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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

**Improved Student Outcomes Won't
Happen without Strong School Leadership:
Recommendations for New Mexico**

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ABOUT THE GREATER ALBUQUERQUE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1917, is one of the most influential business associations in New Mexico. The Chamber works with government, business, and community partners to promote and develop a welcoming business environment and thriving, diverse economy in New Mexico. Its goal is to ensure Albuquerque – and the state as a whole – is a great place to start and grow a business and a safe, exciting place to work and raise a family. Improving the quality of public education offered to students is key to New Mexico’s long-term economic growth, to the development of a highly-skilled workforce, and to stopping the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The Chamber believes every child – regardless of their background – can learn and grow academically each year, and every child deserves the opportunity to receive the life-changing, transformational benefits of a great education. Education policy is one of three primary focus areas of the Chamber.

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Education Research and Development (EdRD) was founded on the belief that practitioners and policy makers need to leverage research and evidence to design and implement practices that will ensure each student—regardless of background—is prepared for college, careers, and life. EdRD conducts research and creates tools that enable educational leaders and policy makers to access research findings and apply lessons from practice. These tools include reports, frameworks, case studies, resource databases, decision-making protocols, and professional development sessions.

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- Peter Lorenz, Chair of the GACC Board of Directors and CEO of Unirac, Inc.
- Terri Cole, President and CEO of the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce
- Mike Canfield, Member of the GACC Board of Directors and President and CEO of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I can tell you a good principal is worth their weight in gold. They make everything work. And when you have a principal that is not good, teachers leave.”

– Mimi Stewart, Senate President Pro Tempore

Principals play a critical role in school improvement and student success. Studies have shown strong school leaders are second only to teachers as a strategy for improving student achievement. In fact, research finds that replacing a below-average principal with an above-average principal leads to 2.9 additional months of math learning gains for students per year and 2.7 additional months of reading learning gains for students per year - a greater impact than 66% of math interventions and 50% of reading interventions. Developing effective school leaders is also an effective strategy for addressing teacher shortages and retention.

The principal role is particularly important in low-performing schools, where research has documented that improvement simply does not occur without strong leadership. Their essential role in improving low-performing schools makes school leaders an absolutely necessary component for addressing the *Martinez/Yazzie* court ruling, which calls for more adequate and equitable educational opportunities for at-risk students.

However, **New Mexico does not have a bench of well-prepared school leaders** across the state to simply replace existing leaders with more skilled ones. This situation exists because New Mexico has not focused intently enough on school leadership in its education policies and programming. In the state’s administrative code, statutes, education department structure and programs, and policy priorities, school leadership is often not emphasized and has long taken a backseat to other areas of focus. For example, none of the strategies listed in the state’s 2022 Action Plan in response to the decisions in *Martinez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico* focus on school leadership. Many of the systems needed to develop, support, and retain school leaders are lacking and inadequate.

This presents a missed opportunity to dramatically turn around schools given that **proven strategies for improving school leadership already exist.** An extensive set of reports, webinars, and other materials provide detailed guidance to state and district policymakers on how to design and implement cost-effective strategies that have been shown to have a statistically significant effect on student outcomes school-wide, not just classroom by classroom.

This report calls for state leaders to collaborate on a comprehensive and sustained strategy for improving support for school leadership. New Mexico must invest in a continuum of supports that dramatically change how leaders are incentivized, trained, and supported throughout their career, beginning in their preparation program. This requires a statewide vision and team of policy players dedicated to supporting this work overtime.

The report, commissioned by the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, reviews research on how school leaders impact student outcomes and on promising practices for their development and support. It provides an overview of the particular challenges facing New Mexico and offers a menu of policy options, rooted in research on best-practice policies that work. The report ends by identifying specific priority recommendations for the New Mexico Legislature, Public Education Department (PED), and philanthropy community.

Areas of Need

The policy recommendations are designed to address four of the greatest areas of need for improving school leadership in New Mexico: 1) Compensation; 2) Preparation; 3) In-role professional development; and 4) PED capacity. These areas were prioritized by a steering committee of business leaders and Chamber Board members based on input from interviews and focus groups of stakeholders in New Mexico, including leaders from schools, districts, business, philanthropy, the Legislature, PED, higher education, professional associations, charter organizations, and advocacy organizations.

1) Update compensation systems to incentivize interest in school leadership roles and improve retention. The Legislature increased teacher salaries in FY23 and school principal salaries are determined by a “responsibility factor” multiplied by the teacher salary. For example, elementary principals can make 1.15 times the salary of teachers. The pay differential accounts for additional days the principal works over the summer but inadequately accounts for additional skill, responsibilities, and stress required by leadership positions. The compensation system also fails to encourage school leaders to maintain knowledge and skills by engaging in continuous learning opportunities to maintain their license. This mismatch discourages teachers from pursuing school leader positions in the first place and fails to encourage school leaders to spend time on their own professional growth once they are in an administrative role.

2) Redesign and relaunch preparation programs to reflect best practice and hold all programs across the state to the same high standard. Addressing principal licensure programs is the first step to a comprehensive strategy to building a statewide bench of effective leaders. New Mexico does not require programs to be aligned to the most recent national standards and only requires 180 hours for the administrative internship. Semester-long internships are hailed as a proven research-based strategy that allows aspiring leaders with meaningful opportunities to practice leadership; however, only one program in New Mexico offers candidates a full-time internship experience. Programs across the state often fail to reflect other research-based components, such as: rigorous recruitment, close district-university partnerships, cohort structures, curriculum focused on the most important knowledge and skills (according to research and professional standards), and mentoring/coaching. Some traditional programs overemphasize “sit-and-get” learning while other programs offer inconsistent quality. As a result, many school leaders feel underprepared for the role, especially to lead schools that experience the greatest challenges in teaching and learning conditions. While some programs might have the capacity and will to improve their quality, New Mexico needs to create

accountability systems and incentives that ensure all programs reflect best practice. Otherwise, New Mexico will not be able to meet the challenge of adequate and equitable educational opportunities for schools as called for by the *Martinez/Yazzie* court ruling.

3) Provide equitable access to in-role professional development. In general, school leaders have limited high-quality opportunities for professional development after they are placed in their role. The most common opportunities tend to be “one-shot” conferences and workshops that do not reflect best practices of sustained development over time with an emphasis on practicing new skills and receiving coaching. While exceptions exist, they are not accessible to all principals throughout the state. These limited opportunities provide insufficient support, especially for principals who entered the role underprepared, are taking on evolving roles and responsibilities, or are serving at-risk students. Given the critical role school leaders play in improving low-performing schools, principals in these schools need to receive prioritized support.

4) Increase PED capacity. Structurally and historically, New Mexico’s education system has not clearly championed the role of a school leader, specifically as a critical change agent within schools – especially the lowest-performing schools. Too often, principals operate more akin to mid-level managers within a large bureaucracy and have been prepared, supported, and paid as such. As an agency, PED does not have a division dedicated to reporting data on school leaders and the schools they serve, monitoring and enforcing high standards for leader preparation, and supporting school leaders through high-quality mentoring and other professional development. In addition, stakeholders and the *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling have raised concerns regarding whether PED can effectively create rules and oversee quality control processes that allow for different local approaches to supporting school leadership (such as preparation or mentoring programs) while also ensuring they adhere to quality standards. As such, PED could benefit from an external organization that advocates for a comprehensive, sustained, and rigorous focus on school leadership and aims to hold the State accountable to that mission.

Recommendations

We recommend the **Public Education Department**:

- 1) Propose the creation of an Office of School and District Leadership;
- 2) Design and oversee a robust school leader data tracking system; and
- 3) Seek expertise on research and best practices when designing rules and guidance for things like preparation and mentoring programs – and then hold the line when enforcing high standards.

We recommend the **New Mexico Legislature**:

- 1) Transform pre-service leader preparation by sunseting all current school leader preparation programs and providing them grant funding to re-design and re-launch their programs in line with evidence-based best practices, including a full-time residency requirement;

- 2) Establish a statewide intensive mentoring program for all first-year principals;
- 3) Expand the current suite of well-designed principal development programs led by the Priority Schools Bureau to serve more leaders in the highest-need, lowest-performing schools; and
- 4) Update school leader compensation to incentivize entry and continuous learning.

We recommend the **New Mexico philanthropy community**:

- 1) Establish a statewide coalition or commission, with a primary focus area on school leadership; and
- 2) Invest in an advocacy organization to hold all of state government – including executive agencies, the Legislature, and higher education institutions – accountable for deploying high-standards school leader programming that improves school and student performance.

This list is not intended to be a menu. Policymakers should collaborate to pursue all of the recommendations because each recommendation creates enabling conditions for the others.



Principals play a critical role in school improvement and student success.¹ In fact, research shows that principals are second only to teachers in school-level factors that affect student achievement.² They are “multipliers” of positive student outcomes who impact an average of 483 students each. For example, a recent review of research found that replacing a below-average principal with an above-average principal leads to 2.9 additional months of math learning gains for students per year, 2.7 additional months of reading learning gains for students per year, and a greater impact than 66% of math interventions and 50% of reading interventions.³

Research has found that school leadership can be an effective strategy for addressing teacher shortages and retention because school leaders are among the most important factors in teachers’ decisions to stay in their school and in the profession.⁴ Studies have also shown the principal role is particularly important in low-performing schools, where improvement does not occur without strong leadership.⁵

States and districts are increasingly focusing on school leadership as a cost-effective strategy for improving student outcomes at scale. The promise of this strategy has been reinforced by a RAND Corporation study of six districts implementing comprehensive strategies to improve principal leadership. The study found the district efforts had widespread positive effects on principals and, in turn, on students. Students in schools led by the impacted principals markedly outperformed those attending comparison schools in both math and reading, and principal retention improved. What is more, the strategies used by these districts were a feasible and relatively inexpensive approach to improving student achievement.⁶

Not surprisingly, the **Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce (“the Chamber”)** has **decided to focus on school leadership as a strategy for addressing chronically poor academic achievement in public schools statewide.** The Chamber partnered with Education Research and Development (EdRD) to: 1) summarize promising practices for developing and

¹ Grissom, Egalite & Lindsay (2021). [How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research](#);

² Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004). [How leadership influences student learning](#).

³ Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). [How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research](#). The Wallace Foundation.

⁴ Learning Policy Institute (2016). [A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.](#)

⁵ Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin (2012). [Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The Case of School Principals](#); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004). [How leadership influences student learning](#).

⁶ The RAND Corporation (2019). [Principal pipelines: A feasible, affordable, and effective way for districts to improve schools](#).

supporting school leaders, 2) conduct a landscape analysis of current efforts to develop and support school leaders in New Mexico (NM), and 3) offer policy recommendations based on promising practices nationally.

This report begins by providing background on how the school leader role has evolved over time. Chapter 1 summarizes promising practices for developing and supporting school leaders. Chapter 2 details findings from the landscape analysis. Chapter 3 provides a menu of policy options to consider. Chapter 4 details recommendations for PED, the Legislature, and the philanthropy community to implement for the greatest impact.

Evolution of the Principal Role

This section provides an overview of the nature of effective school leadership and how it is changing over time. The review also highlights connections to leadership in the private sector, when relevant.

School leaders have a job that has become increasingly difficult over time.⁷ Historically, the principal role focused on management responsibilities such as coordinating school building maintenance, organizing schedules, and taking inventory of curriculum. Some people refer to this historical role as being focused on the 3 Bs—buses, boilers, and books.

In the early part of the 21st century, principals were called upon to focus more on **Instructional Leadership**. This shift happened largely in response to the standards movement, which was based on evidence that all students can learn through effort (that is, intelligence is not fixed) and the role of schools is to prepare all students to achieve state standards that specify knowledge and skills for each grade level. The focus on instructional leadership has been grounded in extensive research documenting that schools effective in improving student achievement have principals who focus on curriculum and instruction. They do this by setting a vision for high-quality instruction, observing and providing feedback to teachers, structuring time for teachers to examine data together and support each other’s professional learning, and hiring and developing teacher talent. During this period, the education field frequently referenced Jim Collin’s 2001 *Good to Great*, which drew on research from corporate success stories to argue that good leadership establishes clarity on what is essential, gets the “right people on the bus,” and focuses on what needs to be done and how to get it done.

