in low-performing schools.
  - *Indicator of progress:* Does your state provide training and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools?
- **Conditions to help improve teaching and learning:** States and districts should ensure that policies, practices and resources make it possible for well-prepared principals to use proven strategies in improving school and student performance — and hold them accountable. Research on this indicator is under way, and baseline measures will be reported in 2008.

Building a learning-centered school leadership system entails more than fixing problems within any one of these core components — or putting each of them in place. All components need to fit and work together to improve student learning. For example, how can a state hold school principals accountable for student learning if preparation programs do not train them for such work, if the state does not provide helpful professional development, and if the state and district only evaluate principals on school management issues and not student achievement and learning? Most states leave the principal evaluation to school districts, and few states have a required statewide principal evaluation process.

In sum, the capacity of states to improve the quality of schools is greatly diminished when the whole leadership system is not in place or effective.

Even with changes to school leadership in some states in recent years, it is not enough to ensure the states have a system for producing the leaders that all schools need. Policies often are too vague about the expected changes. Provisions for the training and technical assistance that university faculties and district staffs will need and the resources required for effective implementation are either not included or inadequate. In most instances, the policies also fail to make high-level university and district leaders accountable for improved principal preparation programs, and to make district leaders and school boards accountable for creating supportive working conditions for principals.

For states to have cohesive school leadership systems, they need carefully designed policies that point state agencies, universities and school districts toward a new model of school leadership. They need to provide incentives, training and conditions that support change, and they need to hold all parties accountable for better results.

*The capacity of states to improve the quality of schools is greatly diminished when the whole leadership system is not in place or effective.*

## *Measuring SREB States' Progress in Ensuring a Quality Principal for Every School*

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**T**his report examines the progress in each of the SREB states, and the region as a whole, on ensuring that every school has a leader who can help improve student achievement. Since 2002, SREB has tracked states' progress on adopting and implementing policies, practices — and in providing statewide systems — to achieve this goal.

The SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program reviewed research and worked with state education agencies, universities, leadership academies and school districts to determine how to measure progress, and SREB interviewed many state education agency officials to rate the level of progress on each indicator.

In 2002, SREB reported for the first time on six indicators, and again in 2004 in *Progress Being Made in Getting a Quality Leader in Every School*.<sup>3</sup> Since then, SREB has added a seventh indicator, which will track progress on learning-focused leadership standards. SREB also has made the criteria used to measure the existing indicators more rigorous. State progress for 2006 is based on the revised criteria. (See Box 1 for the revised rating scale. See Figure 1 for composite profiles of each state's progress. The SREB scoring guide for measuring state progress on school leadership is available for review but does not appear in this report. To review the scoring guide, please e-mail [schoolleadership@sreb.org](mailto:schoolleadership@sreb.org).)

### Box 1

#### Definitions: Levels of Progress

**No progress** — States received this rating if there was no state action that met or addressed any of the criteria for progress on an indicator.

**Little progress** — States received this rating if they had taken action for which there is potential for meeting one or more criteria in the future.

**Some progress** — States received this rating if policies, programs or procedures that fully met some, but not all, of the criteria for progress on an indicator had been adopted, but statewide implementation had not begun.

**Promising progress** — States received this rating if policies, programs or procedures that fully meet the majority of the criteria for an indicator were in the initial stages of statewide implementation.

**Substantial progress** — States received this rating if policies, programs or procedures that fully meet all of the criteria for an indicator were being implemented statewide and the state was collecting evidence that the intended results are being achieved.

Figure 1

**States' Status in Developing a Learning-Centered School Leadership System, 2006**

Indicators	Alabama	Arkansas	Delaware	Florida	Georgia	Kentucky	Louisiana	Maryland	Mississippi	North Carolina	Oklahoma	South Carolina	Tennessee	Texas	Virginia	West Virginia
Recruit and select future school leaders.	* ●	○	* ●	* ●	* ●	●	* ●	* ●	●	○	●	* ●	○	●	○	
Redesign principal-preparation programs to emphasize curriculum, instruction and student learning.	* ●	* ●	* ●	●	* ●	●	* ●	* ●	●	●	●	* ●	●	* ●	●	
Develop programs with school-based experiences that prepare participants to lead school improvement.	* ●	●	* ●	●	●	* ●	* ●	* ●	●	●	●	●	●	●	* ●	●
Base professional-level licensure on improved school and classroom practices.	* ●	●	●	○	* ●	●	* ●	●	○	* ●	* ●	* ●	* ●	* ●	* ●	●
Create alternative pathways to initial licensure.	●	●	* ●	●	○	●	* ●	* ●	* ●	* ●	○	○	●	* ●	●	
Provide training and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools.	* ●	* ●	●	* ●	* ●	●	* ●	●	●	* ●	* ●	●	* ●	●	●	* ●

○ No Progress   ● Little Progress   ● Some Progress   ● Promising Progress   ●+ Substantial Progress

\* Indicates rating improved since 2002. Criteria for progress on the indicators were more rigorous in 2006 than in 2002.  
 Notes: See Box 1, Page 4 for definitions of Progress Levels.  
 Data compiled by SREB, 2006.

**States Make Progress, But Pace Must Be Accelerated**

All SREB states have made progress since 2002 in creating a school leadership system that can improve student performance in every school. Yet individual states' rates of improvement and their areas of focus vary greatly. **This unevenness is reflected in the number of indicators on which each state has made progress.** (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Number of Indicators on Which SREB States Improved Ratings, 2002 to 2006*					
Six	Five	Four	Three	Two	One
Louisiana	Alabama	Delaware	Florida	Arkansas	Kentucky
		Georgia	Oklahoma	Mississippi	North Carolina
		Maryland	Tennessee	South Carolina	West Virginia
		Virginia		Texas	

\* A new indicator, “**Adopt learning-focused leadership standards,**” is not included in this analysis.  
Compiled by SREB, 2006.

A few SREB states are building learning-centered leadership systems at a strong pace. Others are moving at a moderate pace or too slowly. About half the SREB states showed progress on each indicator toward building a learning-centered school leadership system. Too many SREB states — 13 of 16 — only have reached “some progress” as an overall rating on all six indicators. While no state remained at “no progress” overall, the three states with the most significant overall progress — Alabama, Louisiana and Maryland — made “promising progress” on several indicators, but “substantial progress” on none. Louisiana was the only state to achieve “promising progress” on six indicators.

You as a policy-maker or education leader need to know how to create a learning-centered leadership system, what the pacesetter states are doing in the region, and how your state is performing. This report will help you answer seven key questions.

- *Are your state’s leadership standards learning-focused — defined in terms of principals’ knowledge, skills and responsibilities — and measured by specified performance criteria?*
- *Does your state require universities and districts to work together to recruit, select and prepare future principals with the most promise of improving classroom practices and student achievement?*
- *Has your state taken steps to redesign university-based leadership preparation programs to emphasize the principal’s responsibility for improving curriculum, instruction and student learning?*
- *Have all preparation programs in your state developed school-based experiences and internships that prepare participants to lead school improvement?*
- *Is your state developing a licensing system that ensures only individuals with the knowledge and skills required to improve student performance are eligible to serve as principals?*
- *Is your state implementing alternative pathways to licensure for candidates who hold a master’s degree in another field and demonstrate the potential to be effective school leaders?*
- *Is your state providing training and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools?*

QUESTION 1:

*Are your state's leadership standards learning-focused — defined in terms of principals' knowledge, skills and responsibilities — and measured by specified performance criteria?*

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States need to describe explicitly what they expect of principals. Education leaders refer to these expectations as standards. Such standards define the scope of a principal's responsibilities for student learning. They identify the knowledge and skills that principals need so they can ensure students reach high achievement levels. They also provide a guide for states and districts as they develop criteria for measuring principals' performance. When states define standards this way, they are able to determine:

- what universities should teach and, to some extent, how to teach it;
- the competencies participants should demonstrate to complete a preparation program and qualify for an initial state license; and
- the expectations districts should have for principals' performance.

