



Preparing to Lead



Shanghai

Continuing
Professional
Development



CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION BENCHMARKING
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Preparing to Lead: Shanghai Continuing Professional Development

Case Studies for School Leadership Development Programs in High-Performing Education Systems

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Table of Contents

View from the Principal's Office	1
School Leadership Development in Shanghai	3
Shanghai System Context	5
Roles and Responsibilities of School Leaders in Shanghai	7
Notes	24
References	26

Figures

Figure 1 Principal's Career Ladder and Teacher's Career Ladder in Shanghai.....	15
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View from the Principal's Office

Jacky Ni is the principal at Pudong High School, a senior secondary public school in the largest district in Shanghai, China's largest city. As principal, Ni considers it his responsibility to build the culture of trust, professionalism and personal growth among teachers at his school. To model a learning attitude for all teachers, Ni prefers the title "Head Learner" over principal.

Ni has twenty years' experience as "Head Learner" in schools across Shanghai. He is now a level 1 principal, just one level below Master Principal on Shanghai's career ladder—this puts him in very select company, as only 5 percent of principals in Shanghai are Master Principals.¹

Ni started teaching in 1993, and was appointed as the head of grade by his principal in his first year. He was then appointed as a teacher leader the following year.

In 1996, Ni went to New York and Connecticut for a teaching exchange and to undertake professional development training. Upon his return to China, Ni was appointed as Secretary of the Party Branch, which is an in-school position equivalent to the principal. This was just four years after he started as a teacher.

Since assuming his first principal position, and with encouragement from his district, Ni has taken up numerous opportunities for professional development training offered by the Pudong Education Bureau, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, and universities. Ni has also studied in England to learn from another system of education. This was partly to satisfy the provincial requirement that new principals undertake a minimum number of professional development hours to qualify as principal, and partly for his own sense of professionalism. He says there is no shortage of opportunities to undertake training for aspiring and serving principals in Shanghai.

However, Ni has never been required to undertake a formal "qualification program," as principals in Ontario, Singapore, or Hong Kong must. There is no mandatory pre-service qualification program for aspiring principals in Shanghai.

Principal professional development is complicated and not standardized, involving multiple expectations for "accepting" training in various areas of school management and leadership.

A major stage in Ni's professional development as a principal was his decision to enroll for executive MBA courses in different business schools since 2001. After several years in the principalship, and having undertaken extensive training already, Ni felt there were certain challenges in his job that the educational development programs offered by Shanghai Municipal Education Commission and the local universities had not prepared him to manage. He decided he needed further development in the administrative and

organizational management side of school leadership. This decision has had a formative effect on his approach to school improvement and his role as a principal.

For instance, Ni's approach to school improvement is to focus on the teacher leaders—develop the capacity of your heads of department and subject heads, he believes, and you will improve teaching and learning at the school. Ni spends a lot of time and energy developing his teacher leaders, because they can in turn cascade this influence through to the classroom teachers. At the beginning of each term, Ni organizes development training with his teacher leaders. He prepares material to help them understand the annual school mission and vision, so they in turn can share this with the teaching staff.

This philosophy for organizational improvement and leadership development is very much shaped by Ni's training in business administration and the reputation and practice of companies like General Electric corporation, which emphasize talent identification and management, and multiple leadership roles across the organization.

Ni's role as principal requires him to hold difficult professional conversations with his teachers. This includes not only hiring high-potential new teachers, but also focusing on “waking up” serving teachers. This is particularly important for principals in Shanghai's public system, because it is almost impossible to fire teaching staff who are underperforming. Ni says that principals in Shanghai must work with their teachers to bring the best out in them, focusing on areas of development but also on their areas of strength, to motivate them. Key to this aspect of teacher development is finding out why teachers are behaving in a certain way, and finding someone—whether a teacher mentor, family member, or an expert from another school—to help the teacher better understand the curriculum, teaching skills, communication strategies, and so forth. This takes patience, a willingness to listen, and respect for the teacher.

Ni occasionally meets with principals across the district, but more often less experienced principals will simply call or email for advice on school management and leadership. He has mentored several vice principals through to the principal position, an achievement for which he is proud and considers a core part of his role as a principal.

Ni's advice to aspiring and newly-appointed principals is: respect your teachers; listen before acting; train your teacher leaders; understand the curriculum; communicate with the community; and concentrate on how you can help improve teachers' teaching skills.

Ni is exceptional, both by reputation (he is widely respected for improving several schools across Shanghai and for being a successful mentor) and in the sense that it was not just system structures but his own philosophy and search for development opportunities that got him where he is. Ni was—and remains—proactive in seeking out his own professional development opportunities. While sometimes this has been with the support of the Pudong Education Bureau or the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, it has also been at his own expense.

School Leadership Development in Shanghai

Understanding leadership development in Shanghai requires understanding key moments in the province's reform history.

Since the early 1990s, the national government of People's Republic of China has taken decisive steps towards depoliticizing educational leadership, with clear implications for school leadership and development. Critically, the Principal Responsibility System reforms introduced in 1993 began the process of decoupling educational and political leadership. Prior to the introduction of that system, schools were administered by the local party secretary. Principal Responsibility System reforms transferred authority over aspects of school management and leadership from the local party secretary to the school principal. The introduction of a career ladder for principals, first piloted in 1993, further professionalized school leadership, linking principal promotion, remuneration, and recognition to improving school performance and not (as previously) to party favor.

Together with the national Ministry of Education's Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals,² the career ladder and principal ranking system introduced new incentives that have further professionalized school leadership in Shanghai.

Today, the principal's role in Shanghai is substantially different from that of principals in the United States and many Western systems of education. The roles and responsibilities of Shanghai's principals are shaped by the career ladder for teachers, school-based lesson and research groups, and performance management systems. These are the crucibles of teacher and principal development, and shape the principal's role once in the job.

