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# **When Learning Counts:**

## Rethinking Licenses for School Leaders

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The findings and recommendations in this report are solely those of the authors.

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# Executive Summary

This report asks two fundamental questions: do the licenses that states require of school principals encompass the knowledge and skills those principals need to promote student learning? If not, what kind of policy framework would help decisionmakers, educators, and others rethink principal licenses and the school leadership they support? To find the answers, we examined licensure content for principals in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. Based on that in-depth investigation, we reached the following conclusions.

**Licenses don't reflect a learning focus.** No state has crafted licensing policies that reflect a coherent learning-focused school leadership agenda. On the contrary, licenses run between two extremes: a reliance on individual characteristics, such as background checks or academic degrees, that signal nothing about the purposes or practice of the principalship, and lists of knowledge and skill requirements whose scope and depth don't clearly sum to a meaningful definition of the job. Neither approach represents a set of qualifications on which the public may rely or the profession may depend. In an era of standards and accountability, this omission stands out.

**Licensing requirements are unbalanced across states and misaligned with today's ambitions for school leaders.** Thirty-five states rely either primarily or exclusively on the *individual-focused licensing requirements* we just mentioned. In the latter case, state licensing policies fail to specify *any* knowledge and skill requirements for school principals. Meanwhile, 10 states base principal licenses primarily on *generic organizational knowledge and skills*, such as problem analysis, communication, oversight, and resource management.

Six states base principal licenses primarily on *learning-focused knowledge and skills*. Twenty-eight others include some learning-focused content in their licensing requirements but rely more on non-learning criteria. Thus, while two-thirds of the states include some learning-focused content in their licensing requirements, inclusion of that content seldom amounts to a coherent policy focus or plan. Even when states include it, the learning-focused content is narrow in scope. For instance, only five states—Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, New Mexico, and Oklahoma—include learning-focused content in all five categories of the leadership-for-learning variables we included in this report, encompassing knowledge and skills related to academic programs, students, teachers, schools, and communities.

In addition to the variation in policy focus (across individual, organizational, and learning content), licensing demands also vary in terms of sheer numbers, ranging from 1 regulatory requirement (Hawaii) to 435 (Arkansas).

These findings are troublesome because academic results lag behind accountability expectations, achievement gaps persist, and accountability sanctions loom ever larger. At the same time that accountability raises the bar for learning-focused knowledge and skills among principals, the magnitude of the learning challenge for students signals the need for practices beyond the boundaries of business as usual. How, then, can states develop school leaders who can do this job? And what role can licensing play in securing the principals that schools need?

**Licenses form the foundation of school leadership development.** Rethinking principal licenses is an important first step in promoting leadership for learning. Licenses are an important policy tool, regulating who may become a principal and signaling the qualifications the public may expect in its school leaders. Licenses are a broadly applied tool, in use by all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and thus are able to influence practice widely. However, as our findings suggest, licenses also are a problematic tool, one not in sync with the demands of school leadership. They rest on assumptions about who can practice effectively and about the nature of school leadership itself that need to be re-examined in light of the learning challenges states now confront.

**Doing licensure well means tackling licenses in the larger context of school leadership development.** Three issues in particular shape any attempt to rethink principal licenses:

- The myth of the “super principal,” that can-do person who is able to accomplish with ease what many would regard as an untenable set of demands. Piling school leadership expectations onto lone individuals has not resulted so far in school systems that serve all children well.
- The distinction between entry-level skills and expertise. Licensing, by design, represents only entry-level knowledge and skills, a level sufficient to keep the public from harm. It does not indicate that a principal is able to tackle the occupation’s thorniest problems. The hardest and most consequential tasks require expertise beyond the license and a concerted effort to develop it.
- The difference between “practice” and “leadership.” Licenses govern practice. They represent knowledge and skills needed to carry out technical tasks. Leadership, however, is a social task, driving change and movement in organizations. No one licenses leadership. Leaders emerge after organizations make substantial investments in their training, scrutinize their promise, and build on the right mix of personal attributes. If

learning expectations demand true leadership at the school level, then states must set out consciously to develop it or to recognize it from whatever quarter it appears.

Doing licensure well, then, begins by challenging traditional licenses. A short list of overarching questions captures the most important elements of licensing and forms a basis for affirming or altering the licenses states promulgate:

- Does the license protect the public from harm?
- Does the license adequately represent knowledge and skills upon which the public may rely and the profession may depend?
- Does the license demand a test or similar performance demonstration that fairly and effectively separates qualified from unqualified candidates?
- Does the license direct practitioners to keep their skills sharp and their knowledge current?
- Does the license ensure fair access to the job?
- Is there a rational basis for licensing variations across states, or do the differences merely add complexity or inhibit mobility?
- Do states treat licenses in isolation or do they coordinate them with other policy or professional mechanisms that promote expertise and leadership?

Doing licensure well also requires a balanced framework that's able to link licenses with the duties and demands of the principalship. The framework we constructed for this analysis includes three categories: *individual-focused elements* (personal character, education, experience, skill assessment, and prior certifications), *organizational-focused elements* (strategic, social performance, technology utilization, and constituency management knowledge and skills), and *learning-focused elements* (knowledge and skills regarding educational programs, students, teachers, schools, and community outreach, the heart of the leadership-for-learning ambition).

Finally, leadership for learning requires more than a license. It needs a policy framework that makes coherent linkages among the standards, goals, and policy targets that define licensure's purpose and the practice it enables; then situates licensure within broader school leadership development strategies that account for differences between entry-level and expert practice, the problematic reliance on "super principals," and the need for

change-oriented school leadership. We call this framework *Licensing-Plus*, and it affects practitioners in four stages:

- 1.** It *(re)structures the license* itself to include a background check, academic degree, specification of required knowledge and skills, and a test of knowledge and skills that is open to all candidates regardless of background.
- 2.** It *provides for the development of expertise* through focused continuing education tied to required knowledge and skills; voluntary, post-licensure certifications in specialized areas of school leadership; and distributed leadership roles.
- 3.** It *promotes leadership development* through specialized leadership training that includes policy and professional opportunities.
- 4.** It *promotes effective licensing policies* by using research to align licensing provisions, principal knowledge and skills, and school performance.

Licensing-Plus raises the prospect that school principals will be upstanding, educated, qualified, administratively competent, on target, possessed of the right know-how, and able to handle their job in any school or district that beckons; that is, it raises the prospect that principals will match what reasonable citizens might demand in school leaders. In short, when student learning matters, states must view principal licenses as tools to promote learning. Tackling new demands for school leadership requires that states rethink principal licenses in ways that move the profession toward the learning-focused school leadership the nation now demands.



# Preface

Principals today are expected to be more than “plant” managers. They are supposed to be “leaders of learning.” How is this expectation understood in the research and practice literature? Have expectations for principals’ skills and abilities changed as demands for student performance and school-level accountability have increased?

Chapter 1 raises these questions in the context of three problematic issues that shape any attempt to rethink principal licenses. First: the myth of the “super principal,” our seemingly unquestioned assumption that lone individuals can successfully tackle an ever-expanding list of job mandates. Is leadership for learning a one-person show or is it the province of an ensemble, however organized? Second: the distinction between entry-level skills and expertise. Licenses reflect only the former. Rethinking principal licenses, therefore, requires consideration of a fuller range of activities that propel principals from mere competence to expertise. Third: administrative practice versus leadership. Licenses govern administrative practice, those activities that keep an organization on track. In contrast, organizational leadership assumes other skills and personal characteristics that enable individuals to craft new goals, marshal an organization’s will and resources, and reorient its work. In other words, fostering leadership for learning may require new thinking and new policies that begin with the license but continue with other mechanisms that are better able to develop principals’ advanced skills and leadership.

In light of emerging expectations, Chapter 2 then explores the background, qualifications, and credentials that a reasonable citizen might expect of school principals. While informed by scholarship, these attributes also represent characteristics that many educators and public officials, too, might agree are desirable in the men and women who lead the nation’s schools. What would well-informed observers expect from a person licensed to lead a school? And how well do existing state licensing requirements match these expectations? In addressing these questions, Chapter 2 provides a first look at principal licensing requirements in the 50 states and District of Columbia, as well as a first impression of how successfully today’s licenses protect the public’s interest in well-qualified school leaders.

Chapter 3 provides both a deeper assessment of principal licensure and a policy framework for understanding skills and characteristics that better support today’s school leadership ambitions. Its basis is a three-part analytic tool we devised to assess licensure requirements. Comprised of individual characteristics, generic organizational capacities, and learning-specific knowledge and skills, the tool enabled a systematic and critical look at principal licenses across the states. One important finding is that the con-

tent of principal licensure is poorly aligned with today's expectations for principals' work, paying little attention to the learning-oriented knowledge and skills principals need to move schools ahead. A related finding is that even when principal licenses address learning issues, the scope and depth of what they cover is narrow; in effect, sending the right signal but with important parts of the message missing. Moreover, these requirements vary widely across the states, all of which tout similar performance hopes for students. Such variation raises questions about the coherence and portability of the licenses states now issue. When we combine these findings with the super principal, practice-versus-leadership, and entry-versus-expert problems, we find plenty of latitude to question the utility of today's principal licenses and how states might rethink these licenses in light of their own new demands for school leadership.

Is there a better way to think about principal licenses and, importantly, principals' leadership development? In Chapter 4 we propose standards, goals, and policy targets for improving principal licensure. Building on the three-part framework outlined in Chapter 3, this chapter suggests a new approach, Licensing-Plus, which encompasses entry-level credentials supplemented by continuing education, specialized certificates, and the use of additional mechanisms to develop real expertise and leadership for learning. The chapter then explores what this new way of licensing would mean for policy and why it holds more promise for school leadership than the licenses we have today.

This report is the sixth and final report developed at the Center on Reinventing Public Education for the Wallace Foundation under a grant from the foundation's school leadership initiative. Earlier, the Center produced:

- *A Matter of Definition: Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?* (Marguerite Roza with Mary Beth Celio, James Harvey, and Susan Wishon, January 2003.)
- *An Impossible Job? The View from the Urban Superintendent's Chair* (Howard L. Fuller, Christine Campbell, Mary Beth Celio, James Harvey, John Immerwahr, and Abigail Winger, July 2003.)
- *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (Bradley Portin, Paul Schneider, Michael DeArmond, and Lauren Gundlach, September 2003.)
- *From Bystander to Ally: Transforming the District Human Resources Department* (Christine Campbell, Michael DeArmond, and Abigail Schumwinger, April 2004.)
- *Buried Treasure: Developing an Effective Management Guide from Mountains of School Data* (Mary Beth Celio and James Harvey, January 2005.)

Imagine yourself in the following situation: You are a school district superintendent. One of your schools, Parrington High, recently has come under close state and school board scrutiny due to poor student performance. Test scores on the state’s annual assessment not only are low but flat, showing little improvement of late. What’s more, in three years the state accountability plan will require all students to achieve proficiency on this test before they receive a high school diploma. Only about half of Parrington’s students meet this standard now. The principal at Parrington is retiring, opening an opportunity for new leadership.

As superintendent, you will select the new principal. A district hiring team, composed of administrators, teachers, and parents, has submitted two candidates for your consideration. One is licensed per state regulations. These regulations require three years of classroom-teaching experience and a Master’s degree in educational leadership earned at a state-approved preparation program. The other candidate is not licensed. In fact, she has no school experience of any kind. On the other hand, she is a gifted and experienced nonprofit executive with a solid track record of good results. This second candidate came to you through a pilot program that allows nontraditional candidates from other fields to be considered for school leadership roles.

That the hiring team emphasized the importance of your decision was hardly necessary. You count yourself among the 79% of superintendents nationwide who believe that “the first and most important step in turning around a troubled school is to find a strong and talented principal” and the 99% who acknowledge that “behind every great school is a great principal.”<sup>1</sup>

At times you almost think that “greatness” is a prerequisite for today’s principals. Amidst increasing expectations for student learning and rising stakes if children are left behind, the men and women who lead America’s schools must draw successfully on knowledge and skills that encompass planning and problem solving, promoting effective instruction, assessing student performance, shaping a learning-focused culture, addressing student and staff needs, and engaging external stakeholders. In other words, the business of shepherding schools toward greater student learning requires strategic, instructional, organizational, and political talents.<sup>2</sup> Moreover,

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1. Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, Ann Duffett, and Tony Foleno, with Patrick Foley, *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk About School Leadership* (New York: Public Agenda, 2001), 7.

2. See, for example, Bradley Portin, Paul Schneider, Michael DeArmond, and Lauren Gundlach, *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (Seattle: University of Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education, September 2003.)

principals must carry out this work coherently, across years, and with shifting student and teacher cohorts, fluctuating resources, and evolving community and policy demands.

As important as principals are in promoting student learning, you also understand how the deck is stacked against them. Much of their day is taken up with unscheduled problems or demands that they handle quickly and sequentially, often in face-to-face exchanges that last less than a few minutes. “Routine notions of time management . . . do not apply as irate parents, injured children, intransigent students, safety issues, and mundane breakdowns are pressed into the principal’s office for attention.”<sup>3</sup> With virtually no time for reflection, tasks that demand sustained attention await evenings and weekends. In this context, learning-focused strategic planning, instructional leadership, and community engagement receive short shrift.

