

School Leadership Change Emerging in Alabama:

SREB

LEARNING-CENTERED
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Results of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

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ALABAMA

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Executive Summary

When Alabama Governor Bob Riley established the Governor's Congress on School Leadership in 2004, few people in the state fully anticipated the resulting transformation in the state's philosophical and conceptual framework for educational leadership. There were even doubters among the chairs of key committees in the Governor's Congress. Many a blue ribbon commission has resulted in little more than a well-intentioned report. Major reform initiatives often are launched with great fanfare only to lead nowhere. As with many major reform initiatives, the Governor's Congress on School Leadership confronted skepticism and resistance from those who did not want to change and those who did not see the value of proposed changes or accept the need for their involvement. Resolute leadership on the part of the state, along with perseverance on the part of scores of dedicated educators across the state, overcame these obstacles and ensured that the Governor's Congress would make its mark on education policy and practice in Alabama.

The Governor's Congress on School Leadership resulted in an unmistakable statewide paradigm shift to a firm belief that Alabama's principals must be instructional leaders as opposed to school administrators. While the reform effort is still in its infancy, its impact is visible in several dimensions of the state's educational system, from the state level to the school level:

- The Alabama Instructional Leadership Standards succeeded in placing an emphasis on instructional leadership. With the inclusion of rationale, descriptors and behaviors, these standards informed the redesign of university preparation programs, provided a basis for redesigned professional learning requirements and are expected to assist in the development of an aligned evaluation system.
- Universities have made dramatic advances in the rigor, relevance and authenticity of their school leadership preparation programs. All 13 school leadership programs have been redesigned, and a first cohort of 70 future leaders graduated from redesigned programs between fall 2008 and fall 2009.
- The leadership pipeline appears to be changing to better meet the needs of Alabama's schools. Whereas before, many students enrolled in leadership programs primarily to get a salary boost by acquiring an advanced degree, now almost all of them have every desire and intention to become principals.
- Universities, districts and other key stakeholders are in general agreement that the changes resulting from the Governor's Congress on School Leadership have Alabama heading in the right direction.
- Alabama provides all principals with a high degree of autonomy and authority, creating the working conditions that emerging research says principals need if they are to succeed.
- The move from clock-based Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to standards-based Professional Learning Units (PLUs) is consistent with the other leadership reforms designed to improve the recruitment and professional development of instructional leaders in Alabama.
- In spring 2010, the Mobile County and Baldwin County school systems agreed to continue supporting semester-long residencies for aspiring school leaders, despite significant budget constraints. These districts have seen enough benefit from the improved leadership preparation program at the University of South Alabama to continue covering this cost in the face of budget restrictions.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) conducts a biennial policy study to track the implementation of leadership reforms in the 16 SREB states.¹ Alabama has been a pacesetter state since the 2004 study was released, benchmarking state policies that can make a difference in leader quality. Findings from the 2009-2010 study suggest that Alabama remains a strong leader in adopting a cohesive set of policies advocated by SREB to raise the quality of leader preparation and practice.

Alabama received full points for its policies that address leadership standards, preparation program redesign, field-based experiences for leader candidates and leader licensure. In 2009-2010, this biennial study was expanded to include surveys of superintendents and leadership preparation program chairs or coordinators² as a measure of the extent to which state policies are being implemented. Alabama preparation programs work more closely with districts in authentic partnerships than preparation programs in any other SREB state, according to the reports of department chairs of university programs. Overall, preparation program ratings placed Alabama in the top three states in the SREB region, with only negligible differences among the three states. Superintendent ratings, by contrast, were less enthusiastic, falling in the middle of the pack of SREB states. When the superintendent and preparation program ratings are combined for a single overall rating of leadership development implementation, Alabama ranks in the top quartile of SREB states, largely due to the strength of ratings given by preparation programs.

Even with these successes, much work remains. The sustainability of the early gains of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership is threatened by a lack of resources and an incomplete understanding among front-line education leaders of what is necessary for implementation or why implementation is necessary or desirable. Future efforts should focus several main areas of concern:

- While many districts have embraced the changes, others have not. For example, the universities report that many district administrators and school principals continue to resist providing release time for aspiring leaders to fulfill the requirement for a 10-consecutive-day residency.
- Some university administrators and faculty across the state still do not understand that a change in leadership preparation has occurred and want to continue the old ways of doing business in spite of clear requirements to the contrary.
- The reforms remain — very naturally — immature.
 - Districts perceive less change in university preparation programs than the universities. The universities see how much work they have put in; but, at this point, few districts have seen a payoff in better new leaders.
 - University-district partnerships will need continuing work. These are new relationships and will require time to work out shared expectations and boundaries.
- The changes brought about by the Governor's Congress on School Leadership will take time to develop, and even more time to bear definitive evidence of their success. A developmental period is to be expected; however, there is a real danger that, without care, the reform initiative will lose impetus while this maturing process takes place.

¹ SREB has 16 member states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. More information is available online at www.sreb.org

² Twenty-seven superintendents and seven preparation program chairs or coordinators from Alabama participated in the SREB survey for the 2009-2010 policy study.

- The decreasing availability of resources to sustain the reforms, magnified by a lack of data showing immediate gains in school performance resulting from the changes, threatens continued support for and widespread maturation of the reforms.
- The university programs would benefit from increased opportunities to share ideas.
- The PLU system was new in the 2009-2010 school year and still involves a large number of questions about how it will work in practice. (How will documentation be handled? How will credentialed aspiring leaders still serving as classroom teachers meet their PLU implementation requirements? How will district staff wanting to maintain school leader certification meet implementation requirements?)
- The collection and publication of data on Alabama's school leadership infrastructure and pipeline needs further development. Alabama is not unique in its need for a data collection system, but it currently has no way to automatically and systematically connect its serving principals and their records as school leaders with the programs that prepared them.

The task forces of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership did not all make equal progress. Some ideas that emerged from the Governor's Congress have stalled in the political process and other ideas have been deferred deliberately for future implementation. Several areas will require further attention and work:

- The Governor's Congress recommended adoption of a Code of Ethics for Alabama's instructional leaders, but that idea failed in the legislature when the Alabama Education Association opposed it.
- The principal evaluation system still needs to be revised to match the new instructional leadership standards.
- Statewide supports for principal mentoring are still being developed.
- The Governor's Congress included a recommendation that Alabama establish a three-tiered licensing system for principals, recognizing leaders who were licensed but not yet hired, acting instructional leaders and master-level principals. That development has been put on hold due to a lack of funding to create incentives for master principals.

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Part I: How Alabama Changed School Leadership

The Governor's Congress on School Leadership

The Governor's Congress on School Leadership was first convened by Governor Bob Riley and State Superintendent Joseph B. Morton on November 30, 2004. A group of 200 delegates from across Alabama, representing a wide range of stakeholders, served as members of the Governor's Congress. Considerable efforts were made to include representatives from school districts, higher education, professional associations and the business community.

Much of the work of the Governor's Congress was completed by five task forces, each composed of 20 to 25 carefully selected individuals. Each task force was co-chaired by a district superintendent and an acting principal.

Task Force One: Standards for Preparing and Developing Principals and Instructional Leaders

Task Force Two: Selection and Preparation of School Leaders

Task Force Three: Certification Standards for School Leaders

Task Force Four: Professional Development

Task Force Five: Working Conditions and Incentives

The work of the task forces met variable success in moving from recommendation to implementation. Task Force One quickly developed the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders, which were adopted by the State Board of Education in 2005. Its Code of Ethics, however, has not yet advanced beyond recommendation to become official policy. Task Force Two devised a process for the selection and preparation of school leaders, which has been used successfully to redesign all 13 school leader preparation programs in Alabama. Task Force Three presented a recommendation that Alabama adopt a three-tiered scheme of principal certification, but the legislature has not provided funds to create incentives for principals to achieve the master certification level. The work of Task Force Four resulted in a transition from clock-based Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to standards-based Professional Learning Units (PLUs) in the 2009-2010 school year. The work of Task Force Five resulted in the extensive 2008 "Take20" principal working conditions study, discussed in this report, but has not resulted in any policy changes regarding incentives for principals.

The Governor's Congress was reconvened on May 11, 2005, when its final report was issued and detailed action plans were presented for the Governor, State Board of Education and the legislature to review and implement the recommendations of the Governor's Congress.

Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders

The first and most critical task of the Governor's Congress was to create a new set of standards for instructional leadership with which all other aspects of the leadership reforms — redesign of leadership preparation programs, creation of a new licensing structure, development of professional learning frameworks, and development or adoption of new instructional leader evaluation instruments — would be aligned. The new standards represented the philosophical backbone of the reform effort.

The members of Task Force One understood the importance of clearly stating the rationale behind each standard and providing detailed key indicators and descriptors to help explicate the meaning of each standard for the purposes of training leaders to meet the standards and evaluating performance against the standards.