Since then, the role (and research evidence about the role) has continued to evolve to focus on: creating physically and psychologically safe learning environments, supporting the whole child (including social-emotional as well as academic development), and leading for equity. These ideas have been incorporated in the most recent version of national leadership standards, the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL).⁸⁹ During this process, the

⁷ National Association of Elementary School Principals (2018). [The PreK-8 School Leader in 2018](#)

⁸ National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015). [Professional Standards for Educational Leaders](#).

⁹ Clifford & Cogshall (2021). [Evolution of the Principalship: Leaders Explain How the Profession Is Changing Through a Most Difficult Year](#)

standards committee considered adding entrepreneurial skills increasingly important for charter and private school leaders, such as marketing and finance. Since there was not a research base to justify the importance of these skills for all principals, the group ultimately decided not to include them in national standards and instead recommend that they be supplementary skills emphasized in development and evaluation when relevant to particular situations.

As the roles and responsibilities of school leaders have expanded, emerging research has also documented the value of **Distributed Leadership**. This perspective argues that the principal does not have to undertake all leadership responsibilities directly and in all situations. Instead, their role should focus on identifying and cultivating a team of leaders, such as assistant principals, deans, instructional coaches, department heads, grade team leads, etc. This approach not only makes the role more “doable,” but it also creates teacher leader positions that can become steppingstones toward the principalship—enabling individuals to develop leadership skills in their role as they lead increasingly larger teams (similar to how individuals progress through management ranks in the private sector).

The work of school leaders has also increasingly focused on **Continuous Improvement**, which—based on implementation science—emphasizes the importance of using data as part of short cycles that involve identifying a problem, testing strategies, and assessing the impact. School leaders are expected to be able to guide teams in setting goals, monitoring progress to goals, and adapting instructional and other school strategies accordingly. This focus has paralleled and incorporated lessons from the private sector that use processes such as Plan-Do-Study-Act and Agile learning to quickly test new approaches and learn from them.

These shifts have culminated into a notion that the principal’s role is best described as an **Organizational Leader of School Improvement**.¹⁰ This perspective emphasizes the principal’s role in establishing systems and structures for all the components of schooling (instruction, culture, continuous improvement processes, etc.) and orchestrating a team of leaders (including assistant principals and teacher leaders) who collaborate to take on the leadership roles and responsibilities that are often too broad for one person to accomplish alone. Organizational leaders focus on engaging teacher leaders and teacher teams in instructional improvement efforts by ensuring they have adequate collaborative time, access to necessary data and resources, and the supports needed to effectively identify and implement effective instructional practices.¹¹

Concerns for the Future

Many districts are facing a looming crisis. **Increasing numbers of school leaders are planning to leave the profession**, in part due to the increased pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic but also because of the unreal expectations placed on the position. The National Association of Secondary School Principals predicts a “mass exodus of principals from our

¹⁰ Horng & Loeb (2010). [New Thinking about Instructional Leadership](#)

¹¹ Grissom & Loeb (2011). [Triangulating Principal Effectiveness: How Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Assistant Principals Identify the Central Importance of Managerial Skills](#)

preK-12 schools” based on a nationally representative survey it administered in Fall 2021. It found 4 out of 10 principals (38%) expected to leave the profession in the next three years.¹²

The expansion of roles and responsibilities has led many to conclude “the job is not doable.” As described above, the **number and complexity of the responsibilities has increased**, mirroring heightened expectations for schools to address more rigorous standards across more subjects, needs of the whole-child (including social and emotional learning), and improved equity for historically marginalized students. Not surprisingly, time demands of the role have increased. The average number of reported hours worked per week has steadily increased from 44 hours in 1928, to 56 hours in 2008, to 61 hours in 2018.¹³

In addition, managerial **caseloads are too high**. Principals manage many more people than do leaders in other fields. An analysis by Bain and Company found a typical principal is directly responsible for the performance and development of 37 teachers and an additional 10 non-instructional staff, pushing their span of control close to 50 people. This span of control is much higher than other industries where a manager of complex, highly skilled work typically oversees five people.¹⁴

The **COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated problems** by creating new and increased responsibilities for school leaders, such as contact tracing and retrofitting facilities to align to COVID policies. They have had to lead their schools through the tactical and adaptive challenges of pivoting back and forth between in person and remote learning. Their roles expanded to include crisis management as they learned new skills to communicate through multiple social media channels in a highly politicized environment. Additionally, many school leaders have been caught in the middle of contentious debates about masking and other COVID policies, sometimes enduring physical threats to themselves and their family.¹⁵ Even while trying to cope with their own stress, principals had to emotionally care for staff and students who were experiencing trauma brought on by the pandemic. Principals have felt underprepared and under supported for their new responsibilities.¹⁶

Losing principal talent is particularly problematic because **principal replacement costs are high**. Studies suggest costs of developing, hiring, and onboarding a new principal can be up to \$50,000 to \$75,000 per principal. Principal turnover is highest in the first three years in the role, creating churn that can result in lower student achievement.¹⁷ In addition to the financial burden, schools experiencing principal turnover often find it challenging to initiate or sustain improvement efforts, which can be particularly problematic for low-performing schools.

The next chapter outlines promising practices to combat these challenges, better support school leaders, and improve retention.

¹² NASSP (2021). [NASSP Survey Signals a Looming Mass Exodus of Principals from Schools](#)

¹³ NAESP (2018). [The PreK-8 School Leader in 2018](#)

¹⁴ Bain & Company (2016). [Transforming Schools: How Distributed Leadership Can Create More High-Performing Schools](#)

¹⁵ Arizona Republic (2021). [Three Charged After Threatening Tucson Principal with Arrest, Zip Ties Over Covid-19 rules](#)

¹⁶ AIR (2021). [Schooling Innovations and New Perspectives From a Year Interrupted](#)

¹⁷ New Teacher Center (2014). [Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover](#)



Several strategies have been tried over the last two to three decades to improve school leadership, with varying degrees of success. Initially, some districts and states tried to simply incentivize more exceptional individuals to enter and stay in school leadership positions. But they ultimately found there were not enough such individuals for all of the schools and students that needed them. Enabling **great school leaders at scale necessitates system-level changes** to how school leaders are developed and supported.¹⁸

Promising practices for developing, supporting, and retaining strong principals can be grouped into the following categories:

- 1) Pre-Service Preparation
- 2) In-Role Professional Development
- 3) Recruitment, Selection, and Succession Planning
- 4) Working Environment

This chapter describes common problems and strategies for each category. Chapter 3 offers a menu of state-level actions that can address specific challenges in New Mexico, according to themes from interviews that are summarized in Chapter 2.

1 - Pre-Service Preparation

Problems

Many school leaders do not feel prepared to lead schools.¹⁹ This is not surprising given many traditional programs do not reflect best practices in school leader preparation.²⁰ They tend to rely on lecture-style teaching of theoretical ideas rather than practice-based learning and assignments. Universities often have systems that encourage professor autonomy rather than standards-aligned curricula.²¹

As a result, **programs often fail to address the most important leadership skills** associated with improved school practice and student learning. In particular, many participants do not feel adequately prepared to build relationships with stakeholders, use multiple communication strategies (including social media), and manage change.

¹⁸ George W. Bush Institute and New Leaders (2010) [Great Principals at Scale](#)

¹⁹ Center for Public Education (2012). [The Principal Perspective](#)

²⁰ Anderson & Reynolds (2015) [The State of State Policies for Principal Preparation Program Approval and Candidate Licensure](#)

²¹ RAND Corporation (2009). [Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems](#)

In addition, programs often struggle to ensure their candidates have permission to carry out practice-based assignments in real life settings. **Sustained internships are often lacking** because program participants cannot obtain release time and/or salary to participate in them. Another increasing problem is the **proliferation of less-rigorous online programs**, which have emerged in response to consumer demand for cheaper and more flexible options.²²

Promising Practices

Promising Practice #1: Increase access to **high-quality preparation programs**. Research has shown the quality of preparation programs can influence the success of principals, including impact on student achievement.²³ In a recent meta-study of the impacts of principal preparation and development, Learning Policy Institute (LPI) found high-quality principal learning programs have the following common elements:

- Rigorous recruitment;
- Close district-university partnerships;
- Cohort structure;
- A focus on important content, such as leading instruction, managing change, developing people, shaping a positive school culture, and meeting the needs of diverse learners; and
- Ability to apply what they learn through job-based internships, applied learning, and mentoring or coaching.^{24,25}

Similar to medical residencies, aspiring principal residencies are a critical element of high-quality programs because they provide opportunities to practice in real-life settings.²⁶ According to national standards for principal preparation, internships should provide a minimum of six months of concentrated (10-15 hours per week) clinical experience that include authentic leadership activities within a school setting and overseen by a trained mentor.²⁷

Promising Practice #2: Create **teacher leader career pathways** with a set of roles that provides incremental opportunities for increased leadership responsibility from the classroom to the principalship. Emerging research suggests new principals are better prepared when their districts provide them with job-embedded opportunities to develop leadership skills throughout their career trajectory, beginning as teacher leaders. For example, a U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) implementation study of the New Leaders program

²² Anderson & Reynolds (2015). [A policymaker's guide: Research-based policy for principal preparation program approval and licensure](#).

²³ The RAND Corporation (2019) [Preparing school leaders for success: Evaluation of New Leaders' Aspiring Principals Program 2012–2017](#); The RAND Corporation (2019) [Principal pipelines: A feasible, affordable, and effective way for districts to improve schools](#); Darling-Hammond et al (2007)

²⁴ Learning Policy Institute (2022). [Developing Effective Principals: What Kind of Learning Matters?](#)

²⁵ The Education Development Center has created a toolkit ([Quality Measures: Principal Preparation Program Self-Study Toolkit](#)) which further defines best practices and provides a self-study guide for programs to assess themselves.

²⁶ NYC Leadership Academy & American Institutes for Research (2016). [Ready to Lead: Designing Residencies for Better Principal Preparation](#); Cheney et al. (2010). [A New Approach to Principal Preparation: Innovative Programs Share Their Practices and Lessons Learned](#)

²⁷ [National Educational Leadership Preparation \(NELP\) Program Recognition Standards](#) (2018)

attributes stronger impact on student outcomes over time to a programmatic shift toward developing leaders earlier on the path to the principalship.²⁸

This strategy is said to more closely resemble leadership development in the private sector, where individuals more typically begin by managing one or two people, then a small team, and then a larger team. A preparation pathway might include a mentor teacher role, a part-time teacher leader role (e.g., department- or grade-level lead), a full-time teacher leader role (e.g., instructional coach), a junior school administrator role (e.g., assistant principal or dean), or a senior school administrator role (e.g., principal). Each of these roles should be thoughtfully designed to build upon the previous one. For instance, an individual in an assistant principal role would have opportunities to lead instruction and not to just enforce discipline and manage operations.

Teacher leader career pathways have also been successfully used to improve teacher recruitment and retention because opportunities for growth and promotion can be incentives to attract potential applicants and retain strong performers.

2 - In-Role Professional Development

Problems

Districts often do not invest in professional learning for school leaders. A common mindset historically is that principals already have the knowledge they need to be successful when they enter the position. Central offices therefore do not prioritize providing development opportunities. In some cases, such opportunities are nonexistent. In other cases, support is sporadic—depending on whether principals themselves take the initiative necessary to earmark school-level funds or request district funds (for example, to attend conferences or purchase coaching services). Sometimes districts simply invite principals to sit in on the same training provided to teachers, which tends not to be well aligned with the knowledge and skills they need at the leadership level.²⁹ Development opportunities for assistant principals are similarly nonexistent or sporadic.³⁰

Efforts to support principal learning tend to be group-based and low-quality. Districts have increasingly tried to utilize principal meetings to support their professional learning. These meetings are typically once per month for a half or full day. Inevitably, they become informational meetings used to disseminate information to principals or provide them with training on new policies or initiatives, leaving little or no time to utilize these meetings to focus on improving principals' leadership practice. In some cases, an external partner or speaker comes in to focus on a topic—such as English-language learners or social-emotional learning—but these experiences are often one-shot or workshop-based.

