



Preparing to Lead



Lessons in Principal Development
from High-Performing
Education Systems

Brief



CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION BENCHMARKING
LEARNING FROM THE WORLD'S HIGH PERFORMING EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Brief

Improving school leadership is central to education improvement efforts. After teacher effectiveness, school leadership has the greatest in-school impact on student outcomes and is widely considered crucial to system reform.¹ The 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act* recognizes this and provides targeted funding to help U.S. states and districts set up strategies and actions to improve their leaders. But it is not clear what to do to achieve this, as many interventions have had limited success.

The world's highest-performing school systems have all made extensive investments in school leadership. They have developed comprehensive systems to recruit, select, prepare, and provide continual support to school leaders. While these efforts represent only one aspect of their systems, they play a major role in helping schools in these countries become and remain high performing.

A new report commissioned by the National Center on Education and the Economy, *Preparing to Lead*, examines one key aspect of school leadership development in top-performing nations: leadership development programs. It focuses specifically on four jurisdictions—Hong Kong, Ontario, Shanghai, and Singapore, where students performed in the top ten in literacy, mathematics, and science in the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).²

With the exception of Shanghai, all of these jurisdictions designed mandatory pre-service preparation programs for aspiring principals starting in 2000. Singapore's Leaders in Education program (LEP), Ontario's Principal's Qualification Program (PQP), and Hong Kong's Preparation for Principalship (PFP) program within the Continuing Professional Development Framework are gateway qualifications for principals aspiring to serve in these systems' primary and secondary public schools.

This brief situates these leadership-preparation programs in the context of leadership development in the high-performing jurisdictions, and identifies the key aspects of the programs that make them effective. It concludes with findings about effective leadership-preparation programs.

Leadership Development: A Continuum

Leadership development in top-performing countries is a continuum. It starts with rigorous training for all teachers, from whose ranks principals are drawn. Teachers typically are given leadership roles in schools, like instructional leader or curriculum development leader, that give them experience leading teams of teachers and thinking strategically about school development. While principals are self-selecting in some countries like they are in the United States, in others they are identified and groomed for school leadership roles. All aspiring principals are then required to go through a rigorous

preparation program. The top-performing international systems take different approaches to training, depending on their model of school leadership. But whether top-performing systems focus on training aspiring leaders to be instructional leaders, to manage and treat teachers as professionals, or both, preparation involves action research projects and mentoring by a successful school leader.

Support for school leaders does not end when principals attain their credentials and begin leading a school. Top-performing systems provide a range of supports to practicing school leaders to ensure that they are continuously developing their skills and have opportunities to grow into new and more challenging roles. Principals are regularly given opportunities to visit other schools in their district, state, or province, and even abroad in order to learn about successful practices and adapt their own leadership practices accordingly. This practice is intended to keep leaders learning continuously and to promote a benchmarking culture. Many top performers also have career ladders for school leaders that provide incentives for increasing roles and responsibilities within their district, state or province.

Top-performing jurisdictions give principals time and support for ongoing learning, along with incentives to participate in ongoing learning regularly. These incentives may sometimes take the form of mandates: a set number of hours of training that principals must complete annually in order to remain in good standing, for example. But some top performers also offer rewards for ongoing learning, like the honor of a prestigious appointment to the principal training program, in order to make participation in ongoing learning a reward, rather than an obligation.

Shanghai and Singapore have highly structured career ladders for their principals, not unlike those developed for their teachers. Like teachers, principals in Shanghai and Singapore advance along a ladder with time—although time is not the only factor that determines promotion. Positive performance on evaluations and the amount, quality, and relevance of professional development completed are factors as well. Therefore, participation in continuous learning results in leaders getting promotions more quickly, which in turn helps them earn additional pay and take on more advanced responsibilities.