There is no mandatory pre- or post-service qualification program for aspiring principals in Shanghai.

In keeping with expectations of teachers' continuing professional development, newly-appointed principals in Shanghai agree to undertake 300 hours of professional development over the first six months of their appointment. There are numerous programs and training options that can contribute to this quota. Shanghai Normal University offers a development program for newly appointed principals, for instance, but this is just one option for newly appointed principals looking to fulfill their continuing professional development hours.

This qualification requirement does not require a substantial change in behavior for newly appointed principals, because continuous professional development is fundamental to what it means to be a teacher in Shanghai. Rather, it is simply the kind of professional development opportunities undertaken—and not the act of undertaking development opportunities per se—that signals intent to undertake a formal school leadership position.

Principals are legally responsible for their schools, and maintain teaching duties after appointment to the position.³

Unlike Singapore—the other system with structured career tracks for teachers and school leaders—Shanghai does not map milestone leadership development programs against the career ladder. There is huge variety in professional development programs for teacher and leadership development in the province, and it is not tightly structured. Program evaluation in Shanghai—like most systems—is not strong.

There is therefore considerable variety in teachers' developmental journeys towards the principal's office, and less of a cohort identity among leaders than in systems with mandatory qualifications.

Principal development in Shanghai is highly complicated and not standardized.

Lesson and research groups (also called teaching and research units) at the school, district, and provincial levels are central to leadership development and teacher professional development.⁴ The multi-level teaching and research unit structure at the school and district level can provide a pathway for teachers to establish their expertise in instruction and curriculum improvements, and therefore to progress along the teacher ladder towards the principalship.⁵

Shanghai System Context

China has more schools—and more school leaders—than any other system in the world.

At the policy and academic level in mainland China, K-12 education reform is framed by the “quality-education” reform agenda (*su zhi jiao yu*).⁶

Quality-education reforms encompass school review and accountability, enrollment, and school personnel systems. The reforms aim to improve the quality of education through improving teacher quality, school leadership, and curriculum reform, and by paying attention to the holistic development of all students.⁷

This reform agenda shapes school leadership in China today.⁸

Reforms in the principalship began in the early 1990s. Since that time, the Chinese Ministry of Education has taken huge strides towards professionalizing leadership across the country. As in Hong Kong, prior to school leadership reforms in the early 2000s, school leadership training and development at this time was largely administrative in scope and—particularly in mainland China—focused on party ideology.

However, reforms rolled out from the early 1990s signaled a fundamental shift in the political presence in the school system. In 1993, the Principal Responsibility System reforms transferred key responsibilities from the party secretary to the principal, initiating a process of depoliticization of school leadership that continues to this day.

Under the Principal Responsibility System reforms, Shanghai piloted a principal ranking system and career ladder (*zhiji zhi*) in 1993. This tied principal promotion, remuneration, and appraisal to leading school improvement rather than garnering political favor.

The introduction of the continuing professional development expectations for newly appointed and serving principals through the 1999 Basic Education Principal Training Guidelines further consolidated new expectations for school leadership and school performance.⁹

More recently, the Chinese Ministry of Education launched the national Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals in 2013 and the Professional Standards for Senior Secondary Principals in 2015. The development of these Professional Standards was benchmarked against examples from Chinese, Cantonese, and English-speaking systems of education, including those of England, Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and Australia.

These interventions structurally decoupled political and educational leadership, ushering in a new stage in China’s approach to school leadership development

In the spirit of national reforms, Shanghai has undertaken further provincial reforms aimed at professionalizing school leadership.

Like Hong Kong, Shanghai is not a typical Chinese educational jurisdiction. Shanghai is one of four provinces with special administrative privileges under China's central government. Shanghai has developed a unique significance within China as an economic and educational hub.

Roles and Responsibilities of School Leaders in Shanghai

The changing face of the principalship in Shanghai

The Chinese term for principalship is *xiaozhangxue*, which translates as the discipline of principal studies.¹⁰

In practice, the top leadership in schools is tripartite: Together, the principal, party secretary, and staff committee comprise the upper-most tier of in-school leadership in Shanghai's schools.¹¹

Under *Xiaozhang fuzezhi*—the “Principal Responsibility System”—principals gained greater authority over curriculum and pedagogy, teacher development and staffing, and financial resources.¹² Principals can select and set the salaries of teachers (the basic salary is set by the government and local educational authorities, but principals have discretionary power over class-hour earnings and achievement bonus). Principals can also use differential pay to recognize excellence in teaching (such as ‘imported expertise’ of new teachers).¹³

However, the party secretary retains an important role in Shanghai's schools.

All schools in Shanghai have a position for the party secretary, which is of equivalent seniority to the principal and is usually filled by a teacher. The relationship between the party secretary and the principal is not always mutually supportive, and can represent an important area for principals' professional relationships.

In some—typically smaller—schools, the party secretary and the principal may be the same person. This is called “carrying with two shoulders” to denote the distinct but supportive roles that each play in school leadership and management.¹⁴

The duties of the party secretary include enhancing the position of the school party organizations (including the Party Youth League), ensuring the implementation of national policies and regulations at the school level, and contributing to decision-making processes for school management. In the initial roll out in 2000 of the principal ranking system, party branch secretaries were responsible for evaluating its impact and success in schools.

Typically, the party secretary also supports the principal by supervising the principal's implementation of educational policies and overseeing aspects of teacher development. The school staff committee supports decision making and provides feedback and supervision.¹⁵

School-based lesson and research groups

Leadership in Shanghai schools also takes place in school-based lesson and research groups. Action research has been central to teacher professional development since China introduced teaching and research units (also known as lesson and research groups) in schools in the 1950s.¹⁶ Shanghai has encouraged action research at the school and system level as a cornerstone of professional development and school improvement for more than thirty years.