²⁸ New Leaders (2019). [Tailored: Strengthening leadership and delivering results through customizable, evidence-based programming](#)

²⁹ Clifford & Mason (2013). [Leadership for the Common Core: More than one thousand school principals respond](#)

³⁰ Ikemoto (2019). [Principal Learning and Supervision Guidebook](#)

Leadership development strategies fail to reflect lessons from the private sector, which emphasizes job-embedded opportunities, coaching, and peer networks. The 70:20:10 approach to Leadership Development (Rabin, 2013) is the basis of organizational learning strategy in an increasing number of large corporations, including Boeing, Sun Microsystems, Goldman Sachs, Nokia, Bank of America, Coca Cola, HP, Wal-Mart, American Express, and many others. The 70:20:10 Model suggests that development strategies should originate:

- 70% from challenging assignments incorporated into an individual’s roles and responsibilities;
- 20% from people – also referred to as “social learning,” including mentoring, communities of practice, and peer networks; and
- 10% from formal learning – also referred to as “structured learning,” including courses, books, websites, workshops, and conferences.

The 70:20:10 approach essentially flips the traditional school leader approach on its head, given that strategies typically focus on structured learning opportunities—such as professional conferences or monthly sessions where principals meet district-wide. While these strategies are still valuable, the 70-20-10 research suggests they should not be the primary strategy.

Promising Practices

Promising Practice #1: Providing opportunities for **job-embedded learning opportunities**, such as challenging assignments and feedback on practice via ongoing coaching. Principals should be given opportunities to practice skills needed for their current role, such as opportunities to participate in a districtwide community engagement initiative as a means to practice relationship building skills or serve on a district task force to practice strategic thinking skills. These opportunities should be coupled with regular opportunities to be observed—either directly or via artifacts—to receive explicit feedback on that practice. The feedback should be regular, systematic, constructive, and provided by experts.³¹

Promising Practice #2: One strategy for providing job-embedded learning opportunities is **redesigning the principal supervisor role**. In their revised role, supervisors focus on supporting principal growth and school improvement—as opposed to compliance monitoring. They spend the majority of their time in schools supporting principals in leading improvements in teaching and learning. They use a coaching stance to help principals set meaningful goals for improvement and develop the leadership skills that will help principals to achieve those goals. They help principals access expertise by connecting them to group professional development opportunities and/or resources such as books and tools available on the internet. They also provide clear and actionable feedback that helps principals understand how their school and leadership practice can improve.

Promising Practice #3: School leaders benefit when they have access to **mentors and peer communities of practice**.³² Research has documented that principals benefit from mentoring,

³¹ Ikemoto (2019). [Principal Learning and Supervision Guidebook](#)

³² Sciarappa & Mason (2014). [National principal mentoring: does it achieve its purpose?](#)

particularly in their first two to three years on the job. This research also underscores the importance of identifying quality mentors and training them.³³ More than half of states have enacted requirements for mentoring of new principals.³⁴

3 - Recruitment, Selection, and Succession Planning

Problems

Low pay disincentivizes interest in becoming a principal. In many systems, the pay bump for becoming a school leader does not adequately adjust for increased hours (many principals work over the summer), increased responsibilities, and decreased job security. Teachers at the top of the salary range may need to take a pay cut to become an assistant principal. The problem has grown worse as teachers have received pay increases, sometimes overall and sometimes as incentives for obtaining special certifications or working in particular schools. While these policies might help to improve teacher retention, they can also undermine school leader recruitment and retention.³⁵ A recent survey by Learning Policy Associates found that a larger percentage of principals planning to leave their schools were more likely to say they were not fairly compensated than principals planning to stay. Those planning to leave were also more likely to report student loan debt from principal preparation.³⁶

Education systems often fail to engage in succession planning. They might forecast school leader vacancies that are due to retirements but typically do not plan any further into the future. They rarely project how many principal positions will become vacant over the next two to five years, instead only focusing on the next school year. Districts also rarely analyze their pipelines to project general or specific needs (such as Bilingual, Title I experience, turnaround experience, or English-language learners) in relation to a local supply of qualified candidates available to apply for vacancies.

Recruitment efforts are typically limited to passive strategies such as posting an open position on their website. In some cases, they announce the posting in a newsletter, or maybe share the posting to a regional educational service agency. While individuals within the district might forward the posting to individuals and encourage them to apply, there is no organizational strategy and plan to make sure targeted recruiting happens.

Selection processes are inconsistent, inadequate, and unfair. While multiple stakeholders might be involved, they often lack clear and commonly understood selection criteria. As a result, stakeholders involved in the process apply their own criteria, which may or may not be aligned with evidence-based characteristics of effective leadership. Even when districts adopt research-based criteria for the selection of principals, they often do not have specific rubrics or selection

³³ The Wallace Foundation (2007). [Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons for the Field](#)

³⁴ The Wallace Foundation (2012). [The making of the principal: Five lessons in leadership](#)

³⁵ Doyle & Locke (2014). [Lacking leaders: The challenges of principal recruitment, selection, and placement](#)

³⁶ Levin, Scott, Yang, Leung & Bradley (2020). [Supporting a Strong, Table Principal Workforce: What Matters and What Can Be Done](#)

tools that allow the selection committee to consistently assess for those criteria.³⁷ Without transparency and clearly defined processes, selection can be based on “who you know.”

Promising Practices

Promising Practice #1: Some studies suggest **increased salaries** may attract more qualified candidates to the profession in general and to hard-to-staff schools in particular.³⁸ Some systems have also used compensation **bonuses** to attract talent to high-needs schools.³⁹ LPI Institute suggests the use of student loan forgiveness or housing supports as other forms of compensation that might be considered for school principals¹⁴.

Promising Practice #2: The district deliberately pursues **strategies for outreach**. The district plans and executes strategies for spreading the word about vacancies to a wide audience and for encouraging high-potential candidates to apply. The district leverages internal and external networks to advertise vacancies. On an ongoing basis, the district develops and maintains professional networks that may serve as sources for candidates or provide recommendations of candidates—particularly for candidates that may serve well in hard-to-staff areas. The district notifies people in these networks when vacancies are posted. Open positions are formally advertised through professional associations, institutes of higher education, social media, and internet-based employment services. The district partners with other organizations who can help it advertise vacancies to the populations they want to recruit.

Promising Practice #3: **Selection processes are transparent, rigorous, and fair**. Each step of the process is clearly defined and transparent. Candidates are required to demonstrate qualifications via a variety of authentic performance assessments, such as scenarios, presentations, writing prompts, portfolios, and/or interviews.⁴⁰

Promising Practice #4: Districts engage in **succession planning** by systematically reviewing individual talent and making a plan for backfilling individual roles by drawing on internal talent. Similar to the private sector, they have processes and tools to analyze their talent pool and identify specific individuals who can be cultivated for future positions. For example, in top corporations, CEOs and senior leaders have detailed conversations about each individual in their talent pool and discuss their individual strengths and gaps.⁴¹ They discuss possibilities for future promotions (considering the individual’s interests, preference, and skills), and they collaborate to identify upcoming roles and assignments that could be given to grow those individuals. In the private sector, system leaders do talent management themselves. In a study of 20 international companies generating more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, CEOs reported spending at least a fifth of their time on talent management strategies.⁴²

³⁷ Doyle & Locke (2014). [Lacking leaders: The challenges of principal recruitment, selection, and placement](#)

³⁸ Roza et al. (2003); Mitgang (2003); Papa (2007); Pijanowski & Brady (2009)

³⁹ George W. Bush Institute (2020). [Principal Talent Management Framework](#)

⁴⁰ Ikemoto (2019) [Principal Recruitment and Selection Guidebook](#)

⁴¹ Curtis, R.E. (2010) “Managing Human Capital to Improve Student Achievement.” In Curtis, R.E. and J. Wurtzel, Eds. Teaching Talent: A Visionary Framework for Human Capital in Education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

⁴² Economist Intelligence Unit (2006) [The CEO’s role in talent management: How top executives from ten countries are nurturing the leaders of tomorrow.](#)

Promising Practice #3: Education systems use **leader tracking systems** to collect data on current and potential future school leaders. These systems typically include data such as preparation program, degree/certification/license, positions, school characteristics (Title I, bilingual, etc.). This data can be used for planning and for matching candidates to schools.⁴³

4 - Working Environment

Problems

District bureaucracy that creates more work for principals. Too often, district bureaucracies hinder rather than enable the efforts of school leaders. For example, principals can find themselves having to navigate complex bureaucratic approval processes for basic services or having to attend district-mandated meetings on topics tangential to their core jobs. Another problem is when central office staff see their roles as monitoring compliance rather than as providing tools and support or when they see the central office priorities as more important than campus priorities.⁴⁴ According to a 2020 study, the most influential reasons principals were planning to leave were heavy workload (63%) and an unresponsive, unsupportive district (51%).⁴⁵

Lack of autonomy (or autonomy without support). Principals are often required to implement practices and policies that were designed without their input, and which may not advance, or may even hinder, their own school-level goals. Lack of autonomy—particularly around dismissal of poorly performing staff—is one of the leading reasons principals cite for leaving the profession.⁴⁶ Autonomy without sufficient tools, processes, and support can actually be detrimental to good decision-making. For example, a study of a New York City empowerment structure, which gave principals increased autonomy in a number of areas, found that while this empowerment structure allowed some principals to turn around failing schools, some principals—particularly new and inexperienced ones—struggled with the lack of guidance and support that accompanied increased independence.⁴⁷

Promising Practices

Promising Practice #1: Some school districts, however, have successfully contributed to improved school practices and student outcomes by **transforming the culture and work of central office employees**.⁴⁸ *Drawing on lessons from total quality management, several districts have created a culture of customer service and reorganized their central offices to focus*

⁴³ Anderson, Turnbull & Arcaira (2017). [Leader tracking systems: Turning data into information for school leadership](#)

⁴⁴ Honig (2012). [District Central Office Leadership as Teaching: How Central Office Administrators Support Principals' Development as Instructional Leaders](#).

⁴⁵ NASSP & Learning Policy Institute (2020). [Supporting a Strong, Stable Principal Workforce: What Matters and What Can Be Done](#)

⁴⁶ NASSP & Learning Policy Institute (2020). [Supporting a Strong, Stable Principal Workforce: What Matters and What Can Be Done](#)

⁴⁷ Hemphill & Neuer (2010). [Managing by the numbers: Empowerment and accountability in New York City's schools](#).

⁴⁸ Southern Regional Education Board (2009). [The district leadership challenge: Empowering principals to improve teaching and learning](#)

on their clients: students. These districts provide cohesive tools, guidance, and support to schools, including supports for principals to utilize decision-making authority effectively. They develop true partnerships with school principals in order to support schools in ensuring the success of all their students.⁴⁹ Central offices can also create conditions that enable principals to provide equity-focused instructional leadership.⁵⁰

Promising Practice #2: Providing balanced autonomy in which principals have discretion to meet the needs of their schools balanced with the necessary tools, support, and oversight.⁵¹ Many leadership studies have found school effectiveness improves when principals have autonomy over decision-making.⁵² This autonomy is more likely to create value for students when districts help school leaders to exercise their autonomy. For example, in a study by The New Teacher Project (2008), the district central office provided important tools and processes to enable schools to make good decisions when New York City decentralized hiring to schools. Central offices could also do more to collect principal input to inform districtwide decisions, be aware of how policies are affected by varying school contexts, and be responsive to principal and school needs.⁵³

Summary

Challenges to developing and supporting school leadership have been widely documented. At the same time, several strategies have been shown to combat these challenges. The following chapter outlines findings from interviews of stakeholders in New Mexico, highlighting the particular challenges facing the state as well as strengths from which to build. The next chapter provides a menu of policy recommendations that could be used at the state level to create or encourage the promising practices outlined in this chapter.

