



## Voices from the States

### Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses Tool

As Race to the Top States assessed their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the policy and practice levers that experts call most powerful in building instructional leadership, their responses served both as evidence of progress and a call to further action. States can point to specific changes that boost their capacity to foster and support effective leadership. At the same time, they express certainty that efforts to date must go much further to ensure all schools have effective leaders.

In light of the work in many States to revise teacher, and to a lesser degree principal, effectiveness systems, several States cited the new evaluations as important strengths. Several noted that the teacher evaluations create the right context for more meaningful interactions between teachers and instructional leaders. This is in part the case because the evaluations are more focused, States indicated. Along with college- and career-ready standards, the new evaluations help shape what some States see as a shared understanding of the work needed and now underway to improve schools. Even so, some States acknowledged that teacher evaluation can be uneven across districts. As one State education agency (SEA) leader put it, SEAs have rubrics and forms, but it remains to be seen if people really are ready to use them competently. Educators in another State questioned exactly what the typical principal was well prepared and well suited to do to support a teacher who needs significant improvement. Several States also noted

that the new teacher evaluations require more time from instructional leaders. The question of time looms large for several States, with the split between instructional leadership demands and those of operational oversight of a campus at the core. Even time for instructional leaders to develop their own professional practice is limited, they said.

In many instances, States have built new principal effectiveness systems on competencies they have determined to be critical; they see their clear statements of what effective instructional leaders know and do as strengths. This is not always the case, with one State questioning if its highly regarded evaluation system is specific enough in elaborating on competencies, while at the same time noting the system is a strength given its alignment to interstate leadership standards. Another State noted that competencies have not yet assured instructional leaders have sufficient cultural competence to move schools ahead in all communities. States found weakness in the absence of similar competencies to define the work of non-principal instructional leaders such as instructional coaches or teacher leaders. As one put it, the skills needed to make the transition from teacher to leader are not clear enough. This was among the concerns States expressed around providing better-defined career pathways for educators; States reported that tight budgets have made it harder to find ways to move teachers into leadership roles. The pathways are fewest for elementary teachers, some States noted.

States expressed similarly mixed views about the preparation and licensure of school leaders. One State offered its work on alternative preparation and identification of potential teacher leaders among its strength, while another saw a lack of

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quality control across different paths to leadership. Several States indicated that new strengths included their efforts to improve principals' preparation by placing greater emphasis on performance and by holding preparation programs more accountable through standards and public reporting. At the same time, a teacher union leader on a State team observed that the view of too many prospective leaders about the preparation they need is that of a checklist with too little attention to depth. States saw promise in changes to licensure, particularly around relicensure throughout a leader's career. Several States indicated that adjusting requirements for relicensure was allowing them to raise expectations in the field quickly. At least one State indicated this new demand was a struggle. Still, some noted that even with a greater emphasis on performance in new principal evaluations, licensure often cannot prevent an ineffective leader who lost his job from switching districts and being assigned a new school.

States generally acknowledged more work ahead when it comes to supporting the professional growth of principals on the job. Professional development still lacks enough emphasis on strategy, enough alignment to the professional learning that teachers experience and enough direct connection to student outcomes. States questioned if they had capacity within SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide the needed support, part of a broader concern about scaling improvements. Notably, only one State indicated its partnerships outside of the SEA and LEAs are strengths.

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