Despite all this, expectations awaiting Parrington’s new principal are crystal clear: improve student learning. Your choice between the two candidates, therefore, must reflect the probability of accomplishing this goal.

In weighing the choice, you confront your own assumptions about the type of candidate who is more likely to promote student learning. The traditional candidate is an experienced teacher who knows students, classrooms, curricula, assessment, and school culture; in short, the technology and challenges of learning. That said, teaching and instructional leadership are different tasks. When one adds the principalship’s organizational and political dimensions to the mix, the roles seem fundamentally different.

Of course, the traditional candidate successfully completed the required academic training in school administration. Still, you agree with the 69% of principals and 80% of superintendents who say that leadership training is out of touch with the demands of the job.<sup>4</sup> Your own on-the-ground experience tempers any confidence that preparation programs adequately prepare teachers for a successful transition to administration. Reinforcing that concern, superintendents nationwide claim that only about a fifth to a third of principals are competent at school leadership tasks such as communicating a school vision, building support for an agenda, and motivating staff and holding them accountable; and no more are competent at using money effectively, making tough decisions, or developing talented teachers.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Carolyn Kelley and Kent D. Peterson, “The Work of Principals and Their Preparation: Addressing Critical Needs for the Twenty-First Century,” in *The Principal Challenge: Leading and Managing Schools in an Era of Accountability*, eds. Marc S. Tucker and Judy B. Codding, 247-306 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 254.

4. Farkas, et al., *Ahead of the Game*, 31.

5. *Ibid.*, 24.

In contrast, the nontraditional candidate seems to excel at the very things traditionally licensed principals do not: creating an organizational mission, securing resources to carry out a job, developing a talented workforce, and being accountable for results. But providing a service developed and delivered by adults who chose the work is a far cry from fostering academic learning among a conscripted student coalition of the willing and unwilling, advantaged and disadvantaged. Nothing in the background of the nontraditional candidate indicates any facility with curriculum, instruction, or assessments; that is, no proficiency with the core technology of schooling: teaching and learning.

So here's the situation: a school needs help, an opportunity for new leadership has opened, a district work group has forwarded their recommendations, and the choice is yours.

Whom would you hire?



It is not much of an oversimplification to say that a generation ago school principals were regarded as education's middle managers. They were expected to worry about the processes and procedures that kept schools running smoothly: discipline, scheduling, maintenance, and adherence to directives from the central office.<sup>6</sup> While none of that has changed, more is now demanded.

## New Demands for School Leaders

Today's school principal operates in an era that prizes student learning above all else, and at levels never before demanded or attained. The performance imperative reflected in state learning standards and accountability measures, federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements, and state judicial decrees regarding educational adequacy is inescapable: all children must learn. As a matter of public consensus and policy, meeting the needs of merely some students is no longer good enough for America's schools.

For the nation's principals this commitment means that persistent achievement gaps, easily measurable along racial and class lines, must be closed, and the chasm between student performance levels and accountability expectations must be bridged. That gap is so great that states, districts, and schools must double or triple student achievement gains within a very few years or face the hammer of accountability sanctions. The magnitude of these changes signals the need for strategies and practices beyond the boundaries of business as usual.

What's more, a growing consensus among scholars asserts that performance-oriented educational reforms have changed the very nature of school leadership, altering the knowledge and skills required of principals.<sup>7</sup> Foregoing bureaucracy's treat-everyone-the-same procedures for a professionalism that tailors practice to students' circumstances, focusing less on organizational maintenance and more on developing student and staff potential, and trading formal positions (whose job is it?) for task competence (who can do the job?), the new educational leadership targets instructional improve-

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6. For a classic description, see Harry F. Wolcott, *The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

7. See, for example, Richard F. Elmore, *Building a New Structure for School Leadership* (The Albert Shanker Institute, Winter 2000); Joseph Murphy, *Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools*, Paper prepared for the National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, January 1996); Joseph Murphy and Karen Seashore Louis, "Framing the Project," in *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, 2d ed., eds. Joseph Murphy and Karen Seashore Louis, xxi-xxvii (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

ment and distributes its responsibilities among several players, not just the principal.<sup>8</sup> This shift invites school leaders to create “powerful, equitable learning opportunities for students, professionals, and the system,”<sup>9</sup> and to motivate them to take advantage of these opportunities. In short, the men and women now leading public schools are supposed to be far more than competent managers. At both elementary and secondary levels, they are expected to be “leaders of learning.”

In making this transition, principals more and more must define learning goals that move their schools forward. They must win the support of community members and association stakeholders. They must motivate students and inspire teachers while ensuring their capacity to accomplish what’s expected. Principals also must marshal resources, manage their programs, even model values and habits that are consistent with the learning orientation schools must champion. Without such leadership, student progress may be slow, haphazard, or nonexistent. As a result, ensuring school-level leadership for learning is a worthy enterprise for policymakers who demand this success, for practitioners who must achieve it, and for philanthropists whose investments support it. The question is: How do we develop school leaders who can do this job? And in the context of this report, what role can licensing play in securing the principals schools need?

Dating roughly from the mid-1980s,<sup>10</sup> this era of heightened expectations and performance accountability has prompted new thinking about the kind of school leadership the nation needs. It also has compelled renewed scrutiny of the policy mechanisms states use to mold the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the men and women who take on such ambitious agendas. This report furthers that discussion, examining the extent to which principal licenses foster the learning-focused leadership states expect. However, before we introduce findings or consider changes in policy, we must set the stage by introducing three problems that shape our critique of administrator licenses: the myth of the super principal, the difference between administrative practice and leadership, and the entry-level-only knowledge and skills that licenses represent. These issues define licensure’s challenges and lead us toward Licensing-Plus.

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8. James P. Spillane, Richard Halverson, and John B. Diamond, “Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective,” *Educational Researcher*, 30 (April 2001); Portin, et al., *Making Sense of Leading Schools*.

9. Michael S. Knapp, Michael A. Copland, and Joan E. Talbert, *Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders* (Seattle: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, February 2003), 12.

10. See Joseph Murphy and Jacob E. Adams, Jr., “Reforming America’s Schools 1980-2000”, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 36 (1998): 426-444.



## The “Super Principal” Myth

One troubling side effect of these high-challenge, high-stakes performance developments is the growth of a “super principal” myth: that a single man or woman is able to accomplish with ease what many would regard as an untenable set of demands.<sup>11</sup> Held accountable by multiple constituencies, today’s principals are commonly portrayed as the key actor in school change.<sup>12</sup> States and districts increasingly count on them to ensure that every student learns and that faculty become more skilled. At the same time, stakeholders expect principals to share decisionmaking, link with external partners, and broaden community involvement in shaping a school vision.

Demands don’t stop there, however. Principals also craft budgets and engineer staff and student schedules. As key players in personnel decisions, principals hire, supervise, and evaluate dozens of employees, who hail from multiple collective bargaining units, each with its own set of “dos and don’ts.” Principals handle facilities issues from broken light bulbs to building renovations, and they juggle often-rigid policy edicts established in central offices, frequently without their advice. They supervise bus lines, cafeterias, and basketball games and handle daily complaints ranging from the minor to the life threatening. The list of principal responsibilities goes on and on, at least it seems that way. Yet, heaping all these expectations on lone individuals has not resulted—so far—in school systems that serve all children well.

Perhaps we should stop the piling on and give the super principals a break, at least when it comes to licensing. Our analysis found 13 states with licensing regulations—discrete skill or knowledge requirements—that included dozens, and in one instance (Arkansas) hundreds, of expectations for principals.<sup>13</sup> To put the magnitude of these expectations in perspective, state regulatory content governing principal licenses nationwide ranged from 1 requirement (Hawaii) to 435 (Arkansas). The average number of requirements was 39, but the median was 18, demonstrating how those numerous-expectation states pulled the average upward. By comparison, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for school leaders, which we also analyzed, included 196 separate expectations.

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11. Michael A. Copland, “The Myth of the Superprincipal,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82 (March 2001): 528-533.

12. For a research perspective, see, for example, Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) or Philip Hallinger and Ronald H. Heck, “Exploring the Principal’s Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980-1995,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9 (1998): 157-191. For a practice perspective, see Farkas, et al., *Ahead of the Game*.

13. In ascending order: Virginia, Illinois, New Jersey, Colorado, Missouri, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Vermont, New Mexico, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

In the context of super principals and licenses, this variation raises two questions: How much regulatory detail does it take to align principal licenses with emerging school leadership demands? And, on the high side of demand, is it possible for one individual to comply with requirements of this (super principal) magnitude? At some point, more regulation surely becomes inefficient while less probably omits important knowledge and skills. Where is that line? Those 13 numerous-expectation states also happen to be the ones with the greatest scope and depth of both organizational- and learning-focused knowledge and skills, just the type of regulatory content that directly relates licensing to a principal's job requirements. So have they aligned their licensing requirements to practice more successfully than other states, or are they only piling on regulations that tie licenses to super principals? One way to tackle that question—to rethink principals' responsibilities and licenses—is to distinguish between administrative practice and school leadership, recognizing how licenses only start our future leaders on the path they need to travel.

### **Distinguishing Practice from Leadership**

Even if the principalship were structured in a manageable way, the license still poses a problem for policymakers, educators, and public, namely, the practice of school administration differs from the leadership of learning organizations. This distinction is critical, if seldom acknowledged.

Licenses govern practice. They represent knowledge and skills needed to carry out technical tasks: cut hair (barber), fly an airplane (pilot), remove an appendix (doctor), build a bridge (engineer). Technical-managerial practices in organizations produce order and consistency.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, school administration programs (and state licensing requirements) typically reflect this technical orientation, ordering up coursework in finance, budgeting, personnel evaluation, program monitoring, and the like.

Leadership, however, is a social process, not a technical one; its authority must be socially and morally earned.<sup>15</sup> Leaders produce change and movement in organizations rather than order and consistency; and they do it by establishing new directions, building teams, motivating staff, and empowering subordinates.<sup>16</sup> Effective leadership connotes the ability to mobilize communities, coordinate their work, and select effective technologies. It demands the ability to find resources and the flexibility to use them, adapt rules and regulations to new missions, and generate support from stakeholders.<sup>17</sup>

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14. John P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

15. Ann Weaver Hart and Paul V. Bredeson, *The Principalship: A Theory of Professional Learning and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), xix.

16. Kotter, *A Force for Change*.

17. Robert D. Behn, *Leadership Counts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Sound familiar? These lessons from public management have made their way into educational leadership, and we just used many of them—mobilize, strategize, envision—to describe the demands of leadership for learning. In Chapter 3, we make these demands more explicit. The point here is that effective organizations, schools included, need managers and leaders, and they recognize the differences between them.

The fact is, no one licenses “leadership,” not government, industry, or the military. Leaders emerge after organizations make substantial investments in their training, scrutinize their promise, and build on the right mix of personal attributes. Or they find their leaders elsewhere, reaping the benefit of someone else’s investment.

The implications of these realities are evident. If today’s educational expectations demand true leadership at the school level, then states must set out consciously to develop it or to recognize it from whatever quarter it appears. States cannot expect school leaders to emerge by happenstance, nor simply because a license grants them permission to try. While states may anchor leadership development in licenses, the emergence of real capacity requires additional investments and a conscious, purposeful plan. The nature of those investments depends in part on the challenges states and districts intend to address. Fostering leadership is one challenge. Another deals with the skill gap between newly licensed practitioners and experts in the field.

### **“Do No Harm” Versus Expertise**

States license school principals just as they license barbers, doctors, lawyers, morticians, plumbers, and more than a thousand other occupations ranging from the familiar (school teacher) to the offbeat (frog farmer).<sup>18</sup> The policy debate about school leadership development frequently centers on these licenses. Why?

Licenses are important credentials. They represent an authorization—permission—from the state to practice an occupation. Licenses are intended to protect the public from quacks and charlatans. Imagine an “engineer” whose bridges collapsed under load or an “electrician” whose household wiring overheated, and the importance of occupational licensing becomes clear. Courts have interpreted licenses as representing the “skills and learning upon which the community may confidently rely.”<sup>19</sup> And while, in terms of the public interest, there is a difference between a collapsing

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18. Pam Brinegar, ed., *Occupational and Professional Regulation in the States: A Comprehensive Compilation* (Lexington, KY: The National Clearinghouse on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation and The Council on State Governments, 1990).

19. *Dent v. West Virginia* 129 U.S. 114, 1889 at 122.

bridge and a bad haircut, the principle is the same: protect the public by requiring a minimum, do-no-harm level of qualifications as a prerequisite to practice.<sup>20</sup>

And there's the rub: licensing, whether of beauticians, engineers, physicians, pilots, or school principals, represents only entry-level knowledge and skills, a level sufficient to keep the public from harm but not one that's able to tackle an occupation's thorniest problems. No one would expect a newly licensed practitioner to style a diva's hair, pilot a 747, remove a brain tumor, or design the Golden Gate Bridge. Nor, frankly, would a neophyte's senior peers allow him or her to try. Should school district leaders, then, toss newly licensed principals into schools that are burdened by long-running staff turnover, low morale, poor student achievement, violence, or other maladies, and expect them to succeed? No, the hardest and most consequential tasks require expertise beyond the license.