Many leaders believe they have succeeded in refocusing their state's school leadership system on student learning by adopting the nationally recognized Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. But that action is not enough. These standards place a primary focus on organizational knowledge and skill criteria — over 70 percent, according to research funded by The Wallace Foundation.<sup>4</sup> These standards place too little emphasis on the responsibilities today's school leaders have for improving schools and student learning, and they provide too little specificity about what they are to know and do to carry out these responsibilities.

SREB states have been strongly influenced by ISLLC and similar standards. (See Table 2.)

- Kentucky and West Virginia have adopted the ISLLC Standards, with no modifications or additions.
- Arkansas, Delaware, Mississippi and Virginia have based their standards on the ISLLC Standards, adding to or modifying them.
- South Carolina has adopted the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards, which are substantially the same as the ISLLC Standards.
- The nine other SREB states have created their own standards and then reported how they are aligned with ISLLC Standards.

**States' standards fall short of emphasizing student learning:** SREB analyzed current state standards for school principals, using reports from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the The Wallace Foundation, to measure state standards' focus on principals' responsibilities for student learning.<sup>5</sup>

A majority of SREB states have adopted standards that do not substantially emphasize a principal's knowledge and skills related to student learning, and focus instead mainly on organizational management.

In nearly all SREB states — 13 of 16 — fewer than 40 percent of school leaders’ responsibilities, as defined by states’ standards, relate directly to student learning. This finding corroborates Wallace Foundation research into state licensing requirements for principals, that “... learning took a backseat to individual- or organizational-focused licensure criteria, [and] the learning-focused criteria that states included were narrow in scope and shallow in depth.” Only three SREB states — Alabama, Maryland and Texas — have standards that focus more on student learning-focused knowledge and skills. (See Table 2.)

**States lack criteria and consistent processes for evaluating principals’ performance on the leadership standards:** After a state’s leadership standards are established and implemented, how can policy-makers know if an aspiring or practicing school leader meets the standards? States need specific criteria to measure each principal’s job performance and to distinguish levels of performance.

**No SREB state has developed criteria for measuring principals’ performance on the state-adopted leadership standards.** Three SREB states — Arkansas, Louisiana and Maryland — specify the types of evidence that can be used for evaluations of current principals and for aspiring principals during their internships. One additional state, North Carolina, includes in its standards suggested documents and examples of work for a performance portfolio that a principal can use to demonstrate mastery of a standard.

States have continued to delegate to university faculties the important process of determining whether aspiring principals are competent in the knowledge, skills and responsibilities they need in the workplace. In turn, initial licenses are granted upon candidates’ successful completion of a preparation program and their scores on state or commercially developed examinations that test their ability to apply the standards in hypothetical situations.

**SREB states need to examine and revise their existing standards to define more sharply the instruction-related knowledge and skills that effective principals should master.** States also need to develop criteria and processes for measuring principals’ performance on the standards.

*Adopting standards is essential, but not sufficient.* Learning-focused standards with explicit definitions of principals’ responsibilities and criteria for measuring their performance are the foundation of a leadership system designed to improve student achievement. But these standards alone do not guarantee a learning-focused system. In most states, progress has lagged in linking the standards to the design and approval of university-based principal preparation programs, in continuing professional development, in district hiring practices and in the evaluation of principals’ job performance. Until these links are strong, states will not have learning-centered leadership systems.

Table 2

**Development and Characteristics of Leadership Standards in SREB States**

State	Relationship of State Standards to ISLLC Standards			Characteristics of State Standards		
	Same as ISLLC Standards	Based on ISLLC Standards with additions or modifications	Aligned to ISLLC Standards	Explicitly define knowledge, skills and responsibilities of leaders	Percentage connected directly to student learning	Include criteria for measuring performance of school leaders
Alabama			✓	Moderately	41%	No
Arkansas		✓		Moderately	34%	No, but lists evidences of each indicator
Delaware		✓		Minimally	21%	No
Florida			✓	Minimally	40%	No
Georgia			✓	Considerably	37%	No
Kentucky	✓			Minimally	21%	No
Louisiana			✓	Considerably	33%	No, but lists the required performance tasks for each indicator
Maryland			✓	Considerably	63%	No, but lists evidence in practice for each indicator
Mississippi		✓		Minimally	12%	No
North Carolina			✓	Considerably	34%	No, but suggests artifacts for a performance portfolio
Oklahoma			✓	Moderately	39%	No
South Carolina*	✓ (same as ELCC Standards)			Moderately	30%	No
Tennessee			✓ in adoption process	Moderately	38%	No
Texas			✓	Moderately	43%	No
Virginia		✓		Minimally	14%	No
West Virginia	✓			Minimally	20%	No

\* “ELCC Standards” indicates Education Leadership Constituent Council Standards.  
Sources: State departments of education.

## **Actions states can take to establish learning-focused leadership standards:**

- Appoint a standards task force to recommend statewide school-leadership standards that emphasize student learning.
- Develop explicit descriptions of what the standards require principals to know and do — the knowledge, skills and responsibilities that are linked to student achievement and school improvement.
- Identify criteria and consistent processes to measure performance on the standards for entry-level licensure and for continuous evaluations of on-the-job performance.
- Provide universities and school districts with models and training in the development and use of scoring guides and other measurement tools for distinguishing performance levels on the standards.

### **SREB Pacesetter: Arkansas**

The Arkansas Leadership Academy's process for evaluating the progress and performance of veteran principals who participate in the state's Master Principal Program is a promising example of how states can create criteria and measurement tools to determine the level of aspiring or practicing principals' performance on the standards. Scoring guides lay out the criteria for five levels of performance in each of these areas: a) building and sustaining accountability systems, b) leading and managing change, c) developing deep knowledge of teaching and learning, d) maintaining collaborative relationships, and e) creating and living the mission and vision. Evidence comes from three sources: student achievement data, a portfolio containing artifacts reflecting principal performance, and a site visit to the school. Scorers include stakeholders in education from Arkansas and other states who are trained in the evaluation process. More details are online at [http://www.arkansasleadershipacademy.org/master\\_principal.htm#scoring\\_guides](http://www.arkansasleadershipacademy.org/master_principal.htm#scoring_guides)

QUESTION 2:

***Does your state require universities and districts to work together to recruit, select and prepare future principals with the most promise of improving classroom practices and student achievement?***

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**E**very school district needs access to a ready supply of well-prepared principals. States currently have an abundant supply of individuals with school-leadership credentials, but a scarcity of qualified candidates willing and able to do the job effectively. If states and districts want to place high-performing principals in all schools, they cannot depend on a volunteer pipeline that produces a large pool of aspiring principals who have untested competence in improving curriculum and instruction. Nor can they rely on traditional university admission criteria that emphasize academic credentials over proven classroom expertise and the ability to work with teachers to improve student achievement.