Schools in Shanghai operate lesson and research groups by discipline or subject. These groups provide a platform for teacher professional development (including for new and experienced teachers). Teachers meet regularly with their unit to discuss, for instance, class scheduling, conduct joint lesson planning, set assignments and tests, and develop younger teachers' capacity with the help of senior mentors.¹⁷

The lesson and research group structure at the school and district level can provide a pathway for teachers to establish their expertise in instruction and curriculum, and to progress along the career ladder towards the principalship.

For instance, senior grade teachers can serve as deputy director of the district-level lesson and research group, observing classrooms and advocating good teaching practices across the district through demonstrating exemplary lessons and publishing research.¹⁸ This experience can provide candidates with evidence of relevant teaching and learning activities required for promotions along the career ladder.

Lesson and research groups also provide a platform for classroom-based inquiries into student learning—this helps teachers identify key areas for improvement for student learning, which in turn provides the focus for school-improvement planning and professional development for teachers. A similar relationship between classroom inquiry/ student needs analysis, school-improvement planning and teacher professional learning can be seen in Ontario and British Columbia, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

A Shanghai Municipal Education Commission official gave the following example of a research question to illustrate how teachers use research to improve their practice in the classroom:

When dealing with difficult subjects, what kinds of questions can teachers ask in the classroom to encourage students to think critically without being intimidated by the topic?

This is a teacher-led research question. It illustrates an awareness of student learning dynamics and actual classroom-based practice that is rarer in research projects conducted by policymakers and university researchers.

In this way, research questions generated within the classroom directly shape the school improvement plan, linking curriculum leadership, student learning, and school improvement.

This kind of teacher-led research is seen provincially as a characteristic strength of Shanghai's approach to education reform. In other provinces, reforms are more heavily influenced by universities, which gives a different flavor to reforms, and in some instances imposes a greater distance between research and what happens in schools.

Principals typically work alongside the school's lesson and research groups to guide formative processes and help teachers reflect on the research as a way of improving their performance. School-level lesson and research groups in turn work with their district counterparts.

Currently, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission approves and funds more than 200 research projects on education each year.¹⁹ In 2013, around 100 projects were conducted at schools, and this number is increasing.

The teaching and research unit at the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission is closely related to the work in schools. It is staffed by many former teachers, and works closely with schools to run projects (particularly through the Academy of Education Sciences Division). The system draws on teacher researchers in designing curriculum reform. The teaching and research structure therefore helps connect classroom research to curriculum reform at the system level.

The districts and counties also support Shanghai's research-informed approach to reform, frequently publishing research by teachers and principals for dissemination across the province.

Impact of reforms on the principalship today

Today, a person cannot become a principal in Shanghai without first being an excellent teacher. There are two primary reasons for this: one cultural, and one structural.

First, professional respect is a prerequisite for effective school leadership in Shanghai. The cultural respect for and professional status of excellent (*gugan*, meaning "backbone") teachers means that principals will not be effective leaders without being able to demonstrate their own proficiency in teaching and mentoring.

Second, the school system ensures that teachers develop and are rewarded for core curriculum and leadership skills through a structured career ladder and ranking system, ongoing professional development, and performance appraisal.²⁰ These structures also change the role of the principal once in the job—teachers are curriculum leaders and

are heavily involved in improving instruction through lesson and research groups (called teaching and research units).

The action research and collaborative professionalism conducted through the teaching and research units is a form of ongoing, school-based leadership development that is embedded in teachers' routines in Shanghai.

The principal's role is therefore as a leader of instructional leaders, rather than the sole instructional expert for the school. This is markedly different from the expectations for principals in many other systems, though it resembles the distributed instructional leadership roles in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Through the teaching and research groups, teachers in Shanghai develop instructional and curriculum leadership skills on the job. A teacher's regular practice in Shanghai is likely to involve, for instance: holding difficult conversations about their own and other teachers' professional development and practice; giving and receiving feedback; undertaking classroom observations and being observed; participating in and leading teaching and action research groups; focusing on methods for improving teaching and learning (such as joint lesson planning); and cultivating collaborative professional learning communities among teachers (such as through classroom groups by grade/level).²¹

These skills are embedded in what it means to be a teacher in Shanghai, and are rewarded and recognized throughout a teacher's career. Teachers will not be promoted up the career ladder unless they have demonstrable capacity to deliver demonstration lessons, contribute to the professional development of other teachers (such as leading inductions for new teachers or mentoring), and publish school-based action research through journals or local teaching college publications.²²

This culture of teacher professionalism and lifelong learning has implications for principal development and training in the province. Whereas in other systems, aspiring principals need to develop, for instance, the ability to hold professional conversations at the formal program level (see, for instance, Ontario and Singapore), principals in Shanghai have had extensive school-based experience in this by the time they reach the principal's office.

There is no mandatory pre-service qualification program for aspiring principals in Shanghai.

Unlike Hong Kong, Singapore, and Ontario, Shanghai does not have a mandatory pre-service qualification or preparation program. Training and development is complicated and not standardized, with newly appointed principals undertaking many different types of training or developmental opportunities depending on their respective district bureau.

Principal selection in China and Shanghai

In 1991, the Ministry of Education implemented the *National School Principal Qualifications and Job Requirements* (MOE 1991).²³ The Requirements articulated three key criteria for principal qualifications, including political qualities, job or work-related qualities, and job abilities. Six specific job abilities are:

- formulation of plans for school development;
- carrying out ideological work and moral education;
- guiding the school's overall teaching and other professional work;
- collaboration with school faculty and community members;
- carrying out research; and
- written and oral communication skills.