While various existing standards could have been used as starting points or benchmarks, the members of Task Force One believed that it was important to begin with a blank slate and work from their own experience and expertise to identify those areas in which effective instructional leaders must demonstrate excellence. The Governor's Congress developed standards in eight domains:

Standard 1: Planning for Continuous Improvement

Standard 2: Teaching and Learning

Standard 3: Human Resources Development

Standard 4: Diversity

Standard 5: Community and Stakeholder Relationships

Standard 6: Technology

Standard 7: Management of the Learning Organization

Standard 8: Ethics

Because much of the rest of the work of the Governor's Congress was dependent on the development and acceptance of standards as a philosophical foundation for the reform effort, Task Force One worked quickly. Within less than five months, it had built a consensus around the eight standards. The State Board of Education adopted the standards shortly after the final meeting of the Governor's Congress in May 2005.

Alabama's Standards preceded the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008,³ which were adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in late 2007. Alabama's eight standards each have between seven and 20 "key indicators," and the six ISLLC standards each incorporate three to nine "functions." SREB staff conducted an alignment exercise using an iterative methodology similar to that used to align other states' standards and proposed standards to the national ISLLC standards. (See Table 1, page 4.) A mapping of Alabama's key indicators against the ISLLC functions allows for the identification of relative emphases and gaps. Because many of Alabama's key indicators aligned with multiple ISLLC functions, the mapping contained in Table 1 does not represent one-to-one matching.

The comparison of Alabama's Instructional Leadership Standards and the ISLLC 2008 standards is instructive, clearly demonstrating the extent to which the new Alabama Standards shift the focus from a view of principals as managers and administrators to a definition of principals as instructional leaders. As the dean of one of Alabama's colleges of education noted, the new standards "put the focus where it should have been all along."

The Alabama Standards matched most frequently with three ISLLC functions (identified by bold text in Table 1):

- Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff. (17 matches)
- Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning and high expectations. (14 matches)
- Obtain, allocate, align and efficiently utilize human, fiscal and technological resources. (11 matches)

The review also identified six ISLLC functions that the Alabama Standards did not appear to emphasize or directly address (identified by italicized text in Table 1):

- Supervise instruction. (*Note: This could be considered an aspect of developing the instructional capacity of staff.*)
- Maximize time spent on quality instruction.

³ The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) has been a national leader in setting standards for school leadership since 1996. It is supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

- Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems.
- Promote and protect the welfare of students and staff.
- Safeguard the values of democracy, equity and diversity.
- Act to influence local, district, state and national decisions affecting student learning.

Some of the ISLLC standards appear to not match well with Alabama's standards because of the way ideas were grouped. For instance, while Alabama's Standard 4 is focused entirely on diversity, the corresponding ISLLC function related to diversity includes an expectation that a school leader should act to "safeguard the values of democracy" as well — a separate and distinct idea that is not incorporated in Alabama's standards. Finally, the ISLLC function of the school leader acting to "influence local, district, state and national decisions" implies an appropriate role for a principal actively managing in a way that the Alabama standards do not conceive.

The Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders have succeeded in providing a philosophical framework for the redesign effort, are widely accepted as encapsulating expectations for school leaders in Alabama, and were used successfully in setting directions for university redesigns and developing new professional learning frameworks. While the standards should be reviewed periodically and revised as needed in the future, they are more than adequate in meeting current needs.

TABLE 1
Alignment Between ISLLC and Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership: Alabama Mapped Onto ISLLC

ISLLC Functions									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
ISLLC Standards									
1. An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders	Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning	Create and implement plans to achieve goals	Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans				
Number of AL indicators matching function	7	7	6	9	7				
2. An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth	Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	Create a comprehensive, rigorous, coherent curricular program	Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	<i>Supervise instruction</i>	Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	<i>Maximize time spent on quality instruction</i>	Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program
Number of AL indicators matching function	14	5	6	2	8	17	2	4	5
3. An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources of a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment	<i>Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems</i>	Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	<i>Promote and protect the welfare of students and staff</i>	Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning				
Number of AL indicators matching function	0	11	2	3	6				

4. An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources	Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	Promote understanding, appreciation, and the use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources	Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners				
Number of AL indicators matching function	3	3	5	8				
5. An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner	Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	<i>Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity</i>	Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling			
Number of AL indicators matching function	3	3	2	5	3			
6. An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context	Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	<i>Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning</i>	Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies					
Number of AL indicators matching function	4	0	5					

Source: *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 as Adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration*. Council of Chief State School Officers — http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/elps_isllc2008.pdf.

Redesign of University Instructional Leadership Programs

Until recently, many university school leadership programs were caught in a downward spiral, characterized in Art Levine's 2005 indictment *Educating School Leaders*, as accepting anyone willing to pay tuition, teaching a curriculum that lacked rigor or relevance, and giving the students degrees that entitled them to pay increases without evidence of value-added and to leadership credentials they might never use.⁴ A consensus grew that the national system for preparing school leaders was broken. SREB issued a call to Alabama and the other Southern states to address this growing crisis with its 2001 publication, *Preparing a New Breed of Principals: It's Time for Action*.⁵

The Wallace Foundation became a national leader in drawing attention to the necessity of providing every school with strong instructional leaders, supporting the work of SREB, the State of Alabama, and many others in improving school leadership over the past decade. Growing out of that work was increased recognition of the necessary components of quality school leader preparation programs. Linda Darling-Hammond and her co-authors established benchmarks of quality in 2007 by identifying through research a list of conditions that closely match the reforms that Alabama pursued in the redesign of its university preparation programs:⁶

- University-district partnerships
- Greater selectivity in choosing future leaders
- More rigorous course work, connected with field-based learning and residency experiences
- More rigorous residency experiences
- Effective mentoring
- Cohort structures for all students

Although the exact details of implementation differed from institution to institution, all six of these components were incorporated into each redesigned university program before the state allowed it to admit new students. A visiting team consisting of representatives from the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and SREB, along with other leadership experts, traveled to each campus in the state to provide technical assistance and ensure understanding of and compliance with the new program rules. As a result of these visits, some programs were temporarily denied permission to re-open until certain defects in their programs were addressed.

College deans said that although the changes their programs made were costly and difficult, most of their presidents, provosts and program faculty supported the changes. The deans also said that they thought that the changes would result in their students' improved preparation to become principals. When asked about the changes expected in their graduates, one dean's response captured the views of many of her colleagues: "I think they will be more confident. They will have deeper understanding of teaching and learning and data and achieving, and how you ensure that students learn. We have a much greater focus on teaching and learning than we did in the past."

⁴ Levine, Arthur. *Educating School Leaders*. The Education Schools Project, 2005.

⁵ Bottoms, Gene, and Kathy O'Neill. *Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action*. Southern Regional Education Board, 2001.

⁶ Darling-Hammond, Linda, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen. *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs — Final Report*. Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007.

University-District Partnerships

“Research indicates that university-district partnerships are very important. They not only provide the most effective means for preparing principals for specific district and regional contexts but also expand the resources available to both university preparation programs and school districts.”⁷

Michelle D. Young

Executive Director, University Council for Educational Administration

Strong university-district partnerships are a key to achieving both more selective admissions and more authentic residency experiences for aspiring leaders. University-district partnerships also have the potential for increasing the necessary exchange of information between universities and districts. The exchange provides districts with access to the latest research, and it gives university programs a better understanding of the day-to-day problems districts and schools face. As part of the redesign, all university programs in Alabama were required to establish formal partnerships with school districts.

Working out the details of university-district partnerships is difficult and requires conversations about responsibilities, boundaries and expectations. One of the deans reported a strategy of having quarterly meetings with all of the superintendents with whom her program had partnerships and making sure that the meetings were used as working sessions and not just opportunities to report out. She said that it was necessary to engage in constant selling of the program and the partnerships, especially in response to turnover among superintendents and key district staff.

The University of South Alabama has created a Leadership Advisory Council with its LEA partners. (See Figure 1.) The Leadership Advisory Council oversees all aspects of the program, but each partner is expected to take the lead for specific tasks. For example, districts lead activities related to selecting aspiring leaders, identifying residency schools and identifying and training mentor principals. The university takes the lead in revising, delivering, monitoring and assessing the curriculum, course work and residencies.

FIGURE 1

Conceptual Framework for University-District Partnerships — University of South Alabama



⁷ Young, Michelle D. “From the Director: The Promise of University–District Partnerships.” *UCEA Review*, Winter 2010.

When the relationships in these university district partnerships have not been defined carefully, the partnership can be perfunctory or even dysfunctional. One university respondent observed, “The LEAs do not want the level of engagement with the University that the Department of Education and the Governor’s Congress mandate. They are busy people and we are asking that they participate at a level that requires more than they are willing to give.” When it functions as intended, the university-district partnership should provide recognizable benefits to both sides. A more positive view was expressed by a respondent from another university: “There is a synergy that develops when the school system buys into the concept of ‘growing their own’ future leaders in partnership with the university. These kinds of partnerships are the best part of this program.”

Selection of Aspiring Leaders

“The people we’re selecting and the intensity of the work is wonderful.”

Fran Kochan

Dean, College of Education, Auburn University

All of the participating universities changed their selection processes to be more selective and to include district partners in the process. The selection processes at most universities was designed either completely by district partners or with substantial district involvement, and district staff typically participate in candidate selection interviews. Some programs require candidates to be interviewed by LEA staff who are not from their home district. Some programs have moved to requiring districts to “tap” candidates, while others continue to accept self-nomination by aspiring leaders.