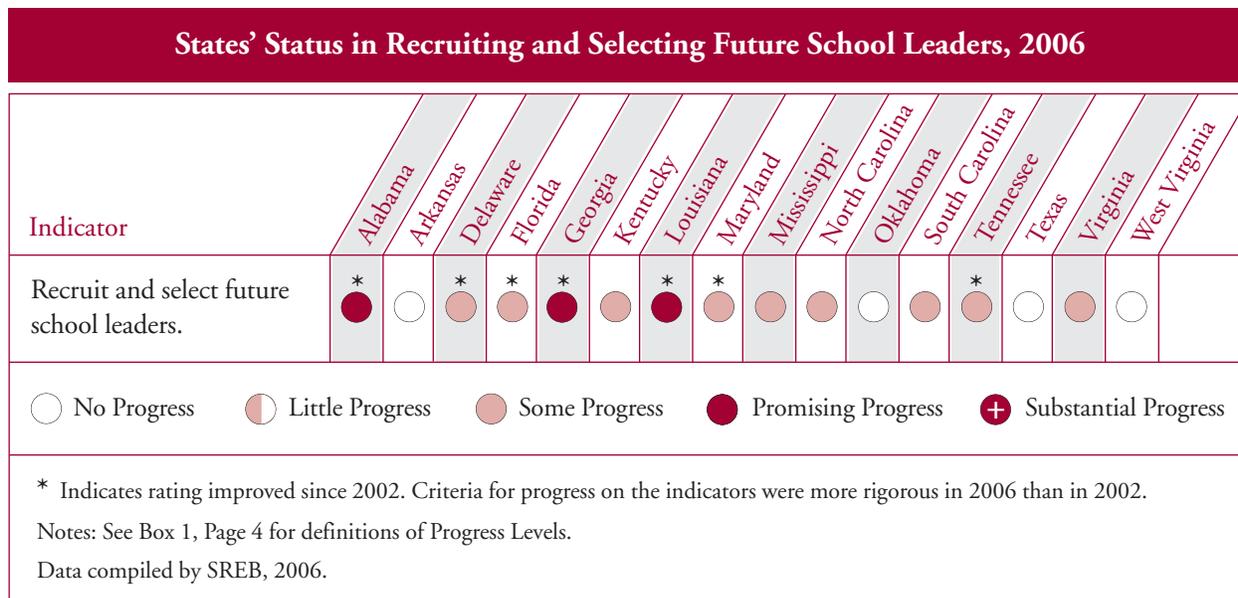
States should begin by developing criteria for universities and districts to use in jointly recruiting and selecting principal-candidates who have expertise in curriculum and instruction, a record of improving student achievement and proven leadership abilities. Once the criteria are set in state policy, states can provide guidelines to assist universities and districts in forming partnerships for recruiting, preparing and supporting a sufficient and high-quality pool of potential school leaders to meet current and projected district and school needs.

States also should encourage school districts to develop a school leadership succession plan. Districts should identify teachers and others who demonstrate the capacity for school leadership and provide these individuals with tuition fees, released time, mentoring and other types of support that they need to become effective school principals. District officials need to place potential school leaders in roles such as committee chairs, instructional coaches and department chairs, and in problem-solving task groups. Universities and districts can work together to develop teacher-leader graduate programs that emphasize problem solving, research-based strategies for improving student learning and teacher leadership in school improvement.

One important tool for projecting your state's need for principals in the future is a statewide data system that tracks supply and demand for principals, projected retirements, principal preparation program enrollment and completion rates,

*The University of Kentucky and the Pike County School District recruit only principal-candidates who understand Kentucky's core content and learning goals, have expertise in curriculum and assessment, demonstrate instructional leadership in schools, show evidence of being a master-teacher, work well on a team, show evidence of lifelong learning, and understand teaching and learning.<sup>6</sup>*

Figure 2



licensing and hiring of in-state and out-of-state program graduates, the impact of recent program graduates on schools and student achievement, and the investment of resources in principal preparation. Without such data, your state and districts cannot make data-based decisions about principal preparation and professional development.

### **Actions states can take to promote partnerships among universities and districts to recruit and prepare future principals:**

- Establish admission criteria for principal preparation programs that include candidates' potential for raising student achievement and leading school improvement.
- Provide guidance and incentives to the partnerships so that they will implement joint recruitment, selection and admission processes that result in higher-quality candidates.
- Encourage and support school districts in implementing school leadership succession plans to ensure well-qualified leaders for the future.
- Maintain data systems that provide districts the information they need to ensure high-quality principals for their schools.
- Provide incentives for universities to develop new master's degree programs for teachers that emphasize problem-solving, improving student learning and teacher leadership of school improvement — rather than allowing educators to use the education administration degree solely as a means to higher pay.
- Require universities to make educational leadership programs a priority area for funding and to fully invest tuition earnings into the programs.

## SREB Pacesetters: Delaware and Alabama

**Alabama** requires universities and school districts to implement a joint screening and selection process to identify potential school leaders who meet instructional leadership criteria. The process includes an interview with a program admission committee and a portfolio of letters of recommendation; a record of the aspiring leader's most recent performance appraisal and professional development; evidence of the candidate's ability to improve student achievement; and evidence of school leadership potential. Four university-district partnerships are developing model procedures that other programs can use.

The **Delaware** State Action for Education Leadership Project is helping school districts develop principal succession plans to ensure that high-quality school leaders are available in the future. The project reports turnover and retirements of school leaders and forecasts needs for the future; builds partnerships with businesses to help school leaders learn succession planning from business leaders; and provides funding and support for school districts, including salary incentives for mentors.



### QUESTION 3:

***Has your state taken steps to redesign university-based leadership preparation programs to emphasize the principal's responsibility for improving curriculum, instruction and student learning?***

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**S**tates need to make redesigning preparation programs to prepare principals who can lead improvement of teaching and learning an urgent priority. As states and school districts struggle to meet the requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law and their own accountability systems, they are realizing they need more high-quality principals who can improve student learning. States should take steps to ensure that principal preparation programs go far beyond a set of courses on school administration and management — courses that have been the hallmark of university-based educational leadership programs for decades. Today's principals must be prepared to:

- help teachers, students and parents to raise achievement and ensure that all students will be prepared to succeed in college and careers — and develop a mission for their schools aimed at these purposes;
- guide teachers to use data to analyze deficiencies in student learning and to implement proven instructional strategies to improve achievement;
- develop a school organization that values and supports every student;
- create ways for parents and teachers to work together to improve each student's education;
- facilitate and manage change that leads to an improved learning environment and includes meaningful, sustained professional development;
- use time and resources in innovative ways to meet school improvement goals;

- maintain support from the school district office, community and parents; and
- learn and share new research and proven practices.

Most states do not have university-based principal preparation programs that help aspiring principals develop instructional leadership competencies. While there is a growing consensus about the best designs for these programs, **many of today’s principals are ill-prepared to be instructional leaders because their graduate programs did not prepare them for the instructional and organizational changes their schools need to raise student performance.**

Research shows gaps between what is taught in principal preparation programs and the competencies effective principals need. Studies reveal that most preparation programs stress school law, finance and teacher evaluation — but not how to improve academic programs in K-12 schools.<sup>8</sup> Further, preparation programs often do not have curricular coherence, adequate clinical instruction, qualified faculty, and high admission standards.<sup>9</sup> State policies and strategies intended to promote the redesign of principal preparation programs have produced only episodic changes.<sup>10</sup>

SREB has developed a set of guidelines, Conditions for Quality Learning-Centered Principal Preparation, which synthesizes leading research on the features of exemplary principal preparation programs by scholars such as Linda Darling-Hammond, Barbara Jackson, Carolyn Kelley, Laraine Roberts, Michelle D. Young, Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling. The guidelines advise universities and other types of preparation programs involved in redesign to take the following steps:

- Make programs the joint responsibility of university-district partnerships to ensure relevant content, quality school-based experiences and support for candidates.
- Organize research-based program content, problem-based assignments and performance assessments around the essential question: What do principals need to know and do to improve teaching and learning in their schools?
- Use a variety of instructional methods to include simulations, in-school observations and problem-based assignments, participation on school improvement teams at both high- and low-performing schools, seminars, and opportunities for analyzing experiences and the application of standards.
- Provide high-quality internships — with well-trained mentors — that engage candidates in sustained experiences in key areas of school leadership responsibility. Interns should take the leadership role in an extensive school improvement project.