⁴⁹ Ikemoto, G. (2021). [Prioritizing Principals Guidebook: Central Office Practices that Support School Leaders](#)

⁵⁰ Honig, M., & Rainey, L. (2020). [District systems to support equitable and high-quality teaching and learning](#)

⁵¹ George W. Bush Institute and New Leaders (2010) [Great Principals at Scale](#)

⁵² Adamowski, Therriault & Caranna (2007). [The Autonomy Gap: Barriers to Effective School Leadership](#); Augustine et al. (2009). [Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems](#); Barber et al. (2010). [Capturing the Leadership Premium: How the World's Top School Systems are Building Leadership Capacity for the Future](#)

⁵³ NASSP & Learning Policy Institute (2020). [Supporting a Strong, Stable Principal Workforce: What Matters and What Can Be Done](#)



This chapter provides some basic background about the New Mexico context, including characteristics of schools served by school leaders in New Mexico and a summary of the *Martinez/Yazzie* court ruling. The chapter also provides important considerations about the political context and findings about the most pressing challenges to developing and supporting school leaders in New Mexico. It also highlights promising practices and programs that are strengths from which future policies can build.

Findings presented in this chapter are themes based on a series of interviews with stakeholders in New Mexico. We interviewed a total of 23 individuals, including leaders from business, philanthropy, the Legislature, PED, higher education, professional associations, charter organizations, and advocacy organizations. We also talked with principals, superintendents, and a school board member. We reviewed organization websites, news articles, and key documents. We did not fact-check the information provided in interviews, which means some information may be inaccurate or not representative of a broader set of perspectives.

Background

Characteristics of Schools

To understand the needs of New Mexico, it is important to understand that districts are mostly rural (with one urban district), students are diverse, and schools are historically underperforming.

Mostly rural with one urban district. New Mexico has 840 schools that serve approximately 331,636 students. The schools are governed by 91 districts and 51 state-authorized charters.⁵⁴ Charter schools enroll approximately 7% of New Mexico’s public school students. Over a fourth of students (27%) attend the largest district, Albuquerque Public Schools, and over half of students (52%) attend rural schools.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ New Mexico Public Education Department accessed on August 21, 2022 at <https://newmexicoschools.com/>.

⁵⁵ Learning Policy Institute (2020). [Improving Education the New Mexico Way: An Evidence-Based Approach](#)

Diverse students. Students attending public schools in New Mexico are 73% low-income, 77% students of color, 62% Hispanic, 16% English learners, 10% Native American, and 15% students identified as having disabilities.⁵⁶

Historically underperforming. New Mexico ranks 50 in the U.S. News and World Report rankings of states.⁵⁷ A major court decision (described below) has documented that the education system has been systematically inadequate and inequitable.⁵⁸

Martinez-Yazzie Court Ruling

On July 20, 2018, Judge Sara Singleton ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the consolidated *Yazzie* and *Martinez* lawsuits. The lawsuit found the state of New Mexico had failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate, sufficient education to at-risk students (i.e., socioeconomically disadvantaged children, English learners, Native American students, and children with disabilities). More specifically,

- *“The state had failed to provide at-risk students with programs and services necessary to make them college- or career-ready;*
- *The funding provided has not been sufficient for all school districts to provide the programs and services required by the New Mexico Constitution; and*
- *Public Education Department (PED) has failed to meet its supervisory and audit functions to assure school districts are spending money provided to them to most efficiently achieve the needs of providing at-risk students with the programs and services needed for them to obtain an adequate education.”*⁵⁹

The ruling ordered the state to increase funding, explicitly stating that redistributing the current appropriations would be insufficient. In May 2022, the New Mexico PED released a discussion draft of an action plan to address the *Martinez/Yazzie* order. The plan outlines strategies to address outcome targets for specific populations as well as wide-ranging strategies intended to improve education for all students, such as early childhood education; extended learning programs; reading programs; college and career readiness; technology; and counselors, social workers, and other non-instructional staff.⁶⁰ The plan does not currently address school leadership.

⁵⁶ New Mexico Public Education Department website accessed on August 21, 2022 at <https://newmexicoschools.com/>.

⁵⁷ US News and World Report website accessed on August 21, 2022 at <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/new-mexico>.

⁵⁸ Legislative Education Study Committee (2018). [Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico: July 20, 2018 Decision and Order](#)

⁵⁹ Legislative Education Study Committee (2018). [Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico: July 20, 2018 Decision and Order](#)

⁶⁰ Public Education Department (2022). [Discussion Draft Action Plan: Decisions about Martinez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico](#).

THE OPPORTUNITY: FUNDING AND MOMENTUM

New Mexico has dramatically increased funding for education, resulting in significant funds potentially available for investment in school leadership. State revenues have increased significantly, largely due to strong oil and gas production and prices. From FY18 to FY22, New Mexico increased funding for public education by \$750 million (28%) and school districts are receiving an additional \$1.4 billion over three years from the American Rescue Plan (and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds).⁶¹

- *“The good news is that we have the money. We have more money than we know what to do with.”*
- *“I heard a news report about our revenue projections going into Fiscal Year 24. And they are big. It won’t last because it’s tied to oil and gas revenue. But right now, we have significant resources and we need to find the most effective way to spend them. I think everyone is starting to agree that school leadership is a good investment. But, how do we do that in a way that ultimately makes a difference for student success?”*

All interview respondents indicated they are seeing an increased interest among critical stakeholder groups to focus on improving school leaders. The interest has been voiced by The Chamber, the Legislative Finance Committee, the Legislative Education Study Committee, key legislators, the Public Education Department, multiple superintendents (including Albuquerque Public Schools), and at least one key philanthropic organization.

- *“On this topic, in particular, there’s potentially really low-hanging fruit that it’s a priority at the staff level for us [in our legislative committee], and the Secretary of Education, who the Governor really looks to for her policy advice. And so having all three of those things aligned, is a significant amount of momentum going into this next session to do something big. The question for my staff is what’s big? And what’s doable? And what would actually make a difference?”*
- *An activity report memo for the week ending August 19, 2022 from the Legislative Education Study Committee cited research showing that principal retention and student achievement benefit from quality principal preparation.*

Political Challenges

While New Mexico has several similarities to other states, there are a few political challenges that are particularly relevant in New Mexico, especially as it relates to school leadership. They include: balancing needs of rural districts with one large urban district, distrust of outsiders, distrust of higher education, and concerns about the Public Education Department.

Balancing rural versus urban needs

As mentioned previously, New Mexico has one very large district, but the majority of districts are small or very small, averaging only 500 students (according to an interviewee). Smaller districts may have only one or two principals, and the principal may also be the superintendent.

⁶¹ Public Education Department (2021). [Update about development of the Yazzie/Martinez Education Plan](#).

- *“We’re a rural state. Most of our 80 plus districts are pretty tiny. Albuquerque is obviously sort of the monster at serving 80,000 plus kids, and then our other large districts aren’t really that big. So, if you are going to improve the state, you have to improve Albuquerque. But politically, you have to treat all 88 districts the same. So that’s just sort of the challenge.”*

This context creates difficulties in crafting state policies that can work in both types of districts. One solution is to couple state guidance with support and local autonomy. But in order for local autonomy to work, school boards and district leaders need professional knowledge and skill to use their resources well. Another solution is to build regional capacity through Cooperative Educational Services (CES) to support schools and districts in using autonomy. CES is a purchasing cooperative that helps districts solicit, evaluate, contract, and manage vendors.⁶² CES also offers professional services including leadership development programs, but interviewees reported quite a bit of variability in the knowledge and experience of individuals employed by CES (see examples below). More information should be gathered to determine whether CES could be more effectively used to help balance needs across different-sized districts in New Mexico.

Distrust of outsiders

Many respondents noted that New Mexico has a history of rejecting the possibility that lessons from other places could be relevant in New Mexico. One respondent cited a famous quote from Governor Lew Wallace from over 100 years ago, “All calculations based on our experiences elsewhere fail in New Mexico.” In the words of other respondents,

- *“In New Mexico, we do tend to be resistant to outside actors, and reluctant to trust anything that’s not homegrown.”*
- *“Yeah, New Mexico is pretty suspicious of outsiders.”*

Given this strong tradition, many respondents said it would not work to bring external organizations or models into New Mexico. That said, they also felt a need to change this culture because it has prevented professionals from keeping up with research and best practices, which has left New Mexico behind in terms of the quality of educational practices.

- *“When I got to New Mexico, everything that I was seeing in this district was counter to the research and counter to what we’ve seen districts do when they have been successful in improving student outcomes. And what scared me the most is that they don’t even know what they don’t know.”*
- *“It’s like if you had a doctor who got his medical degree like 30 years ago and then never paid attention to everything the medical field has learned since then. Would you want someone like that as your doctor? Well, that’s happening here at every level of the system [teachers, school leaders, district leaders, PED, associations, etc.]”*

⁶² For more information, see the CES [website](#).

- *“We've been doing education pretty poorly for a pretty long time. And I think we need to have some humility to be able to say, ‘Let's look outside the bounds of our state and look at what's truly working and is backed by data.’”*

SUCCESS STORIES: TAPPING EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

Respondents noted several exceptions where New Mexico has had more success in tapping external expertise:

- 1) Technical assistance for developing teacher residencies was provided by Bank Street College (specifically by an individual, Karen DeMoss, who is a New Mexico native but also an expert on teacher residency design via her work with Bank Street).
 - *“We have had problems when we highlight the good work being done at UNM because I guarantee you there'll be someone at Western New Mexico University who will say, ‘Well, of course, that's UNM, they get all the special treatment, you know.’ So there's internal hostility also. So it was helpful when Thornburg made a grant to bring in Karen DeMoss from Bank Street. In some ways, she's an outsider, but she can also talk about how much she loves green chile or whatever. Sometimes I think you're better off just having like a neutral outsider who comes in and says, ‘I don't have a horse in this race, but I've seen what works in other places, and I'm here to help.’”*
- 2) While New Mexico does not have any of the national charter organizations (such as KIPP or Aspire), it has drawn on research and knowledge of best practices to produce some very successful home-grown charter schools.
 - *“We are so resistant to national models, so we don't have any CMOs [Charter Management Organizations]. Every charter is essentially home-grown. It has worked well to have that model of choice and community engagement that charters bring but then a focus on outcomes. Some charters are good and some are bad, but I think that's an example of how it worked in this context.”*
- 3) University of New Mexico built its ALL program (see description below) based on research from the Wallace Foundation and the University Council of Education Administration—a national association of leadership preparation providers that provides tools and best practices.
 - *“The initial work, design of the ALL program was built on the information at the time that was coming from the work that Wallace was doing.”*

Distrust of Higher Education

Several respondents expressed deep frustration with higher education institutions and their **lack of willingness to improve**. Several interviewees reported that universities had failed to teach teachers the science of reading in their preparation programs, which meant that districts and states had to remediate for that lack of knowledge.

- *“We started initially by talking to the educator preparation programs about the importance of teaching science of learning because none of them were using structured literacy in their programs, or science of reading. And then we had superintendents come and visit with the educator prep programs and say, ‘This is ridiculous, I have to provide significant professional development to teachers right out of school. They should have been taught this stuff.’ But the programs still didn’t change. And so now the legislators are holding the deans and directors accountable for educator prep.”*

As a result, several respondents were skeptical about whether school leader preparation programs would be willing to improve without strict accountability measures. One notable exception is the ALL program that is a partnership between the University of Mexico and Albuquerque Public Schools (described in more detail below).