Principal Preparation in Hong Kong, Ontario, Singapore and Shanghai

The design of principal preparation programs in top-performing nations varies, depending in large part on the role of the principal in the jurisdiction. In **Singapore**, principals serve as “CEOs” of professional learning organizations, while teacher leaders (i.e., heads of departments and subject and level heads) are responsible for curriculum leadership and improving instruction at the departmental level. There, the Ministry of Education has developed programs to prepare both principals (Leaders in Education Program) and teacher leaders (Management and Leadership in Schools Program). The Management and Leadership in Schools Program is a stepping stone for potential principals.

Management and Leadership in Schools Program (MLS)

Designed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), with the MOE. The MLS was conceived in 2006 and launched in 2007 to prepare middle level leaders to lead and manage teams and departments.

Provided by the NIE. More than 40 NIE faculty members are involved in designing and delivering the MLS.

Objective: The MLS "...aims to create new knowledge in generative and collaborative learning, beyond a single discipline/ subject; enhance expert competence among middle-level leaders, with reference to their position on the leadership track; and enhance capacity to lead teaching and learning through a learning team, focusing on continual improvement in the curriculum."*

Selection: The Ministry of Education selects participants each year. Candidates must have been in a teacher leadership role such as Head of Department, subject head or level head for at least one year.

Program: The MLS is a milestone leadership development program for middle level leaders on the leadership track. It is a 17-week full-time program sponsored by the Ministry of Education. The MLS prepares middle leaders for curriculum, management and leadership in schools, particularly as instructional leaders and to support the principal. The MLS includes these core components:

- Core module (fundamentals of leadership and management);
- Elective modules (curriculum, assessment, stakeholder relationships, etc.);
- Curriculum project (action research by discipline in schools with a mentor principal);
- Local organizations and school visits; and
- One-week overseas study visit.

* Management & Leadership in Schools Program: Handbook for Participants (NIE, Singapore, July 2016), 8.

Leaders in Education Program (LEP)

Designed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), with the MOE. It was launched in 2001 to replace the Diploma in Educational Administration to prepare principals for Thinking Schools Learning Nation.

Provided by the NIE. More than 40 NIE faculty members are involved in design and delivery.

Objective: "The programme aims to develop principalship capability that is values-driven, purposeful, innovative and forward-looking, anchored on strong people leadership, strategic management skills, and an appreciation of how principals could work effectively in a complex environment."*

Selection: MOE selects 30 to 40 vice principals and Ministry of Education officers annually, based on ongoing performance management reviews, situational tests and interviews. After the LEP, graduates return to their schools until placed in a principal role by the MOE. Participants typically have completed the MLS earlier in their careers.

Program: The LEP is a 6 month full-time pre-service milestone program. MOE sponsors participants' fees, including a 2-week international visit. Fees for international participants are US\$14,000. LEP participants work in syndicates of 5 to 6 members with a NIE faculty facilitator. Key LEP components include:

- Compulsory modules (there are no electives);
- Creative Action Project (a school improvement action research project undertaken in a school under the mentorship of the principal);
- Talks and case study sessions;
- Industrial and school site visits; and
- Management Dialogue Sessions and sessions on Ministry objectives.

* LEP Leaders in Education: Handbook for Participants (National Institute of Education, Singapore, July 2016), 5.

In **Ontario**, the Principal's Qualification Program is based on the Ontario Leadership Framework, which was first introduced in 2006 to provide system and school leaders with a common leadership language and a shared understanding of the traits of effective leaders and the characteristics of effective organizations. The Framework, and the PQP, are revised periodically to include new research and best practices.

Principal's Qualification Program (PQP)	
<p>Designed by the Ontario College of Teachers, the teaching regulatory body. The College develops guidelines for providers to design a PQP, which the College accredits.</p>	<p>Objective: The program is designed to "...support candidates in becoming critically reflective educational leaders who function effectively in dynamic, diverse and complex contexts characterized by rapidly changing circumstances."*</p>
<p>Provided by multiple sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities • Principals' councils • Some district school boards partnered with councils 	<p>Selection: Aspiring principals apply directly to their provider of choice. Prerequisites include five years' teaching experience; teaching qualifications in three of four school levels including intermediate (grades 7 to 10); and a Master's degree or two specialist qualifications or one specialist and a half-Master's degree.</p>
	<p>Program: The PQP has three core components: Parts I and II and a leadership practicum. Parts I and II are 125 hours each, organized around five leadership domains in the Ontario Leadership Framework. The leadership practicum is a 60-hour school improvement action research project undertaken in a school. Participants must demonstrate through the practicum that they have contributed to the school improvement plan for that year. It is an inquiry-based, collaborative project. Fees vary by provider, but are about CAN\$990 (US\$733) for each of the two parts.</p>