While these requirements guide the selection, annual assessment, and training of primary and secondary principals, selection in Shanghai is largely decentralized. There are various school groupings and constituencies within the system that have distinct selection processes.

The Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has oversight over principal selection at some schools, while the district Education Bureaus set and administer principal selection at others.

The Pudong Education Bureau serves Shanghai's largest school district. The Pudong Education Bureau organizes a selection process for aspiring principals within the district. This includes interviews with Bureau officials, to assess candidates' academic strengths, curriculum knowledge, and problem solving capabilities. Many aspiring principals fail this test.²⁴

The two main teacher training universities, Shanghai Normal University and East China Normal University, also control principal selection at university-run schools (in Chinese higher education, "Normal" signifies a teacher training provider).

Shanghai Normal University, for instance, operates four schools, over which the university has authority for principal selection. Teachers at these university schools are employed by the university and receive benefits (such as health care) like university faculty, but they are trained at the district colleges.

Commentators within China have also argued that the *Requirements* are macro-policies that are difficult to implement: they do not establish expectations for professional behaviors at the school level, and so alone will not lead to improvements in leadership to improve student learning.²⁵

The inclusion of “political qualities” as a criterion also confirms the ongoing role of politics at the school level.

All newly appointed principals must “accept” at least 300 hours of professional development training within the first six months of their appointment. Topics can include school financial management, legal responsibilities for school management, dealing with the media, and many other areas. Principals are legally responsible for their school, and continue teaching once they are in the position. Training and development therefore addresses the diverse roles and responsibilities that principals have in schools, but not necessarily through a single program designed to provide the foundation for this position.

The Shanghai Municipal Education Commission does not prescribe which programs or training opportunities aspiring principals should undertake—thus, there is no shortage of training through diverse providers, including the universities, local district education bureaus and private institutions.

Shanghai’s approach to principal preparation is an extension of China’s long-standing tradition of lifelong learning among teachers. The expectation of self-motivated continuous professional development is deeply embedded in what it means to be a teacher in China—undertaking sabbaticals, extracurricular programs, international exchanges, and additional training are par for the course for teachers. In Shanghai, teachers must undertake at least 360 hours of continuing professional development over a five-year cycle, while senior teachers must undertake 540 hours over the same cycle (the more senior a teacher is on the career ladder, the greater their CPD requirements).²⁶ The Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals (2013) indicate that principals are responsible for ensuring release time for teachers’ continuous professional development to meet this requirement. Continuous professional development activities frequently lead to formal credentials (certificates, diplomas, and even degrees).²⁷

For teachers aspiring to the principalship, therefore, the requirement to undertake 300 hours of continuing professional development over six months does not require a substantial change in behavior: it is simply the kind of professional development opportunities undertaken, and not the act of undertaking development itself, that signals the transition into a formal school leadership role.

Principal ranking and career ladder

Teachers in Shanghai can expect to spend upwards of thirty years in the profession. They are supported through their career progression through a structured career ladder (zhiji zhi). The teacher career ladder was piloted in 1986 and has been revised several times since. It has been implemented across the province since 2000.²⁸

The principal career ladder and ranking system was piloted in Shanghai’s Jing’an province in 1993 under the Principal Responsibility System (PRS) reforms.²⁹

Part of the problem for school leadership in Shanghai prior to the PRS reforms was that principals at higher-status schools traditionally earned more and enjoyed higher social standing than those at lower-status schools.³⁰ Pay and status were therefore linked to official ladders rather than professional excellence, and principals were reluctant to transfer to lower-status schools. The introduction of the career ladder established a professional ranking system and new pay scale that tied principal pay to school performance, encouraging them to innovate and compete on improving student learning.³¹

In the spirit of PRS, the principal career ladder provided new incentives for principals to focus on school improvement, rather than earning party recognition. This was achieved in part through integrating principal appraisal, remuneration, and school performance. This encouraged leadership behaviors focused on improving teaching and learning, because principals cannot be promoted up the career ladder without demonstrating a positive impact on student learning at the school.

The principal career ladder also supported greater equity across the system. Recognition of excellent leadership (i.e., through promotion to a higher grade on the ladder) required demonstrating improvements in school performance, and not simply being associated with a “high-status” school.³² Like Jacky Ni, principal at Pudong Secondary School, principals in Shanghai today can expect to serve in a range of schools, and can earn professional respect and recognition for turning around underperforming schools.

In 2015, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission also emphasized that principals who are working in underperforming or rural schools should be recognized for their contribution to turning around schools.

Taken together, the teacher and principal career ladder encompasses the lifespan of teaching and leadership in schools, starting with induction-level teachers and culminating in experienced—or Master—principals.

Career tracks and principal ranking system: function and purpose for leadership development

While similar to Singapore’s career tracks in many respects, Shanghai’s career ladder has a few distinguishing features in terms of its function for school leadership development. Notably, unlike Singapore, Shanghai’s career ladder does not have streams for teaching, leadership, and specialist teachers. The principals’ career ladder in Shanghai is an extension of the teaching ladder, and ends with the Master Principal role (rather than system-level leadership positions).

Furthermore, Shanghai does not require teachers to undertake specific milestone development programs designed for key leadership roles along the career ladder, such as

the Management and Leadership in Schools for teacher leaders and Leaders in Education for aspiring principals at Singapore's National Institute of Education.

There is therefore greater variety in teachers' developmental journeys towards the principal's office in Shanghai. Principals in Shanghai do not necessarily develop the cohort identity or professional network that is gained through Singapore's mandatory milestone programs, but have a shared grounding in lesson and research groups at the school level and expectations for continuous professional development.

The principal career ladder articulates educational requirements, expected professional skills and continuing professional development requirements, and performance appraisal processes for principals in primary and secondary schools.³³ Requirements are specified for secondary and primary principals at the different levels and classes or grades of the principalship.

