



# SREB

## *SREB Leadership Initiative:*

### Creating Effective Principals Who Can Improve the Region's Schools and Influence Student Achievement

The SREB Leadership Initiative is an effort to redesign educational leadership preparation and development programs so that they are aligned with the new accountability systems and standards instituted by the states. SREB recognizes the key role leadership plays in creating and sustaining schools that help all students achieve high standards. The organization is taking deliberate steps to get this issue on the priority lists of policymakers, education agencies and higher education institutions across the 16-state SREB region. The leadership initiative strives to meet the SREB goal: “Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.”

School leaders who can change curriculum and instruction are essential to increasing student achievement and ensuring the economic and cultural progress of the South and the nation. In this era of high-stakes accountability, school systems are having increasing difficulty recruiting new leaders to replace retiring administrators. The most common explanation is that the principal's job has become impossible to perform, but the real problem is that recruitment, preparation and professional development programs for educators who want to become leaders are out of sync with scaled-up expectations. This looming shortage of **qualified** school administrators — versus **certified** school administrators — is a crisis, but it presents opportunities to redefine what it means to be an educational leader and to identify and prepare a diverse new generation of leaders who can change curriculum and instruction and build higher performing schools.

### What Are the Major Goals of the Leadership Initiative?

In an effort to change the way leaders are prepared, the goals of the Leadership Initiative include:

- strengthening and diversifying the leadership pool by tapping potential leaders who demonstrate that they can change curriculum and instruction and raise student achievement;
- creating multi-tier, performance-based and flexible certification that offers options outside traditional university leadership preparation programs;
- redesigning university programs to prepare leaders who can improve the core functions of the school and increase student achievement;
- developing state leadership academies that engage teams from low-performing schools in continuous learning activities focused on comprehensive school reform and that provide alternative routes to leadership certification and recertification; and
- putting in place essential conditions to support school leaders' efforts to improve curriculum and instruction and raise student achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

*A 1999 report by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds estimated that in the next six years, 40 percent of the country's 80,000 principals and 50 percent of the country's 15,000 superintendents will be eligible to retire.*

## What Activities Does the Leadership Initiative Support?

**State Leadership Academy Network** - Six leadership academies work with SREB and school districts to redesign how principals and other school leaders are tapped, trained, certified and supported as school teams work to improve learning and student achievement. States are encouraged to design a "special" leadership academy that focuses on developing leadership teams from low-performing schools that are just above the lowest-performing schools.

**University Leadership Development Network** - Eleven universities work with SREB and school districts to redesign how university leadership preparation programs train aspiring school leaders. Additional redesign efforts focus on changing how leaders are tapped, certified and supported in their work. Universities are designing curriculum and instruction based on more practical content that provides more challenging assignments and new performance assessments.

**Curriculum** - Using the expertise of SREB, practitioners, a curriculum designer and network members, SREB is developing a leadership curriculum designed to prepare principals, aspiring leaders and teacher leaders to aggressively improve curriculum, instruction and student achievement in their schools. Based on what successful school leaders do in their schools, the curriculum is modular and can be adapted for delivery in academy training programs and university courses.

**Publications** - The Leadership Initiative produces publications for various audiences. Benchmark reports are published to inform educational leaders and policymakers of progress toward the redesign of leader preparation and development. Policy reports provide information to help educational leaders and policymakers as they develop policies to support leadership preparation and development. Newsletters help network members and others stay informed about promising practices and the initiative's work. Other publications share lessons learned through the redesign efforts of leadership academy and university network members. (See page 4.)

**National Conference** - The Leadership Matters conference is held annually to share the work of the Leadership Initiative. Members of the two networks present their redesign efforts, and other educators doing similar reform work engage participants in powerful discussions about school improvement and student learning.

**Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement** - The SREB Leadership Initiative collaborates with the Georgia Board of Regents in the operation of the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), which is a leadership development and preparation prototype housed outside of any traditional university. The GLISI prepares and develops current and aspiring school leaders through a core workshop, technology applications and customized modules that support individual development plans.