*“The federal No Child Left Behind law and state-level accountability rules have placed principals squarely on the front lines. ... If principals merely perform as competent managers, but not as engaged instructional leaders who can develop effective teams in their schools to drive sustained improvement in teaching and learning in every classroom, they do so at the risk of their jobs.”*

*Leadership for Learning:  
Making the Connections Among State,  
District and School Policies and Practices,  
The Wallace Foundation, 2006<sup>7</sup>*

- Staff programs with university faculty, district- and school-based practitioners and others who can convey leadership knowledge and skills aimed at improving student achievement.
- Administer rigorous, standards-based assessments that provide candidates with feedback on their performance throughout the program. Decisions about candidates' continuation and completion of programs should be based on these assessments and evaluations by internship mentors, district staff and university faculty members.
- Allocate sufficient time, money and staff to coordinate, develop, implement and evaluate program redesign. States may need to provide full-time staff to coordinate efforts across entities such as the boards of professional standards, public education and higher education. Districts and universities also may need additional staff, training and technical assistance to support program redesign.
- Implement joint university-district monitoring and evaluations to ensure that each element of the preparation program, and the overall program, meets quality standards. Evaluations also should ensure that district needs for effective school leadership are being met and that recent graduates are leading improvement in schools and student achievement.

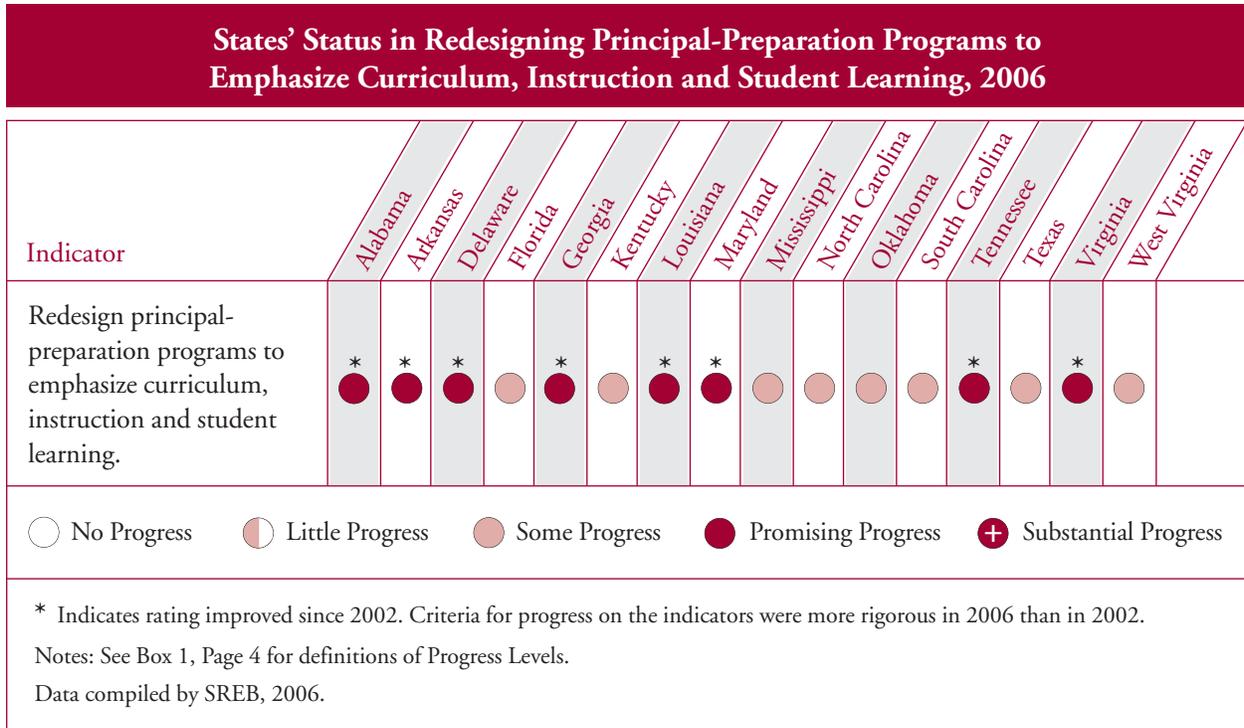
Linda Darling-Hammond's research of school leadership indicates that building preparation programs with the above components leads to principals who can engage successfully in many of the practices associated with school success. These include cultivating a shared vision and practice, leading instructional improvement, developing organizational capacity, and managing change. Her research also found that principals who completed such programs focused more on instructional leadership and supported school improvement, which was evident in school outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

SREB's work with states and universities indicates that high-quality training and support for university faculty members and school district leaders is an essential component in the redesign of principal preparation programs. Key university and district leaders need guidelines for the redesign of preparation programs and training in developing effective partnerships, creating courses rich in learning-centered content and problem-based assignments, planning effective school-based experiences and internships, and providing curriculum materials and other resources that focus on principals' responsibilities for student learning. In addition, states need to provide model programs, close monitoring and ongoing feedback and coaching during the redesign process to help preparation programs meet higher quality standards and conditions.

When preparation programs do not fully meet expectations, state agencies can approve them with stipulations and require improvements. State agencies should deny approval if the stipulations are not ultimately met. States should move to close preparation programs if the majority of graduates who are employed as principals fail to produce positive changes in classroom practices and student achievement.

These steps can be more effective if preparation programs are reviewed by consultants who are not affiliated with programs in the state, who have recognized expertise in school leadership preparation and who understand the state's criteria for approving programs.

Figure 3



**Actions states can take to redesign leadership programs:**

- Adopt state policies to establish learning-centered principal preparation programs and require universities to meet the conditions for state approval by a specified date.
- Provide strong state leadership for program redesign and oversight of state agencies' work.
- Provide universities and districts with incentives and support for redesigning programs, including training, technical assistance and additional resources.
- Use the leadership standards and conditions for learning-centered programs to evaluate and approve leadership programs; include outside experts in school leadership programs to serve on program review panels. Deny approval, after a reasonable time for redesign and implementation, for programs that do not meet state standards and conditions, and use the standards and conditions for assessing program renewal over time.
- License principals who were prepared by out-of-state programs only when their preparation meets the conditions for approval of in-state programs.
- Evaluate new state policies' and procedures' impact on programs, graduates and schools. Use data to improve policies and procedures.
- Research the cost of effective learning-centered programs and align state and university budgets with priorities for improved school leadership.

## SREB Pacesetter: Louisiana

**Louisiana** has set clear expectations for universities and districts to work together in redesigning preparation programs by establishing guidelines. (See below.) Fourteen school leadership programs are working to redesign how they train principals. The state is supporting four university-district partnerships as models of collaborative program development and implementation. Universities and their district partners work together to:

- establish admission criteria for educational leadership programs — and use the criteria to select candidates for the programs;
- identify competencies for instructional leaders related to literacy and mathematics;
- create course activities that are based on real issues in schools and on state and national educational leadership standards;
- create the university-based curriculum — one-third of which focuses directly on improvement of student achievement; and
- develop school-based experiences and internships.