For greater confidence in a professional's skills, certification is required. Developed through long-term, specialized training and supervised clinical practice, certification represents professional accomplishment, not minimum qualifications. The most familiar example is the "board certification" of medical specialties, such as pediatrics, neurology, and emergency medicine. Whereas states grant medical licenses on the basis of medical school education and some training (usually one year), the American Board of Medical Specialties, a professional association, awards certification to licensed doctors who complete advanced clinical training and rigorous examinations. In education, the hope is that the certification provided by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards will provide a similar Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval for highly qualified and demonstrably effective teachers. Nothing similar exists for school principals.<sup>21</sup> Later in the report we describe how Licensing-Plus tackles this issue on a smaller scale. For the moment, however, we focus on a prior question: why bother? What can a license do to move school leadership toward its emerging focus on learning? And how does that license establish a base on which certification can build?

### **What Does a License Signify?**

With regard to school principals and the field's ambition to foster leadership for learning, why focus on the license? There are several arguments. First, licensing is an *important policy tool*. It regulates who may become a princi-

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20. Valuable though it is, the license is not a guarantee of competence or integrity. Newspapers periodically report on lawyers too inebriated to represent their clients in capital cases, doctors leaving surgical instruments in patients, and accountants skipping town trailing red ink. Nevertheless, the license remains the public's primary defense against incompetents and frauds.

21. The nearest effort is in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for school leaders, which have influenced some state regulations, preparation programs, and tests used for licensure—all mechanisms on the front end of licensing, not the back end where certification occurs.

pal (no license, no job), and it signals the fundamental qualifications the public may expect in its school leaders. In so doing, the license determines the size and nature of the applicant pool, screens candidates for minimal competence, and regulates the administrative practice that shapes schools and their results.

Second, licensing is a *broadly applied policy tool*. At the time of this writing, all 50 states plus the District of Columbia had regulations controlling principal licenses, although these regulations encompassed widely varying standards and assumptions. No other policy tool has as broad a reach. Thus, changing licensure requirements creates an opportunity to influence the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of all new principals in a state; and, if the changes extended to continuing education requirements, maybe even all principals in a state. Under pressure from national organizations or professional associations, changes in licensure that were coordinated across states might similarly influence principals nationwide.

A third argument for paying attention to licensing is that it can become captured by the occupations it regulates. In such cases, practitioners use the license to protect themselves from competition, either by excluding whole classes of candidates or by restricting the mobility of already-licensed peers.<sup>22</sup> The Federal Trade Commission has raised such criticisms in regards to the funeral, prescription drug, and ophthalmic dispensing industries, which were accused of using licenses to inhibit competition in order to keep prices high.<sup>23</sup> A captured license ceases to protect the public, becoming instead a tool for private gain.

Similarly, licenses may be founded on false assumptions about who can practice successfully. In the general case, where licensing typically entails years of schooling, training, citizenship, good moral character, and examinations, anyone who makes it across these hurdles may practice; that is, any educated, trained, upright citizen who passes the test. There is no assumption about who can practice; the exam ensures that licensees possess the minimal knowledge and skills that protect the public from harm, screening out those who don't.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the exam is a tangible shield against incompetence, providing a check on a candidate's education and training. If the exam is reliable, then candidates who pass it are good bets to practice without causing harm. Moreover, mandatory continuing education requirements, a frequent component of licensing, challenge practitioners

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22. For example, Robert L. Hollings and Christal Pike-Nase, compilers, *Professional and Occupational Licensure in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography and Professional Resource* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); and Benjamin Shimberg, *Occupational Licensing: A Public Perspective* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1982).

23. Shimberg, *Occupational Licensing*.

24. Shimberg, *Occupational Licensing*.

to keep their skills sharp and to learn about new and better ways of doing their job.<sup>25</sup> Principal licenses aren't much different, focusing primarily on the characteristics of individuals. (Chapter 3 explains how.)

With principals, however, there's an additional requirement: teaching experience. In fact, it's the most frequent regulatory prerequisite for principal licensing nationwide (46 states). The assumption here is that only former teachers can handle the principalship effectively. Is that assumption accurate? For us, the question is empirical. It requires research to see whether and how prior teaching experience influences the practice and school success of principals from different backgrounds, such as the two candidates you considered for Parrington High. The question is also important because if the assumption doesn't hold, then states are excluding whole classes of would-be principals who might lead schools effectively. What additional information would have allowed you to make your choice for Parrington more confidently?

By the way, when you chose a principal for Parrington High, did you *assume* a one-person model of school leadership, maybe a super principal who could do it all? Or did you consider a division of labor among the principal, lead teachers, and others? In fact, would the assumption of teaching experience for principal candidates change in the face of a shared leadership model in America's schools? Our point is that rethinking principal licenses requires a critical look at regulatory language *and* the assumptions that underlie it *and* the context in which we expect principals to operate. Policy language, policy assumptions, and work context: they have to fit together coherently in order to produce a license that serves public and professional interests.

The fourth argument that draws attention to licensing is that the license for school principals is a *problematic policy tool*, one not in sync with the demands of school leadership. The problem is long running. The conclusion of the profession in the 1980s, at the opening of the standards and accountability era, was that "licensing procedures do a great disservice because they purport to designate individuals particularly suited ... to administer schools; but the claim is indefensible."<sup>26</sup> Despite intervening years and increasing demands on school leaders, the conclusion remains valid today.

What can one make of all this? While licensing per se is powerful and ubiquitous, it demands periodic attention to ensure that the licenses states issue protect the public appropriately and guide the profession meaningfully. Licenses should represent more than casual permission to practice. If they operate as intended, licenses should shield the public from harm, signal

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25. Hollings and Pike-Nase, *Professional and Occupational Licensure*.

26. Daniel E. Griffiths, Robert T. Stout, and Patrick B. Forsyth, eds., *Leaders for America's Schools: The Report and Papers of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1988).

knowledge and skills needed on the job, and screen out candidates who don't meet appropriate standards. Licenses also should allow fair access to the job, charge practitioners to keep their skills sharp and their knowledge current, and reflect a manageable scope of work. Finally, within a context of state licensing but nationwide expectations, licenses should facilitate the movement of practitioners across state lines without shortchanging the public's interest or the profession's needs. In education, these characteristics indicate the roles licensing can play in securing school leadership focused on learning. They provide a base on which expertise and leadership can build and a template that constrains the unreasonable expansion of responsibility.

These characteristics translate into a short list of overarching questions that helps to assess licensing in any field:

- Does the license protect the public from harm?
- Does the license adequately represent knowledge and skills upon which the public may rely and the profession may depend?
- Does the license demand a test or similar performance demonstration that fairly and effectively separates qualified from unqualified candidates?
- Does the license direct practitioners to keep their skills sharp and their knowledge current?
- Does the license ensure fair access to the job?
- Is there a rational basis for licensing variations across states, or do the differences just add complexity or inhibit mobility?
- Do states treat licenses in isolation or do they coordinate them with other policy or professional mechanisms that promote expertise and leadership?

Answers to these questions can affirm or challenge the utility of any particular license. Table 1 summarizes licensing's roles, standards, and evaluation criteria. We'll keep these factors in mind as we examine the content of principal licenses nationwide, and we'll return to them as we move toward Licensing-Plus in Chapter 4.

**Table 1. Assessing Principal Licensure: Roles, Standards, and Evaluation Criteria**

ROLE	STANDARD	EVALUATION CRITERIA
Shield	Public safety	Does the license protect the public from harm?
Signal	Legal compliance	Does the license adequately represent the knowledge and skills upon which the public may rely and the profession may depend?
Screen	Accountability	Does the license require a test or similar performance demonstration that fairly and reliably separates qualified from unqualified candidates?
Magnet	Fair access	Does the license protect or preclude classes of candidates, artificially restricting the number of qualified applicants?
Whetstone	Expert practice	Does the license direct practitioners to keep skills sharp and knowledge current?
Template	Manageable work scope	Does the license reflect a manageable scope of entry responsibilities? Is there a rational basis for licensing variations across the states?
Foundation	Leadership development	Do states treat licenses in isolation or do they coordinate them with other policy mechanisms that develop leadership?



So much of the licensing and school leadership discussion is aimed at education insiders and policy wonks that it's sometimes easy to forget the public's stake in these matters. After all, licensing was instituted to protect the public. If that's the case, then how would public opinion view principal licenses? What practical expression would reasonable citizens give to the characteristics of licensing we raised in Chapter 1? The following seven concerns represent a defensible response.

- Background check. Principals work with children and adults, and they routinely oversee the expenditure of public money. They also hire and fire teachers and other staff. Thus the public has every right to expect that licensing would try to ensure the honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior of principal candidates. Background checks may not predict the future, but they do flag egregious problems in one's past.
- Academic degree. Given that principals preside over educational institutions, it's no stretch for the public to expect that principals would be well educated themselves. Apart from promoting learning directly, principals also must communicate effectively with students, teachers, parents, and others, and they must tackle complicated school-based problems. At a minimum, a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education would be expected, and probably a master's.
- High-stakes test. Principals serve in responsible positions, and their actions influence the character, operations, and results of America's schools. Given the level of community investment in schools and the stakes communities impute to their success, it's reasonable for citizens to expect that licensing fairly and reliably separates qualified from unqualified candidates. As with other professions, a test of knowledge and skills, as a prerequisite to practice, could satisfy this expectation.
- Administrative competence. As a necessary component of school success, regardless of the objective, reasonable citizens could expect principals to be competent managers. Can they develop master schedules, assign teachers, and get students to class? Do they take steps to keep everyone safe? Can they manage budgets? Do they follow the right procedures and respect the appropriate rights when taking personnel actions? Do they understand the due process requirements involved in suspending students who misbehave? As a matter of school

routine, principals must be able to handle the organizational maintenance duties they confront.

- Learning focus. In light of state, federal, and judicial emphases on greater student achievement, reasonable citizens also might expect licensing to signal that student learning is the chief goal of schooling, hence a principal's primary responsibility. What good are state policies that integrate standards, curriculum, assessment, and accountability in theory without the school-level leadership that makes them meaningful in practice? Leadership weaves these elements into a coherent and strategic program at the level of teaching and learning. To ensure that educational systems push toward student success, licensing, too, reasonably should focus principals on learning.
- Learning-related knowledge and skills. A focus on learning by itself, however, merely establishes a goal. Accomplishing that goal is another matter, one involving real know-how. Given the frequency with which public officials and educators tout "leadership for learning," reasonable citizens could expect that licenses link the practical goal—more student learning—with the professional knowledge and skills needed to promote it. In this regard, licenses for school principals and automobile drivers aren't much different. Before taking to the highways, drivers must pass a written test of knowledge and a road test of skills. The tests may reflect only minimal, entry-level proficiencies, but those proficiencies are directly related to safe driving, and all drivers share them. In public education, a reasonable citizen could just as easily expect that licenses cover the job-related knowledge and skills principals need to promote student learning. Citizens might express this expectation only in terms of good teaching, up-to-date materials, reasonable testing, and student services, but that layman's view would be on target.
- Portability. Since all states promote similar learning goals, and since the skills and knowledge required to promote student learning don't change across state lines, a reasonable citizen could expect that principal licenses nationwide should be, if not identical, at least similar enough that states or school districts could routinely hire principals licensed anywhere in the United States with confidence that their licenses represent a consistent knowledge and skill base. The resulting portability of licenses would enable principals to move easily and schools to select from the widest pool of applicants.

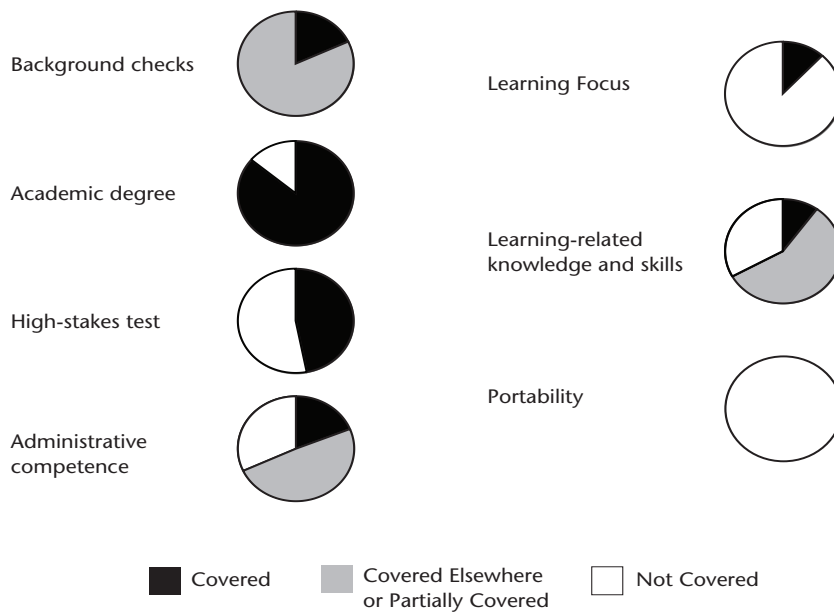
In short, citizens reasonably could expect their principals to be upstanding, educated, qualified, administratively competent, on target, possessed of the right know-how, and able to handle their job in any school or district that beckoned.