## What Must Leaders Know and Be Able to Do?

Leaders must practice these critical success factors in order to turn around student achievement in low-performing schools:

- Create a focused mission to improve student achievement and a vision of the elements of school, curriculum and instructional practices that make higher achievement possible.
- Set high expectations for all students to learn higher-level content.
- Recognize and encourage good instructional practices that motivate students and increase their achievement.
- Create a school organization where faculty and staff understand that every student counts and where every student has the support of a caring adult.
- Use data to initiate and continue improvement in school and classroom practices and student achievement.
- Keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement.
- Make parents partners in students' education and create a structure for parent and educator collaboration.
- Understand the change process and have the leadership and facilitation skills to manage it effectively.
- Understand how adults learn and know how to advance meaningful change through quality, sustained professional development that leads to increased student achievement.
- Use and organize time in innovative ways to meet the goals and objectives of school improvement.
- Acquire and use resources wisely.
- Obtain support from the central office and from community and parent leaders for the school improvement agenda.
- Continuously learn from and seek out colleagues who are abreast of new research and proven practices.

*“Things in school have changed dramatically over the past few years. Now ‘they’ not only permit us to proceed with a new idea; they expect and demand that we do. As one principal recently put it, ‘If I had shared my vision of a school 10 years ago, I would have been locked up. Now, I can’t get a job without a vision.’”*

Roland Barth  
*Learning From the Heart*

*“Principals are generally dissatisfied with their graduate programs. There is little evidence that graduate training increases the effectiveness of school administrators in general and principals, in particular.”*

Brian O. Brent  
*Teaching in Educational Administration*

*“A lot of SREB [focus] is on getting all students to achieve at high levels. These higher expectations are important. I think that’s one of the positive differences between SREB, our state and NCATE.”*

Judith Adkison  
University of North Texas

## How Are the Leadership Initiative Goals Implemented?

The SREB Leadership Initiative connects state academies and universities across the region to improve leadership preparation and development by:

- supporting university and academy networks as they redesign their purposes and programs;
- collaborating to provide a modular curriculum designed around what successful leaders need to know and be able to do; and
- establishing indicators for tracking progress that state educational leaders and policymakers can use as the basis for actions that support preparation and development programs and certification requirements that prepare leaders to improve schools.

## How Are Network Members Supported?

SREB works with 11 universities and six leadership academies to improve leadership preparation and develop a broader, more diverse pool of school leaders. SREB support includes:

- contact meetings for networking;
- teleconferences for sharing;
- site visits to provide “critical friends” for analysis;
- module development and distribution for curriculum support;
- study groups for the deep study needed to solve complex problems of redesign and change;
- annual conferences for sharing lessons learned;
- research and data collection for measuring progress; and
- newsletters and publications for benchmarking and reporting progress.

## What Publications Are Available to Network Members?

SREB Leadership Initiative publications are concise, accurate, timely and informative. They keep each member of the network up-to-date on the latest advances in leadership preparation, licensure and assessment.

The following publications are currently available on the SREB Web site at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org):

- Are SREB States Making Progress? Tapping, Preparing and Licensing School Leaders Who Can Influence Student Achievement
- The Bottom Line Newsletter
- Leadership Matters: Building Leadership Capacity
- Leading School Improvement: What Research Says
- What School Principals Need to Know about Curriculum and Instruction
- Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It’s Time for Action
- Making Leadership Happen

## What Are the Conditions of Redesign for Universities?

The goal of the University Leadership Development Network is to design, deliver and evaluate a school leader program that emphasizes comprehensive school improvement and improved student achievement and can be adopted by other colleges and universities. Each participating institution is expected to design a school-leadership preparation program tightly linked to the standards and goals of the state accountability system.