For instance, Master Principals must not only have senior qualifications, but should have an outstanding record of education theory and teaching research, and be recognized provincially and even nationally as an influential leader in education.³⁴

To be promoted one class, principals must achieve a rating of "excellent" in one annual assessment or a rating of "qualified" for two consecutive assessments.³⁵

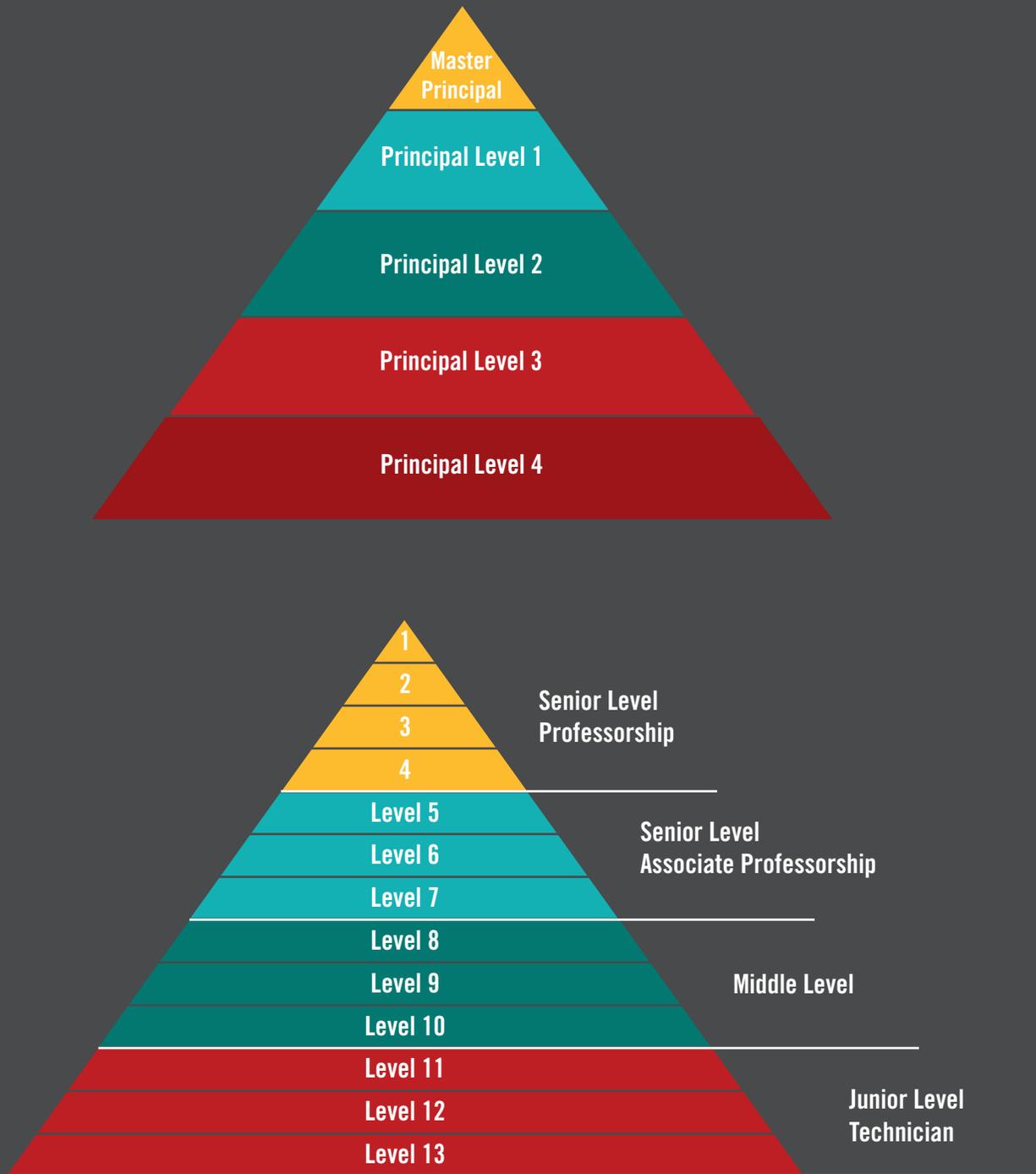
The higher up a teacher progresses along the career ladder, the more continuous professional development he or she must undertake to be promoted. As noted above, new teachers must undertake 360 hours of professional development training over their five years; secondary school senior teachers must undertake 540 hours every four years; and newly appointed school principals agree to "accept" at least 300 hours in their first six months in the new role.³⁶ They also undertake targeted training in topics such as finance and dealing with the media.³⁷

What does the transition from the teacher ladder to the principal ladder look like?

To transition to the first tier on the principal ladder, a teacher typically must be on the senior level of the teacher ladder. This demonstrates to the public, the profession, and the Municipal Government that the teacher has met expected standards for teaching and commitment to the profession. This does not necessarily imply a minimum number of years in the classroom, but it is a recognition of excellence in teaching, and experience in research and improving teaching and learning.

Leadership in Shanghai is therefore not exclusively performance-driven, as is sometimes assumed. While performance management plays a central role, other factors are considered in promotions to the principalship. Leadership experiences that demonstrate instructional capacity and earn professional respect—such as leading teaching and research units at the school and district level—are taken seriously in principal promotions.

Figure 1 Principal's Career Ladder (Top) and Teacher's Career Ladder (Bottom) in Shanghai



Source: Adapted from Zhang et al. (2016)

There are multiple ways to make this transition to principal level 4. Aspiring principals can, for instance, serve as local party secretary, as Head Learner Jacky Ni did. They can also self-nominate or be mentored to undertake specialized training and selection at the district Education Bureau. Some lead teaching and research units at the school and district level to gain relevant experience in classroom observation, evaluation, and teacher professional development. This kind of experience can lead to promotion to the principalship.