Do principal licensing requirements reflect these reasonable concerns? To answer this question we examined administrative regulations governing principal licenses in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. To do this systematically, we created a three-part assessment framework that's described in the next chapter and detailed in Appendix C. This analytic tool enabled us to categorize each separate state regulatory requirement in terms of its focus on *individual attributes* (such as a candidate's educational level or years of experience), *generic organizational knowledge and skills* (problem solving, communicating, or program monitoring, for instance), or *knowledge and skills related directly to learning* (for example, adapting curriculum, interpreting state and district learning assessments, focusing professional development on a learning agenda, or supporting teachers in instructional leadership roles). From our reasonable citizen's vantage, the findings generated by this analysis are mixed.

### Licensure and the Reasonable Citizen Test

A quick tour of the licensing terrain demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of principal licensure against our "reasonable citizen" criteria (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Licensure and the Reasonable Citizen Test**



**Background checks.** At first blush, it appeared that most states don't provide even the minimum guarantee that principals "First, do no harm." Nationwide, only nine states directly referenced a background check within their principal licensure regulations: Arkansas, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington. Seven states required character references of another kind, such as a letter of recommendation: Kentucky, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia.

That so few states required a background check for individuals who work with children every day seemed surprising, so we looked elsewhere in state regulations. As it happened, the overwhelming majority of states did require a background check for all persons working with children. Thus, most school leaders are subject to criminal records checks in some form during the course of their careers. To do otherwise would only invite trouble. These statutory requirements are located within broader teacher certification language or delegated to school districts.

Still, 42 states did not explicitly require a background check as a routine condition of licensing. In a context of rethinking principal licenses, with states exploring alternative routes to the principalship, where they rely on local education agencies to perform these checks, or where a number of years might pass between the issuance of a teacher's license (where a background check is done) and an administrative one (where it is not), the policy question is whether background checks should be required of principal candidates within the explicit language of principal licensure, or whether it remains sufficient to maintain these protections elsewhere in state regulations. In our later discussion of Licensing-Plus, we recommend the former.

**Academic degree.** Forty-four states required an academic degree of principal candidates, either a B.A. or an M.A. For purposes of this research, the level was immaterial. Our interest lay in whether or not states explicitly defined an educational level. Beyond the degree, every state except Hawaii specified some kind of educational experience for principal candidates. The most frequent requirements across the states included academic degree (44 states), state-approved program (37 states), credit hours in graduate courses (29 states), or accredited institution (29 states), alone or in combination. In terms of a principal's educational background, most states seem to have included clearly understandable requirements.

**High-stakes test.** Just about half the states (24) required a test of administrative skills. Another 10 states required skill demonstrations of another type, such as a performance or portfolio assessment, or test of basic skills.

**Administrative competence.** The expectation that administrative knowledge and skills would be emphasized in licensure programs proved to be correct in part. Twenty-five states explicitly included administrative knowledge and skills in their principal licensing requirements, though these requirements formed only a minority of all requirements in these states. Ten more states (Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Virginia, and Vermont) placed a primary emphasis on such criteria.

Sixteen states mentioned nothing of administrative skills in their licensing requirements, delegating responsibility for principal training content to graduate education programs. This is not to say that institutions of higher education do not, in their degree programs, cover the administrative leadership skills one would expect a principal to master. It is only to point out that licensing requirements in many states are silent on this issue, a surprising finding given the traditional expectation that principals, if nothing else, should be competent administrators. In contrast, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for educational leadership focus primarily (over 70%) on organizational knowledge and skill criteria, signaling their importance to the work of school principals.

**Learning focus.** Six states (Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Wisconsin) based principal licensing *primarily* on learning-focused knowledge and skills (Figure 2). Twenty-eight more states included learning-focused knowledge and skills in their principal licensing requirements, while focusing on other criteria.

What does it mean for licensing content to be “learning focused”? For purposes of this research, a licensing requirement was “learning focused” if it directly connected knowledge and skills to the improvement of student learning, either by establishing student learning as the chief focus of principals’ work or by specifying skills that furthered that end. For instance, New Mexico’s licensing regulations clearly put learning at the center of a principal’s job:

[The principal] promotes learning as the primary purpose of the organization.<sup>27</sup>

Regulatory language in Massachusetts addressed specific activities that promote learning:

[The principal] . . . (4) Knows and encourages appropriate uses of *instructional technologies*. (5) Promotes activities that honor *academic excellence*. (6) Involves staff in preparing and imple-

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27. New Mexico Code 6.62.2.10, D2.

menting professional development plans that are related to *improved student learning* [emphasis added].<sup>28</sup>

The terms “instructional technologies,” “academic excellence,” and “improved student learning” relate school leadership specifically to learning rather than to unspecified organizational aims. This passage from Oklahoma’s licensing regulations illustrates the latter circumstance:

Administrator candidates shall possess leadership knowledge and skills including, but not limited to, (a) group dynamics and group processes; (b) information collection; (c) problem analysis; (d) judgment/ethics; (e) organizational oversight; (f) implementation; (g) delegation; (h) district culture; and (i) collaboration among colleagues and institutions.<sup>29</sup>

These requirements could be applied to managers or leaders in any field or type of organization. Knowledge of group dynamics and skills in problem solving are equally germane to corporate leaders and school principals. As such, the language fails to distinguish a learning-focused application of these skills from any other. In an era when state and federal policies are steering public education toward higher student performance, licensure wants a learning focus. Wisconsin’s regulatory language, for instance, expected principals to have “an understanding of and demonstrate competence in the [state’s] teacher standards,” then embedded the teacher standards in the principal licensure language, standards which addressed knowledge and skills needed for good teaching but also for leading the improvement of teaching.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, 15 states, ranging from small (Wyoming) to large (California), shaped licensure *exclusively* around attributes of individuals, such as educational level or possession of a teaching credential, what the analysis termed “individual focus” licensure requirements. Tennessee’s language was typical. The Volunteer State’s regulations required

[1] an approved graduate program in school administration  
[2] at a college/university with acceptable accreditation [which includes] [3] a practicum or a one-semester internship through a Tennessee school system under a mentor principal ... [and]  
[4] completion of a state required test/assessment.<sup>31</sup>

This statement contains no reference to organizational- or learning-focused knowledge or skills, only characteristics of the candidates themselves: education, experience, and test results.

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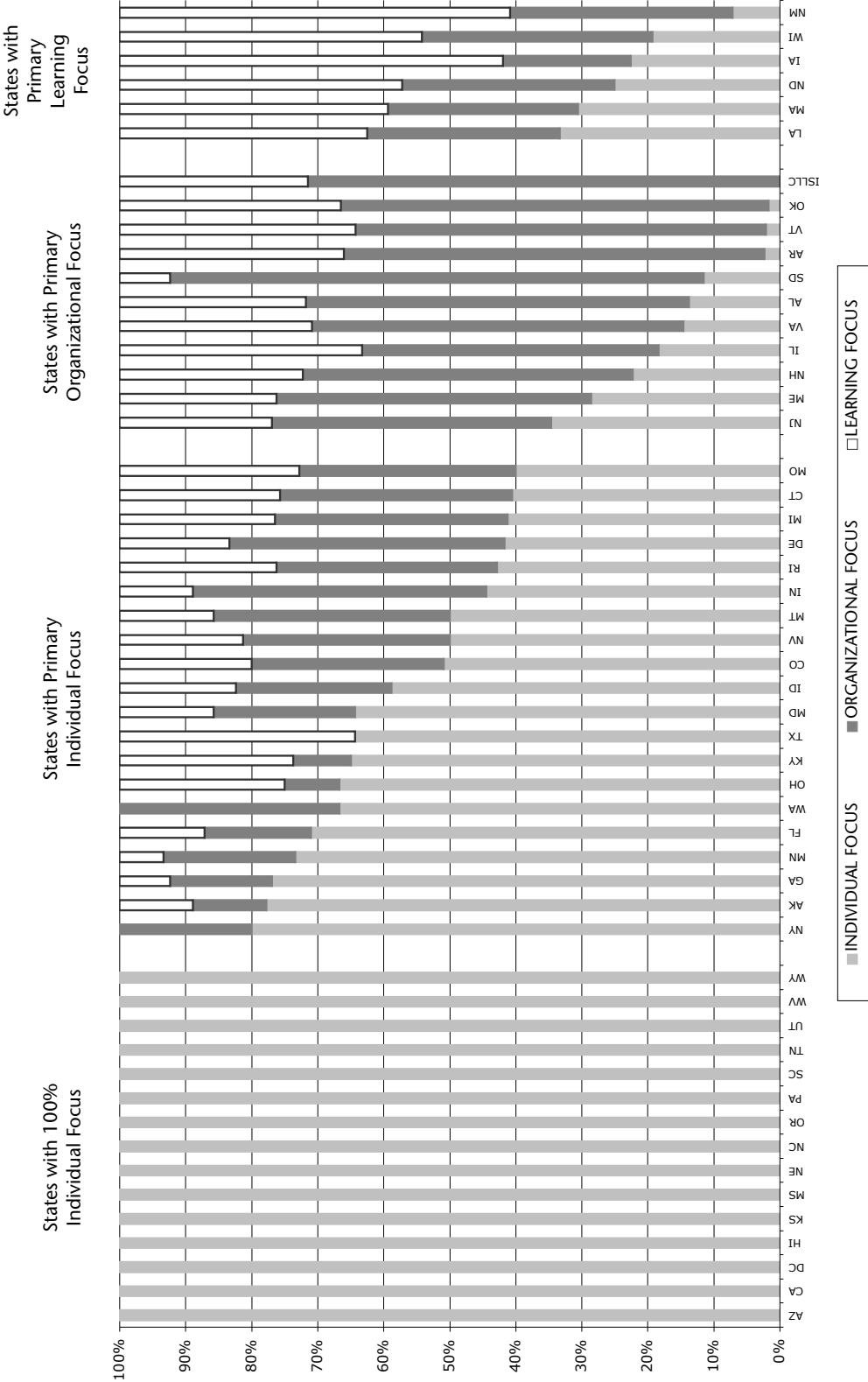
28. Massachusetts Code 603 CMR 7.10.

29. Oklahoma Code 70-6-189.

30. Wisconsin PI 34.03.

31. [www.tennessee.gov/education/license/lic/lic\\_admin](http://www.tennessee.gov/education/license/lic/lic_admin).

Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of Licensure Content by Policy Focus and State



Another 20 states relied *primarily* on individual focus licensure requirements but included some organizational- and/or learning-focused content. And as we noted previously, 10 states emphasized generic organizational skills (problem solving, communication, resource management, and the like).

In terms of the nation's focus on student learning, these results are mixed. Thirty-four states included some learning-focused criteria in their principal licensing requirements, but only six emphasized learning. In the remaining 28 states that addressed learning at all, learning took a backseat to individual- or organizational-focused licensure criteria. And as we'll see shortly, the learning-focused criteria that states included were narrow in scope and shallow in depth, indicating only cursory coverage of the learning-focused knowledge and skills that help principals promote the learning that state and federal policy now demands.

**Learning-focused knowledge and skills.** What particular knowledge and skills are required for principals to lead schools toward better student outcomes? If our only guide were state licensing requirements, it would be hard to say. Here are the most salient findings:

- In terms of raw counts, 28% of licensing content in the states did not specify any knowledge or skill requirements at all, relying instead on characteristics of principal candidates, such as background checks, academic degrees, and years of experience.<sup>32</sup>
- If we use median counts, which enable us to compensate for the undue influence of states with numerous licensing requirements (Arkansas, as we mentioned, had 435 requirements; New Mexico, 98; Texas, 14; and Hawaii, 1), then half of the principal licensing content in the states did not specify any knowledge or skills.
- Among the 13 states that delegated all knowledge and skill issues to university preparation programs, 8 included learning content in graduate school program standards; 5 included no learning content even there.
- Of the five categories of leadership-for-learning variables we included in the analytic tool, covering skills related to academic programs, students, teachers, schools, and communities, plus learning-oriented knowledge, 14 states included licensing

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32. Each discrete licensing requirement in state regulations equaled one "count" in our analysis. For instance, if a state required a "master's degree" from an "accredited institution" which included a "course in curriculum" and "knowledge of strategic planning," we noted four discrete requirements, or counts. For the 50 states and District of Columbia, we observed 2,003 such counts.



content that addressed the leadership of academic programs; 7 included content regarding students; 13, teachers; 12, schools; 11 communities; and 31, learning-focused knowledge, indicating a narrow scope of learning variables in principal licensing content.