The Troy University admissions process is fairly representative of the various processes being used. Candidates must submit a portfolio including evidence of three successful years of teaching, leadership ability, intellectual capacity and their desire to become a principal. Candidates with satisfactory portfolios are invited to participate in interviews with program faculty and district representatives. In 2009, a written exam was added to the admissions process at Troy University. Candidates are given an authentic writing task, such as preparing a memo to the faculty explaining a policy change. Candidates must receive passing scores on all components of their application, and the university no longer permits conditional admissions to the program.

The comments of one interview respondent from Troy University illustrated how the new selection process has changed the nature of the program: “We began the interview process and included the admission portfolio. Immediately our numbers fell off. Where we might have 20 applicants, we ended up with 10. But those ten students ... were more thoughtful and reflective. The quality of their work was much better than those who self-selected for the program.”

The increasing selectivity of the university leadership preparation programs not only will improve the quality of its pool of future leaders, but also will reduce the quantity of teachers who apply to the program simply seeking the pay increase that comes with a master’s degree in Instructional Leadership. To complete the intense work of the new programs, students must be committed to ultimately seeking a leadership role.

Rigorous Course Work

A long-standing critique of educational leadership programs is that they have offered a watered-down curriculum that gives preference to school management and administration over instructional leadership, relies on dated texts, and gives graduates a heavy dose of organizational theory and educational philosophy with only a garnish of practical knowledge and experience.⁸ The redesign process required that all of the universities review all of their course work for both rigor and

⁸ Levine, Arthur. *Educating School Leaders*. The Education Schools Project, 2005. Hess, Frederick M., and Andrew P. Kelly. *Learning to Lead: What Gets Taught in Principal Preparation Programs*. American Enterprise Institute, 2005.

relevancy. Program site visits organized by the ALSDE ensured that old syllabi were not simply re-packaged with superficial changes, but that program course work is at a level of complexity that prepares candidates to meet the demands of the job and to work effectively with teachers to improve instruction and student achievement.

In some cases the programs increased the number of courses required for students to graduate. For example, before the redesign, the University of South Alabama required its aspiring leaders to complete five core courses in leadership. Now its students must complete six redesigned courses enhanced by field-based experiences through which they apply course concepts and leadership theories. Jacksonville State University increased from a 31 semester-hour program, which included 10 stand-alone courses and a single internship course at the end of the program, to a 36 semester-hour program that was designed by practicing administrators, district partners and program faculty.

More courses alone do not equal greater rigor, but this expansion of the course requirements allowed more in-depth study of instructional leadership topics. Program faculty also revised the order of courses to make sure that foundation courses came first and students' later course work would build on previous learning in a logical manner. For example, because the focus of the program at Auburn University is instructional leadership, the Instruction and Curricular Development course is taught during the first semester and the Continuous Improvement and Planning course is taught the following semester.

High-Quality Residency

“These folks have to perform when they get on the job, and the better that field experience is, the better they will be prepared when they become a principal or an assistant principal. So you have to make that experience a very valuable, very substantive experience.”

Larry Powers

Dean, College of Education, Alabama A&M University

In order to be prepared to assume the principalship, aspiring leaders must have the opportunity to **observe** exemplary school leadership in a variety of settings, **participate** in school leadership tasks as part of a team, **and then lead** instructional activities, under the watchful eye of an experienced mentor, in a working school. Progressing from observing to participating and then leading gives aspiring leaders the experience and confidence to assume the daily tasks of leadership.

The most contentious change in the university programs has been the requirement that all programs include a 10-consecutive-day residency. This requirement was a compromise, as many ALSDE and university leaders wanted, and still want, a full-semester residency. The University of South Alabama has been able to maintain a full-semester residency. Some districts balked at any requirement to provide release time to aspiring leaders who are, in many cases, their best classroom teachers (and in the cases of specialized subject areas such as upper-level math and science courses, foreign languages and AP courses, can be very hard to replace with substitutes). The 10-consecutive-day residency emerged as a compromise that would ensure some commitment to a meaningful residency. The reasoning behind the 10-consecutive-day rule was that an hour or two at a time would not give aspiring leaders any insight into the daily routines and challenges of the principalship.

One of the criticisms of the consecutive-day rule is that the school year has its own rhythm, and a residency experience during the spring testing window will differ from a residency just before or just after the testing period. The beginning of the school year has its own processes, critical to the success of the school, with which an aspiring leader must be familiar. Scheduling for the next year and hiring to fill vacancies are critical tasks that occur on a predictable schedule that might not coincide with a residency. For reasons of participant and district convenience, many programs schedule the 10-consecutive-day residencies to coincide with spring breaks and to be split between the resident's district and a neighboring district, so that the aspiring leader is absent from his or her regular duties for only five days. While the consecutive-day rule ensures that aspiring leaders gain the perspective of a full day and week in the life of a school administrator, they do not guarantee exposure to all of the critical tasks of school leadership that aspiring leaders might receive through a more comprehensive, competency-based residency.

The greater rigor and importance of the residency is more demanding of program faculty, and Auburn University has responded to this reality by adding a full-time faculty member to manage students' clinical experiences and ensure that all course work is connected with practical experiences. This addition mirrors an approach taken in a similar redesign of a school leadership program at East Tennessee State University, which began a few years before the redesign at Auburn.⁹ This innovation is expensive, but has been a successful addition to the program.

Policies and support for release time vary greatly from program to program and even within a program, depending on an aspiring leader's home district. Some districts allow their aspiring leaders to continue to draw their salaries while completing the residency. Other districts require aspiring leaders to take unpaid leave or to pay for their own substitutes. While paying for their own substitutes is a serious expense for aspiring leaders, it usually is a better option for them than taking unpaid leave.

Effective Mentoring

SREB drew attention to the importance of mentoring for aspiring and new instructional leaders with its 2007 report, *Good Principals Aren't Born — They're Mentored: Are We Investing Enough to Get the School Leaders We Need?*. Mentoring also was one of the key strategies for leadership preparation identified by Linda Darling-Hammond and her co-authors in their 2007 study of exemplary preparation programs, and it has been the subject of extensive study by Susan Villani.¹⁰ The importance of effective mentoring has been stressed repeatedly by the participants in SREB leadership programs in states neighboring Alabama. To Alabama's credit, the graduates of the pilot redesign programs at Auburn University and the University of South Alabama gave high marks to the helpfulness of their mentoring experiences in their development.

All leadership programs were required to include provisions for effective mentoring in their redesign. While several of the programs had for years provided mentoring opportunities for their students, the redesign made those plans more formal and extensive. The purpose of mentoring, as described by the University of South Alabama, is that "mentor principals become role models who guide candidates to use SREB's steps of leadership preparation, which are to observe, participate, and finally assume a leadership role in those daily activities of the school that contribute to a highly productive culture of success for students."

While all of the programs reported providing training to the mentor principals (as much as five days of training in one case) and some of the programs reported taking steps to carefully match aspiring leaders with mentors, none of the programs reported being able to offer stipends to mentors after their state grants to cover the costs of redesign expired.

Currently, the more extensive mentoring programs benefit from their novelty; but as that wears off, Alabama should expect greater challenges in finding exemplary principals who are willing to serve as mentors. One of the programs reported that its greatest problem at present is identifying and training suitable mentors: "Too often, with their busy schedules, administrators do not have the time to take on the additional responsibility of working closely with interns." Mentor selection should be strategic; it should not be allowed to default to an aspiring leader's own principal (a common mistake made by systems short on time or funds), or to anyone who is willing to do it. The ALSDE is working to create statewide supports for mentoring, and those efforts should continue to receive a high priority.

⁹ "Final Grant Performance Report to the U.S. Department of Education: Building Capacity for Redesign of Preparation of School Leaders." Southern Regional Education Board, 2009. Unpublished.

¹⁰ Gray, Cheryl, Betty Fry, Gene Bottoms and Kathy O'Neill. *Good Principals Aren't Born — They're Mentored: Are We Investing Enough to Get the School Leaders We Need?* Southern Regional Education Board, 2007.

Darling-Hammond, Linda, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen. *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs — Final Report*. Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007.

Villani, Susan. *Mentoring and Induction Programs That Support New Principals*. Corwin Press, 2006.

Cohort Structures

“We always had cohorts, but these are much more closely bound together. I think we are creating networks that will work together over time, and that’s a very powerful thing.”

Fran Kochan

Dean, College of Education, Auburn University

Cohort structures, like mentoring, have been identified as a key aspect of exemplary school leader preparation programs both by research and by SREB’s experience in several states. Although a cohort structure has been recognized as the gold standard for leadership preparation in Alabama, and some universities now offer only cohort routes, some programs continue to allow students to work toward their degrees outside of a cohort structure. Students outside the cohort structure lack a sense of continuity in their studies, the benefits of peer support, and the benefits of sustained peer-to-peer interaction and learning that come from taking courses together and sharing experiences in growing as instructional leaders.