### QUESTION 4:

***Have all preparation programs in your state developed school-based experiences and internships that prepare participants to lead school improvement?***

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**S**chool-based learning experiences are more essential in preparing effective principals than simply textbooks and lectures. Today's principals need problem-solving and analytical skills. Principal-candidates need to master these skills before they receive their initial licenses. **Schools need principals who are prepared to plan and implement school improvement strategies from their first day on the job.**

### **SREB Finds Serious Flaws in Many Internship Programs for Aspiring Principals**

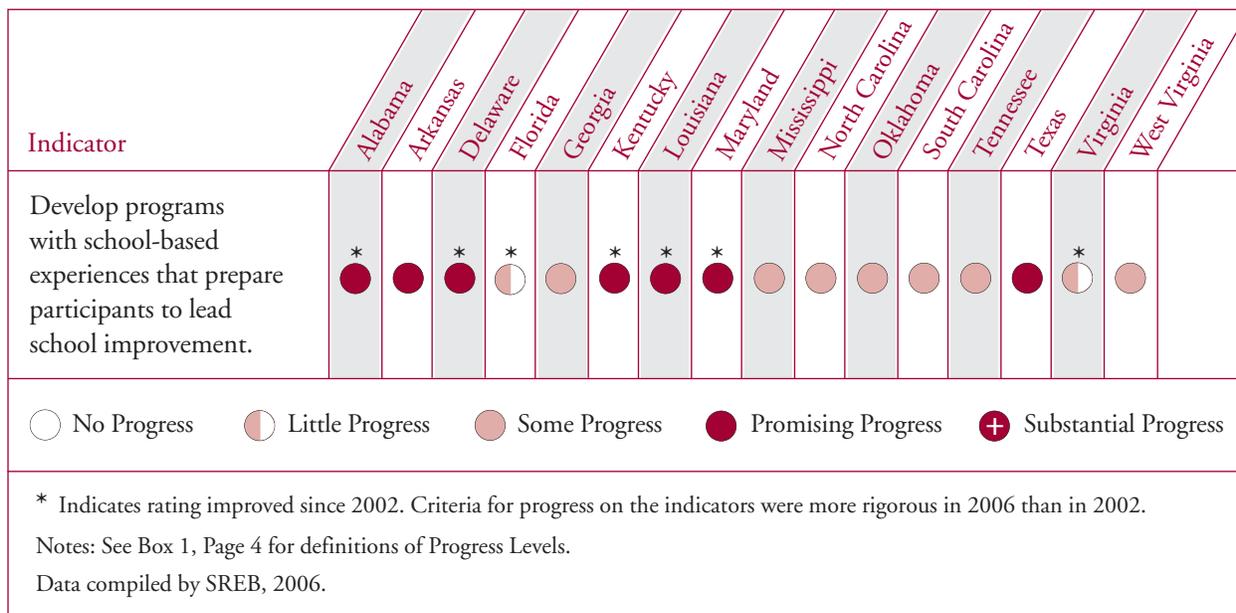
SREB's research shows serious flaws in principal internships and the mentoring candidates receive — hindering principal-candidates' development in the competencies they will need to be effective principals.

The failure of universities and school districts to work together on well-designed and supervised internships keeps principal-candidates from the experience they need in solving a range of school problems and leading school improvement. Some principal-candidates have reported inadequate internships that included little more than following behind a veteran principal, handling routine chores, attending a school board meeting or taking up tickets at a school event.<sup>12</sup>

Many preparation programs allow interns to choose their own mentors and internship sites, failing to ensure all interns will be guided by trained principal-mentors who can expertly demonstrate the state's leadership standards.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 4

States' Status in Developing Programs with School-Based Experiences that Prepare Participants to Lead School Improvement, 2006



Quality internships do not happen by chance. If states, universities and districts together cannot find the resources to provide quality internships and mentoring for principal-candidates, then states should consider reducing program enrollments and allowing university faculties, mentor principals and district staffs to concentrate on preparing candidates with the most potential for success. States also can reduce the number of approved preparation programs, focusing resources on high-quality programs while still producing an adequate supply of new principals.

High-quality field experiences can enable aspiring principals to lead teachers in designing curriculum and instruction and diagnosing problems in schools that contribute to achievement gaps. They can help aspiring leaders learn to work with teachers to align course content, assignments and classroom assessments to grade-level or higher standards and to help students who need special attention.

*Learning-centered principal internships require the following elements:*

- A formal **agreement** between a university and district to focus the internship on instructional leadership and to set clear expectations for the university, district and the mentor principal to enable the intern to develop and demonstrate the competencies required in state standards.
- A **continuum** of experiences that progresses from observation to participation in school leadership in a variety of school settings. Toward the end of the internship, the principal-candidate should be engaged in solving significant school problems and providing leadership on at least one project designed to improve student achievement.
- **Guiding materials** that define the internship design; expectations of the principal-candidate; and roles and responsibilities of faculty supervisors, mentor principals and district personnel.
- **Clinical supervision** by university faculty and others who have the expertise and time to guide and assist the mentor principal and intern. The faculty role is to set goals, plan learning experiences, assess the intern's performance and help the intern meet the standards.

- **Mentoring** by seasoned principals who model the essential competencies of effective leadership and are well-trained in guiding interns through activities that help them meet state standards.
- Rigorous **performance evaluations**, based on clear criteria and consistent procedures, that measure a candidate's ability to demonstrate essential competencies as defined by state standards.

### **Actions states can take to develop quality internships:**

- States with limited resources should consider reducing the number of preparation programs and program enrollments, and focus resources instead on the best candidates in high-quality programs.
- Require university-district partnerships to specify roles and responsibilities for ensuring that candidates meet state standards.
- Prepare principal-candidates to improve low-performing schools by requiring them to observe and participate in school improvement activities in a variety of schools and to complete a substantial internship that includes leading at least one school improvement project.
- Establish criteria for mentor selection and training, and allocate resources for the mentoring needed to support high-quality internships.
- Base successful completion of an internship on mastery of state standards — not on required hours of participation.

### **SREB Pacesetters: Kentucky, Louisiana and Maryland**

The **Kentucky** Legislature passed a resolution in 2006 that requires universities and school districts to work together to offer clinical training and internships that engage aspiring principals in problem-based learning. Each participant is part of a cohort group and is assigned a mentor.

**Louisiana** requires preparation programs to provide candidates with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge through school-based activities and projects. The state also uses SREB materials to train program staff on establishing quality internships, including mentor training.

In **Maryland**, universities and school districts are required to develop agreements on how they will provide internships that address the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework.

QUESTIONS 5 AND 6:

*Is your state developing a licensing system that ensures only individuals with the knowledge and skills required to improve student performance are eligible to serve as principals?*

*Is your state implementing alternative pathways to licensure for candidates who hold a master's degree in another field and demonstrate the potential to be effective school leaders?*

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**S**tate policies on principal licensure are a powerful tool for ensuring schools have qualified principals. More than that, licensing determines the size and nature of the applicant pool and screens candidates for minimal competence. Having a good principal licensing system means being able to answer “yes” to these questions:

- Does the license adequately represent mastery of the knowledge and skills required to be a competent school principal?
- Does the entry-level license require candidates to demonstrate they are competent to serve as school principals?
- Does renewal of the license or advancement to a higher-level license require evidence of continued advancement in knowledge, skills and performance, particularly in advancing student learning?