- Only five states (Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, New Mexico, and Oklahoma) included learning-focused licensure content in all five categories of leadership-for-learning variables.
- If we look beneath the learning categories to the 23 variables they subsume (for instance, under program requirements: curriculum and instruction; under teacher requirements: support for ongoing professional development), 23 states included five or fewer of these learning variables, 3 states included between 6-10 variables, and the remaining 8 states included between 10-14 variables. These counts, too, indicate the narrow scope of learning-oriented requirements in principal licensing nationwide, even among states that included learning in their regulations.
- The most common learning-focused requirements included courses in curriculum (17 states) and instructional supervision (11 states), knowledge of learning technology (14 states), and skills related to engaging parents in a learning agenda (10 states) and in developing or adapting relevant instructional practices (10 states).
- Totally missing from state licensing frameworks was any attention to the meaning and use of learning assessments, indicators and feedback mechanisms that indicated progress toward goals, promoting peer evaluation of teaching, or fostering knowledge of learning goals among teachers.

Small numbers of states required a learning framework for potential school leaders that encompassed curriculum and instruction (10 states), student assessment (7 states), accountability (1 state), teacher supervision and evaluation (3 states), or support for ongoing professional development (8 states).

In general, this analysis of principal licensing requirements nationwide reveals the uneven and shallow coverage of learning-related knowledge and skills in state policies.

**Portability.** While some states have made arrangements to recognize each other's school administrator licenses, we found insufficient similarity among state licensing requirements to indicate coherence, or even common

direction, among principal knowledge and skill expectations across these states.<sup>33</sup> The wide variation in principal licensing regulations across states is hard to square with an expectation that leadership-for-learning knowledge and skills transcends state contexts. Whether common expectations apply in practice is another matter.

In sum, most states made provisions for background checks and bachelor's or master's degrees. About half the states tested aspiring principals as a way of demonstrating qualifications. In terms of administrative competence, more states focused licensing language on technical-managerial skills—what we call an organizational focus—than they did on individual- or learning-focused content, and coverage within any of these focuses was thin. Learning-oriented knowledge and skills appeared in the licensing requirements of 34 states, but only six states focused licensure primarily on learning criteria, which composed only about 1 in 5 requirements nationwide.<sup>34</sup> Principal licensing requirements in 15 states didn't mention learning at all. And no two states were alike in terms of the scope and depth of individual- versus organizational- versus learning-focused content, making portability problematic in terms of coherence if not fact.

Whether this array of licensing requirements is “indefensible,” to use the term of the 1988 National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, is a matter of judgment. Could it be improved and must it be improved in order to move the field toward leadership for learning? We think, yes. Clearly, few states have taken the important step of crafting licensure policies that reflect a coherent learning-focused school leadership agenda. In an era of standards and accountability, this omission stands out.

### **The School Leaders We Expect**

Who will lead public schools? What do states expect these leaders to know? Where do states expect principals to learn their craft? If licensing regulations were our only guide, answers would be clear. States expect school leaders to be former classroom teachers who have at least three years of teaching

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33. In the period October 2000-September 2005, 31 states were party to National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) interstate contracts regarding school administrators. These contracts are designed to facilitate the movement of educators across state lines by allowing educators to obtain “analogous licensure” in any participating state. Not all states participate, however, and not all participating states recognize licenses from each other. Florida, for example, recognizes only Alabama's administrator license; Maryland and Massachusetts each recognize licenses from 28 other states. Of note here, the pattern of interstate agreements is not aligned with the pattern of individual, organizational, or learning licensure focuses we found among the states (see Chapter 3). See National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, *The NASDTEC Manual on the Preparation of Educational Personnel 2002*, 7th ed. (Sacramento: School Services of California, Inc., 2002).

34. Using median counts.

experience and a master's degree from a state-approved program. Fewer than half the states specify particular knowledge or skills, whether set forth in regulations or measured by a test, often delegating such questions to institutes of higher education. Those that do specify knowledge and skills rely on education and management coursework to do the job, emphasizing organizational issues while paying relatively less attention to learning. Fewer than 20 states rely on induction programs, mentoring, professional development, or other on-the-job training as a means of knowledge and skill development.

In an era of performance accountability, a key question for policy and practice is whether such expectations constitute an adequate basis to protect the public interest or to develop school leadership for learning. The selection of a new principal at Parrington High makes the issue tangible and creates an opportunity to affirm or rethink the licenses that shape school principals. Who is most qualified to improve student learning? What do they need to know? Where can they learn their craft?

If current principal licensing requirements are inadequate, then states have three options: (1) determine that there is no state interest in school leadership and stop licensing principals, leaving the determination of principal qualifications to local education agencies; (2) declare a state interest in school leadership but conclude that states themselves are ill-suited to regulate that interest, vesting the operational authority for licensing in professional associations while overseeing their work; or (3) affirm a state interest in school leadership and align licensing practices with that interest.

Stakeholders will debate these issues and come to their own conclusions about whether today's licensing practices promote leadership for learning and the public's interest in school leadership. To support that debate, we turn now to ways of rethinking principal licensing that address the states' and the profession's need for entry-level competence, expertise, and leadership development in the pursuit of greater student learning.



**C**an states structure principal licenses in ways that more clearly and effectively orient school leadership toward learning? This question crystallizes the policy debate that begs an audience. Let's approach it in terms of the hiring challenge we started with: a school that needs help and a choice between principal candidates. Whom did you select for Parrington High: the teacher or the nonprofit manager? And why did you make that choice? If you chose the teacher, was it because you reasoned that student learning depends foremost on good teaching, therefore, teachers necessarily will make the best principals? This argument represents the basic rationale for the licensing framework states now use. If you chose the nonprofit manager, did you do it because you presumed that successful managers could adapt their organizational know-how to schools? Proponents of this approach believe that demonstrated performance in results-oriented organizations is a better predictor of principal success than teaching experience and graduate coursework. The crucial question, however, is only secondarily about candidates' backgrounds. It is primarily about what states are licensing principals to do.

The performance accountability and leadership-for-learning rhetoric of the 2000s leaves no doubt that student performance is a school's first priority. But what does this mean for principals? The signals from licensure aren't clear. As we've seen, state regulations fail to orient principals toward a compelling or consistent image of the work: some organizational maintenance, some learning, but often not even this. In effect, licenses run between two extremes: a reliance on individual characteristics that signal nothing about the purposes or practice of the principalship, and lists of knowledge and skill requirements whose scope and depth don't clearly sum to a meaningful definition of the job. Neither extreme neatly aligns the four pieces of this puzzle: state expectations for school performance, practitioner knowledge and skills needed to deliver that performance, organization of a principal's work, and licensure requirements. Neither do the extremes recognize the inherent logic in these pieces. Goals come first, then the knowledge and skills that promote them. Next comes consideration of how the principalship itself can be organized to most effectively harness the sum total of a school's talents to promote learning. Only then can decisionmakers judge the background, or range of backgrounds, that best fit aspiring principals. Until public leaders link these questions to licensure, states risk haphazard or incoherent approaches to school leadership development.

### **Assessing Licensure and School Leadership**

What does leadership for learning mean in operational terms? What knowledge and skills does it require? These issues drive expectations for

principals' work. In this section of the report, we look underneath the individual, organizational, and learning labels to the elements that give them meaning. The result is a balanced framework for assessing principal licensure and the leadership for learning that it must support.

The framework evolved from three basic concerns. First, it's important to acknowledge that state licensing requirements for school principals begin, and sometimes end, with admonitions regarding the background characteristics of the individuals who seek these jobs: Are they educated, of good character, with the right experience? Though limited in their ability to promote leadership for learning, these provisions are important, nevertheless. As such, our framework begins with them, too.

Second, since individual characteristics don't clearly or directly represent leadership capacities, a useful framework must attend to these capacities directly. So we added a second perspective, a conceptual roadmap of sorts, that indicates the knowledge and skills one needs to effectively manage organizations. After all, organizations exist for a purpose, and good leaders should be able to accomplish it.

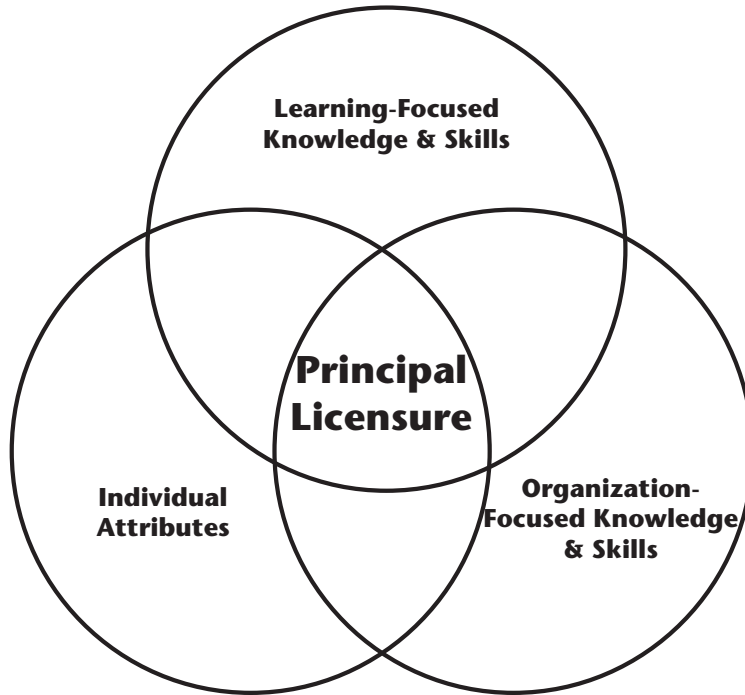
Third, since we can't assume that success in one type of organization implies the ability to succeed in another, one with fundamentally different goals, technology, and challenges, a balanced framework requires attention to the specific knowledge and skills one needs to lead schools (a particular type of organization) toward greater student achievement (a particular result). True leadership for learning requires knowledge of schools *and* a facility with the technologies of learning. In an era of standards and accountability, school leaders must enable the work of teachers and students. If states license individuals to undertake this task, it is only fair to expect that licensing practices will produce principals who can accomplish it.

Thus, our three-part framework for understanding principal licensure balances characteristics of individuals, capacities of managers, and demands of learning-oriented leadership (Figure 3). Only in joining these perspectives can one effectively assess principal licensing requirements and their relationship to learning, enabling policymakers, educators, parents, and others to assess the utility of principal licenses in their states.

### **Individual Focus**

Individual-focused requirements in the balanced framework encompass a principal's character, education, experience, skill assessment, and prior certifications (Table 2). Their purpose is to ensure that principals meet the "do no harm" standard of professional practice and that they have training or experiences that prepare them for the job.

**Figure 3.** A Balanced Framework for Principal Licensure



**Table 2.** Individual Focus Licensure Content

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Character Requirements
Education Requirements
Experience Requirements
Skill Assessment Requirements
Prior Credential/Certification/Licensure Requirements

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*Character* requirements include a candidate's minimum age, background check, and references, such as a letter of recommendation. *Educational* requirements include minimum academic accomplishments, such as a bachelor's degree. They define acceptable post-graduate training, most frequently a graduate degree in educational leadership from a state-approved program. And they indicate the need for specialized courses, professional development, or practicum preparation.

Individual-focused content also encompasses a candidate's professional *experience*. In current licensure practice, this requirement most often represents years of teaching experience, but it also includes internships, mentor programs, and probationary employment. *Skill assessment* requirements reflect some demonstration of knowledge and skills, whether through interviews; performance assessments; portfolios; or tests of administrative, teaching, or basic skills. *Credential, certification, and licensure* requirements seek preliminary certifications, professional standards board reviews, or related licenses, such as for pupil personnel specialists.

All states include some individual-focused elements in their licensing requirements. The balanced framework affirms their place there.

### **Organizational Focus**

Organizational-focused requirements in the balanced framework encompass core competencies in organizational management, namely, strategic, social performance, technology utilization, and constituency management skills (Table 3). They also incorporate an individual's values, attitudes, and work habits and his or her knowledge of organizational leadership. Principals' work, both traditional and emerging, incorporates many dimensions that are managerial. In fact, licensure's partial emphasis on workplace and system functioning, like ISLLC's, appropriately indicates how workplace maintenance, even in a context of learning and performance accountability, is a priority activity for school principals. Such an emphasis reinforces empirical findings that principals' unique value stems from their work in creating structures and systems that enable learning to thrive.

**Table 3. Organizational Focus Licensure Content**

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Strategic Skills
Social Performance Skills
Values, Attitudes, Work Habits
Technology Utilization Skills
Constituencies Management Skills
Knowledge of Organizations

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Specifically, *strategic* skills include planning, attention to organizational mission and goals, data-driven inquiry, decision making, and problem solving. *Social performance* skills include communicating; mentoring, coaching, and



other forms of capacity building; and the ability to promote organizational progress by negotiating, resolving conflicts, collaborating, and teambuilding. *Social performance* skills also involve the ability to motivate, persuade, and promote a culture that's consistent with an organization's goals. They also address governance and the delegation of authority. It is possible for school principals who possess many of the technical skills required for success to founder because their social abilities fall short.

*Technology utilization skills* in the organizational context encompass more than simply computers and telecommunications. They deal with the nuts and bolts of an organization's systems: information technology; resource, personnel, and program management; workplace safety; contracts; and collective bargaining. Program planning, monitoring, and implementation belong here, too.

In contrast, *constituent management* skills focus organizational leaders outward, engaging and responding to stakeholders; working with media; acquiring resources; and responding to statutory, regulatory, and judicial demands.

