



# Building Principal Capacity and Engagement for Reforms

## Principal Role

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### Purpose of This Document

The Reform Support Network (RSN) has created a series of virtual learning modules to assist you in implementing and integrating new educator evaluation systems, academic standards and assessments. Implementing these reforms requires principals to do their work differently, allocate their time in new ways and often learn new skills. This learning series will address the top principal capacity challenges you identified and will focus on the policies and practices you can influence.

The RSN has developed several tools for understanding the current policy and practice conditions that impact principal capacity, which are included in the appendix of this document. The tools are designed to align with the work States have undertaken with the RSN and are based on New Leaders' research on the conditions needed for effective leadership.<sup>1</sup> There are three "levers" States can use to assess the impact of their policies and practices on principal capacity:

1. **Distributed leadership** - the degree to which principals involve other leaders in critical school-level leadership tasks
2. **Principal role definition** - the degree to which human capital policies provide principals with the expectations and authority to effectively enact key reform strategies

<sup>1</sup> Adams, E., Ikemoto, G., & Taliaferro, L. (2012). Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers. New Leaders: New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/playmakers/>.

Ikemoto, G., Taliaferro, L., Fenton, B., & Davis, J. (2014). Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective. New Leaders: New York, NY and George W. Bush Institute: Dallas, TX. Retrieved from <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/great-principals-at-scale/>.

3. **Principal professional learning and management** - the degree to which principals have the skills and knowledge to effectively lead reform efforts and the degree to which those who supervise principals have the expectations, authority, skills and knowledge to support and develop principals

### Guided Activities

The activities described below will be used throughout the community of practice. They will guide your team through the tools provided as you apply the lessons learned through the virtual learning modules to your State's unique context.

During the first learning module, you will work with your other State team members to answer the following questions, focusing on strategies for improving principals' use of time. These questions will continue to guide your team throughout the learning series as you develop and execute your own action plans for supporting the broader set of principal capacity challenges.

1. What one or two strategies from the learning module resonate most with you and why? What outcomes do you expect these strategies will achieve?
2. How have the strategies been implemented to date? What policies and practices could enable and improve implementation?
3. What challenges are likely in implementing these strategies in your State? How might those challenges be overcome?

**The Reform Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, supports the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms, while sharing these promising practices and lessons learned with other States attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.**

## Activity I: Assessing Current Policies and Practices

The *State Policy and Practice Alignment Tool* is designed to help you assess the effectiveness of your State's policies and practices in supporting principal capacity. You will examine strengths of your current efforts and identify challenges along with specific evidence to support those observations.

### Step 1:

Read the condition statements for each policy lever listed in Tool 1: *State Policy and Practice Alignment Tool*. These statements describe various policy and practice conditions that help improve principal capacity. Edit or add to each statement, if necessary, to represent your State's vision of quality. The RSN team will record changes to condition statements.

### Step 2:

Individually, reflect on the condition statements and rate the effectiveness of implementation (as either "basic" or "innovating") based on your opinion of the status of each condition in your State. Identify the appropriate quadrant for the urgency and impact matrix by rating the degree to which each condition requires timely attention (urgency) and the degree to which each condition is expected to help your State meet its goals for improving principal capacity (impact).

Urgency x Impact Rating	
(-) Urgency (+)	
	(-) Impact (+)

*Example:* The star on this matrix indicates that the policy lever is not urgent in terms of State need, but could have a significant impact on improving principals' capacity for implementing reforms in the long run.

### Step 3:

Share your responses, and discuss areas of agreement and disagreement. Your team should reach consensus on the status of implementation and the urgency and impact rating.

## Activity II: Prioritizing Areas of Focus

The *Prioritizing Strategies and Action Planning Tool* is designed to help you identify areas of focus.

### Step 1:

Review the policy conditions and, using Tool 2, *Prioritizing Strategies and Action Planning*, discuss ranking these conditions from highest to lowest priority for improvement.

### Step 2:

As in Activity 1, highlight areas of agreement and disagreement, and reach consensus on ranking the areas of focus.

## Activity III: Identifying Strategies and Action Planning

The *Identifying Strategies and Action Planning Tool* is designed to help you identify strategies and system-level actions you can take to improve principals' capacity to implement reforms.

### Step 1:

Review the conditions your team identified as high priority in the previous activity (during the first learning module, you will consider State actions under those conditions as they relate specifically to principal time management). It will be helpful to review and have available the document, *Improving the Use of Principal Time*.

### Step 2:

Use Tool 3, *Identifying Strategies and Action Planning*, to explore actions and strategies for impacting the conditions related to each lever. With your team, choose the most promising strategies for your State, based the outcomes they are likely to produce.