Concerns about the Public Education Department

Many respondents have concerns about the political stability, political will, and capacity of the Public Education Department to effectively play the role of creating rules for education programs that are rooted in best practices and holding the system accountable to adhering to them. While most seem to respect and speak highly of the current PED cabinet secretary, several respondents noted that PED has had four cabinet secretaries in four years and are concerned that turnover – at all levels of the department – will continue. Concerns remain about the past and future stability of the agency.

- *“The consistency has not been there. So even though one leader may feel strongly about a certain initiative or certain policies that they want to push, a lot of the frontline staff in the department feel like they can just weather the next Secretary. And they don't really find a lot of continuity between each.”*

Some respondents are wary of providing the PED with too much authority because of a perceived **lack of knowledge, skill, and bandwidth**. The *Martinez/Yazzie* court decision cited evidence that PED had failed to carry out its supervisory and audit functions to assure efficient use of funds, and respondents were skeptical about whether PED has (or will have) the capacity to carry out this function. While many state departments of education are responsible for designing and implementing accountability systems, several respondents worried about whether New Mexico’s PED has the knowledge and expertise to do this well (or the inclination to seek expertise when they don’t have it). For example, multiple respondents worried that PED would use additional funding for school leadership to simply pay for school leaders to attend teacher training (an approach that is not aligned with best practice).

Respondents also voiced concern about **political will**. For example, the state had to backtrack requirements for teacher residencies because some universities did not have the capacity to create quality residencies (see more below). This led to political pushback on the rigor of the criteria.

- *“When teacher residencies were originally funded with a \$1 million appropriation, only one college was eligible because of the requirements. And so then it became viewed*

like, 'well, this is just favoritism to UNM' so changes had to be made so other institutions could get the money."

And respondents worried about whether the state has the political will to maintain quality standards for any new funded programs. For example, one respondent was skeptical of whether New Mexico could use an approach from Illinois in which the Legislature funded a statewide mentoring program for early career principals but also restricted use of funds for state-approved mentoring programs that had demonstrated alignment with research-based best practices.

- *"I'm not sure if that would work. If programs didn't get approved, they would complain. And it's really probably sad to say, but there is a lot of nepotism in the state of New Mexico because of our sheer size. It's hard to hold the line when everyone knows everyone."*

Several respondents wondered whether there are strategies to bypass PED either by funding school leaders directly or by creating a new organization (such as Tennessee SCORE) or coalition that could lead the work with more stability, political will, and ability to attract and retain knowledgeable and talented staff.⁶³

One notable exception is a highly respected principal training program run within PED by the Priority Schools Bureau (described below).

Challenges to Developing and Supporting School Leaders in New Mexico

Poor working conditions deter interest and undermine effectiveness

While not everyone agrees there is a school leader shortage, several people do strongly believe the leadership bench is too shallow and includes many people who are not yet ready for the role despite completing a preparation program (see challenges with pre-service preparation below). They say talented educators are less and less interested in becoming a principal because:

- **The position has become more complex**, especially after the pandemic.
 - *"I think the other is just too much on their plates. And that was true, even prior to the pandemic. But during the pandemic, principals were doing a lot of the work on contact tracing, and reporting and communication and all of that, which was just like a whole other thing added to principals' plates."*
 - *"We know that teachers are feeling stressed and leaving the profession. I think there is just a poor morale overall that principals are trying to manage."*
- **Boards are difficult**. Similar to national trends, boards are becoming more contentious, especially as they debate controversial pandemic safety protocols. Increasingly, people seek board positions because they disagree with the superintendent or principal and are seeking authority to overturn school leader decisions or even to oust them entirely. In

⁶³ For more information about Tennessee SCORE, see this [website](#).

districts where this is occurring, it has created significant stress that deters potential candidates from wanting the role.

- *“Parental pushback is at an all-time high. I've seen more parents who are disgruntled with a decision and feel like it is ok for them to come in and be aggressively challenging. They rail in board meetings as an example. And in that case, the job becomes no fun, right? I mean, if you can't see momentum, and you can't see progress, and you can't be supported by your board, or by your community, then you will leave and go someplace else, because you don't need that in your life.”*
- **Funding has been inadequate and inequitable.** As the *Martinez/Yazzie* lawsuit has documented, schools (and principals) have not had enough resources to meet the goals and expectations set for them, which can be demoralizing. Even though there was a weighted formula to allocate more money toward schools with more needs, the factor was determined to be too low. The factor was recently increased, ostensibly sending more resources to schools. But even with more money from the state, APS, for example, does not use site-based budgeting to allocate funding to schools based on need.
 - *“We split staffing resources according to enrollment, not need. So, if one school has 20 kids that need a counselor and the school across town has 3 kids that need a counselor, those two schools split a councilor 50/50 even though one school has a greater need and it probably should be more like a 70/30 split.”*
- **School leaders lack autonomy to make good decisions about resources.** Schools often lack autonomy over important decisions such as programming, curriculum, and staffing decisions. As a result, they are required to implement policies and practices that are not aligned with their school needs. At the same time, some respondents questioned whether principals have the knowledge of best practices to make good decisions about how to use their funding.
 - *“If a school is having trouble with reading scores, I would want to see them maybe hire more reading specialists rather than hiring a gardening teacher, for example, which is kind of what happens. There is just too much of a ‘let a million flowers bloom’ approach, which is part of the problem also.”*
- **Position is not well respected.** Especially in light of the *Martinez/Yazzie* lawsuit, there has been a lot of press about how poorly the education system is performing. Since the system is not respected, it is hard for individuals to feel proud about being a leader in that system.
 - *“We're doing plenty of good things in our system. There's plenty of good people that are trying to do their best. But we haven't done a good job getting the word out about some of the good things that they do.”*

Compensation structures create disincentives

The majority of respondents referenced compensation as a particular problem in New Mexico. In particular, the compensation structures actually create disincentives for people to move from teacher to principal positions. The preparation program interviewees said this was their number one challenge to recruiting more people into their programs.

- **Overall pay is too low compared to what teachers make.** As of FY23, teacher salary minimums were increased to \$50,000 for level one teachers, \$60,000 for level two, and \$70,000 for level three.⁶⁴ School principal salaries are determined by a “responsibility factor” of 1.15 for elementary schools and 1.6 for high schools. So, a teacher who just started at level three could go from making \$70,000 to \$80,500 by becoming an elementary principal. In APS, a teacher would have a daily rate of \$380 (based on 184 days) and a principal would have a daily rate of \$381 (based on 211 days).⁶⁵ While the state factor might address the additional days of work, it does not compensate for the additional levels of responsibility.
 - *“I think our overall principal pay probably needs to be examined, and it's probably too low.”*
 - *“Who would want to be a principal when they basically do not make any more than a teacher after you account for the extra days they have to work?”*
- **Pay does not appropriately account for size of school.** The amount of responsibility and nature of the job looks quite different depending on the size of the school.
 - *“There are some elementary schools with less than 100 kids and others that are PreK to 8 with 1500 kids, almost as big as our high schools. And they would be on the same salary schedule.”*
- **Pay does not adequately incentivize interest in hard-to-staff schools.** Respondents reported a lack of candidates to lead certain types of schools, such as those that serve students with greater needs and those that are located in remote locations. They struggle to recruit applicants when principals can make the same amount of money in an “easier” and/or better-located school.
- **The original pay scales were determined politically.** The state did not conduct a compensation study (like businesses typically would to set salary bands) or carefully consider the factors that should be used in the formula.
 - *“We kind of took an easy route out when we threw the numbers out. And those are the ones that stuck politically. Everybody thinks it's a great science, but it's a science of politics, right? The goal was to try to get the ball rolling, but now it's time to revisit that responsibility factor.”*

Lack of quality pre-service programs

New Mexico faces many of the same challenges occurring nationally. Respondents report that school leaders are not graduating ready to lead schools. They cited the following problems:

- Preparation programs, especially those in higher education, are **failing to teach the most important knowledge and skills**. New Mexico does not require programs to be aligned to the most recent national standards, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. Given the distrust of higher education institutions, respondents

⁶⁴ Public Education Department (2022). [Discussion Draft Action Plan: Decisions about Martinez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico.](#)

⁶⁵ See traditional staff work schools for APS accessed at <https://www.aps.edu/human-resources/employee-work-schedules/traditional-work-schedules> on August 27, 2022.

were skeptical that higher education would make improvements without outside pressure.

- *“There’s research around what skills and competencies effective principals actually need, but that’s not what we are teaching... We’re then creating cohorts of leaders who aren’t prepared for the role.”*
- Programs **lack full-semester internships** or other opportunities for practice in real-life settings. While some programs require internships of 180 hours (approximately one month), interviewees reported that these internships vary in quality and can sometimes be limited to shadowing a principal instead of practicing leadership. Respondents also reported that preparation programs are being “watered down” in response to market demand from program candidates that are looking for easier and shorter pathways to licensure. While the University of Mexico has a rigorous, residency-based program, it has more people enrolled in its fully online program. These “lighter” programs are appealing to candidates, but do not align to best practices for developing leadership skills.
 - *“What’s happened in New Mexico is that cooperative educational services have worked together with rural superintendents to develop an alternative pathway to licensure, which is much different than a university program. I don’t like to speak disparagingly of it, but it’s really a quick, cheap way to get people into licensed administrator positions. I think a lot of our charter schools have chosen this path as well, because it’s quicker. But graduates have told me they don’t feel those programs prepared them well.”*
 - *“The research is pretty clear about a rigorous program being practice-based, including cohorts, having a residency (or some practice-based internship component), but those programs take time and energy and are expensive. And so individuals are being drawn to online programs because they are a smaller number of hours and don’t include an internship that makes them leave their classroom for some period of time. [Their perspective is] ‘I can do it when I want on the weekends or whenever because that’s more convenient for me. And it’s less expensive. And so I’d rather go that route.’ But then we’re finding lots of people doing the light route, and then not really feeling prepared when they get into the role.”*
- Strong programs struggle with a **lack of qualified and interested applicants**. For example, one organization has a school leader fellowship for assistant principals, and the graduates have had impressive results. But the program only has one or two fellows. The ALL program (described in the text box below) also struggles with recruitment.
 - *“I would admit as many as we could, but it’s usually one to two. Our biggest barrier used to be money. It’s not money anymore. It’s people. We refuse to lower our standards here and... there’s no pipeline of, you know, who’s the awesome teacher who’s 28? Because we could do a lot more. And the demand is huge. We just don’t have the people who are ready for it.”*

AREA OF STRENGTH: ALLIANCE FOR LEADERSHIP LEARNING

The Alliance for Leadership Learning (ALL) program is a partnership between the University of Mexico and Albuquerque Public Schools. It is a one-year program that involves six semester hours in the fall, nine semester hours in the spring, and six semester hours in the summer. The spring semester includes a sabbatical when they are released from their teaching assignment for a semester-long internship. Classes are co-taught with APS and typically meet twice a week for two hours face-to-face at the school of the principal who is co-teaching. Graduates are mentored during their first year of the principalship.

Original funding for the program came from a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education. At the end of the grant, APS began using Title II funding to pay 50% of the tuition for participants and to pay substitute costs to cover program participants' classrooms while they participate in a semester-long internship. APS decided to make this investment because it was finding that graduates from the program were far more prepared to move into the principalship. 87% of the 150 graduates are still in leadership positions.

The program has funding for up to 12 participants, but it has struggled with recruitment given declining interest in the principalship due to the pandemic and compensation disincentives (see above). With additional funding, the program could be expanded to partner with additional districts to serve a broader set of program participants.

Limited opportunities for quality in-role professional development

In general, there are very few opportunities for professional development for school leaders already in-role. The one exception is a set of programs provided by the Priority Schools Bureau (see details below). Almost all interview respondents had heard positive reports about that work.