Network universities agree to:

- Create an advisory board made up of faculty, business leaders, exemplary principals, state education department representatives and other school leaders with diverse backgrounds who represent a wide range of schools and school systems who meet regularly to assist in designing the program.
- Plan learning experiences in which leadership candidates apply research-based knowledge to:
  - solve field-based problems;
  - concentrate on learning about core functions of the school, including instruction and student learning; and
  - engage in internship experiences that are well-planned and integrated throughout the preparation program and that allow aspiring leaders to receive mentoring and practice skills with master leaders.
- Create a preparation program that can be customized for individuals on the basis of their experience in providing leadership while serving in other positions.
- Provide faculty, practicing educators and others with broad, research-based knowledge, and redesign university leadership preparation to emphasize school-based learning.
- Contribute staff time and expertise to design, develop and field test leadership training modules that address problems leaders must solve in school, and develop a team structure among leadership faculty to facilitate their working together to teach modules that are, at least in part, school-based.
- Support faculty with time to conduct school-based research and to participate in an ongoing evaluation process to determine if program adjustments are preparing leaders who demonstrate the ability to increase student learning and produce high-achieving schools.
- Realign the faculty advancement and reward system to include acceptance of school-based work as part of tenure and promotion requirements.
- Support school districts in identifying potential leaders with demonstrated leadership ability, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and a proven record of high performance.
- Adjust budgets to allocate additional time, resources and staffing to coordinate, develop and implement a new curriculum for school leader preparation.
- Solicit waivers from state agencies as needed to address certification issues.

*Oklahoma State University works with local districts to get aspiring principals release time each week for three semesters. Candidates use this time to work on school problems with a study team, and they meet weekly with university faculty.*

## What Are the Conditions of Redesign for State Leadership Academies?

The goal of the State Leadership Academy Network is to help states design academy programs for school leadership teams from schools that in current accountability programs are neither “bad enough” to get intensive, focused help nor “good enough” to help students who are counting on them ... or should be. The intent is to prepare a team composed of current and aspiring principals and teacher leaders to work together to apply research-based knowledge to improve curriculum and instructional practices and student achievement.

State leadership academies must agree to:

- Enroll teams from school sites just above those schools identified as low-performing. Teams should be composed of current school leaders, future leaders, teacher leaders and at least one district office representative.
- Work with SREB to design and develop curriculum modules that engage and prepare current and emerging leadership teams in applying research-based knowledge and processes to real problems that are creating barriers to comprehensive school improvement in their schools.
- Support school districts in identifying potential leaders with demonstrated leadership ability, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and a proven record of high performance.
- Recruit instructors to serve as teachers and coaches who have knowledge about what it takes to transform low-performing schools and who can help schools apply research-based knowledge to improve school and classroom practices.
- Work with universities or state agencies to offer academy-based leadership programs that count toward professional leadership certification and/or renewal.
- Conduct school-based research to determine if the academy program is producing leaders who are improving student achievement.
- Work with networks of school-site leadership development teams in ways that allow them to learn from one another.
- Create an advisory board that meets frequently and includes state educational leaders involved in comprehensive school improvement, business leaders, and successful school and system leaders who have made significant gains in student achievement.

## How Do We Measure and Report Progress?

Each network team uses surveys, 360-degree instruments and rubrics to self-assess their progress. SREB is tracking changes across the conditions of redesign for leadership programs and academies and measuring changes in core program components, content, assignments and performance assessments. A study has been conducted to measure changes in policies and practices for the selection, preparation, certification and on-the-job support provided current and future school leaders. It is available on the SREB Web site at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

*“I have changed my attitude and focused on instruction. I have come to the conclusion that lunch will be served and the buses will run with or without me.”*

A participant in the Alabama Leadership Academy

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*"I think much of what's driving change in the way programs are being designed and redesigned has come out of the whole-reform movement of the last 20 years and out of the realization that many of the research-based programs and much of educational administration research really wasn't having much impact on improving schools."*

SREB Network Member

## For More Information

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## About SREB

The Southern Regional Education Board, the nation's first interstate compact for education, was created in 1948 by Southern governors. SREB helps educational and governmental leaders work cooperatively to advance education and, in doing so, to improve the region's social and economic life.

SREB assists state leaders by directing attention to key issues: collecting, compiling and analyzing comparative data; and initiating studies and discussions that lead to recommendations for state and institutional action.

**Funding for the Leadership Initiative is provided by The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds.** WRDF has three objectives:

- Attract and place a broader pool of able candidates into the principalship and superintendency.
- Strengthen the abilities of principals and superintendents to improve student learning.
- Create conditions that facilitate and support leadership for successful schools.