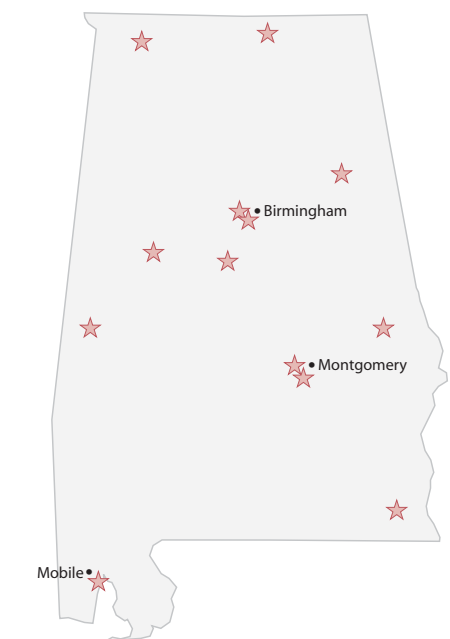
One university reported that it had attempted to create cohorts from specific districts so that it could tailor instruction to their particular context, but was unable to do so because of the lower enrollment resulting from greater selectivity. Another university reported that economic conditions had affected its planned cohorts as students whose spouses were laid off, or who were laid off themselves, had to drop out of the program or reduce their course loads due to financial concerns. This problem was severe enough that a cohort of 20 students intended to graduate in the spring of 2010 had been reduced to seven students.

In spite of these difficulties, the redesign clearly has resulted in more of Alabama’s future leaders being prepared as part of formal cohorts, and research suggests that the state and its schools will benefit from this improved preparation.

Geographic Distribution of Alabama’s School Leadership Infrastructure

The 13 college campuses with school leadership programs are spread throughout the state, geographically. (See Figure 2.) While several of the programs offer online classes or satellite locations and some offer classes at school district locations to minimize travel required of their students and maximize the hands-on nature of their training, the map shows an unmistakably empty area between Montgomery and Mobile. Future plans for professional development for school leaders, university-district partnerships, and inquiries into the scale and sustainability of Alabama’s leadership reforms should take into consideration the ways in which this region will be served.

FIGURE 2
Geographic Distribution of Universities With School Leadership Programs



★ Indicates a university with a school leadership program

Professional Learning for Principals

In 2006, Alabama adopted new Standards for Professional Development, applying to all educators.¹¹ As a logical extension of this change, and in keeping with intentions made clear in the Governor’s Congress, Alabama announced in 2008 the change from Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to Professional Learning Units (PLUs). The Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) provided the following definition of PLUs:

“A Professional Learning Unit (PLU) is a content driven, long-term unit of professional study for instructional leaders that fully addresses all knowledge and ability indicators under an Alabama Standard for Instructional Leaders. ... A PLU is earned at the completion of professional study which fully addresses the knowledge and ability indicators under an Alabama Standard for Instructional Leaders. The professional study must include comprehensive coverage and evaluation of effectiveness in the school setting. Professional study that earns a PLU must be approved either by the Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) or approved by the local superintendent. The PLU will take the place of the continuing education unit (CEU) which is based on seat time at one event rather than the development of knowledge and ability over time.”¹²

Over a five-year certification cycle, an instructional leader must earn five PLUs. Two PLUs must be approved by the ACLD, two PLUs must be approved by the local superintendent, and one may be approved by either the ACLD or the local superintendent. The Alabama State Board of Education created the ACLD for the express purpose of overseeing the implementation and ensuring the high quality of professional learning for leaders. Its 15 members are practitioners nominated by the State Board and other education leaders and appointed by the State Superintendent.¹³

Several of the major education associations in Alabama, including the Alabama Education Association (AEA) and the School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA), have developed PLUs. PLU providers must receive approval for their training ahead of time, and every PLU must include evidence of learning, implementation in a school setting and evaluation. For example, in June 2009, the Council for Leadership in Alabama Schools (CLAS) presented its members with two state-approved opportunities to earn a PLU — one focused on Standard 1 of the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders, and one focused on Standard 7. Both training strands consisted of three phases, with one or more activities in each phase. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2
Example of PLU Training Provided Through CLAS

Phase	Focus	Activity I	Activity II
Phase I	Knowledge & Content	Attend sessions at the CLAS conference	Take one of two SREB leadership modules
Phase II	Implementation	Focus on implementation at least 1 hour a week in the school setting	Maintain online blog on activities
Phase III	Evaluation	Attend CLAS conference session for follow-up and reflection	

¹¹ “Professional Study Training 2008-2009.” PowerPoint presentation. Alabama Council for Leadership Development, 2009—<http://alex.state.al.us/leadership/psinfo.html>.

¹² “Alabama Department of Educational Leadership and Evaluation” — <http://alex.state.al.us/showleaderpg.php?lnk=psinfo>.

¹³ *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) 290-4-3-.01(2) (a-d)*.

The 2009–2010 school year is the first during which PLUs replaced CEUs, and a number of practical questions and, in many cases, some confusion about the implementation of the change have arisen.

- Some school leaders saw the change and thought that they should attempt to complete all five PLUs in the first year to get the requirement out of the way. The learning is supposed to be intensive, continuous and tied to the leader's professional development plan and annual review, and it has taken some education to ensure that school leaders understand that the intention is that they focus on and complete one PLU each year.
- By intention, school leaders are not required to complete a PLU on a different standard each year. If leaders need to focus more of their professional growth in a particular area, they can complete multiple PLUs for the same standard.
- As a PLU requires evidence of learning, implementation and evaluation, the documentation requirements for PLUs greatly exceed the level of documentation previously required for CEUs. District office staff must necessarily take on these additional responsibilities for collecting and maintaining documentation and create new systems for doing so.
- Even after the change from CEU to PLU, one respondent familiar with the changes cautioned that submission of documentation is not by itself an indicator or a guarantee of quality of learning.
- The requirement of school-based implementation is a challenge for initially certified school leaders who have not yet been hired in school leadership roles, especially if they are still classroom teachers, and for previous principals who are working in central office positions but who want to maintain their credential. State clarification and guidance are needed to explain how such leaders can complete their PLUs.
- Rural districts with smaller central offices are more likely to have problems making the change to PLUs. Alabama's 11 Regional In-Service Centers (RICs) can assist smaller districts, and some smaller districts have worked with larger districts and used their PLU programs. As noted above, professional organizations such as CLAS are stepping forward to create PLU opportunities, but their solutions can be expensive. In the case of CLAS, obtaining a PLU requires paying for a seminar in addition to attending two conferences in Mobile, resulting in a cost that will be prohibitive for some.

Principal Working Conditions in Alabama

"It is hard to *recruit* the right people to a bad situation. As we say, 'How are you going to keep them down on the farm once they have seen the farm?' Or how are you even going to get them to the farm once they know so much about it?"

Michael Fullan, *What's Worth Fighting For in the Principalship*¹⁴

In 2008, Alabama principals participated in a Take20 study of working conditions led by Eric Hirsch, a nationally recognized expert in working conditions for K-12 educators.¹⁵ Results of the survey were mixed. Alabama's principals were generally positive about their district leadership, professional development and the extent to which they feel empowered. They were less positive about the time pressures they feel, their inability to devote significant time to practicing instructional leadership, and their lack of training and skills to coach and remediate teachers who are weak instructors.

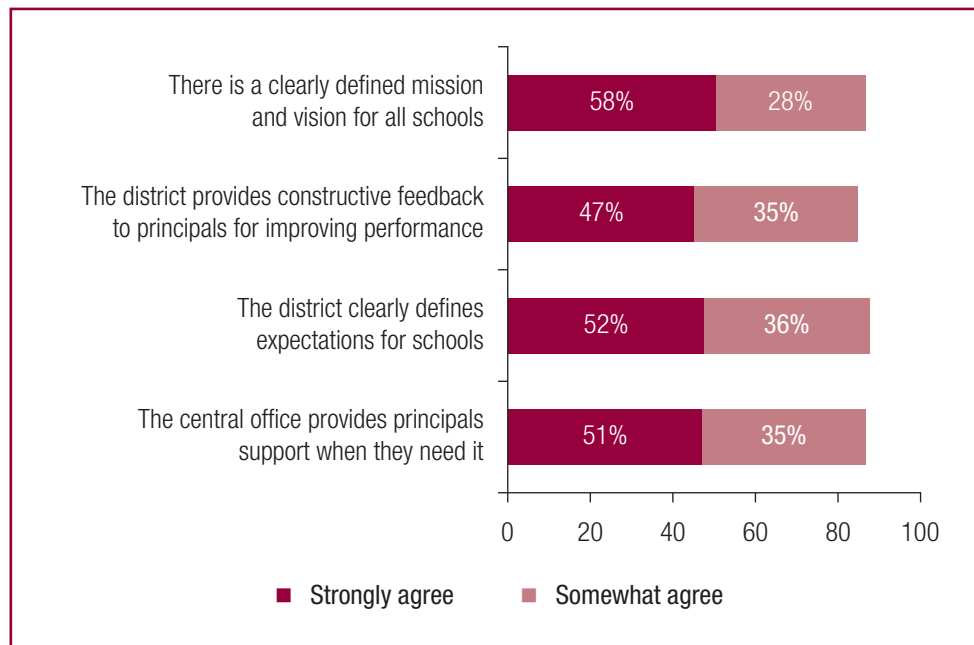
¹⁴ Fullan, Michael. *What's Worth Fighting For in the Principalship?*. Second Edition. Teacher's College Press, 2008.