- *"We have several groups that are providing statewide conferences for superintendents and other leaders above the principal level, but they all seem like sort of one-stop shops, where you go for a weekend, you may learn a few things, you network with a lot of colleagues, but not sure if it translates into better retention or stronger understanding of how to affect school performance."*
- *"There is a Superintendent Institute run by Stan Rounds that provides mentoring to new superintendents, but nothing like that for principals."*

Cooperative Education Services (CES) provides a couple of professional development programs for principals, including the First Year Principals Academy (FYPA) and the Leadership Series.⁶⁶ While some people reported that the training provided by Cooperative Education Services is better (more hands-on and useful) than many higher education courses required by master's degree programs, multiple respondents also thought the CES programs lack quality control.

⁶⁶ See the CES leadership development [website](#) for more information.

- *“I did participate in a program through cooperative educational services, but it was not particularly impactful. We had leaders that were not super well trained for some of those sessions. Our instructor had worked as maybe an assistant sup and was a principal at one of the larger, comprehensive high schools in the state. But he didn’t really know much about the session topic, which was kind of bizarre.”*

Since most districts are small, they do not offer professional development for school leaders.

- *“APS is making a significant investment in school leadership and has dedicated a big chunk of the federal relief money to school leadership. I wish it was strategic. And it’s not. The board just approved big contracts for technical assistance providers who provide PD for school leaders. And it was basically this laundry list of providers. And so like principals could pick whatever they want for their PD. So, I don’t think that’s a very efficient use of money or a strategic approach.”*

AREA OF STRENGTH: PRIORITY SCHOOLS BUREAU LEADERSHIP SERIES

The Priority Schools Bureau (PSB) offers a series of development programs targeted toward school leaders that are highly regarded by program graduates. The original flagship program, Principals Pursuing Excellence (which was rebranded after the pandemic gave new meaning to the acronym PPE), was designed to serve leaders of low-performing schools that had been designated priorities by PED. It was modeled after a highly regarded school turnaround program at the University of Virginia, which is a joint partnership of the business and education schools.⁶⁷

The programs in this series currently include:

- RISE (Resilience, Instruction, Support, Excellence), which is an updated version of the flagship program that has since been opened to all principals in the state (not just priority schools). Participants apply and their competencies are assessed via a 360 survey. The program is grounded in a 90-day plan and each participant has a coach (typically a program graduate) who works with them individually based on their competency assessment.
- THRIVE is a program specifically focused on developing instructional leadership skills to lead a cycle of observation, feedback and coaching. It currently services 3 cohorts across the state.
- LEAD is in its pilot year and is focused on providing support to first year principals, and focused on coaching/mentoring, instructional infrastructure, data-driven instruction, effective school culture, and the use of feedback.⁶⁸

Program participants are very positive about the program. They especially appreciate the networking, peer mentoring, and coaching.

- *“I think the Priority Schools Bureau has a program that has been strong and has*

⁶⁷ See UVA’s Partnership for Leaders in Education [website](#) for more information.

⁶⁸ See the PSB’s [website](#) for more information.

remained very strong. I have participated as a mentee and a mentor. All of the work that they do is really rooted in the work from the University of Virginia around school turnaround and what the best schools in the country are doing.”

The program has faced past criticisms for being too selective. It was originally created for priority schools with Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESSA) funding sources that were intended to be used for the priority schools that PSB serves. The program also included a selective application process because the peer learning component benefited from cohorts of leaders who were invested in their learning and supporting the learning of others. But concerns were raised because applicants who were not being selected were being “left behind” because the state did not have other strong professional development opportunities for them. Now any school in the state is allowed to apply.

Summary

All of the interviewees were in agreement that school leadership is an important lever that should be addressed to help improve schools and student success. In the words of Senate Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart, who was interviewed as part of this project, *“I can tell you a good principal is worth their weight in gold. They make everything work. And when you have a principal that is not good, teachers leave.”*

Our research of the New Mexico context reveals that New Mexico is dealing with many of the same challenges to developing and supporting school leaders nationally, such as:

- Increasing difficulty of the principal role;
- Pre-service programs that are inadequate;
- Limited opportunities for in-role development; and
- Challenging working environments.

At the same time, New Mexico also has a unique opportunity presented by the *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling to invest more heavily in school leadership through a research-based and strategically comprehensive way. New Mexico also has several promising programs that present strengths from which to build.



This chapter outlines an initial set of policy options – a broad menu, so to speak - for developing and supporting school leadership statewide in New Mexico. We convened focus groups of the stakeholders originally consulted in interviews for chapter 2. Based on their feedback, we revised and narrowed these options into a smaller set of “highest-impact” policy recommendations outlined in Chapter 4.

The policy options are grouped into four areas:

- 1) **Pre-service preparation;**
- 2) **In-role professional development;**
- 3) **Working conditions;** and
- 4) **Infrastructure investments.**

The proposed options are by no means exhaustive. We chose to highlight these particular options because they:

- Align to best practices, as described in Chapter 1;
- Address specific challenges faced by New Mexico, as described in Chapter 2;
- Are supported by relevant stakeholders (i.e., options were not recommended if they were likely to face significant resistance across stakeholders);
- Can build from existing programs or strategies currently in place in New Mexico; and
- Are feasible in a state with limited capacity to support and monitor implementation and outcomes.

1. Pre-Service Preparation

Our interviews revealed a need for programs that can identify and groom future leaders with training and support that is high quality and tightly aligned to the job responsibilities. Some strategies to address this include:

1a - Paid residency for aspiring school leaders

High-quality programs have field-based internships that enable candidates to apply leadership knowledge and skills under the guidance of an expert practitioner. Current national educational leadership preparation standards (used for national accreditation) require a sustained internship experience, defined as a six-month, concentrated internship that includes authentic leadership

opportunities within a school setting.⁶⁹ Across all of our interviews, we heard only favorable responses to the recommendation for the state to fund an internship for all aspiring principals in the state. Responses were favorable due to the widespread belief that the best way to learn how to be a school leader is by practicing the work. The recent implementation of New Mexico's Teacher Residency Model for teacher candidates was mentioned as a model policy for NM to follow.

We recommend PED establish research-based criteria for program approval and oversee a process through which programs are approved to serve as a residency site. Based on challenges we learned with implementing New Mexico's Teacher Residency Model, we recommend awarding one-year planning grants with technical assistance that allow qualifying institutions to plan and develop their capacity for offering the year-long residency model. In the event that not enough in-state organizations meet the criteria, out of state organizations that meet the criteria should be allowed to operate their programs in New Mexico. The feasibility and success of this policy option depends on: 1) availability and capacity of programs to meet research-based criteria; 2) availability of quality mentor principals with whom residents can be placed; and 3) availability of substitute teachers to backfill candidates' teaching responsibilities.

1b - Grant funding to encourage Grow Your Own leader programs

Grow Your Own (GYO) is a teacher preparation strategy focused on developing and retaining teachers from the local community. GYO is intended to address teacher shortages and diversify the teacher pipeline by encouraging those who might otherwise not consider or be able to afford teacher training programs. More than half of states have GYO focused policies.⁷⁰ A collective of New Mexico Foundations is also pursuing this promising strategy by investing nearly \$1 million in grants to support The Golden Apple Scholars program.

The school leadership pipeline can similarly benefit from Grow Your Own programs that proactively encourage teachers to enter the leader pipeline and provide logistically and financially feasible programs. Similar to teacher GYO programs, school leader GYO programs can also help to diversify the workforce. These programs are typically created and run by large school districts (who have the capacity to create their own programs with cohorts of at least 10-12 individuals), although this can be replicated on a regional level through regional-serving organizations. One Grow Your Own program in New Mexico worth scaling is the University of New Mexico/APS ALL program.

Taxpayer funds should only be used for programs that meet research-based criteria, such as those outlined by LPI and summarized in Chapter 1: rigorous recruitment; close district-university partnership; cohort structure; focus on important content; and ability to apply learning in an internship. Like the residency approach, we recommend that PED establish research-based criteria and oversee the process for program approval.

⁶⁹ National Policy Board for Education Administration (2018). [National Educational Leadership Preparation \(NELP\) Program Recognition Standards.](#)

⁷⁰ New America (2022). [A 50-State Scand of Grow Your Own Teacher Policies and Programs.](#)

To enable existing programs across the state to align with research-based criteria, we recommend funding technical assistance for programs that want to redesign to meet quality standards.⁷¹

Similar to the Golden Apple Scholars Program, New Mexico might want to invest in an alternative leader program informed by a national model but designed to meet New Mexico's specific needs. For example, New Leaders is an organization that partners with districts and states to create Grow Your Own leader programs, including programs for teacher leaders, aspiring principals, and aspiring district leaders.

1c. Sunsetting preparation programs and providing grant funding for program redesign

Many states have struggled to reform principal preparation programs. Universities are designed to be responsive to the market, and program participants want programs that are easy and affordable. These pressures compete with research-based components such as residencies.

States, however, have accrediting authority and one strategy they have used to hold preparation programs accountable to research-based practices is to sunset all principal preparation programs. Illinois's award-winning strategies for bold and impactful statewide reform of university-based principal preparation programs began with the sunset of all principal preparation programs. Programs were then required by law to redesign their programs and submit under the new research-based state requirements threaded through strong university-district partnership⁷². Illinois-based programs that were already built around research-based practices (like the University of Illinois at Chicago Urban Leadership Program and New Leaders/Chicago Public Schools Aspiring Leader Program), were lifted up as models in the state. These programs still had to go through the redesign process but used it as an opportunity for continuous improvement within their program and with their district partner, Chicago Public Schools. New Mexico should look for similar opportunities to leverage existing strengths and capacity of in-state programs.

Through collaboration and input with the early childhood community, the new endorsement expanded into a PK-12 Endorsement, which also requires the infusion of early childhood content threaded throughout the program and requires all candidates to get internship experiences in early childhood settings, in an effort to ensure principals are equipped to lead pre-K and early grade classrooms⁷³. Illinois is currently the only state to require the inclusion of early childhood content into its preparation programs.

⁷¹ For example, the New Leaders Higher Education Partnership program provides these services. For more information, see its [website](#).

⁷² For a short video on how Illinois revamped its Principal Preparation programs in partnerships with model programs in the state, see the Wallace Foundation [web site](#).

⁷³ New America (2019). [Preparing Principals for Pre-K in Illinois: The Prairie State's Story of Reform and Implementation](#).

In a review of all 50 states, University Council for Education Administration (UCEA) found that only two states—Illinois and Tennessee—had “well-developed” policies in the five “high-leverage areas” to approve preparation programs and award principal licenses. New Mexico should consider taking bold action to revamp principal preparation programs aligned to UCEA’s five high leverage areas. Funding for technical assistance should be provided to programs during the redesign period. Organizations that provide support for this work include as examples:

- New Leaders Higher Education Partnerships⁴
- New York City Leadership Academy⁷⁴
- University Council of Education Administration⁷⁵

Additionally, we recommend New Mexico allow out-of-state programs to apply for state approval to assure that enough principal preparation programs are in place to serve the needs of districts throughout the state and especially rural districts. Some examples of potential programs include:

- New Leaders National Aspiring Principals Fellowship program² (an online program that follows a cohort- and residency-based model);
- AASA/NAESP have a National Aspiring Principals Academy⁷⁶

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states to reserve up to an additional 3% of Title II funds to be used for principal preparation activities, including the following⁷⁷:

- Approve and establish school leader residency programs, set performance goals, and terminate programs that fail to produce effective principals.
- Develop and implement selective admissions standards in residency programs to ensure admittance only to those that demonstrate effective performance in education.
- Improve preparation programs and strengthen supports for principals, or other school leaders, based on the specific needs of the state.

2. In-Role Professional Development

2a. Statewide mentoring for new principals and superintendents

Principals need high-quality mentoring tailored to their individual and district needs, especially in their first years on the job.⁷⁸ This need is particularly true in New Mexico where rural principals often feel isolated and turnover is high.

⁷⁴ For more information on New York City Leadership Academy Aspiring Principals Program, see its [website](https://www.leadershipacademy.org/workshops/aspiring-principals-program/). <https://www.leadershipacademy.org/workshops/aspiring-principals-program/>

⁷⁵ For more information on UCEA, see its [website](#).