The balanced framework anticipates that organizational managers and leaders will know and readily draw on the field's *knowledge* of planning, employee relations, technology, culture, performance, and external contexts. It expects them to model their organization's expectations, ethical behavior, sound work habits, and processes that move its agenda forward.

These organizational dimensions encompass managerial roles that produce order and consistency, such as budgeting, staffing, and problem solving; and the leadership functions that produce change and movement, such as establishing direction, setting strategies, building coalitions, securing commitments, and motivating others.<sup>35</sup> Its components reflect effective public sector leadership and leadership theory and research.<sup>36</sup>

Thirty-five states included some type of organizational-focused content in their licensure requirements, most of which reflected expectations that principals acquire a *knowledge* of organizational issues and skills with organizational technologies, such as budgets and collective bargaining.

## Learning Focus

The framework's learning focus requires the most attention if licensing is to encourage leaders of learning. Learning-focused content spans knowledge

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35. Kotter, *A Force for Change*.

36. Respectively, for example, Behn, *Leadership Counts*; and Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), particularly the skills approach represented by M. D. Mumford, S. J. Zaccaro, F. D. Harding, T. O. Jacobs, and E. A. Fleishman, "Leadership Skills for a Changing World: Solving Complex Social Problems," *Leadership Quarterly*, 11 (2000).

and skill requirements regarding educational programs, students, teachers, schools, and communities. As with the organizational focus, learning content includes its own perspective on individuals' values, attitudes, and work habits, plus knowledge about how to promote student learning (Table 4). These elements directly link leadership with learning, reaching to the heart of the leadership-for-learning ambition. As a result, they indicate how schools differ from other organizations and what the technology of learning demands of school leaders.

**Table 4. Learning Focus Licensure Content**

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**Program Requirements**

- Student learning standards
- Curriculum and instruction
- Assessment systems
- Accountability systems
- Program coherence/alignment

**Student Requirements**

- Special instructional program supports
- Noninstructional student learning supports
- Student placement and assignment
- Behavioral support and management

**Teacher Requirements**

- Mentoring and induction support
- Support for ongoing professional development
- Supervision and evaluation
- Staffing and assignment
- Recruitment and hiring

**School Requirements**

- Strategic skills to support learning
- Operational skills to support learning
- Developing a learning-focused culture
- Values, attitudes, and work habits
- Leadership development

**Community Requirements**

- Family/parent engagement
- Community engagement

**Knowledge of Learning**

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Learning-focused *program requirements*, for instance, emphasize skills regarding learning standards, curriculum and instruction, assessment, accountability, and, importantly, ensuring coherence across a school's educational program: linking standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments. Requirements regarding *students* incorporate ways to support their learning, such as addressing special needs, attending to student assignment, and ensuring nutritional, counseling, and similar supports.

*Teacher* requirements involve principals in mentoring and induction activities, professional development, supervision and evaluation, staffing and assignment, and recruitment and hiring, all focused explicitly on building a cadre of effective instructors.

*School* requirements hold principals' attention inside the building, ensuring that their actions support a learning agenda. In this regard, they govern principals' roles in strategic planning and problem solving and in operational activities that enable the work of others: creating master schedules, organizing resources, and ensuring a safe learning environment, all explicitly tied to learning. School requirements also encompass activities that build a learning-oriented school culture, develop leadership among teachers, and model learning-focused values, attitudes, and work habits.

In contrast, *community* requirements move principals beyond schoolhouse boundaries, engaging parents and community stakeholders in a school's work, securing community resources that promote the learning agenda, and establishing community-based educational opportunities for students.

These learning elements come from research literature that distinguishes instructional leaders' direct and indirect effects on learning,<sup>37</sup> principals' influences on school climate or social circumstances related to learning,<sup>38</sup> and the effective supervision and evaluation of instruction.<sup>39</sup>

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37. For example, Kenneth Leithwood and Doris Janzi, "Principal and Teacher Leadership Effects: A Replication," *School Leadership and Management*, 20 (2000): 415-434; George J. Peterson, "Demonstrated Actions of Instructional Leaders: An Examination of Five California Superintendents," *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 7 (18) (1999); Joseph Blase & Jo Blase, "Principals' Instructional Leadership and Teacher Development: Teachers' Perspectives," *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35 (1999): 349-378.

38. C. John Tarter, Dennis Sabo, and Wayne K. Hoy, "Middle School Climate, Faculty Trust, and Effectiveness: A Path Analysis," *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 29, (1995): 41-49; Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice*, 5th ed. (San Antonio: Trinity Press, 2001).

39. Carl D. Glickman, Stephen P. Gordon, and Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, *Supervision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach*, 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001); Joseph Blase and Peggy C. Kirby, *Bringing Out the Best in Teachers: What Effective Principals Do*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2000).

As we've noted, 34 states included learning-focused content in their licensing requirements, most of which emphasized *knowledge* that undergirds leadership for learning; followed by school-focused operational *skills* that support learning; then the values, attitudes, and work habits of learning-focused leaders.<sup>40</sup>

As an assessment tool, the balanced framework revealed the extent to which state principal licensing content focused on learning. In Chapter 2 we reported these findings in terms of the *percentage distribution* of this regulatory content (Figure 2), which showed the wide variation in policy focus across the states. Looking at the *frequency distribution* of the individual requirements themselves—the actual number of requirements in each policy focus—provides additional insight (Figure 4). This vantage reveals how the weight of licensure demands varies across the states. From a national perspective, again, it appears that principal licensure arrangements are both unbalanced across states and misaligned with today's ambitions for school leaders. Some states, however, those on the right side of the figure, clearly include more learning-focused requirements than others. Where do these learning-focused provisions come from?

### **Where Does a Learning Focus Come From?**

Determining the focus and scope of principal licensing is largely a responsibility of state policymakers. In the majority of cases, however, legislators delegate authority to state agencies or state boards of education. The Mississippi Code typifies the process:

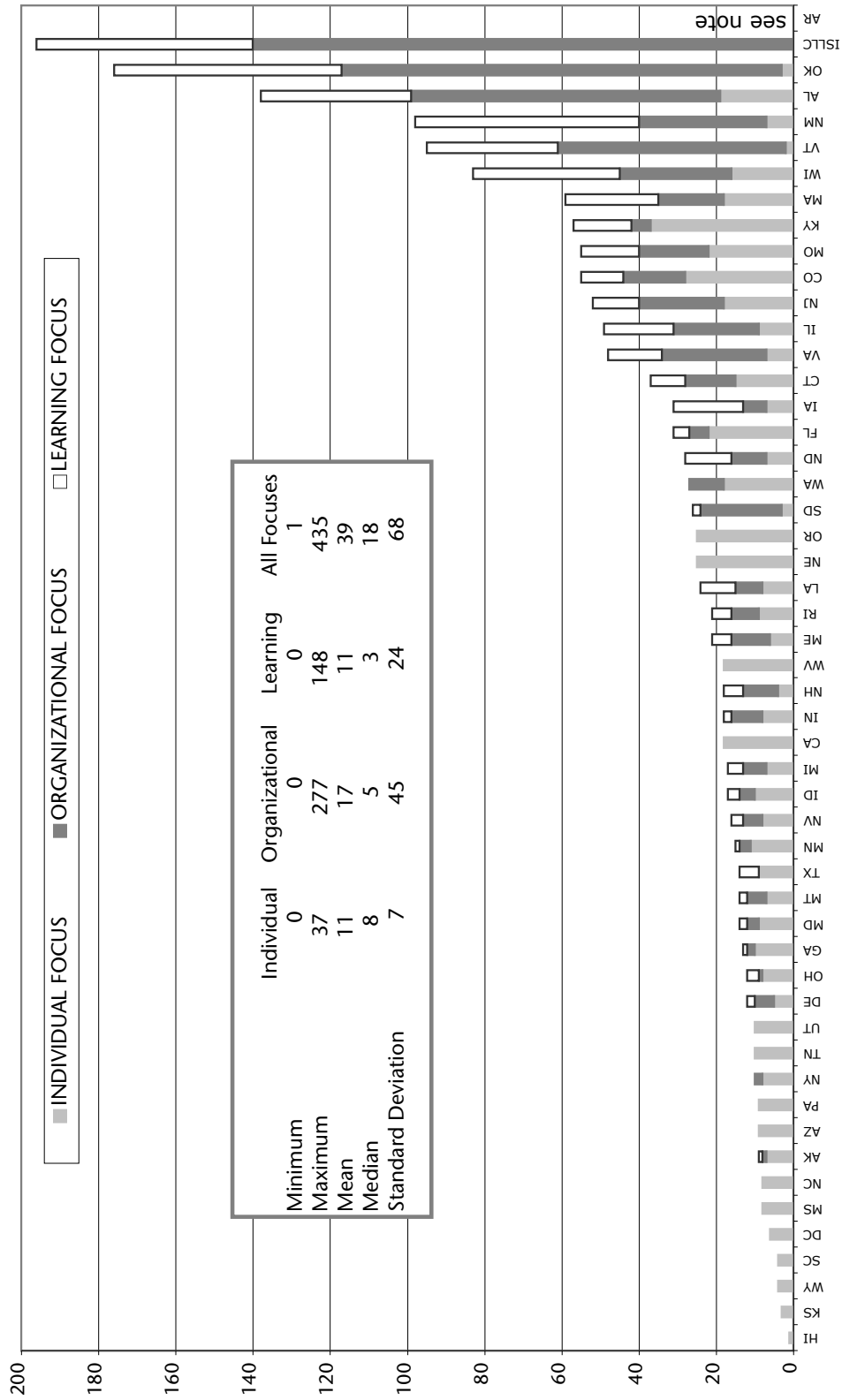
There is established within the State Department of Education the Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Licensure and Development. It shall be the purpose and duty of the commission to make recommendations to the State Board of Education regarding standards for the certification and licensure and continuing professional development of those who teach or perform tasks of an educational nature in the public schools of Mississippi.<sup>41</sup>

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40. Readers may note the parallel structure of the organizational and learning sections of the balanced framework. This similarity is intentional, nesting principals' school- and learning-specific knowledge and skills within the generic knowledge and skills of organizational leaders.

41. SEC. 37-3-2. Certification of teachers and administrators.

**Figure 4.** Frequency Distribution of Licensure Content by State



Note: Arkansas values not included on this chart for scale reasons. Arkansas counts were as follows: Individual Focus, 10; Organizational Focus, 277; Learning Focus, 148; Total Observations, 435.

Beneath these state-level actors lies a network of academics and advocates who study licensure issues and advise policymakers. For instance:

- **University-based researchers.** A score or more of professors are routinely cited in leadership policy circles.<sup>42</sup> In addition, universities attempt to influence educational leadership policies by convening task forces or concentrating analysis in policy research centers.
- **Think tanks.** Groups such as the Institute for Educational Leadership, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and Manpower Development Research Corporation actively promote perspectives about educational leadership among constituent groups and state policy audiences.
- **Regional education laboratories.** The Atlanta-based Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), for example, sponsors and disseminates licensure and leadership preparation research reports.
- **Educational administration policy boards.** The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) was instrumental in initiating a call for change in educational leadership preparation<sup>43</sup> and produced standards for advanced programs in this area.<sup>44</sup>
- **Philanthropic foundations.** The Wallace and Broad foundations, for instance, have funded research and programs that prominently target educational leadership.

The individual or collective influence of these policy actors, in concert with professional associations, can alter licensing requirements in the states.

Among the states whose licensing content exhibited more of a learning focus, we clearly observed the influence of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium. Learning-focused states, in part, had adopted or adapted ISLLC's standards. Kentucky, for example, adopted parts of the ISLLC standards verbatim, adding performance descriptions that illustrated their intent. Massachusetts included language influenced by ISLLC:

- The administrator helps staff align their curriculum with the state's curriculum frameworks.

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42. For example, Joseph Murphy, Larry Cuban, Richard Elmore, Philip Hallinger, Ron Heck, Rod Ogawa, and Kenneth Leithwood.

43. Griffiths, et al., *Leaders for America's Schools*.

44. National Policy Board for Educational Administration, *Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership* (Arlington, VA: Author, 2002).

- The administrator identifies, implements, and evaluates content-based instruction based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- The administrator reviews, evaluates, and revises instructional programs on the basis of sound information and relevant data.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, among the states that required a test of administrator skills, some specified the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), a proficiency test based on the ISLLC standards. Arkansas and North Carolina, for example, required principal candidates to achieve a minimum score on the SLLA.

Beyond state adoption, the ISLLC standards also have influenced standards produced by other organizations, including those seeking to improve administrator preparation programs across the country. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), for instance, a specialty area review board within the National Council for the Advancement of Teacher Education (NCATE), incorporated ISLLC standards into the 2002 revision of its educational leadership program standards. ELCC comprises representatives of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), demonstrating ISLLC's influence among stakeholder associations.

While there is little evidence that standards adoption has driven wholesale change in educational leadership preparation programs across the country, a number of states, notably Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Oregon, have used standards to develop learning-focused expectations for principal preparation.<sup>46</sup> Still, as the data in this report demonstrate, many states do not focus licensure on learning. Those that don't focus licensure on learning fail to signal the knowledge and skills upon which the public may rely and the profession may depend. They also miss an opportunity to align licensing requirements with the job states expect principals to accomplish.