* PQP Draft Guidelines 2016 p.1

In **Hong Kong**, the Preparation for Principalship program was created in 2002 as part of an effort to enhance leadership development in Hong Kong schools. Its design is described on the next page.

In **Shanghai**, there is no required principal preparation program. New principals are required to take 300 hours of professional development within their first six months on the job. Principals generally do this training in parts by enrolling in different workshops and programs provided by district teachers colleges and other organizations. While the content of the training is not monitored at this point, the province has encouraged principals to cover the six competency areas detailed in the Standards for Compulsory School Principals developed in 2011. A new program at Shanghai Normal University covers these six areas, includes an action learning project and assigns each participant two mentors. Particularly promising new principals are chosen by districts to attend this program.

Preparation for Principals (PFP)

Designed by the Education Department Bureau (EDB), which develops PFP guidelines that providers use to structure an accredited program. The EDB accredits providers annually.

Objective: The Preparation for Principals (PFP) program aims to “...build the capacity of aspiring principals to develop strategic, instructional and organizational and community leadership, as well as to establish sound beliefs and values that Hong Kong school principals should hold.”

Selection: Aspiring principals apply directly to the provider. Candidates must first complete a full-day Needs Analysis program, which may be offered as part of a program. Candidates must have at least five years’ teaching experience and a recognized teacher training qualification.

Provided by multiple sources, including:

- Hong Kong Baptist University
- Chinese University of Hong Kong
- University of Hong Kong

Program: The PFP program is one of three requirements for the certification process for aspiring principals in Hong Kong. The other two requirements are the Needs Analysis and a professional development portfolio and plan informed by the Needs Analysis. The PFP course is organized around six core areas of leadership that are part of the Professional Development Framework. Participants also undertake an action research project as part of the program. Action research projects occur in school and contribute to school improvement based on student learning data. Length and cost vary by provider. As an example, the PFP offered by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2017 costs US\$2,700.

Shared Elements of High-Quality Principal Preparation Programs

The principal-preparation programs in Hong Kong, Ontario, and Singapore vary considerably, but share a number of key elements in design and delivery. These are:

- They emerge from a national or provincial strategy for how schools should be led to prepare students to be successful in the future;
- The role they prepare principals for reflects a national or provincial design for how schools should be organized and managed, which includes leadership roles for teachers in the schools;
- They rely on mentoring of new principals by highly effective and seasoned school leaders who are selected and trained for this role;
- They require participants to design and carry out action learning projects focused on real problems in their own or another school and they evaluate the participants on these projects; and
- They follow-up with continued networking and learning opportunities for cohorts of new principals who have gone through the program.

Even in Shanghai, where there is no required program, the competency areas detailed in the Standards for Compulsory School Principals are informed by the provincial strategy for the development of schools, as well as how they should be organized and managed.

In addition, none of these systems relies solely on formal programs to bear the burden of professional leadership development. The programs are only one component of a broader culture of continuous professional development for teachers and school leaders.

Key Takeaways about Leadership Development

Overall, the high-performing system studies have commonalities in their approach to leadership development. They:

- Structure leadership development programs to reflect their vision for schools;
- Train leaders to manage professional learning organizations;
- Tie leadership development to problems from practice that are actionable;
- Design school leadership programs to build skills for a dynamic work environment; and
- Make leadership development continuous throughout a leader's career.

References

1. Leithwood et al. 2004.
2. Update after 2015 PISA data released.



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