⁷⁶ For more information on the AASA/NAESP National Aspiring Principals Academy, see its [website](#).

⁷⁷ Center for the Study of Education Policy (2016). [Lessons for States: The Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Increases Focus on and Investment in Supporting Principal Preparation and Development](#).

⁷⁸ The Wallace Foundation (2012). [The making of the principal: Five lessons in leadership](#)

We recommend New Mexico implement a statewide new principal and superintendent mentoring program. In Illinois, the state department of education has set aside \$1.2 million each year in the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Review (ESSER) funds to provide a mentor to all new principals in their first year. The New Principal Mentoring Program⁷⁹ matches new principals in their first year on the job with experienced principals who have demonstrated success as instructional leaders. ISBE developed statewide criteria for the program⁸⁰ but through a competitive grant program selected seven different providers who met the statewide criteria. Funding for the program is allocated directly to the district, which designates which of the seven state-approved providers their new principals can use. ISBE guidelines allow mentoring to occur virtually in order to match mentors and principals by important characteristics such as race, gender, and rural experience. With ESSER funding coming to an end, the State Department of Education is looking to make the program a permanent budget item funded by the Illinois Legislature.

Illinois also provides new superintendent mentoring support for the first three years on the job through the Illinois Association of School Administrators. The program is currently funded at \$1.2 million each year through use of ESSER funding with the goal to turn this into a permanent annual program funded by the Illinois Legislature. Due to the instability of the superintendent position in New Mexico (the average tenure of the superintendent in New Mexico is 18 months), we also recommend New Mexico allocate funds to a statewide new superintendent program.

If New Mexico pursues this option, it will be particularly important to ensure programs are hiring and assigning high-quality mentors.⁸¹ If there is a surge in demand for mentors instigated by state funding and not enough qualified individuals to serve as mentors, the state may want to quickly build capacity by providing grants for mentors to access nationally developed training. Several quality programs have recently emerged in response to Wallace Foundation findings that principals' supervisors can be a key source of development when they serve as coaches. West Ed has created a Supervisors of Principals' Academy (SOPA) model which is focused on developing supervisor skills to coach principals. SOPA has been tested as a statewide model in several states including Arizona, Nevada, and Utah and has been used by urban, suburban and rural districts. The American Association for School Administrators (AASA) in partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington also offers a National Principal Supervisor Academy⁸².

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states to reserve up to an additional 3% of Title II funds to be used for mentoring and professional development for school and district leaders, including the following⁸³:

⁷⁹ For information on the Illinois New Principal Mentoring Program, see its [web site](#).

⁸⁰ Illinois State Board of Education (2020). [Illinois New Principal Mentoring Program Standards](#).

⁸¹ The Wallace Foundation (2007). [Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons for the Field](#)

⁸² For more information on AASA Principal Supervisor Academy, see <https://www.aasa.org/PrincipalSupervisorAcademy.aspx>

⁸³ Center for the Study of Education Policy (2016). [Lessons for States: The Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Increases Focus on and Investment in Supporting Principal Preparation and Development](#).

- Provide new principals/school leaders with induction and mentoring programs.
- Provide assistance to LEAs for the development and implementation of high-quality professional development programs.
- Improve the effectiveness of principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders, which may include employees or officers of an elementary or secondary school, LEA, or other entity operating a school who are “responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building.” (This includes supports to superintendents and principal supervisors.)

2b. Invest in a continuum of programs for sitting school leaders and prioritize support for principals serving students with the greatest needs

Respondents indicated that (with the exception of programs offered through the Priority Schools Bureau) the only type of professional development currently available to school leaders tends to be one-shot workshops and conferences. The 70:20:10 research referenced in Chapter 1 suggests there is a place for this type of structured development, but it should only be 10% of the strategy. The primary strategy (70%) should be job-embedded development that involves applying new learning, tools and strategies in their day-to-day work.

PSB offers a continuum of programs that reflect best practices in program development and are focused on school turnaround: they are cohort-based, sustained over time, and involve application of tools to their practice coupled with observation and feedback from a coach that help leaders with learning and implementing research-based school turnaround strategies. By offering a variety of programs, PSB enables principals to choose the program that is best aligned to their learning needs (e.g., THRIVE focuses on teacher observation and feedback; LEAD focuses on first-year principals; RISE focuses on needs of principals in low-performing schools).

Through our interviews, we found favorable endorsements to the quality of these programs (at least 10 interviewees mentioned them favorably), particularly the RISE program (formerly called Principals Pursuing Excellence). In fact, due to demand for the program, PED recently opened eligibility to all principals in the state.

We recommend New Mexico increase funding for these programs, but given the *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling, we recommend that PED prioritize support for schools serving students with the greatest needs—especially schools in need of turnaround. If New Mexico funds the programs sufficiently to serve principals from all types of schools, it should consider the best home for these programs since they will likely serve more than just priority schools. One possibility is to create a new office of school leadership within PED (see recommendation below) or to move the programs to another program outside of PED to protect them from political pressure (and allow for other programs to emerge and compete for funding for these types of programs).

2c. Invest in a statewide micro-credential system that supports learning

A micro-credential is a competency-based certification of a discrete skill, such as “teacher observation and feedback.” Similar to the National Board Certification process, an educator earns a micro-credential by submitting evidence that is reviewed and verified by the granting organization.⁸⁴ Some micro-credentialing systems are more focused on submitting evidence of an existing skill (and giving educators a badge to certify that skill). Others are a learn-by-doing process that is job-embedded in the actual work occurring in the school.

There are many different providers that offer micro-credentials, but we recommend New Mexico partner with BloomBoard⁸⁵ to host its micro-credentialing system. The benefits of this system are:

- Anyone (e.g., New Mexico universities, nonprofits, districts, PED) can design the content of the micro-credential, but they are accessed by educators through one standardized system.
- BloomBoard micro-credentials support learning by doing. Each micro-credential has a common structure through which the candidate reviews relevant resources, collects data from their school, analyzes the information, creates a plan for implementing the focus skill, implements the plan, and reflects on the outcomes.
- BloomBoard specializes in working with states and districts (including 14 states working on state-level initiatives⁸⁶). BloomBoard’s micro-credentials are aligned with Carnegie units, which align with how universities award graduate credit hours. Their system is also aligned to the new national Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL), the national standards for school building leaders.
- BloomBoard hires its own assessors who typically already have experiences as assessors (e.g., College Board) and requires that they are trained to be assessors.
- BloomBoard also has a series of equity-focused micro-credentials for district and school leaders (a Leaders for Equity Series and a Leaders for English Learners Series⁸⁷) that could be considered as a statewide requirement for districts and schools in response to the Martinez/Yazzie Consolidated Lawsuit. The Leadership for Equity Micro-Credential series was developed by educators in Illinois and Tennessee through a federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant based on the Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook⁸⁸.
- BloomBoard will also customize its existing micro-credentials, if New Mexico wants to integrate New Mexico context and data.

If New Mexico decides to pursue this option, it should be wary of low-quality micro-credential systems that are not vetted and do not use trained assessors.

⁸⁴ Council of Chief State School Officers (2020). [Design, Assessment, and Implementation Principles for Educator Micro-credentials](#)

⁸⁵ For more information on BloomBoard, see its [website](#):

⁸⁶ For more information on the states with statewide micro-credentials in place, see BloomBoard [website](#).

⁸⁷ For more information on the Leadership for Equity and Leadership for English Learners Micro-Credential series, see this [website](#).

⁸⁸ Tennessee Department of Education (2016). [Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook](#).

3. Working Conditions

The job of the principal has become increasingly complex over the last decade but even more so since the start of the pandemic. Through our interviews, we heard a great recognition of the importance of the principal, yet a common understanding of how difficult the job is and how under-appreciated school principals are in New Mexico. Recognizing this, we emphasize the need to re-envision the role of the principalship, including how principals are supported in their work, not to mention recognized and rewarded for great work. Some strategies to do this include:

3a. Increase school leader compensation / remove pay disincentives for entry

Our interviews found widespread recognition and agreement that the current salary structure for principals creates disincentives for people to move from teacher to principal positions, especially after recent changes to increasing teacher salaries. We recommend New Mexico study the current principal and district administrator salary structure to make recommendations for the Legislature to enact to entice more teachers to go into leadership. We recommend New Mexico invest in a compensation study to examine salary structures for surrounding states. This study could also use data to identify types of schools with staffing shortages and possibly recommend bonuses to incentivize principals to work in hard-to-staff schools. **We recommend New Mexico does not increase principal pay without also improving the rigor of principal preparation and professional development.**

4. Infrastructure Investments

4a. Create leader data tracking systems

Leader data tracking systems can provide valuable information to states, districts, and preparation programs by compiling data into a single online system. At minimum, these systems usually include the following information about each individual educator:

- School placements, including dates
- Roles, including dates
- Preparation program
- Licensure level
- Demographics

A Wallace Foundation study of six districts found that data systems enabled them to:

- Identify strong leader candidates who might otherwise not be on the radar
- Assist with placement of candidates and matching schools to candidates' strengths
- Forecast principal vacancies
- Remove bias from hiring decisions
- Monitor diversity of the hiring pool

- Provide feedback to principal preparation programs on their placement rates.⁸⁹

New Mexico can learn from other states that have invested in robust data systems to monitor the educator workforce. Colorado produces the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report⁹⁰ in partnership with the Department of Higher Education, the Department of Education, the Department of Labor and Employment, and the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, with support from the Office of State Planning and Budgeting, the State Demography Office at the Department of Local Affairs, and other partners. The report looks at education as well as other industries according to supply strategies to attract the top talent. Colorado also maintains a database⁹¹ on strengthening the educator workforce pipeline that not only looks at data around supply and demand but also breaks down data according to district characteristics, regions, influence of incentive programs, working conditions, school and district performance, and diversity.

In Illinois, through external funding raised, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) developed a supply/demand survey⁹² after dissatisfaction among districts on the quality and transparency of data collected each year by the Illinois State Board of Education. IARSS is made up of 38 Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) and three Intermediate Service Centers (ISC), which are similar in structure to the New Mexico Regional Education Cooperatives. The IARSS supply/demand survey gathers data from districts about their staffing shortages and impact on districts. Using data from the survey, a series of policy papers have been produced to make recommendations for improvements to the teacher and leader pipelines, including one on *Preventing a Mass Exodus of School Leaders*⁹³.

In a similar fashion, the Chicago Public Education Fund, compiles an annual report⁹⁴ on the profile of the Chicago Public School (CPS) school leader based on data collected through an extensive leader tracking database developed in house. In addition to the annual report, the Fund uses data collected to prioritize strategies for investments in CPS leaders.

States like Ohio and Louisiana collect annual educator exit data that is reported to the legislature. On the flip side, some districts are implementing stay interviews⁹⁵ with top talent staff to identify what are the conditions and support that they need to be able to stay within the district and to thrive.

4b. Establish and/or expand a statewide coalition or commission dedicated to school leadership

⁸⁹ Policy Studies Associates (2017). [Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership](#)

⁹⁰ For more information on Colorado Talent Pipeline Report, see its [website](#)

⁹¹ For more information, see the [Strengthening the Colorado Educator Workforce Pipeline Database](#).

⁹² IARSS (2021). [2021 Illinois Educator Shortage Survey Study](#).

⁹³ IARSS (2021). [Preventing a Mass Exodus: Reimagining the Role of the Principal and the Supports Needed](#).

⁹⁴ Chicago Public Education Fund (2021). [Chicago's School Leaders: 2020-2021 Overview](#).

⁹⁵ Education Week (June 22, 2022). [The Stay Interview: How It Can Help Schools Hold Onto Valued Staff](#).

All respondents strongly believed in the importance of school leadership, but it has not been a top focus of state work to date. Recognizing this, we recommend New Mexico identify and invest in a statewide organization that will serve as the lead to the coalition and guide the statewide work through a comprehensive and coordinated effort with a high bar for quality. Examples of advocacy organizations in other states with similar vision/missions include SCORE in Tennessee⁹⁶, Raise Your Hand in Texas⁹⁷ and Advance Illinois⁹⁸ in Illinois. Within these organizations, leadership development is an important pillar threaded into the vision for building quality education systems.