In lieu of a formal development program, aspiring principals take 300 training hours. Training can be undertaken at the district colleges of education/teacher training college, at universities both within China and abroad and, as organized by the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, the district Education Bureaus or private providers.

Programs for newly appointed principals concentrate on basic knowledge and skills needed for the principalship in China, including finance, the legal and policy context of school leadership, dealing with the media and public expectations, management issues, and so forth. Many of these programs address the core areas and professional practices listed in the Professional Standards adopted in 2013.

Shanghai Normal University, for instance, receives funding from the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission to run a program for newly appointed principals. Training takes candidates through the Principals' Professional Standards. Participants are also assigned into four groups, with one academic mentor (who can discuss leadership theory), and one senior principal mentor (who can share practical school-based experiences). The program is designed to encourage principals to think about their own practices, study, and exchange their experiences and ideas with other candidates. The final aspect of the program encourages candidates to analyze real-school contexts, such as school status, problems, and the vision of their school. Particularly promising new principals from districts in the province are selected to attend this program.³⁸

Lifelong learning is taken seriously

In 1999, the Ministry of Education released the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for newly appointed and serving principals.

This expectation is taken seriously. Principals reported “self-learning”—along with strategic planning, school work monitoring, class observation, fundraising, and maintaining *guanxi* (good relationships)—as one of the most important actions of effective school leadership.³⁹

Ongoing continuing professional development for principals is intended to support China's vision for “quality education” by reflecting six principles. Continuing professional development should:

- be context specific;
- target group specific guidance;

- link theory to practice;
- be applicable to practical situations (what is learned can be applied);
- be needs driven; and
- be attentive to school outcomes.⁴⁰

Since 2013, continuing professional development for principals should consider the Professional Standards for Principals (MOE 2013). Continuing professional development should also include ethical and moral theories, education legislation, modern education research and theory, school management theory and practice, ICT in education, and social science and the humanities.⁴¹

Serving principals

For serving principals, continuing professional development activities and programs tend to build on the foundational knowledge and skills to include organizational management, research, and sharing experience.

There are scores of programs and training opportunities that satisfy this requirement. Training options are offered at universities, private providers, and the district colleges of education. Shanghai has 16 districts, each of which has its own college.

There are two national training centers for principal development in China: The National Training Centre for High School Principals at East China Normal University (established around 1990), and the National Training Centre for Primary School Principals at Beijing Normal University (established in 2000).

Principals can also undertake professional development abroad, with some enrolling in masters of education at the National Institute of Education in Singapore, for instance, and further opportunities elsewhere, including the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

At times, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission may instruct principals to undertake specific programs. But principals enjoy considerable latitude in pursuing their own development path, as they see fit, based on the Professional Standards and the school's improvement needs.

Teachers and principals may be promoted along their respective career tracks through meeting multiple requirements, including satisfactory performance appraisal, requirements for training and ongoing development, and effectively mentoring other teachers to improve their performance. Other factors for consideration include contributing to key education issues through action research and lesson and research groups and, particularly since 2015, serving in underperforming schools or rural areas.

Principal appraisal and promotion

For principals in Shanghai, appraisal is a formal, annual process. The Shanghai Municipal Education Commission sets the methods and contents of assessment for principals and for party branch secretaries separately.

To initiate their assessment process, principals submit a personal declaration of no more than 3,000 words to the relevant District Office for principal rankings. The personal declaration should focus on the principal's impact on school performance and improvement, teaching, management, and innovation.⁴²

The District Office reviews these documents, and then organizes consultations with middle-level managers and staff from the school to gather anonymous feedback on the principal's performance and personal declaration.

The District Office then summarizes the principal's supporting material and teacher survey feedback, and provides an evaluation opinion.

The Municipal principal ranking committee is responsible for evaluating applications for level 1 or Master Principal, and the district education bureaus are responsible for assessing level 2 and below. Appraisal teams typically include 9 to 15 members, comprising one-third Party and government officials, one-third "famous" principals, and one-third education experts or researchers. These assessors must have high professional and political skills, and work in three-yearly work terms (after which point they can renew).⁴³

Shanghai review of the principal ranking and certification system

In 2015, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission announced a review of the principal ranking and evaluation system for principals (Circular No.34, 2015).⁴⁴

In the circular to district and school leaders across the province, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to improving the ranking and evaluation of principals in the spirit of the national drive to create a "high-quality, professional cohort of school principals" first established in the 2000 principal ranking reforms (Circular No.4, 2000).

The Commissions reaffirmed professional development expectations, distribution of principals across the ranking levels, appraisal processes and promotion requirements.

Two significant changes include:

- the uptake of the national Professional Standards for Principals (MOE 2013), which were released years after the first ranking system implementation, and
- recognition for principals who improve underperforming schools

This indicates a shift away from the pre-Principal Responsibility System ethos of earning respect for serving in high-status schools, and the ongoing professionalization of school leadership in China.

Principals are expected to “adhere to the principle of principal professional development,” with the Professional Standards as a guide. Principals’ professional “beliefs, knowledge, and behavior” for leadership and management should include a focus on:

- improving school development planning;
- creating cultural education;
- teaching leadership courses;
- leading teachers’ growth;
- optimizing internal management; and
- maintaining relationships with external stakeholders.

Improving curriculum leadership: Shanghai’s three-year plan

In 2010, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission circulated a three-year plan for improving curriculum leadership in the province’s kindergartens, primary schools, and lower secondary schools. Curriculum reform in China is widely held to be the key to “quality education.”⁴⁵

Shanghai’s plan defines curriculum leadership as “the ability of headmasters, as the heart of the teaching team, to plan, practice, and evaluate teaching processes in order to improve the quality of school curriculum.” Principals, teachers, and research staff are key agents for curriculum leadership and reform.