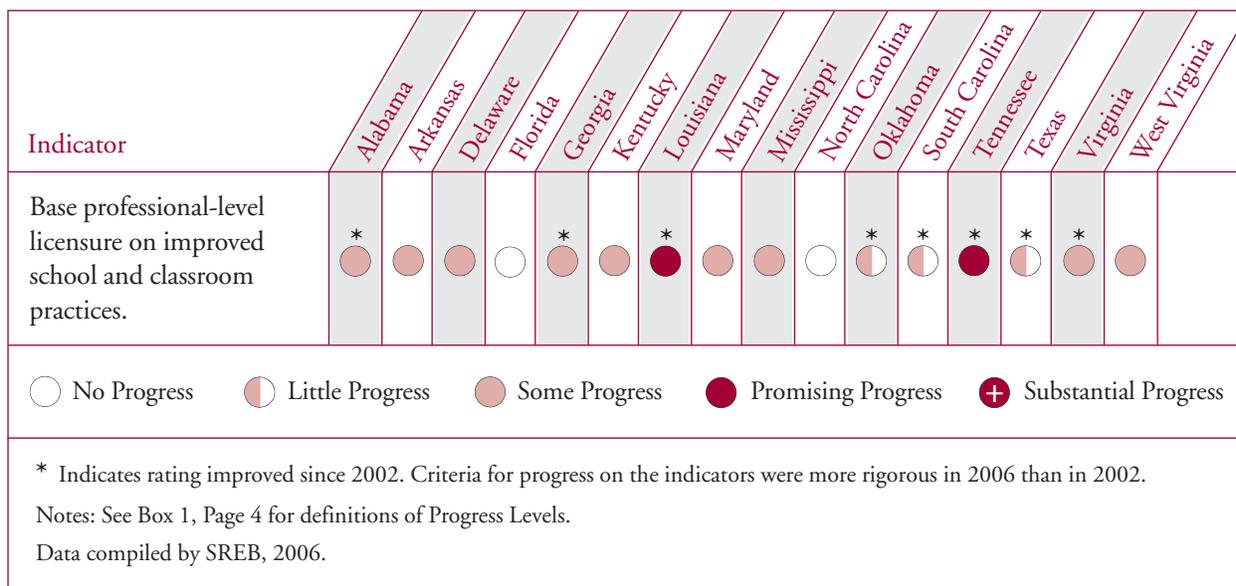
Learning-centered licensure requirements go beyond background checks or academic degrees that indicate little about candidates' capacity to be effective principals. A principal licensure system should include differentiated performance criteria and evaluative measures for entry-level and advanced licensure. The SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program suggests a three-tiered licensure system:

- An **entry-level license** should indicate a candidate has demonstrated competence on the state's leadership standards and has passed a state-adopted exam that includes a component on instructional knowledge and skills. The entry-level license should be valid for three years only.
- A **professional-level license** should indicate a principal has completed two years as a school leader in an induction program under the guidance of an experienced mentor and documented proficiency on the state standards. Renewal of the professional-level license after an initial five-year period, and each five-year period thereafter, should require continuing evidence of work to improve student achievement.
- An **advanced professional license** should be based on a principal's accomplishments, including improved student achievement; mentoring; research that benefits schools; providing professional development; and demonstrated expertise in school leadership such as leading a literacy improvement effort, implementing a rigorous standards-based curriculum, or creating effective extra-help programs for struggling students.

Developing a new licensure system requires states to be clear about the purpose of licensing and to build support among educators for the new licensure system. A new system requires states to create high-quality induction programs for new principals, which most states do not have. School districts and their

Figure 5

**States' Status in Basing Professional-Level Licensure on Improved School and Classroom Practices, 2006**



university or other partners need to develop induction programs based on state-developed criteria that specify the types of training and support principals need during induction into the field.

A new licensure system also requires states to develop and implement new performance-based assessments and tests of knowledge for entry-level licensure and tools for evaluating the on-the-job performance of practicing principals aligned with state leadership standards.

**How Are SREB States Evaluating Principals for Licensure and Job Performance?**

According to a 2005 Council of Chief State School Officers report, most SREB states require tests for licensure of school principals:<sup>14</sup>

**States with licensure tests**

- Eight SREB states — Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia — require candidates seeking an initial principal license to meet the state criteria for passing the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).
- Two SREB states — Louisiana and West Virginia — require a passing score on the Praxis test for principals, developed by ETS.
- Three SREB states — Delaware, Florida and Virginia (which also requires the SLLA) — require a passing score on a state-developed test.
- Three SREB states — Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas — require candidates to pass other state-specified tests.

## States with performance-based assessments for principal evaluation

- Four SREB states have performance-based assessments for principal evaluation — Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

## States with a prescribed principal evaluation process

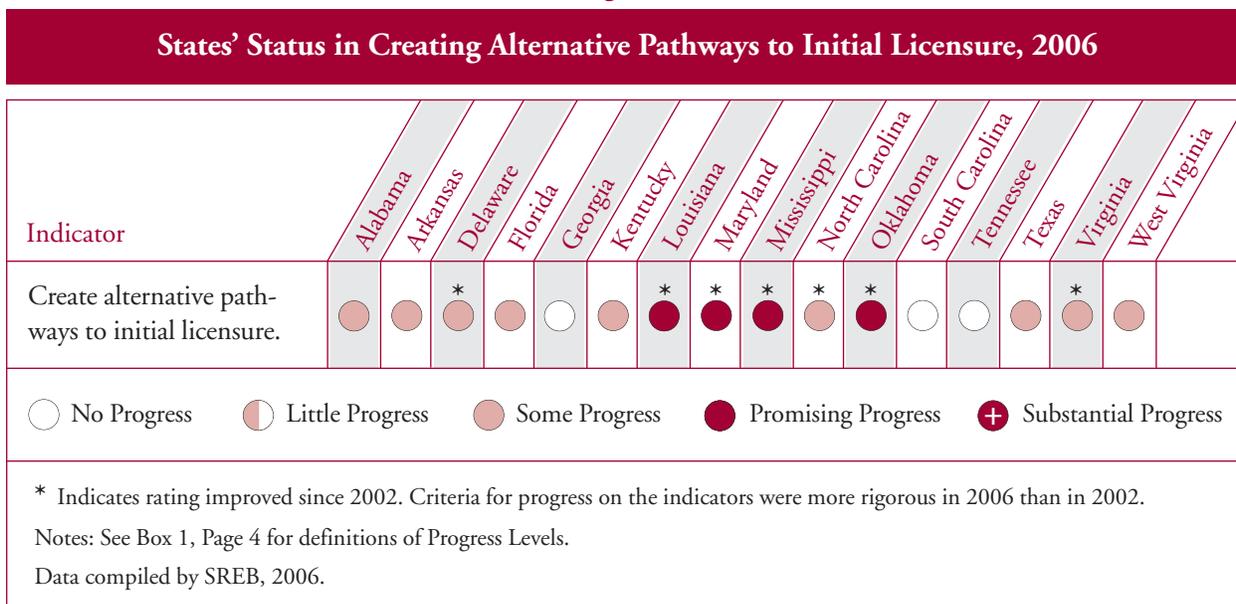
- Nine SREB states — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia — have a required process for principal evaluation.
- Seven SREB states — Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina and West Virginia — delegate decisions about principal evaluation to local school districts.

## How Are States Addressing Alternative Licensure?

To ensure sufficient pools of highly qualified principals, states need to provide ways for high-performing professionals who hold a master’s degree in a field other than education administration to become principals.