### Step 3:

Rate the status and the priority of each strategy. In considering each, honor the work already underway in your State and gauge the degree to which a strategy can improve principal capacity. Mark any strategy "N/A" that you deem inappropriate to your status or context.

### Step 4:

Discuss ratings with your team and reach a shared set of prioritized strategies.

# Appendix

## Tool 1: State Policy and Practice

Level 1: Distributed Leadership					
Conditions	Implementation Effectiveness			Urgency x Impact Rating	
	Basic	Innovating	Rating and Evidence		
Encourage the development of leadership teams, which include effective teachers (as identified by evaluation results and adult leadership potential), to support the instructional leadership and talent management work of principals.	Principals leverage leadership teams, which include effective teachers, to organize and plan activities for increasing instructional rigor for the new standards and implementing new teacher evaluations.	In addition to basic practice, districts have clear and easy to navigate career paths for effective teachers and leaders, with opportunities for them to assume increasing levels of responsibility for improving instruction.		Urgency	
					Impact
Create options and training opportunities for teacher leaders and administrators to serve as certified observers and/or evaluators in the teacher evaluation process.	School and district administrators are trained and certified to evaluate teachers.	In addition to basic practice, teacher leaders are trained and certified to conduct formal observations of teachers and are currently serving as peer evaluators.		Urgency	
					Impact
Support integrated approaches and flexible staffing models that allow principals to distribute operations or other responsibilities across a leadership team.	Principals have guidance and training on how to delegate responsibility and access to tools that support integration of design and implementation of reform efforts (such as technology solutions for conducting evaluations).	In addition to basic practice, district and school practices support flexible school staffing models and alternative school models (such as hiring or repurposing administrative staff for business or operational duties).		Urgency	
					Impact

**Level 2: Principal Role Definition**

Conditions	Implementation Effectiveness			Urgency x Impact Rating	
	Basic	Innovating	Rating and Evidence		
Create or update leadership standards to emphasize the activities principals should prioritize (such as instructional leadership and talent management).	Principals know and understand the leadership standards.	In addition to basic practice, principals use the State leadership standards to prioritize their time and build capacity and skills for improving teacher effectiveness and outcomes for students.		Urgency	
					Impact
Redefine the role of the principal, including corresponding human capital policies, and align the new policies to leadership standards that emphasize the activities principals should prioritize.	State-level model principal evaluation and support system is aligned with the new leadership standards.	In addition to basic practice, district human capital policies and practices (such as job descriptions, recruitment practices, interview techniques and selection tools) are aligned with the State leadership standards.		Urgency	
					Impact
Clearly communicate which leadership practices offer the greatest potential for improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement.	Messages are integrated across reform efforts, and principals are clear about priorities.	In addition to basic practice, State-developed guidance and tools on how principals can implement integrated reforms (such as protocols for using data to evaluate teachers and monitor standards implementation). Principals use the recommended tools to focus on the most effective practices.		Urgency	

Level 3: Principal Professional Learning and Management

Conditions	Implementation Effectiveness			Urgency x Impact Rating	
	Basic	Innovating	Rating and Evidence		
Design and develop a strategy for providing professional development opportunities and other supports to principals.	Principals have access to training and guidance on how to become effective instructional leaders and talent managers.	In addition to basic practice, districts have protocols to identify where principals may need additional tools, training, and support and respond by differentiating professional learning opportunities.		Urgency	
		Impact			
Redefine the expectations for principal managers in providing support for and building the capacity of principals.	Principal observation and evaluation tools are easy to use and support conversations with principals to help them improve their practice.	In addition to basic practice, districts have consistent expectations that principal managers (whether superintendents or other senior district staff) support principals by providing frequent, actionable feedback and differentiating individual support to address identified principal needs.		Urgency	
		Impact			
Ensure that compliance responsibilities and expectations of principals are streamlined and clearly related to their most important responsibilities.	Districts are encouraged to review compliance responsibilities and central office expectations to identify and remove unnecessary activities and communications. For example, districts streamline paperwork requirements and allow flexible systems for implementing reforms.	In addition to basic practice, State-developed guidance and tools on how principals can implement integrated reforms (such as protocols for using data to evaluate teachers and monitor standards implementation). Principals use the recommended tools to focus on the most effective practices.		Urgency	
		Impact			

# Tool 2: Prioritizing Conditions for Building Principal Capacity

	Ranking	Condition	Priority Reasoning
<p>Highest priority for improvement (high urgency, high impact)</p> <p>Lowest priority for improvement (low urgency, low impact)</p> 	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
	5.		
	6.		
	7.		
	8.		
	9.		

## Tool 3: Identifying Strategies and Action Planning

Condition	Strategy or Tool	Actions or Next Steps	Implementation Status	Priority
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				

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