¹⁵ Hirsch, Eric, Casia Freitas and Anthony Vilar. *Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey: Interim Report*. New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz, 2008. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://www.take20alabama.org/library/attachments/interimreport.pdf>. Additional data from this study were provided to SREB by the ALSDE for this report.

District Leadership

More than 80 percent of Alabama principals strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their districts provide support when they need it, clearly define a mission and vision for all schools, clearly define expectations for schools, and provide principals with constructive feedback for school improvement. (See Figure 3.) While principals do agree with all of these statements, about one-third of the principals interviewed only somewhat agreed with the statements, and approximately 10 percent agreed even less, indicating that there is still room for improvement in district leadership.

FIGURE 3
Alabama Principals' Perspectives on District Office Support

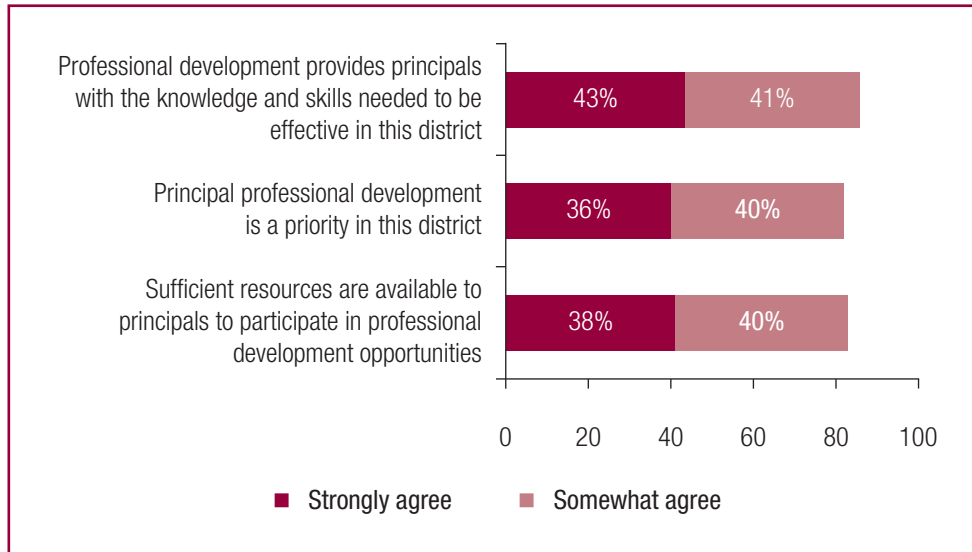


Source: Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey, 2008

Professional Development

In 2008, most current principals in Alabama strongly or somewhat agreed that they received the professional development they needed in order to be effective, that professional development was a priority in their district, and that there were sufficient resources available for them to participate in professional development. Approximately 40 percent of the respondents only somewhat agreed with these statements, and almost one-fourth of respondents agreed neither strongly nor somewhat that professional development for principals was a priority. (See Figure 4.)

FIGURE 4
Alabama Principals' Perspectives on Professional Development



Source: Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey, 2008

Note: Because the shift from CEUs to PLUs was taking place around the same time as the Take20 survey, principals' responses do not necessarily represent feedback on the new, standards-based statewide professional development framework.

The 2008 Take20 working conditions survey indicated that principals already were focused on their need for additional training in instructional leadership, teacher remediation and coaching, and data-driven decision making. (See Table 3.) Based on the design of the new PLU system, these areas should begin receiving more attention. The most noteworthy professional development gap in Alabama, according to the Take20 survey, was in the area of teacher remediation and coaching. This topic was second on the list of areas in which principals felt that they needed more training, but only 11 percent of respondents reported receiving 10 or more hours of training in this area, making it 10th on the list of professional development received. Some respondents took the view that the problem with professional development for teacher remediation and coaching was not a matter of preparing principals to work with teachers to improve teaching practices, but rather a matter of training principals to manage personnel issues effectively when unions become involved in protecting ineffective teachers.

TABLE 3
Selected Topics of Professional Development Needed and Professional Development Received

	In which areas do you need additional support to effectively lead your school?	In which areas have you had 10 clock hours or more of professional development in the past two years?
Instructional leadership	41% (1)	73% (1)
Student assessment	31% (4)	65% (3)
School improvement planning	27% (7)	65% (3)
Teacher remediation/coaching	38% (2)	11% (10)
Data-driven decision making	36% (3)	66% (2)

Source: Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey, 2008

Note: Because the shift from CEUs to PLUs was taking place around the same time as the Take20 survey, principals' responses do not necessarily represent feedback on the new, standards-based statewide professional development framework.

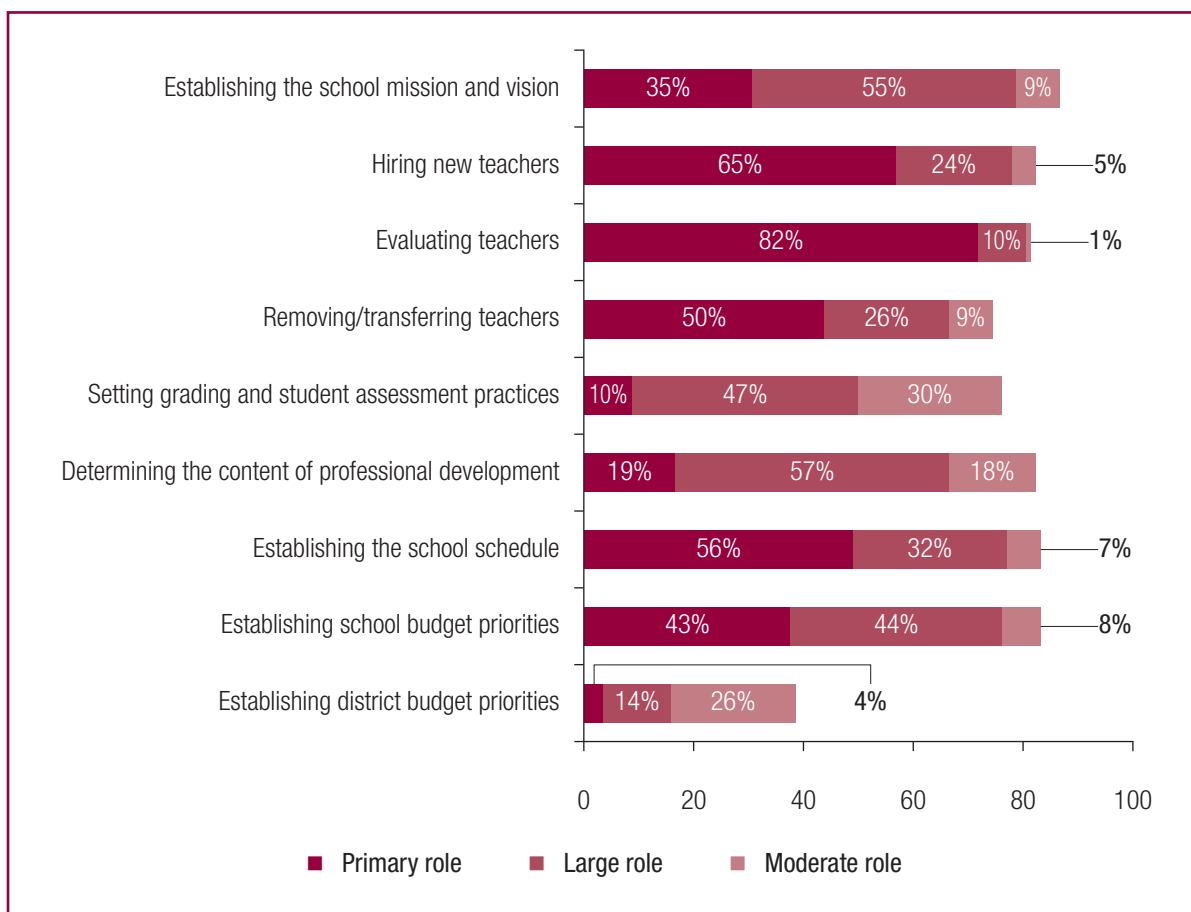
Empowerment

Recent research indicates that empowerment of principals is proving effective in many parts of the country, as evidenced by cases in Chicago and New York City, in particular.¹⁶ With greater empowerment will come greater responsibility on the part of principals, as well as a greater need to ensure that the right people with the right training are leading Alabama's schools. The results of Alabama's 2008 Take20 survey suggest that Alabama principals are given substantial authority and autonomy in making critical decisions for the improvement of their schools. (See Figure 5.)

Data

The Take20 principals' survey also identified as a real strength for Alabama the availability of data on which school improvement decisions might be based. Sixty-two percent of responding principals strongly agreed that their schools received sufficient data and information to make informed decisions and 34 percent somewhat agreed, for a total of 96 percent of principals voicing agreement that they receive the data they need. SREB's considerable school improvement and leadership development work suggests that, in many cases, the availability of data surpasses the skills and capacity of current and aspiring leaders to process the data, and ongoing professional development in using data to improve schools remains a critical need.