Since states began requiring principals to be licensed, former teachers have comprised the vast majority of those preparing and qualifying for an administrative license. While some good teachers can become effective principals — overseeing curriculum and instruction, supervising teachers, engaging parents and establishing good learning environments — research shows that leaders in other fields can, too. Other professionals often have skills that good principals need, including organizational development, entrepreneurship, experience in leading change, team building, problem-solving and working with communities. States and school districts cannot afford to overlook the individuals in this group in their search for candidates with the most potential for becoming effective school principals.

Figure 6



## Actions states can take to implement tiered principal-licensure systems and alternative paths to initial licensure:

- Develop and adopt policies and procedures for implementing a tiered licensure system.
- Base entry-level licenses on completion of a state-approved preparation program and a performance-based exam aligned with state standards, and base professional-level licenses on demonstrated effectiveness in improving school and classroom practices.
- Provide universities and districts with guidelines and measurement tools for developing assessments that distinguish entry-level, professional and advanced performance on the state's leadership standards.
- Ensure that principal licensure tests are aligned with state standards.
- Require districts to develop two-year principal induction programs that focus on learning-centered leadership competencies, and provide participants with expert mentoring and coaching.
- Create alternative licensing that provides entry-level licenses and customized professional development for candidates with a master's degree in a field other than education administration.

### SREB Pacesetters: Alabama and Tennessee

The **Alabama** Board of Education has proposed a tiered licensure system that incorporates the criteria recommended by the SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program. The proposed system establishes the following types of licenses for principals:

A **Professional Instructional Leader**, or entry-level license, will be based on the completion of a school leadership program that meets the state's new leadership standards and passage of a state-required test. It is to be valid for five years.

An **Employed Instructional Leader**, or professional-level license, will be based on assignment in a leadership position, completion of a state-approved induction and mentoring program, and documentation of improved student achievement during entry-level licensure. It is to be valid for five-year intervals.

An **Exemplary Instructional Leader**, or optional advanced-level license, will be based on continuing distinguished work and requires training and service as a principal mentor or similar accomplishment.

In **Tennessee**, advancement from the beginning license to the professional license is based on two years of successful work, continuing professional development and satisfactory evaluations. The state's Leadership Redesign Commission appointed a task force that has made recommendations for redesigning licensure that meet learning-centered criteria.

## SREB Pacesetter: Oklahoma

**Oklahoma** provides an alternative pathway to the initial principal license for candidates who have a master's degree in any field, two years of relevant work experience in a supervisory or administrative capacity, and passing scores on specified tests. Candidates work with a university to determine an individually prescribed set of courses to prepare them for the principalship, and the state issues a three-year license for candidates to work in an administrative position while completing the courses. A regular administrative license is issued when the courses and three years of satisfactory administrative service are completed.



### QUESTION 7:

### *Is your state providing training and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools?*

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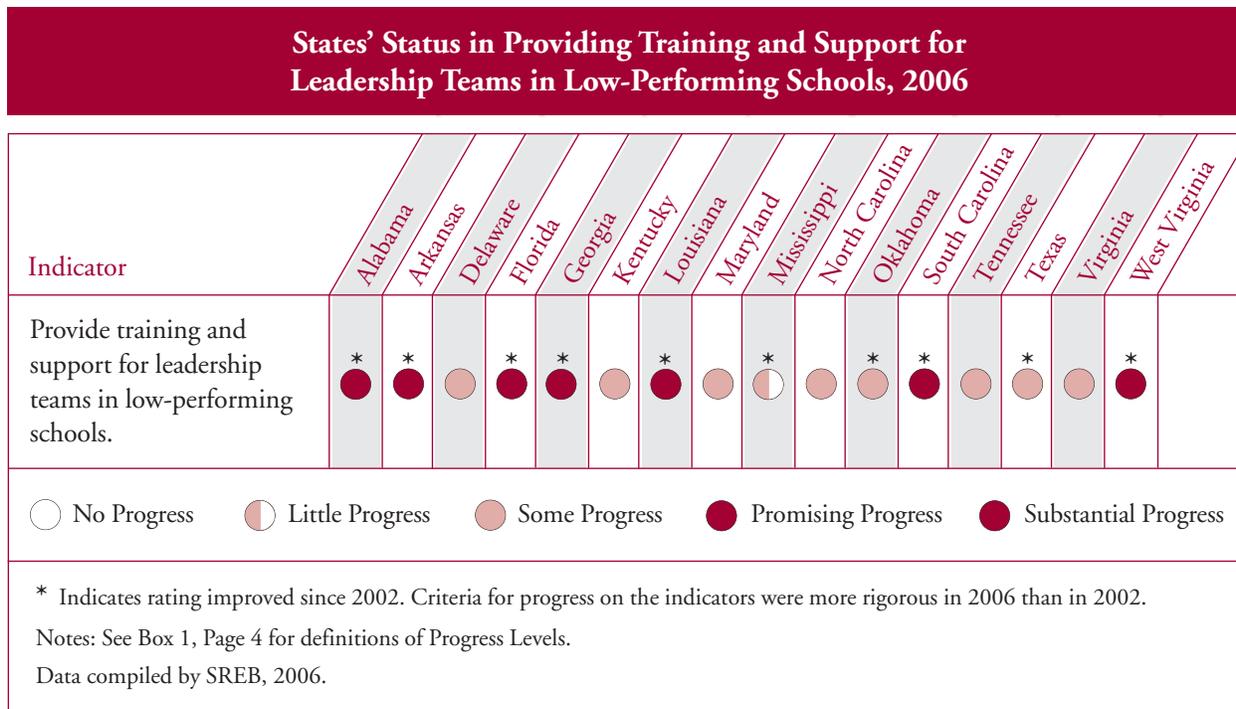
**W**hile many schools across the SREB region have made strides in improving student achievement, work remains in all states to ensure that all students in every school can attain academic success. Every state has low-performing schools, often in impoverished communities. These schools face serious educational challenges and often struggle to recruit and retain well-qualified school leaders. State accountability systems and the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* have drawn attention to the need to improve low-performing schools.

Improving traditionally low-performing schools requires the long-term commitment of school, district and state leaders. States should give special attention to building leadership capacity in low-performing schools. In a learning-centered leadership system, principals of low-performing schools cannot be expected to work in isolation. Research shows that principals cannot transform struggling schools alone. Without additional help, many districts lack the capacity to implement school improvement strategies. States need to ensure that districts build effective leadership teams in low-performing schools who can work alongside principals to promote school improvement. To begin, states can:

- require teams of principals, teachers, and aspiring leaders in low-performing schools to participate in leadership training — along with school district representatives — that involves them in using new knowledge and skills to solve school problems;
- ensure that support and training is high quality, research based and targeted at schools' specific needs; and
- monitor and evaluate leadership teams' progress in using their new skills and knowledge to improve classroom practices and student achievement.

States may need to require leadership teams' participation in continuing training. States should facilitate interaction between educators from low-performing schools and other educators who are solving similar problems. To support the work of school leadership teams in addressing difficult issues, states also

Figure 7



need to provide the teams with coaching, mentoring and other forms of support. Such assistance helps teams apply what they have learned to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

Schools involved in leadership training need external reviews to assess their progress. Effective evaluations measure progress through evidence of improved school and classroom practices and student achievement. Using the results of evaluations to guide further training is crucial.

Even the best-trained principals and leadership teams are apt to fail at improving low-performing schools if they must contend with challenging working conditions that prevent them from making improvements. School leaders need to have, and be trained to use, appropriate data for diagnosing problems and finding solutions. They need access to a pool of well-trained teachers, and sufficient authority to hire and place them in strategic positions and to dismiss those whose performance is not contributing to higher student achievement. And, they need sufficient flexibility in policies and practices to reallocate people, time and money to meet the needs of all students.