How would the information in the balanced framework, which captures that opportunity, have aided your choice at Parrington High? Perhaps it would have represented more comprehensive selection criteria, drawing your attention to a broader range of pertinent issues that span candidates' backgrounds, administrative acumen, and learning skills. Perhaps it would

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45. Massachusetts Statute CMR 603.710.

46. Christopher Mazzeo, *Improving Teaching and Learning by Improving School Leadership* (Washington, DC: NGA Issue Brief, National Governors Association, 2003).

have helped align your thinking with public expectations, providing signposts that better indicated the most upstanding, educated, qualified, administratively competent, on target, and able candidate. No matter how the candidates developed their know-how, perhaps the framework would have enabled a deeper exploration of their grasp of the knowledge and skills that matter most to Parrington's challenge: improving student performance. And given what you, as superintendent, would know already about the talents in Parrington's school community, perhaps the framework would have helped you judge which of the candidates' backgrounds promised greater success in that particular circumstance. In short, the balanced framework highlights important dimensions of principal selection. And though it doesn't represent a complete itemization of a principal's knowledge and skills, much less a closed set of requirements for licensure, it does demonstrate the utility of defining what principals should know and be able to do in the very mechanism that signals what the public and the profession may expect.

How can states use the framework to strengthen connections between licensure and principals' work? And how can they coordinate licensure with other policy and professional mechanisms that develop true leadership for learning? Our response is Licensing-Plus.



One can infer from this analysis that principal licensing needs a better balance, even different approach, if it's to promote school leadership for learning. Within a state commitment to do licensing well, principal licenses should reflect individual, organizational, and learning strengths. Each contributes something important to a candidate's preparation. Principal licenses, too, should be nested within broader school leadership development strategies that account for differences between entry-level and expert practice, the problematic reliance on super principals, and the need for change-oriented school leadership.

Today's licenses fail to guarantee either entry-level competence or superior leadership. Their mismatch with leadership-for-learning fundamentals flags an incoherence in state policy that diminishes states' abilities to champion their own learning goals. Their delegation of control to institutes of higher education and test makers masks the public's ability to know what it can expect from school leadership. That same delegation similarly constrains the profession's ability to promote a uniform view of learning-focused practice. States need a policy framework that goes beyond today's licensing practices, a framework we call Licensing-Plus.

### **Licensing-Plus**

Licensing-Plus is a framework for principal licensure and school leadership development that affects practitioners in three stages: licensure, specialized professional learning that develops technical expertise, and leadership development (Table 5). It also employs research to make tighter linkages between licensing requirements and proven practice.

**Licensure.** The base is licensure itself, and in this regard Licensing-Plus includes four elements. First, it provides for background checks on principal candidates, explicitly in the context of licensure. Second, it provides what most states already recognize as essential: an academic degree which satisfies the public's interest in well-educated principals, with all that that accomplishment implies. These beginning elements reasonably ensure that licensed school leaders are ethical and educated individuals.

Third, because a license also must satisfy the judicial standard that its requirements qualify an individual to practice, Licensing-Plus includes the knowledge and skills that span organizational and learning topics appropriate for an entry-level practitioner, the level a license represents. This standard is considerably more demanding than the content of state regulations we observed. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards represent a substantial and important step forward in this regard. But ISLLC and its progeny don't acknowledge the distinction

**Table 5. Licensing-Plus Career Path**

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**License Requirements (fitting for entry-level work)**

- Background check
- Academic degree
- Specification of required knowledge and skills
- Test of knowledge and skills, open to all candidates regardless of background

**Development of Expertise**

- Focused continuing education tied to required knowledge and skills
- Voluntary, post-licensure certifications in specialized areas of school leadership
- Distributed leadership roles

**Leadership Development**

- Specialized leadership training: policy and professional opportunities

**Effective Policy**

- Research linking licensure provisions, principal knowledge and skills, and school performance
- 

between entry-level and expert practice. To ignore that distinction burdens the license unfairly and confounds expectations for practice at different points in a principal's career and for choices among candidates at particular schools. The difference between initial and professional licenses made in some states starts this process but doesn't go far enough.

Licensing-Plus next requires a test of knowledge and skills, one that is open to all candidates regardless of professional background. The test provides a direct assessment of the knowledge and skills that matter to school improvement. It reduces the need to make assumptions about the "right" background or to rely on proxies, such as years of teaching experience or years of successful organizational management. As such, the test becomes the key hurdle, the signal that a candidate is qualified.

In short, the license in Licensing-Plus promotes seven purposes. It checks backgrounds and determines appropriate educational level. It coherently specifies requisite knowledge and skills, and in so doing both signals and supports learning as the primary purpose of schooling. It distinguishes entry-level skills from advanced expectations, demonstrates candidates' qualifications, and by vesting that demonstration in a test, allows a larger number of candidates to prove their abilities. These purposes represent a

firmer foundation for learning-focused school leadership than what licenses offer today.

**Expert practice.** No matter how useful, licenses still represent an entry point to practice. The expertise and leadership America's schools need depend on other investments, too. The public investment in expert practice, for instance, can be satisfied by requiring continuing education tied to learning-focused knowledge and skills as a condition for license renewal. Many states do this now. In keeping with the ambition of Licensing-Plus, however, current requirements will need to be retooled to identify topics (and perhaps providers) most closely aligned with advanced skills in the field.

The professional investment in expert practice can be satisfied through induction and mentoring programs and by developing voluntary, post-licensure certifications in specialized areas of school administration. Based on advanced clinical training and rigorous examinations, these certifications would be awarded only to highly qualified and demonstrably effective principals. They would represent a level of expertise demanded by high-challenge schools or highly complex school settings.

Specialized post-licensure certifications also represent an opportunity to develop emerging conceptions of distributed leadership. Specialized roles and certifications, distributed among a team of individuals, could bring deeper, targeted expertise to bear on school challenges and could quell regulatory inclinations to rely on super principals. Certifications could manage the development of expertise while providing a context for rethinking how principals can best lead schools toward higher performance.

**Leadership development.** Expertise is still not leadership. The difference may lie in nothing more complicated than knowing what to do and engaging others in a coordinated effort to do it. But that difference is critical. When the goal itself is novel, challenging, or uncertain, or when the setting appears to be intractable, results depend on leadership that can mobilize communities, organize resources, and take the myriad other steps that bring change and progress to schools. Particular investments in leadership development may depend on the unique challenges states and districts face, but the general strategy will be universal: embed licensure within an expanded set of state and local leadership development practices, making best use of special assignments, specialized leadership training, performance evaluations, residencies, and the like to train future leaders, scrutinize their promise, and assess the attributes they bring to the job. Nurturing educational leaders for the most demanding school situations demands such intentional investments.

### Standards, Goals, and Policy Targets for Licensing Policy

What would it take to put Licensing-Plus into practice? If a governor, chief state school officer, legislator, or policy advocate decided to move ahead with such an agenda, how should he or she proceed?

The first step would be to develop greater clarity about the purposes of principal licensing. One message that stands out from this analysis is the lack of clarity about this purpose in licenses today. Either it's not specified at all or it's buried in incoherent lists of duties. Table 6 thus organizes the key issues in this report in terms of standards, goals, and policy targets that define licensure's purpose and the practice it enables. It completes the presentation we began in Chapter 1.

**Table 6. Doing Licensure Well: Standards, Goals, and Policy Targets**

STANDARD	GOAL	POLICY TARGET
Public safety	Do no harm	Background check, academic degree
Legal compliance	Define knowledge and skills upon which public may rely	Learning-focused knowledge and skill requirements
Accountability	Demonstrate qualifications	Required test of learning-focused administrative knowledge and skills
Fair access	Maximize qualified candidates	Alternative paths to licensure test
Expert practice	Learn beyond the license	Continuing education tied to learning-focused knowledge and skill requirements
Manageable work scope	Distribute leadership	Specialized certifications beyond the license
Leadership development	Coherent use of reinforcing policy mechanisms to develop leadership potential	Administrative residency, induction programs, performance evaluation, special assignments, specialized leadership training
Effective policy	Data-driven licensure requirements	Research linking licensure requirements to needed knowledge and skills

In this regard, policy considerations begin with public safety. The goal is simply that principals will do no harm. In the context of Licensing-Plus, background checks and academic degrees satisfy this ambition, and thus provide simple policy targets to guide state action. Next comes the more complex standard of legal compliance. Here the goal is to specify the knowledge and skills that define a principal's entry-level qualifications and that

serve as the basis for public confidence. To make this goal practical, and to do so in terms that distinguish entry-level from advanced capabilities, policy and professional conversations in this area must continue. ISLLC is the obvious starting point. These standards touch all the categories of organizational-focused content in the balanced framework and many of the learning ones. In terms of Licensing-Plus, the remaining shortcomings lie in the gap between ISLLC standards and state regulatory content, on one hand, and between entry and expert domains within the standards, on the other. Once the content is set, then accountability for its implementation becomes an issue. Accountability requires a demonstration of candidates' qualifications via a test of organizational- and learning-focused knowledge and skills that are central to good entry-level practice.

Policy's regard for fair access seeks to maximize the number of candidates who attempt to qualify for the principalship. School leaders today come almost exclusively from the ranks of former teachers. More than a dozen states allow principals to come from other occupations, qualifying on the basis of an academic degree and years of experience in equivalent administrative roles, followed by on-the-job training through internships and the like. Meanwhile, organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools are building alternative paths to the principalship, attempting to work from outside the educational system to prepare new leaders for urban schools. If states want to assure the largest pool of highly qualified candidates for school administration, they should encourage these alternative paths. Remember, under Licensing-Plus, no matter the path to the test, all candidates must demonstrate their qualifications on the test. The alternative paths allow them to come forward; they don't place them in schools.

These steps provide a greater measure of confidence that novice school administrators will possess the personal, administrative, and learning qualities required to tackle their jobs. They won't guarantee success—nothing can—but they offer greater assurance that principals assume their careers demonstrably prepared to undertake the work.

The framework's remaining standards regarding expert practice, manageable work scope, and leadership development differentiate licensure from other leadership development demands. Expertise arises through structured experiences and continuing education. Reining in unrealistic expectations about the scope of work any one person can undertake encourages new thinking about the locus of school leadership, and specialized certifications (along the lines of medical specialties) are a way of getting there. Similarly, leadership development as a separate endeavor must make coordinated use of residencies, special assignments, performance evaluations, and other professional mechanisms to development and test principals' leadership potential.

In these ways, Licensing-Plus places new burdens on state policy. Therefore, to support and to ensure the most effective development of those policies over time, research must inform policy. Investments in school leadership research that link licensure requirements to proven knowledge and skills promise to tighten the link between state regulation and school leadership practice.

### **Moving Ahead**

The challenge of moving ahead is not as formidable as it might appear. With regard to background checks and degree requirements, learning-focused knowledge and skills, and tests of qualifications, states already know how to incorporate these things, and the professional activities that support them are underway. Although skill requirements are not universal, they are common enough to provide a basis for agreeing on best practice. Continuing education also is a staple of state licensing. The policy task will be to re-orient existing programs from “business as usual” formats to accountability-based systems anchored in learning-focused knowledge and skills.

Distributing leadership and encouraging leadership development are not quite as common. New investments will be required to develop advanced certifications, and this burden will fall mostly on universities and professional associations. On the other hand, states, school districts, and universities can draw on a considerable body of knowledge and experience to build internship, residency, and mentoring programs.

Expanding principal supply through alternative paths to licensure does not require state action more complicated than allowing the possibility. Interested candidates will come forward on their own, and the market may provide new educational and training opportunities. The public’s and profession’s interests in advancing only qualified candidates will be protected by developing appropriate and rigorous assessments of learning-oriented knowledge and skills, in the manner of the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, and by the attention to expertise and school leadership that the profession advances. At the same time, the research goal cannot be launched, much less completed, without new state, federal, or philanthropic investments.

Part of the licensing challenge is understanding that the choice between traditional and non-traditional candidates at Parrington High was a false choice. Neither candidate was truly qualified. The licensing practices that produced the former and the non-profit experiences that yielded the latter both fall short of public expectations. Tackling that understanding requires re-thinking licensing in ways that move states and the profession toward the learning-focused school leadership the nation now demands.

**W**e wish to thank research assistants Kate Davis, Paula Faas, Heather Frank, Dan Klabunde, and Susan Wishon for patiently collecting and organizing state administrative code provisions regarding principal licensure. We are similarly indebted to Shelley De Wys, who transformed our raw data into tables and figures, only a few of which appear here but all of which propelled our analysis forward. For reviewing our work in various stages and for always guiding us toward productive ends, we owe additional thanks to Professors William Boyd, Dan Goldhaber, Ron Heck, Paul Hill, Michael Knapp, Joseph Murphy, Rod Ogawa, and Brad Portin, and to Lee Mitgang and colleagues at the Wallace Foundation. We are grateful to James Harvey for drafting the preface and providing organizational suggestions and insightful, mid-course editing that discovered clarity where none existed. Our final thanks go to Julie Angeley, Deb Britt, and Lydia Rainey who designed and shepherded this report to its eventual release.