Another strategy would be to expand the charge of an existing commission or committee to ensure that one of its priority areas is school leadership. The Thornburg Foundation includes as one of its strategic goals for education to “Establish a statewide education committee to sustain long-term, meaningful reform.”⁹⁹ When these entities are created, we recommend the role of district and school leaders with creating systems of equity and excellence be a separate but implicit focus of the commission.

4c. Create an office of school and district leadership within PED

Illinois created a Department of District and School Leadership¹⁰⁰ located at the State Board of Education. The purpose of the Department of District and School Leadership is to partner with stakeholders to foster a robust and diverse leadership pipeline, and it houses the new principal mentoring and new superintendent mentoring programs, among other leadership initiatives. The creation of its own office at PED will elevate the importance of school leadership development and support and provide a unified place to coordinate the support and services in a comprehensive and strategic vision.

4d. Identify and fund a non-profit organization focused on Albuquerque Public Schools

According to one individual interviewed, “If you are going to improve the state, you have to improve Albuquerque. But politically, you have to treat all 88 districts the same.” While we recognize the challenge of equally serving all districts across the state, we also believe external investments made in Albuquerque can spur New Mexico branded innovations that can be piloted and scaled throughout the state.

We recommend a nonprofit be identified and funded to focus on the unique needs of Albuquerque Public Schools, and that it has a specific focus on school leadership. For example, the Chicago Public Education Fund was created 20 years ago as a nonprofit organization dedicated to “investing in principals to build a critical mass of great public schools in

⁹⁶ For information on Tennessee Score, see its [website](#).

⁹⁷ For information on Raise Your Hand Texas, see its [website](#).

⁹⁸ For more information on Advance Illinois, see its [website](#).

⁹⁹ For more information, see Thornburg Foundation [Education Strategic Initiatives](#).

¹⁰⁰ For information on the Department of District and School Leadership, see its [website](#).

Chicago.”¹⁰¹ The Fund’s investors represent a broad cross-section of Chicago’s business, civic and philanthropic leaders.

4e. Establish a school and district leader trust fund

Some respondents expressed concern that the current revenue surpluses would not last in the long term, given the reliance on oil and gas. If New Mexico wants to make long-term investments in leadership, it may want to establish a trust fund to assure there is financial stability to maintain long-term strategies.

New Mexico created the Early Childhood Trust Fund through House Bill 83 and launched it with a \$320M state appropriation. It provides a stable funding source to augment federal funds for early childhood services and the state’s annual appropriations to the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD). Recognizing that school and district leaders provide the foundation of quality in NM public, private, and charter schools, we encourage the exploration of a similar investment. A School and District Leader Trust Fund can provide a stable and continuous flow of funding to maintain a priority of attention to school and district leadership, dividends that are a sure bet.

Unlike the Early Childhood Trust Fund, in which significant funding is needed to build and maintain New Mexico’s early childhood infrastructure, a School and District Leader Trust Fund would require significantly less money. If creating a new trust fund is not feasible, the option to diversify the beneficiaries of the Early Childhood Trust Fund to also include school and district leader programs should be considered.

¹⁰¹ For more information on Chicago Public Education Fund, see its [website](#)



This chapter outlines recommendations for the New Mexico Public Education Department, Legislature, and philanthropy community. These priority areas were determined by The Chamber’s steering committee based on feedback received after vetting policy options from Chapter 3 with various stakeholder groups.

We recommend the **Public Education Department**:

- 1) Propose the creation of an Office of School and District Leadership;
- 2) Design and oversee a robust school leader data tracking system; and
- 3) Seek expertise on research and best practices when designing rules and guidance for things like preparation and mentoring programs – and then hold the line when enforcing high standards.

We recommend the New Mexico **Legislature**:

- 1) Transform pre-service leader preparation by sunseting all current school leader preparation programs and providing them grant funding to re-design and re-launch their programs in line with evidence-based best practices, including a full-time residency requirement;
- 2) Establish a statewide intensive mentoring program for all first-year principals;
- 3) Expand the current suite of well-designed principal development programs led by the Priority Schools Bureau to serve more leaders in the highest-need, lowest-performing schools; and
- 4) Update school leader compensation to incentivize entry and continuous learning.

We recommend the New Mexico **philanthropy** community:

- 1) Establish a statewide coalition or commission, with a primary focus area on school leadership; and
- 2) Invest in an advocacy organization to hold all of state government – including executive agencies, the Legislature, and higher education institutions – accountable for deploying high-standards school leader programming that improves school and student performance.

The following sections elaborate on each of the recommendations. This list is not intended to be a menu. Policy makers should collaborate to pursue all of the recommendations because each recommendation creates enabling conditions for the others.

PED Recommendations

1) Propose the creation of an Office of School and District Leadership

We recommend the PED propose the creation of an office that is solely and explicitly focused on school and district leadership. This office would:

- Signify the state's commitment to leadership as a strategy for improving student outcomes and school turnaround;
- Set a vision for supporting leadership as a key strategy to improve all schools in the state and to address the needs of at-risk students;
- Coordinate policies, initiatives, and services in support of that vision (including programs that are currently managed by the Priority Schools Bureau);
- Determine how to target leadership resources and strategies to schools that need strong leadership the most; and
- Implement new strategies mentioned in other recommendations below.

2) Design and oversee a robust leader data tracking system

PED's new Office of School and District Leadership should create a leader data tracking system to provide valuable information to states, districts, and preparation programs. The system should:

- Use lessons learned by other states and Wallace Foundation grantees (as referenced in the previous chapter);
- Focus on the most essential information (being careful not to overburden schools or districts). For each individual in the leadership pipeline, it should include:
 - School placements, including dates,
 - Roles, including dates,
 - Preparation program,
 - Licensure level, and
 - Demographics;
- Disaggregate by demographic data (race, gender, tribal, region, etc.) of students, schools and leaders to examine whether supports and services are equitably distributed and working in all areas of the state and with all student subpopulations;
- Publish annual public reports with basic information including, but not limited to:
 - Numbers of principals, assistant principals, and superintendents (disaggregated by race, gender, tribal and region),
 - Number of leaders new to their role (disaggregated by race, gender, tribal, and region),
 - Number of licensed leaders in the pipeline,
 - Vacancy and retention rates, and
 - Percent of workforce (in role or licensed) that was trained by each preparation program (disaggregated by race, gender, tribal and region); and
- Provide data files to districts and preparation programs that enable them to conduct analyses that can inform their policy decisions and continuous improvement.

3) Seek expertise on research and best practices when designing rules and guidance

PED's new Office of School and District Leadership should:

- Be led by someone who has background and expertise about 1) the skills and knowledge needed by leaders; 2) how to develop, support, and retain effective leaders; and 3) how school leadership can be leveraged to improve equity and effectively serve the highest need students;
- Work with consultants, experts, and/or advisors who can provide insights from research and practice from other states and national organizations; and
- Use lessons learned in other contexts to inform design and oversight of any new rules or programs related to school leadership, including data tracking systems, pre-service redesign, statewide mentoring, etc.

Legislature Recommendations

The New Mexico Legislature should consider passing legislation in the following three areas: preparation, in-role professional development, and compensation. For each area, the legislation should be written with enough specificity to provide PED with the political cover needed to create research-based rules and sustain rigorous oversight of implementation over time and despite potential turnover.

1) Transform pre-service leader preparation

The Legislature should **sunset all current school leader preparation programs and require them to redesign around a full-semester residency model** by:

- Removing all preparation programs from the list of programs approved for licensure effective summer 2024;
- Requiring programs to reapply for inclusion on the list of approved programs maintained by PED;
- Basing approval on research-based criteria, such as:
 - District-program partnership,
 - Cohort structure,
 - Rigorous recruitment,
 - Content aligned to professional standards,
 - Residency experience, and
 - Coaching;
- Funding full-time, semester-long internships; and
- Grandfathering currently enrolled students into the current licensure requirements.

The Legislature should also **provide grant funding for program redesign**. Grants could be used by programs to:

- Create partnerships with districts to collaboratively design the refreshed programs, including stipends to faculty or district personnel;

- Gather lessons learned from research and programs that have undergone similar redesigns in other states; and/or
- Access technical assistance from experienced national organizations, such as University Council of Education Administration; New Leaders Higher Education Partnerships, or The Leadership Academy.

2) Establish a statewide intensive mentoring program for all first-year principals

The Legislature should:

- Establish research-based criteria for mentoring programs and embed those criteria into statute; and
- Create a competitive grant program to fund mentoring programs for first-year principals and superintendents so long as the programs meet the research-based criteria.

3) Expand the current suite of programs led by the Priority Schools Bureau to serve more leaders in the highest-need, lowest-performing schools

The Legislature should:

- Establish research-based criteria for professional development and embed those criteria into statute;
- Increase allocations to existing high quality programs (including a suite of well-designed PED programs led by the Priority Schools Bureau) so long as they meet the research-based criteria; and
- Target resources toward leaders of schools with the greatest needs, particularly principals leading schools in need of substantial turnaround.

4) Update school leader compensation to incentivize entry and continuous learning

The Legislature should improve the compensation system for school leaders by:

- Increasing the responsibility factor for school leaders to account for not only increased number of contract days but also increased responsibility;
- Encouraging districts to use local flexibility to be more creative in how they compensate leaders depending on their needs (e.g., more pay for larger school sizes, harder to staff schools, etc.);
- Allowing school leaders to qualify for salary increases by earning endorsements via micro-credentials hosted by BloomBoard (see previous chapter for more details); and
- Enable districts to be more creative in how they pay – encourage local flexibility in how school leaders are compensated (school size, availability of support staff, performance).

Philanthropy Recommendations

1) Establish a statewide coalition or commission

Philanthropic organizations in New Mexico should collaborate to establish a statewide coalition that:

- Is supported by a politically diverse group of at least 4-5 organizations (e.g., Thornburg, Stone, Kellogg, Daniels Fund, etc.);
- Focuses on PreK-20 education, and includes school leadership as one of its primary strategy areas; and
- Is focused on strategies to support the school leader pipeline, including supporting the strategies offered in this report and also a more comprehensive set of areas related to school leader talent management, such as professional standards, recruitment and selection, pre-service, in-role professional development, supervision, evaluation, compensation, and working conditions.

2) Invest in an organization to hold all of state government accountable

Philanthropic organizations in New Mexico should also identify and invest in a statewide organization that will:

- Serve as the lead to the coalition;
- Guide the statewide work;
- Publish research on the state of school leadership in New Mexico; and
- Serve as a watchdog that is focused on maintaining rigor, continuity, and comprehensiveness to achieve results for students.

APPENDIX

AUTHORS



DR. GINA IKEMOTO

Dr. Gina Ikemoto started her career as a researcher for the RAND Corporation where she became an expert on school leadership and the policies and programs that support them. She then worked at New Leaders - a national organization that trains school leaders - to apply that knowledge to designing school leader programs for principals, teacher leaders, and district leaders. She also advised on state and federal policies related to school leadership. For the last six years, she has been an independent consultant with Education Research and Development - helping nonprofit, district and state leaders to adapt research-based practices for principal talent management to their local context.



DR. ERIKA HUNT

Dr. Erika Hunt began her work in state policy over 20 years ago as a former staff member for Illinois Governor Jim Edgar. Following that, she worked for over 18 years running a P-20 Education Policy Center at Illinois State University where she directed federal, state, and private education grants on school and district leadership initiatives. This work resulted in key state policy changes, including redesign of all principal preparation programs under new program requirements. This major policy overhaul was recognized by the Education Commission of the States as the recipient of the 2014 Frank Newman Award for State Innovation. Erika recently transitioned her work to a Regional Office of Education in Illinois, which allows her to work more closely with the field.

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