The plan was developed in the spirit of the *Basic Education Curriculum* reforms, including efforts to reduce the examination burden on students and to introduce more choice into the curriculum. Students’ developmental needs and broader social responsibilities are foregrounded in curriculum design and implementation.

Schools are advised that they are not authorized to increase the difficulty of the curriculum, increase the length of classes, or extend the school day without permission. Instead, principals and teachers are called upon to improve efficiency and teaching quality through school management, ICT, and more flexible teaching methods and skills.

The plan also calls on schools and district education bureaus to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for evaluating the curriculum and quality of teaching, and to adjust these as needed to promote students’ all-around development. Education and curriculum evaluation is seen as an inherent requirement for improving the standard of teaching and professional capacity. The plan advises district administrative departments and bureaus

to establish comprehensive and robust methods for evaluation, which consider students' learning needs and interests, physical and mental health, social responsibility, and teacher-student relationships, alongside academic quality. Results from the evaluation should then be used to improve curriculum design, development, and implementation; improve courses; and promote the holistic development of students.

The lesson and research groups (or teaching and research units) are highlighted as central to curriculum leadership and reform. Schools are advised to focus lesson and research groups around curriculum and teaching requirements. The lesson and research groups should be used to help teachers research and think critically about their own practices to solve teaching problems collectively. Curriculum leadership teams—including principals, senior grade teachers, and lesson and research groups—can identify and define problems for research through curriculum evaluation and students' learning needs. This can in turn support the school development plan and can be fed up to provincial curriculum reforms through the lesson and research group structure.

Curriculum leadership and reform requires the collaborative efforts of principals, teachers, researchers, and education administrators. This will require developing a school curriculum plan, reforming teaching and learning methods, and adjusting curriculum evaluation. This is a lengthy process, so the plan recommends taking the interim steps of conduction research, launching pilot projects, and evaluating curriculum and teaching.

Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals (MOE 2013)

Following the wake of leading systems around the world, the Chinese Ministry of Education formally published Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals in 2013, and the Professional Standards for Senior Secondary Principals in 2015.⁴⁶ The Ministry of Education benchmarked the development of the national principal standards against examples from English, Chinese, and Cantonese-speaking systems, including those of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, the United States, England, and Australia.⁴⁷

The Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals (the Standards) were developed in part to contribute to the ongoing professionalization of the school leadership across China.

Until the late 1970s, principals in China were subject to the rankings, appointment, and appraisal systems of the civil service. Under Deng Xiaoping's reforms for "opening-up policy," however, the government initiated a series of reforms to further decouple school leadership from political processes to enhance the professional quality of the workforce.⁴⁸

Further, the Standards are aligned with the central government's vision for education as outlined in the *National Guidelines for Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and*

Development 2010-2010 (MOE 2010).⁴⁹ Among its sweep of whole system reforms, this national education vision advocates the “professionalization of principals.” This includes establishing qualification standards, promoting ongoing professional development and international principal exchanges in Chinese-language systems, and building the management capacity of principals. The Guidelines further call for:

- improvements in principal selection and development through training and programs;
- principals to be held accountable for school management and improvement and for teacher professional development (i.e., principal accountability systems);
- principal transfers between compulsory education schools;
- stricter credential requirements and ranking system for principals in order to increase professionalism and school effectiveness; and
- “favorable conditions” for principals to innovate, implement new ideas, and “cultivate distinctive teaching and school-running styles” at the school level.⁵⁰

China’s Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals and Senior Secondary Principals therefore represent the latest intervention in a series of reform efforts designed to diminish the influence of politics in education, professionalize school leadership, raise the quality of education, and increase public confidence in the teaching workforce.

The Ministry of Education’s Standards apply to principals in compulsory education. Since the 1986 Law of Compulsory Education act, students in China must complete a total of nine years’ compulsory schooling—six years at primary school and three years at lower secondary. At the age of 15, students can either leave school, or continue to upper secondary school after completing the zhongkao entrance examination.⁵¹ Principals at these schools are referred to as compulsory education principals.

What is in the Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals?

The Ministry of Education’s Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals reflects research on principal effectiveness and principal evaluation practices in an international and national context.⁵²

The first part of the Professional Standards outlines **five “basic principles”** for principal leadership at compulsory schools in China. These principles are:

1. **Morality comes first.** Principals are responsible for implementing the socialist policy of the CCP in all aspects of school leadership and management; respecting the legislative and regulatory environment of education; and serving teachers, students, and the country through ethical, honest and impartial leadership and management.

2. **Education is the essence of all work.** Principals should support the healthy development of all students, including the vulnerable, and encourage equality; endeavor to improve the quality of compulsory education; and fully support the Quality Education policy.
3. **School principals lead educational development.** Principals are responsible for the holistic development of students, including their personality; and principals are responsible for leading teacher development and improvement across the whole school.
4. **Professional abilities are crucial.** Principals must combine the theory and practice of effective school management. They are responsible for improving their own capacity to lead and should build a good school culture, develop the professional capacity of teachers, and seek means for personal and school improvement through practice and critical reflection.
5. **Lifelong learning.** Principals must deeply understand and practice lifelong learning for their own continuous improvement, and must be up to date with national and international research in education reform and development.⁵³

In the second part, the Professional Standards outline six professional responsibilities (these are referred to in the literature as the actual “standards”).