FIGURE 5
Alabama Principals' Perceptions of their Role in Selected Decisions



Source: Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey, 2008

¹⁶ Ouchi, William G. *The Secret of TSL: The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.

Gene Bottoms and Betty Fry. *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning*. SREB, 2009. A second SREB report on the role of districts in school improvement, with the working title *Providing Vision, Providing Support: How Districts Can Make a Difference for Schools*, is due out in 2010.

Time

The Take20 survey results identified the demands on principals' time as the working condition most needing improvement in order for principals to become better instructional leaders. While 74 percent of principals said they spent no more than five hours a week observing and coaching teachers (with half of those spending three or fewer hours) and 88 percent said that they spent no more than five hours a week on instructional planning with teachers, only 20 percent said that they spent five or fewer hours on administrative duties. More than half of principals (56 percent) reported that they spent more than 10 hours a week on administrative duties. Most principals (53 percent) also reported spending more than 10 hours a week working before or after school or on weekends to get the job done.

These results indicate that districts are not providing principals with the support they need to focus on instructional leadership. When asked if their central office had "streamlined procedures to minimize principals' time on non-instructional tasks," only 9 percent strongly agreed and 39 percent somewhat agreed. **Forty percent of responding principals disagreed that district offices were taking steps to minimize the time they had to spend on non-instructional tasks.**

Time is a commodity that is always in short supply in education. As Alabama focuses on transforming the role of the principalship into instructional leadership, it should work with districts to explore and implement strategies that can increase the amount of time principals and assistant principals can devote to leading instruction.

Principal Evaluation

The Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders were developed with the evaluation of principals and assistant principals in mind from the outset. Extensive descriptors and examples were included with the standards for this purpose.

Despite the inherent articulation contained in the standards, a new principal evaluation system has not been rolled out simultaneously with the new standards and the redesign of the university preparation programs. The Professional Education Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) Program of principal evaluation is still in use.

The lack of a new principal evaluation system is, in part, a result of the roll-out of a new Educate Alabama teacher evaluation system during the 2009-2010 school year and a desire to limit the number of changes districts and schools are confronted with implementing simultaneously. District feedback has indicated the need for considerable professional development to implement the new teacher evaluation system, and some district leaders have expressed their hope that the roll-out of the new principal evaluation system will be delayed until the 2011-2012 school year to allow more time to work out problems with the new teacher evaluation system.

During the 2010-2011 school year, Alabama, with the support of The Wallace Foundation, will pilot the use of the VAL-ED 360° principal evaluation instrument in approximately 110 schools across the state. A 2009 Learning Point Associates study of publicly available principal performance assessment instruments rated the VAL-ED as the best assessment currently available, based on both its psychometric properties (validity and reliability) and its potential for ongoing use in formative assessment and personnel development.¹⁷

¹⁷ Christopher Condon and Matthew Clifford. *Measuring Principal Performance: How Rigorous Are Publicly Available Principal Performance Assessment Instruments?* Learning Point Associates, 2009.

Part II: University, District and Program Graduate Perspectives on Reforms

University and District Perspectives on Alabama’s School Leadership Reforms

SREB conducted a survey of district superintendents and college of education deans at universities with instructional leadership programs to elicit feedback on the extent to which the school leadership reforms in Alabama have been brought to scale successfully and have been made sustainable. SREB adapted a Wallace Foundation worksheet on scale and sustainability of reforms to gather these data.¹⁸ A five-point Likert scale was used in both surveys, and data were collected via an online survey tool. Nine of 13 deans and 46 of 132 district superintendents completed the survey, for response rates of 69 percent and 35 percent, respectively.

Focus on Principals as Instructional Leaders and Consensus That Better Instructional Leadership Is a Statewide Need

Both deans and district superintendents expressed agreement that Alabama’s school leadership reforms have resulted in a greater emphasis on principals as instructional leaders and also that the reforms were based on a widely acknowledged need for better instructional leadership in the state. (See Table 4). The university deans were more likely than district superintendents to credit Alabama’s reform initiative with strengthening the idea that principals must be instructional leaders, with an average agreement rating of 4.33 out of 5.00, compared with a rating of 3.97 from superintendents. Both groups considered the reform effort to be the result of a widespread belief that the state needs better instructional leadership. These findings reveal statewide consensus around the need for improving instructional leadership.

TABLE 4
University and District Perspectives: Principals as Instructional Leaders

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	University Average	District Average
Alabama’s school leadership reforms — of leadership standards, principal evaluations and professional learning opportunities — have resulted in an increased focus on principals as instructional leaders.	4.33	3.97
Alabama’s school leadership reforms have been based on meeting a widely acknowledged need for better instructional leadership.	4.11	4.14

More Rigorous University Programs, Strength of University-District Partnerships: Divergent Perspectives

University deans credited the reform effort with creating more rigorous and relevant school leader preparation programs in the state (with a level of agreement of 4.22 out of 5.00) and improving university-district partnerships (4.00 out of 5.00), but district superintendents were not as convinced. (See Table 5.) With 3.00 at the mid-point of the scale for these items, superintendents rated their agreement that rigor had increased at 3.77 and their agreement that university-district partnerships had improved at 3.39 — just higher than the center of the scale.

¹⁸ Jody Spiro. *Leading Change Handbook: Concepts and Tools*. Wallace Foundation, 2009.

TABLE 5**University and District Perspectives: Rigor of University Programs and Strength of University-District Partnerships**

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	University Average	District Average
More rigorous and authentic university preparation programs have been adopted across the state.	4.22	3.77
University-district partnerships have been strengthened and improved throughout the state.	4.00	3.39

Most district superintendents responding to the survey were not as convinced as the university deans that the reforms have been implemented statewide. The recentness of the reform effort may be one cause of this disconnect. As of early spring 2010, only 70 graduates had completed redesigned leadership programs, and only a few had been hired as school leaders. Furthermore, only three of the 13 university programs were involved in the early redesign process. District superintendents may see more evidence of increased rigor in university programs as more candidates graduate and begin leading schools. As previously noted in this report, Mobile County Schools and Baldwin County Schools, both of which have been working with this reform longer than most districts in the state, have agreed to continue funding of the semester-long residencies for their aspiring leaders, despite budget constrictions. These two counties have been convinced of the value of the changes.

District superintendents' lower agreement rating related to the strength of university-district partnerships is cause for concern. Either partner's doubt of the strength of the partnership calls into question the very nature of that partnership. One cause of this disconnect may be a greater focus on the partnerships at the university level. Because these efforts involve 13 university programs and 132 districts, most of the conversations that the state and SREB have had about the need for university-district partnerships have been with universities. The ALSDE and SREB may need to take the university-district partnership message directly to the districts and provide more technical assistance to districts in entering, managing and understanding the value of those partnerships with universities. At the same time, universities must be aware that they may have created partnerships that are not meeting the needs of the districts.

Ownership of Alabama's Reform Initiative: Grounds for Concern That It Has Not Been Fully Embraced at the District Level

The Governor's Congress on School Leadership resulted in a clear, driving vision for improving school leadership throughout the state. The original impetus for change came from the state level, and despite efforts from the beginning to involve the districts (for example, the decision that every task force of the Governor's Congress would be co-chaired by a superintendent and a principal), there is a widespread impression that the leadership reforms were imposed from the top-down, and that some of the provisions of the reforms, such as the 10-consecutive-day residency, amount to unfunded mandates. Survey and interview results indicate that the changes have not been fully embraced by districts. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6**University and District Perspectives: State, University and District Levels of Engagement with School Leadership Reform**

		Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	Statement	University Average	District Average
State Level	The school leadership reform initiative furthers existing values and norms found in the culture of the state department of education and among state leaders for education.	4.25	Not asked
	Key individuals at the state level have been engaged in supporting school leadership reform.	4.00	4.02
	The school leadership reforms have a large number of influential supporters in the state government.	3.78	Not asked
University Level	The school leadership reform initiative furthers existing values and norms found in the culture of university colleges of education and school leadership departments.	4.00	3.39
	The school leadership reforms have a large number of influential supporters in the state's universities.	3.56	Not asked
District Level	The need to improve school leadership has been made a priority in your district.	Not asked	4.49
	The need to improve school leadership has been made a priority of districts across Alabama.	3.00	Not asked
	The school leadership reform initiative furthers existing values and norms found in the culture of district central offices.	3.50	3.33
	The school leadership reforms have a large number of influential supporters in school districts.	3.22	Not asked

Superintendents' average level of agreement that their districts have made better school leadership a priority was 4.49 out of 5.00. University deans presented a sharply different view when asked if districts across Alabama had made leadership improvement a priority — giving the statement an average agreement rating of 3.00, meaning they neither agreed nor disagreed. Tellingly, however, there was a convergence of views on the statement, “The school leadership reform initiative furthers existing values and norms found in the culture of district central offices.” University (3.50) and district (3.33) respondents both gave that statement relatively low agreement ratings.