To understand the relationship between licensing requirements for school principals and the knowledge and skills principals need to promote student learning, we conducted a content analysis of the state administrative code sections that govern principal licensure. Content analysis is a methodology for structuring and analyzing written material.<sup>47</sup> This process enabled us to systematically examine and describe administrator licensing requirements in the states. As such regulations constitute a fluid target, it's important to note that this report is based on regulatory language available between 2002-2004.

We examined licensure content for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. In each case, we examined the state's primary code section regarding principal licensure plus any additional code sections it referenced. Within the code, we examined content that specified a requirement for licensure, such as an academic degree, ethical behavior, or knowledge of curriculum. In fact, these "requirements" constituted our unit of observation (with states being the unit of analysis). Given the way state regulations are written, with separate requirements sometimes contained in a single sentence, our coded observations often included units as small as sentence clauses. In contrast, we excluded procedural content, such as how to submit a license application to a state, or similar non-germane information.

Next we created coding categories that identified the conceptual and operational dimensions of state licensing regulations and school leadership knowledge and skills. These categories ranged from the big-picture, policy focuses on individual, organizational, and learning attributes, to specific knowledge and skills. Accordingly, this scheme allowed us to examine four levels of detail, each nested within the one above, for instance: (1) learning focus, (2) academic program requirements, (3) assessment systems, and (4) interpreting state and district learning assessments. In constructing the categories, we identified the individual-focused attributes inductively, whereas we culled the organizational- and learning-focused attributes from management and educational research literature. All the content we examined—each observation—fit into one, and only one, of the coding categories. In addition, we created a coding dictionary that allowed us to code the variety of regulatory language we encountered in a consistent manner. For example, "instruction" coded as a learning focus, but "school" as a type of organization, hence organizational focus. "Partnerships" coded as an external resource, "study of" as coursework, and so on. We also took

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47. See, for example, General Accounting Office, *Content Analysis*, Transfer Paper 10.1.3 (Washington, DC: Author, March 1989); and Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

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the regulatory language at face value, without imposing any interpretation of our own.

The coding process itself involved several steps. We both, separately, read through the data, identifying coding units—the requirements; then together compared results and agreed on the final set that we would use in the analysis. Next, to ascertain the reliability of our coding form and to make revisions that would improve it, we piloted the coding process on sample regulatory content. At this and later stages, we separately coded all content, marking up hard-copy texts, compared findings, which surfaced mistakes or disagreements, and finalized results. Agreement, or reliability, between us on the pilot study was 31%. After revisions to the coding form and dictionary, agreement on the raw observations in the study itself improved to 93.27%, and on the corrected observations, 99.85%.

Coding resulted in a set of frequencies (counts) for each coding category. These counts corresponded to the number of times each individual, organizational, or learning attribute appeared in a state’s licensure content. These counts went into an Excel file, which enabled us to summarize the data and to identify patterns in it, such as appeared in the figures and tables in this report regarding policy focus, scope, and depth.

# APPENDIX C

# Coding Form

	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>INDIVIDUAL FOCUS</b>					
<b>1. Character requirements</b>					
1.1 Age					
1.2 Background check (fingerprints, etc.)					
1.3 Character reference (letter of recommendation, etc.)					
1.4 <Other character requirements>					
<b>2. Educational requirements</b>					
2.1 Academic degrees					
2.2 Accredited institution (also standard, accepted, etc.)					
2.3 Credit hours/number of courses/additional years/unspecified graduate program (seat time)					
2.4 Institutional recommendation/verification of studies completed					
2.5 Minimum GPA					
2.6 Standards-based program					
2.7 State-approved program					
2.8 Training/professional development/induction program					
2.9 <Other educational requirements>					
<b>3. Experience requirements</b>					
3.1 Institutional recommendation/verification of work experience					
3.2 Internship (administrative)					
3.3 Internship (teaching)					
3.4 Mentor program					
3.5 Probationary period/employment before final certification					
3.6 Years experience (teaching, administrative, pupil personnel, specialist)					
3.7 <Other experience requirements>					
<b>4. Skill assessment requirements (demonstrations)</b>					
4.1 Interview					
4.2 Performance assessment					
4.3 Portfolio/portfolio-based assessment					
4.4 Test of administrative skills					
4.5 Test of basic skills					
4.6 Test of teaching competence (specifically for admin.)					
4.7 <Other skill assessment requirements>					
<b>5. Credential/certification/licensure requirements</b>					
5.1 Preliminary administrative services					
5.2 Professional Standards Board					
5.3 Teaching, pupil personnel, specialist					
5.4 <Other credential/certification/licensure requirements>					

## Appendix C

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	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS: Organizational Skills Requirements</b>					
<b>6. Strategic skills</b>					
6.1 Problem solving (data-/inquiry-based approaches to framing, understanding, deciding)					
6.2 Strategic thinking and planning (vision/mission/goals)					
<b>7. Social performance skills</b>					
7.1 Capacity building (including mentoring/coaching)					
7.2 Communication					
7.3 Conflict resolution/negotiation/collaboration/team building (getting along)					
7.4 Culture building					
7.5 Distribution of authority or responsibility (governance or delegation)					
7.6 Motivation					
7.7 Persuasion					
<b>8. Values, attitudes, work habits</b>					
8.1 Regarding ethical behavior/work ethic/work habits (Things I do)					
8.2 Regarding organizational technology (tools/processes/structure) (Things I use)					
8.3 Regarding organizational vision (Things I expect/desire)					
<b>9. Technology utilization skills</b>					
9.1 Contracts/purchasing/payroll					
9.2 Information technology management (data handling, not analysis)					
9.3 Personnel management (hire, fire, supervise, evaluate, collective bargaining)					
9.4 Program planning/monitoring/oversight/implementation; needs assessments; evaluations (deliverables)					
9.5 Resource management (dollars, facilities, time, etc.)					
9.6 Technology/tools applications					
9.7 Workplace safety management					
<b>10. Constituencies management skills</b>					
10.1 Engage/respond to stakeholders (political demands)					
10.2 Public/media relations					
10.3 Resource acquisition					
10.4 Respond to statutory/regulatory demands					

	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS: Knowledge Requirements</b>					
<b>11. Required courses</b>					
11.1 Administration, general (leadership/management/operations, etc.)					
11.2 Administration, school (principalship)					
11.3 Assessment/evaluation/measurement					
11.4 Change process/implementation					
11.5 Communications					
11.6 Culture/socialization/interpersonal relations					
11.7 Decision making/problem solving					
11.8 Diversity					
11.9 Ethics					
11.10 Finance/budgeting (school or general)					
11.11 Governance					
11.12 Information systems					
11.13 Motivation/motivational theory					
11.14 Organizations/organization theory					
11.15 Personnel management/training/adult learning					
11.16 Planning/program monitoring					
11.17 Policy/law (school or general)					
11.18 Public/school-community relations					
11.19 Supervision and evaluation					
11.20 <Other courses>					
<b>12. Knowledge of organization</b>					
12.1 Knowledge of culture					
12.2 Knowledge of external context and constituencies					
12.3 Knowledge of participants					
12.4 Knowledge of performance/outcomes					
12.5 Knowledge of strategic planning (vision/mission/goals), problem solving, decision making					
12.6 Knowledge of technology (tools, processes, structure)					

Appendix C

	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: Program Requirements</b>					
<b>13. Student learning standards (what students need to know and do)</b>					
13.1 Convening conversations with staff about learning standards					
13.2 Establishing learning standards					
<b>14. Curriculum &amp; instruction</b>					
14.1 Connecting curriculum across grades/levels					
14.2 Developing, adapting relevant (cognition/culture) instructional practices					
14.3 Developing, adapting curriculum					
14.4 Engaging school staff in the development of curriculum					
<b>15. Assessment systems</b>					
15.1 Convening conversations about the meaning and use of learning assessments					
15.2 Developing, adapting learning assessments					
15.3 Interpreting state and district learning assessments (tests and test results)					
<b>16. Accountability systems</b>					
16.1 Developing indicators and feedback mechanisms focused on progress toward learning goals					
16.2 Establishing accountability expectations for professional/student learning					
<b>17. Program coherence/alignment (across multiple program components)</b>					
17.1 Developing links between standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments					
17.2 Evaluate/modify learning program based on assessment results					
	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: Student Requirements</b>					
<b>18. Special instructional program supports</b>					
18.1 Establishing/taking responsibility for special learning needs/programs					
18.2 Focusing staff on progress of students with special learning needs (via data, etc.)					
18.3 Supporting staff learning about how to teach special-needs students					
<b>19. Noninstructional student learning supports</b>					
19.1 Establishing/coordinating services that address noninstructional learning supports (e.g., resource centers; nutrition; counseling regarding mental health, drug abuse, pregnancy, etc.)					
<b>20. Student placement and assignment</b>					
20.1 Creating structures that reduce class sizes; enable personalization					
20.2 Talking about assignment, placement, and tracking decisions and their learning consequences					
<b>21. Behavioral support and management</b>					
21.1 Creating opportunities for staff to share/develop/learn classroom management strategies					
21.2 Promoting norms/standards for student behavior					

	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: Teacher Requirements</b>					
<b>22. Mentoring and induction support</b>					
22.1 Developing skills of mentors					
22.2 Setting up quality internship/student teaching/mentoring arrangements					
<b>23. Support for ongoing professional development</b>					
23.1 Ensuring that professional development occurs regularly (frequency)					
23.2 Focusing professional development on the learning agenda					
23.3 Modeling professional learning					
23.4 Promoting peer-to-peer learning regarding instructional practice					
23.5 Supporting inquiry into questions of professional standards and/or practice					
<b>24. Supervision and evaluation</b>					
24.1 Developing/implementing an evaluation system focused on student/professional learning					
24.2 Promoting peer evaluation of instructional practice					
24.3 Using supervision and evaluation to focus on professional or student learning					
<b>25. Staffing and assignment</b>					
25.1 Aligning teacher expertise and assignments					
25.2 Focusing highest quality teaching on students with greatest needs					
25.3 Making the improvement of learning a central part of the school's personnel management					
<b>26. Recruitment and hiring</b>					
26.1 Developing and recruiting promising teaching interns, particularly in key subject areas					
26.2 Making the improvement of learning a central part of the school's hiring process					
26.3 Using professional practice standards in hiring					
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: School Requirements</b>	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>27. Strategic skills to support learning</b>					
27.1 Problem solving regarding learning (data-/inquiry-based approaches to framing, understanding, deciding)					
27.2 Strategic thinking and planning regarding learning (vision/mission/goals)					
<b>28. Operational skills to support learning (planning, budgeting, scheduling, organizing, etc.)</b>					
28.1 Communicating effectively about the learning agenda					
28.2 Creating master schedules that serve learning needs					
28.3 Developing plans/collaborating with school community to implement learning agenda					
28.4 Organizing resources for professional and student learning (budget, facilities, time, etc.)					
28.5 Promoting safe, effective learning environment					

Appendix C

	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: School Requirements (...continued)</b>					
<b>29. Developing a learning-focused culture</b>					
29.1 Assessing the learning culture					
29.2 Celebrating student and staff contributions and learning publicly					
29.3 Creating culture focused on student and staff learning					
29.4 Creating structures and opportunities for interaction focused on learning					
29.5 Developing appreciation for learning goals among staff					
29.6 Incorporating diverse perspectives to enhance learning					
<b>30. Values, attitudes, work habits</b>					
30.1 Regarding ethical behavior/work ethic/work habits that affect learning (Things I do)					
30.2 Regarding learning technology (tools, process, structure) (Things I use)					
30.3 Regarding learning vision (Things I expect/desire)					
<b>31. Leadership development</b>					
31.1 Creating and supporting teachers in instructional leadership roles					
31.2 Creating school governance arrangements that distribute leadership for learning					
31.3 Planning for leadership transition that maintains focus on learning					
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: Community Requirements</b>	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>32. Family/parent engagement</b>					
32.1 Engaging all parents in learning agenda					
<b>33. Community Engagement</b>					
33.1 Engaging/responding to stakeholder/external organizations to promote learning agenda					
33.2 Establishing community-based educational opportunities for students					
33.3 Responding to statutory/regulatory demands regarding educational activity					
33.4 Securing community resources to promote the learning agenda (grants, partnerships, etc.)					



	AL	AK	AZ	AR	etc.
<b>LEARNING FOCUS: Knowledge requirements</b>					
<b>34. Required courses</b>					
34.1 Curriculum					
34.2 Current issues affecting education					
34.3 Educational administration					
34.4 Educational foundations (history, sociology, philosophy, etc.)					
34.5 Educational technology					
34.6 Improvement process					
34.7 Instruction					
34.8 Instructional supervision					
34.9 Learning theory					
34.10 Methods					
34.11 Special education					
34.12 <Other courses>					
<b>35. Knowledge of learning agenda</b>					
35.1 Knowledge of external contexts and constituencies that influence the learning agenda					
35.2 Knowledge of learning culture					
35.3 Knowledge of learning performance/outcomes (student/school)					
35.4 Knowledge of learning technology (tools, processes, structure)					
35.5 Knowledge of strategic planning/decision making/problem solving to enhance learning					
35.6 Knowledge of student and staff learning needs					