1. **Setting the school development plan**, i.e., understand the main goal of running the school; guarantee and improve compulsory education for all school-age children and adolescents, including migrant children, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; develop school improvement strategy and share a common vision; respect the tradition and circumstances of the school.
2. **Cultivating a nurturing school environment**, i.e., put moral education first; treat the culture of the school as an important element of and means for school management; love the traditional culture of China; develop scientific and humanistic knowledge and seek artistic development; understand the psychological, moral, and artistic development of students; and develop campus culture through party youth leagues and student organizations.
3. **Leading curriculum improvement and instruction**, i.e., develop appropriate pedagogical strategies for different students; cultivate students’ sense of responsibility, creative thinking, and practical skills; master the goals and curriculum standards of students at different levels; understand curriculum development, evaluation, and teaching materials; encourage the development of school-based curriculum improvements; implement the compulsory education curriculum standards; do not increase the difficulty of courses for students; establish a system of lesson observation and evaluation in order to improve the curriculum; actively

organize and conduct teaching and research activities and teaching reform; and do not only pursue examination outcomes and enrollments.

4. **Leading teacher professional development**, i.e., teachers are the most valuable human resources for school reform—respect, trust and appreciate every teacher; principals are responsible for teachers’ professional development, especially young teachers; the school should serve as the base where teachers can achieve development; respect and stimulate teachers’ intrinsic motivations for development; understand teachers’ professional quality requirements; master the methods of learning organization construction and strategies for encouraging teachers to develop their professional quality; establish and improve the system of professional development and school-based teaching and research; guarantee 360 hours training for each teacher every five years; develop professional development plans according to each teacher’s needs; and encourage ITC for professional development.
5. **Optimizing organizational management**, i.e., follow the regulatory/compliance environment at the provincial and national level; understand the responsibilities of school principals and national policy; master the practices of effective school management, including trends at home and abroad; understand school personnel, finance, security, and health; liaise with the Party, and respect and support the staff committee in school management; ensure a safe school environment; and ensure coherence with national policy and reforms.
6. **Adjusting to external contexts**, i.e., regard social service as an important school function; ensure effective communication and cooperation with the broader school community, including staff, families and society; be familiar with public relations; engage with the school parents’ association; support home and school cooperation; and play an active role in the community.⁵⁴

The Standards may inform principal appraisal, principals’ continuing professional development plans, and principal development programs (such as Shanghai Normal University’s program for newly appointed principals). In practice, there is still varied uptake across the system.

Some researchers within China are calling for the Standards to be the new basis for regulating principal evaluation, to help consolidate the transition away from political legacy and civil service culture.⁵⁵

Notes

1. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016.
2. MOE, 2013
3. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016.
4. Jensen et al. 2016a.
5. Ibid.
6. Day 2012, 449; Walker, Hu, and Qian 2012. Chu and Cravens 2012.
7. Liu et al. 2015, 5.
8. Day 2012, 449.
9. Chu and Cravens 2012, 187.
10. Walker, Hu, and Qian 2012.
11. Chu and Cravens 2012.
12. Lin 1993.
13. Ibid.
14. Interview with Professor Kai-ming Cheng, Hong Kong University, 1 September 2016.
15. Zhao et al. 2008, 2.
16. Wong 2005, 552.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016, 17.
20. Shanghai's tripartite approach to teacher development has been thoroughly analyzed by Minxuan Zhang and Marc Tucker in various reports and documents in English. This chapter builds on this research base, investigating how these three cornerstones, and other targeted practices and strategies, contribute to Shanghai's system for principal development. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016.
21. Interview with Professor Kai-ming Cheng, Hong Kong University, 1 September 2016; Zhang and Kong 2012, 124–62. Jensen et al. 2016a.
22. OECD 2010b, 88; Jensen et al. 2016a.
23. Liu et al. 2015, 7.
24. Interview with Principal Jacky Ni, Pudong High School Shanghai 30 August 2016.
25. Chen Y and Xu S 2010., cited in Liu et al, p.7.
26. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016, 14; Isaacs, Creese, and Gonzalez 2015, 17.
27. OECD 2010b.
28. The role of the career ladder for teacher development in Shanghai has been discussed in detail by academics and researchers in English-language publications, notably by

Minxuan Zhang and Marc Tucker. A short overview is presented here. The original policy was announced in Circular No.4 (2000). Shanghai Municipal Education Commission 2000.

29. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016, 13.
30. Alexander Wiseman and Tiedan Huang 2011, 15:193.
31. Day 2012, 450.
32. Walker and Qian 2012, 450.
33. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016, 11.
34. Shanghai Municipal Education Commission 2000.
35. Ibid.
36. Zhang, Ding, and Xu 2016, 14.
37. Interview with personnel from Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, Shanghai 29 August 2016.
38. Interview with Professor Jie Wang, Shanghai, 29 September 2016.
39. Walker, Hu, and Qian 2012, 383.
40. Walker, Hallinger, and Qian 2007, 668.
41. Ibid.
42. Interview with Professor Allan Walker, Education University of Hong Kong 2 September 2016. See Circular 34.
43. Shanghai Municipal Education Commission 2000.
44. Shanghai Municipal Education Commission 2015.
45. Day 2012, 449.
46. Principal standards for kindergarten, normal high school and secondary vocational schools are formulated separately.
47. Liu et al. 2015, 6.
48. Liu et al. 2015, 4.
49. Ministry of Education, China 2010.
50. Ministry of Education, China 2010, 14–38.
51. Isaacs, Creese, and Gonzalez 2015, 7.
52. Liu et al. 2015, 12.
53. “Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals” 2013. Private translation—the authors accept responsibility for any errors in translation and interpretation.
54. Ibid.
55. Liu et al. 2015, 4. Jiang, X 2013.

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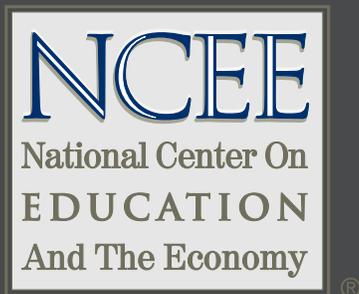
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