**Actions states can take to build leadership capacity in low-performing schools:**

- Train district staffs and school boards to implement research-based school reform strategies and to create conditions that support school leaders' efforts to improve teaching and learning.
- Focus professional development efforts on building the capacity of district and school leadership teams to support continuous improvement and address specific challenges in their schools, especially in low-performing schools.

- Provide low-performing schools with assistance in implementing new knowledge and skills to solve school problems — with “coaches” or master principals, for example.
- Evaluate the impact of professional development and other services to assist with decisions on whether to continue or improve them.
- Examine state and district policies and practices to determine changes needed to support principals in taking ownership of school improvement efforts and engaging teachers in professional development that builds expertise in standards-based instruction.

### SREB Pacesetters: Florida, Georgia and West Virginia

**Florida's** William Cecil Golden Program for School Leaders provides training, coaching and extensive online resources to help school leadership teams implement a continuous improvement model. The state provides funding and other support to help build district capacity to deliver high-quality training to veteran principals and their school leadership teams.

**Georgia** assigns trained facilitators to work intensively with low-performing schools and to provide training and coaching for school leadership teams and district staffs in developing and implementing data-based school improvement plans related to state academic standards. The performance of schools needing improvement is used to evaluate the training and support from the facilitators and regional education service centers. The Georgia Institute for School Improvement offers training that prepares district “change teams” to launch improvement efforts.

In 2004, **West Virginia** invited 20 low-performing high schools to participate in a leadership initiative designed to build the skills leaders need to create and maintain high-performing schools. Funded by a state grant, leadership teams from each of the schools received support and training in a series of research-based leadership development modules. Over the course of two-and-a-half years, the teams learned to apply new skills in their schools and received follow-up training. Initial data showed these schools saw gains in student achievement. The state also created a program to bring business leaders into struggling schools to mentor and advise principals for three years.

## *In Summary: What Can You and Your State Do?*

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**S**REB states are making progress in developing systems to ensure that every school has leadership that improves student performance, but more work remains. States need to accelerate this work if they are to meet their student achievement goals.

The region's pacesetter states provide five lessons that can benefit other states:

1. Policy-makers and education leaders — from the state's governor and legislators to principals and teachers — need to designate school leadership as a visible state, district and school priority focused on the principal's role in leading schools toward higher student performance.
2. Improving a leadership system with the goal of building capacity for raising achievement, particularly in low-performing schools, requires careful attention to all parts of the system and the connections among the parts. For example, states need learning-centered leadership standards to guide the redesign of preparation programs, and these programs should be linked to high-quality internships developed in partnership with school districts. States should require candidates for entry-level licensure to complete approved programs and internships. The links and partnerships among programs, districts and state agencies are crucial.
3. States need to provide incentives, assistance, resources and monitoring to ensure that state agencies, universities, districts and schools work together to improve school leadership and that each fulfills its responsibilities.
4. An effective leadership system requires collecting and using data to analyze the impact of states' efforts to improve school leadership.
5. States need assistance from external organizations that can provide information about effective school leadership, help facilitate change and objectively assess progress.

No SREB state has made substantial progress in creating a learning-centered school leadership system. Yet the redesign of state school-leadership systems in Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia — plus the strategies a few states have used to strengthen specific components — provide models that many states can use.

- Governors may issue **an executive order** or legislators may **pass a bill** that requires the state to develop a learning-centered school leadership system and establishes a **statewide commission** to oversee the system's development. A statewide learning-centered school leadership system should include the components outlined in this report:
  - **School leadership standards** that stress principals' role as the leader of instruction and school improvement.

- **Preparation programs and school districts** that work together closely and use the state-adopted criteria to **identify, recruit and select aspiring principals who have the greatest potential** to lead school improvement.
  - **Redesigned principal preparation programs** that focus on both academic and **extensive field-based studies** that prepare aspiring principals to work with teachers to improve schools and student achievement. Faculty members and school district leaders are provided training in how to design learning-centered preparation programs and standards-based internships.
  - **Well-trained, effective mentors** who work with aspiring principals during their internships on experiences that develop their mastery of the standards and on school improvement projects that will prepare them to lead such work in the future.
  - **Tiered principal licensure** and induction programs that ensure all entry-level principals know how to improve student learning, and that require principals to continually develop expertise and improve classroom practices and student outcomes. States also need to provide alternative preparation for high-performing professionals with master's degrees in other fields who can become high-quality principals.
  - **Professional development that strengthens** principals' and **school leadership teams' capacities** to improve teaching and learning — especially in traditionally low-performing schools.
  - **Supportive working conditions** — including state and district policies and practices on school governance, curriculum, student assessment, personnel, financial and other resources, and professional development — that enable principals to implement research-based strategies for improving teaching and learning.
- A new **statewide commission** that will develop school-leadership redesign **should include key leaders** from constituencies vested in school leadership, with a prominent state leader as chair. The commission will involve representatives from additional groups of stakeholders as it develops new leadership system components grounded in research and with clear implementation steps. States should charge the commission with:
    - recommending policies and procedures that will help focus all components of the school leadership system on the principal's responsibilities in improving teaching and learning;
    - providing oversight for the development and implementation of the new system; and
    - developing strategies for evaluating the system's effectiveness in achieving state goals and expectations — including the quality of principal preparation programs, principal-candidates, induction and professional development programs for principals, and principals' performance and impact on teaching and learning.
  - States need to provide **sufficient resources** — in time, money and people — to develop and fully implement a redesigned leadership system and obtain assistance from national or regional organizations with expertise in improving school leadership.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., and Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.
- <sup>3</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2004). *Progress Being Made in Getting a Quality Leader in Every School*. Atlanta, GA.
- <sup>4</sup> Adams, J. and Copland, M. (2005). *When Learning Counts: Rethinking Licenses for School Leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington.
- <sup>5</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers. (2005). *State Policy Framework to Develop Highly Qualified Educational Administrators*. Washington, DC. Adams, J. and Copland, M. (2005). *When Learning Counts: Rethinking Licenses for School Leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington.
- <sup>6</sup> Browne-Ferrigno, T. and Allen, L. W. (2007). Preparing principals for high-need rural schools: A central office perspective about collaborative efforts to transform school leadership. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 21(1).
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- <sup>10</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2006). *Schools Can't Wait: Accelerating the Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs*. Atlanta, GA.
- <sup>11</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., and Orr, M. (2007). *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs* (Executive Summary). Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

- <sup>12</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2005). *The Principal Internship: How Can We Get It Right?* Atlanta, GA.
- <sup>13</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2007). *Good Principals Aren't Born — They're Mentored: Are We Investing Enough to Get the School Leaders We Need?* Atlanta, GA.
- <sup>14</sup> Sanders, N. and Simpson, J. (2005). *State Policy Framework to Develop Highly Qualified Educational Administrators*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

# *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

1. All children are ready for the first grade.  
*Building a Foundation for Success by Getting Every Child Ready for School*
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.  
*Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades*
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.  
*Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades*
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.  
*Getting Serious About High School Graduation*
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.  
*Getting Students Ready for College and Careers*
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.  
*Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity*
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.  
*Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges*
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.  
*Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability*
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.  
*Progress Being Made in Getting a Quality Leader in Every School*
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.  
*Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed, and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.  
*Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs*
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.  
*From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability*

The Southern Regional Education Board has established these Goals for Education. They are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB adopted in 1988 and on an ongoing effort to promote actions and measure progress. The goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.