Responses by university preparation coordinators and superintendents in SREB's biennial policy study echo this pattern. Preparation program coordinators rated their implementation of reforms favorably, while superintendents reported rather low scores regarding the implementation of leader development programs. Program coordinators firmly agreed that their programs have been redesigned to focus on instructional leadership, that they partner meaningfully with districts, and that university leaders such as deans and presidents are supportive of redesigning school leadership programs. Preparation program coordinators generally disagreed that they are successfully implementing rich field-based experiences. In contrast, district superintendent responses regarding leader preparation were, on the whole, less optimistic. Superintendents did not agree that the quality of principals in Alabama today is higher than principals prepared five years ago. They also did not agree that the district is engaged in meaningful partnerships with universities or that leader candidates have rich internship experiences. Finally, superintendents indicated low agreement that they implement careful candidate selection or planning for succession.

The emerging picture of the reform effort is that it is strongest at the state level, weaker in the universities and weakest at the district level. One dean philosophically accepted this by saying that it was important and necessary that the change be mandated from the top, as it would not have happened otherwise. Another dean, however, offered the observation that an approach involving “more carrot and less stick” would have left fewer residual negative feelings. This dean said that the local superintendents were all supportive, but that superintendents in more rural areas of the state were having a more difficult time adjusting to the changes.

Leadership turnover accounts for some of the challenges in garnering support for the reforms. Any time a university president, provost, or dean changes or a district hires a new superintendent, the need for university-district partnerships, selective admissions and release time for residencies must be discussed again.

Supports for the Leadership Reforms Need Work

University and district respondents were in agreement that Alabama still needs to work on its supports for the leadership reforms. (See Table 7.) Several superintendents called for a reform of tenure laws and others called for a reform of certification — an effort that began with the Governor’s Congress but was left unfinished when funding was unavailable to support master certification of principals.

Much of the concern over supportive laws and regulations is connected with the view that the new requirements are “intrusive,” according to several sources, or unfunded mandates. Greater support is needed to address district concerns related to release time. One respondent mentioned online certification routes and requested that the state provide greater guidance on such options. District and university respondents were in agreement that more training and technical assistance is necessary in order to take the leadership reforms to scale, with an average agreement rating of 3.37 for district respondents and 3.11 for university respondents. It was not clear exactly what technical assistance and training is still necessary.

TABLE 7
University and District Perspectives: Support for Leadership Reforms

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	University Average	District Average
Supportive laws and regulations are in place.	3.63	3.52
The state has well-defined procedures and systems for implementing school leadership reforms.	3.13	Not asked
Training, expertise and technical assistance are available in order to fully support taking the leadership reforms to scale.	3.11	3.37
There is a system in place to monitor progress in the implementation of Alabama's program of school reform, collect necessary data and disseminate information about the initiative's results.	2.89	Not asked

University respondents' low agreement rating related to the existence of a system of data collection and information dissemination for the reform initiatives reveals substantial disagreement that such a system is in place to shed light on the initiative's results. This indicates an immediate need to work with the universities to establish a process for collecting data relating to the quantity and quality of Alabama's future leaders and the role of each university in that pipeline. A cohesive system should collect data on at least the following points for each university and share these data for the purposes of planning, evaluation and continuous improvement:

- Current enrollment in each leadership program
- Program faculty (full-time and adjunct)
- Number of students graduating
- Number of students licensed as instructional leaders
- Number of graduates hired within one, two and three years of graduation
- Average Praxis II scores (subject to privacy concerns for small numbers of test-takers)
- Average GRE scores (subject to privacy concerns for small numbers of test-takers)

Furthermore, these data need to be linked to statewide licensure and school performance data so that Alabama can determine where its instructional leaders have been prepared and provide universities with composite profiles of school leaders prepared by their programs. With information regarding the types of schools principals are leading and where they are or are not achieving success, as determined by state indicators, programs can adapt to better meet the needs of current students. Additionally, university programs can use empirical data on graduates to better inform their selection processes and criteria.

Stakeholder Engagement

From the beginning of the reform initiative, a major effort has been made to engage stakeholders in the leadership redesign process. Obtaining stakeholders' support is critical to the scalability and sustainability of a complex, multi-faceted initiative such as Alabama's school leadership reforms. Neither university deans nor district respondents expressed strong agreement that the state had engaged stakeholders successfully. (See Table 8.) The universities and districts themselves are stakeholders in this process and, as detailed above, still have many concerns about the reform effort.

TABLE 8
University and District Perspectives: Stakeholder Engagement

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	University Average	District Average
Key groups and organizations in Alabama have been successfully engaged in supporting school leadership reform.	3.50	3.67
Key stakeholder groups and organizations perceive the leadership reform effort as furthering their own goals.	3.50	3.67
There have been successful efforts to engage with opponents and reduce open opposition to school leadership reform efforts.	3.13	3.16

One of the most important stakeholders in this process has been the Alabama Education Association (AEA). Support of the AEA was critical in the development and quick adoption of the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders early in the process. It was the AEA that identified the need to include Standard 4: Diversity, which has proven to be a necessity for the effort. More recently, however, the AEA has opposed the passage of the Code of Ethics for Alabama school leaders, resulting in a delay in that component of the reforms.

At this stage in the effort — six years after the convening of the Governor’s Congress launched the reform initiative — the work of sustaining and completing the job requires a renewed effort to engage stakeholders.

Resources Are a Significant Concern

Both university deans and district superintendents disagreed that necessary funding to sustain the effort is available, particularly for districts. (See Table 9.) Twenty-four of the 46 superintendents strongly disagreed that districts have the funding and resources needed to sustain the effort, and an additional 13 somewhat disagreed. University deans also expressed a very low agreement rating that districts have the necessary resources for the effort, and their agreement level related to their own resources was only slightly higher. Both superintendents and deans rated their agreement that districts have the necessary resources at 1.71 out of 5.00, indicating relatively strong disagreement.

TABLE 9
University and District Perspectives: Resources Necessary to Sustain Leadership Reforms

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-5 Likert Scale, 5 high)	
	University Average	District Average
The state has the funding and other resources necessary to sustain its school leadership reform initiative.	2.25	2.24
Universities have the funding and other resources necessary to sustain school leadership reform efforts.	1.88	3.30
Districts have the funding and other resources necessary to sustain school leadership reform efforts.	1.71	1.71

Release time for residency activities is a major concern, as is the ability of districts to identify and support mentors for aspiring leaders. An influential dean of a college of education observed about the practice of many districts of asking exemplary principals to mentor on a *pro bono* basis, “When you keep consistently relying on people’s goodwill, it eventually wears thin.”

At the time of this report, Alabama is in its second year of statewide proration of state education budgets — which cuts the state’s pledged funding to universities and districts — in order to balance the state budget. The universities and districts realize these fiscal constraints and question whether the state has the resources necessary to complete the work of school leadership reforms. During the interviews, one of the deans questioned the financial viability of the leadership program at that university, and several said that their budget cuts and program enrollment declines were placing them on the verge of laying off full-time faculty members — just after adding faculty in order to meet program redesign requirements. Most of the deans have had to cut some or all of their adjunct professors. This loss is a serious blow to the programs, as the adjunct professors often are expected to bring a real-world, practical perspective to the leadership courses. In some cases, full-time faculty members have never served as principals, so the adjunct professors play a crucial role in keeping course work authentic and relevant.

Alabama may not be able to sustain 13 leadership preparation programs. If the number of programs is reduced, the state should attempt to make strategic reductions so that surviving programs are fully committed to the vision of high-quality instructional leadership and best cover the needs of districts across the state.

The very real financial difficulties at every level endanger the implementation of leadership reforms, but also offer an opportunity to make some decisions about which aspects of the reform initiative are truly important. The financial pressures are contributing to a push-back against some program requirements. The state should take this opportunity to identify ways to relieve financial pressures on districts and universities strategically while maintaining high expectations for instructional leadership preparation. Making state funds available for release time and stipends for mentoring for exceptionally qualified candidates may alleviate financial pressures elsewhere in the system, offer recognition to districts and universities that the state understands the costs of the changes, and contribute to the ultimate goal of improved instructional leadership for the future.

Graduates of Early Redesigned Programs

Between fall 2008 and fall 2009, the first cohort of 70 students graduated from the first three redesigned instructional leadership preparation programs at Auburn University, Samford University and the University of South Alabama. Samford University has had three cohorts (fall 2008, spring 2009 and summer 2009) complete its redesigned program, for a total of 39 graduates. The University of South Alabama has had one cohort of 18 students graduate in fall 2009, and Auburn University has had one cohort of 13 students graduate in summer 2009.

Few of the program graduates have been placed in leadership positions. Of the 39 Samford University graduates, four have been placed in school leadership roles — one as a principal and three as assistant principals, including one at a private school — and two have been hired as central office administrators. As of early spring 2010, the cohorts at Auburn University and the University of South Alabama had not yet placed any graduates of their redesigned programs. Program chairs say that these low placement results are atypical and attribute them to current economic conditions. Districts have consolidated schools and reduced allocations of assistant principals in response to declining tax revenues. Districts also have reduced central office positions into which principals frequently moved in the past. Principals are delaying retirement as investment portfolios have shrunk and opportunities for consulting work have decreased. Program chairs have reported that, given current economic uncertainties, many of their graduates are not willing at this time to give up their tenure as teachers in order to pursue school leadership opportunities.

Fourteen graduates of the redesigned programs at Auburn University and the University of South Alabama (45 percent of the graduates from those programs)¹⁹ completed a survey collecting their evaluations of how well the redesigned programs prepared them to lead across a variety of domains and in a variety of contexts. On a four-point Likert scale respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 20 statements relating to their confidence in their preparation. Agreement indicated a positive perception of their preparation and disagreement indicated a negative perception. (See Table 10.)

Collectively, the fourteen respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement in 69 percent of cases, somewhat agreed in 27 percent of the cases, and somewhat disagreed in only 4 percent of the cases. Thirteen of the 14 respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “The program prepared me to be an effective instructional leader.” Respondents also strongly agreed that the redesigned programs gave them the tools and strategies they would need to lead and improve schools effectively, that the mentoring and field-based components of their programs were helpful to them, and that they learned how to use data and to lead teams of educators. They were only slightly less confident that the programs prepared them to be effective principals, manage a school building or successfully handle personnel issues.

Program graduates expressed the least confidence in the extent to which the redesigned programs prepared them for the specific challenges of leading schools characterized by high poverty, high teacher turnover, high dropout rates, lack of community support, highly mobile student populations, or large populations of English-Language Learners. The levels of agreement with these statements ranged from 3.29 to 3.50, indicating that while graduates believe that the programs prepared them to lead in such school settings, there is a need for programs to further focus on building skills to address these specific concerns.

¹⁹ The response rate was lower than desired in part because, due to universities’ policies and concerns about the privacy of their graduates, SREB was unable to directly contact graduates. Survey requests were sent through the universities. Furthermore, the university programs did not have current work or personal e-mail addresses for all of their graduates and sent survey requests to the graduates’ university e-mail accounts, which not all graduates monitor on a regular basis.

TABLE 10
Graduates' Confidence That Programs Prepared Them for Success

Statement	Level of Agreement (1-4 Scale, 4 High)
The program prepared me to be an effective instructional leader.	3.93
The program gave me the tools and strategies that I would need to take a good school and make it great.	3.86
The program gave me the tools and strategies I would need to turn a failing school around.	3.86
I received realistic advice, critiques, and support through the mentoring component of the program.	3.79
The program improved my ability to lead teams of educators.	3.79
The program prepared me to effectively use data to identify the root causes of low-performance.	3.79
The program prepared me to effectively use data to evaluate initiatives for raising student achievement.	3.79
The field-based component of the program was rigorous, authentic and meaningful.	3.79
In order to succeed in the program I had to demonstrate that I could lead.	3.79
The program prepared me to be an effective principal.	3.71
The program prepared me to effectively handle the personnel issues that a principal faces.	3.71
The program prepared me to successfully handle the responsibilities of managing a school building.	3.71
The program prepared me to lead a school characterized by persistently low test scores.	3.57
The program prepared me to lead a school serving a diverse student population.	3.57
The program prepared me to lead a school characterized by high poverty.	3.50
The program prepared me to lead a school characterized by high teacher turnover.	3.50
The program prepared me to lead a school characterized by a high dropout rate.	3.50
The program prepared me to lead a school characterized by lack of community support.	3.29
The program prepared me to lead a school serving a highly mobile student population.	3.29
The program prepared me to lead a school serving a large population of English Language Learners.	3.29

The dean of a college of education, who has been one of the champions for leadership preparation reforms, observed that the biggest change has been in the goals and intentions of students enrolled in the college's leadership preparation program. He noted that, previously, 80 percent of the college's leadership program students never had any intention of becoming principals and were pursuing the degree primarily to obtain a salary increase. Now, he said, at least 80 percent of the leadership program students at his university have every intention of becoming principals. This observation is supported by graduates' responses when asked where they see their career in five years: Of the 15 respondents who answered the question (one respondent answered this question but did not complete the full survey), seven anticipated that they would be a principal in five years, and another six anticipated that they would be an assistant principal. Only two respondents anticipated working in a district or state education agency. None anticipated still being a classroom teacher or serving in some other role or capacity. This is an encouraging finding, particularly when compared with results of a similar survey of students in a recently redesigned program in another state: More than half of the graduates of that program (seven out of 13) saw themselves working in a district or state education office in five years, rather than leading improvements at the school level.

Part III: The State of the Leadership Pipeline and Recommendations for the Road Ahead

The State of the Leadership Pipeline in Alabama

In 2004, before Alabama’s leadership reform initiative was launched, 12 school leadership preparation programs graduated 743 potential leaders. Statewide, Alabama has only 1,500 positions for principals, so the number of school leadership graduates greatly exceeded the state’s needs.

Between fall 2008 and fall 2009, the three redesigned programs at Auburn, Samford and the University of South Alabama graduated a total of 70 students from their first cohorts, compared with 97 graduates from these three schools in 2004. The programs at Samford University and Auburn University increased in size (from 23 to 39 and from 7 to 13, respectively), while the program at the University of South Alabama greatly decreased its number of graduates (from 67 in 2004 to 18 in 2009). Most college deans interviewed reported that enrollment in their leadership programs had decreased to about half of its size before the Governor’s Congress on School Leadership was established. Based on interviews and correspondence from the universities and projections for missing data, Alabama’s 13 preparation programs will collectively graduate approximately 360 new school leaders each year when enrollments reach expected levels in 2011 or 2012. (See Table 11.)

The difficulties that graduates of the redesigned programs have found in being hired immediately as principals should help to allay concerns that the school leadership reforms will prevent Alabama from meeting its school leadership needs.

TABLE 11
Size of Graduating Classes From Alabama’s University Preparation Programs:
Class of 2004 and Future Projections

University	2004 Graduates	Projected Annual Graduates
Alabama A&M	31	20
Alabama State University	46	30
Auburn University	7	13
Auburn University Montgomery	38	25
Jacksonville State University	163	35
Samford University	23	35
Troy University	115	65
University of Alabama	167	25
University of Alabama at Birmingham	Not available	45
University of Montevallo	25	15
University of North Alabama	39	26
University of South Alabama	67	13
University of West Alabama	22	15

Recommendations

Alabama has created a vision for improved instructional leadership, clearly defined that vision with the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders and redesigned its university preparation programs to build a system for producing the leaders it needs. However, sustaining meaningful change requires strong commitment and consistent focus — particularly when the change involves a statewide reconceptualization of the role of school principals and takes place under the adverse conditions of an economic downturn. SREB recommends that Alabama take the following actions to capitalize on what has been accomplished and maintain momentum as a regional leader in education reform:

- **Engage districts as full partners.** Alabama has a good plan to improve the quality of K-12 instructional leadership, and the universities are working on the plan, but long-term sustainability will require greater focus on engaging districts as full partners in the reform effort.
- **Acknowledge that resource constraints are affecting the reform effort,** and that some plans based on best practices in ordinary times may have to be adapted due to reduced revenues in extraordinary times. However, high-quality instructional leadership is essential if schools are to succeed, and Alabama should **commit itself to the improvement of instructional leadership as an *essential state priority*** and should convey to universities and districts an expectation that they also remain committed.
- **Enhance collection of data on the school leadership pipeline.** The state should further develop its systems and processes for collecting data on instructional leadership program participants and graduates and build a linked database that connects pre-service preparation to school outcomes. Such a system will improve university accountability to students and the districts that hire students and would assist in providing empirical evidence of leadership program effectiveness.
- **Revisit and revise residency policies.** The state should review its 10-consecutive-day residency requirement to see if a competency-base requirement or some other requirement might meet aspiring leaders' needs for authentic learning in a way that provides districts with more flexibility. The state may want to **consider creating an incentive for districts that choose to support a full-semester residency.**
- **Adopt tiered licensure to recognize exceptional principals.** State leaders should readdress the issue of tiered licensure and recognition of master principals. Such licensure could result in a cadre of highly qualified principals who can serve as mentors for aspiring leaders. Alabama currently is exploring options for using National Board Certification for principals, once developed, to meet these needs.
- **Review the viability of the current network of leadership preparation programs.** Maintaining 13 instructional leadership programs in Alabama may not be a viable option in the current economic setting. If the 13-program infrastructure is economically untenable in an environment of more selective admissions, the state should take steps to implement a strategic reduction or merging of programs, rather than allow a reduction to occur by happenstance.
- **Facilitate sharing of information, concerns, solutions and best practices.** Alabama should convene annual school leadership summits to share information and maintain momentum.
- **Conduct regular surveys of principals' working conditions.** The Take20 survey provides valuable and actionable information on needed improvements to principals' working conditions, but those data are now more than two years old. Alabama should institute a practice of conducting principal working conditions surveys on an annual or biennial basis and sharing data from those surveys with superintendents and other education leaders in the state.

Contributors

The following individuals helped make this report possible by contributing their time and thoughts through interviews and other responses to requests for information.

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Survey Respondents

Deans of colleges of education (9 respondents)
Superintendents (46 respondents)
Program graduates (14 respondents)

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