

TRANSCRIPT

ESSA Implementation: Evidence on Supporting School Leaders

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[Slide: ESSA Evidence Standards Tiers of Evidence]

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So, armed with the ESSA evidence standards, RAND reviewed the evidence on interventions designed to improve school leadership.

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

We looked at six types of interventions, and we developed these categories to cover the real estate, to cover all types of interventions. So if you feel like there's one that you're considering that's not in that list, I'd love to talk about it and make sure that we're being responsive.

So, we looked at leader evaluation systems. So those are tools, processes, rubrics to evaluate school principals and they may...or assistant principals...

[Slide: For accountability or support purposes]

...and those may be used for accountability purposes. They may also be used for support purposes, to help identify and, and develop a school leader.

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

We looked at pre-service preparation and internships. We were agnostic about who offered it.

[Slide: Universities, districts, alternative providers]

It could be a university, it could be a district-based program, it could be an alternative provider, but we were looking for preparation programs that would lead to a degree or certification, that would lead somebody along the path towards becoming a principal.

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

We looked at strategic staff management.

[Slide: Recruitment, retention, placement, replacement]

That's recruitment, retention, placement, replacement of principals...

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

...so we looked at those. Strategic staff management of the principals themselves, not what the principal does to manage their staff. So that was another category. Professional learning is another category of principal initiatives, and that is probably the biggest category.

[Slide: Workshops, conferences, mentoring, coaching]

It includes all professional development. It could be workshops, it could be conferences, it could be mentoring, it could be coaching. And there's a lot more movement towards mentoring and coaching now, and so that was a particular interest to us.

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

Another type of principal initiative is working conditions. What about the climate, the conditions in which the principal works, shapes what they're able to accomplish?

[Slide: Incentives, autonomy, etc.]

Is it incentives to motivate them to try new things? Is it more autonomy at the school to remove some of the barriers, so that the principal can have more opportunities to shape the way the school operates?

[Slide: Types of principal interventions]

So we looked at a number of different kinds of working conditions. And then, finally, the school reform models, as I'd mentioned before, especially funded under Title I comprehensive models that have a leadership focus. There are a lot of comprehensive models out there.

[Slide: Not a lot really focus on leadership]

There are not a lot that actually really focus in on leadership and that was a requirement, that they needed to have leadership at the center of one of only four or five different key components.

[Slide: Level of evidence by intervention (1)]

So, we feature here, with one exception, only interventions that had some level of evidence, Tiers I through IV. So, we reviewed a huge number of interventions that are not featured here, but did not yet have a strong evidence base, so we couldn't highlight them. We're not the What Works Clearinghouse.

So, we looked at leader evaluation systems and found two leader evaluation systems that are widely used and that have strong rationales that are supported by evidence, so Marzano and the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education, VAL-ED. We also found in principal preparation programs, several branded programs that have evidence of impact. So, New Leaders has Tier II evidence showing positive outcomes and the Texas Principal Excellence Program also has Tier II evidence. The Tier II evidence for Texas did not show a significant relationship between the program and student outcomes after one year, but did show a

significant improvement on some of the principal competencies. And that's where you get into some of the challenges of looking at the evidence on principals.

[Slide: Research on principal impact on student achievement]

All the impact, all the, the research supports the finding that the impact of principals on student achievement is not direct. It's indirect. It's channeled through teachers. It's channeled through instruction. It's an intuitive finding, but it's also supported by the research. So, it may be channeled through school climate.

[Slide: A short study is unlikely to demonstrate principal impact on achievement]

You are really unlikely to see the principal change student achievement in one year, because first, the principal needs to change the climate of the school. They need to change the instruction, they need to change the goals. There are a lot of things that, that the principal will have, does have an impact on, can have an impact on, that will have impact on student achievement.

So when looking at research, if you're looking at new studies, be cognizant that you might need to look at a step back from student achievement if you have a study that's pretty short.

[Slide: Level of evidence by intervention (1)]

Strategic staff management—that is the one where we did include it in the table because there's been a lot of policy push to replace principals, as I said before. And we just wanted to note that we did a pretty exhaustive look and...

[Slide: We did not find...]

...did not find any rigorous evidence, evidence that met ESSA standards, that principal replacement actually would improve student achievement or other outcomes. So that doesn't mean it doesn't, it just means that there's not a lot of evidence supporting that, so I just wanted to note that.

[Slide: Level of evidence by intervention (2)]

In terms of professional learning, the evidence on McREL's Balanced Leadership Program was mixed. It did find a reduction in staff turnover, which is generally a good sign, and it is based on a strong research model. And also, we looked at NISL, the National Institute for School Leadership, and there is statistically significant achievement gains according to several Tier II studies. So that is a strong contender according to ESSA standards.

Under working conditions, what we had mostly was strong theories of action, strong logic models. We did find some research on principal autonomy that had mixed results, and it tended to look like the results were mixed due to challenges in implementation, which may or may not be part of what's happening with principal replacement.

And then, finally, the school improvement models, the Knowledge Is Power Program—KIPP, has strong evidence Tiers I, II, and III, as well as a good rationale, good logic model to support having an impact on student achievement and UVA’s School Turnaround Program, also had Tier II evidence showing effects that would qualify, that meets ESSA standards.

[Slide: Logic Models for Selections, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based School Leadership Interventions]

So, this is a document that came out of the same project where we recognized that a lot of school leadership improvement efforts have solid evidence that meets Tiers I through III, but some of them do not. So how do you know that this is likely to help your leaders? Is it going...is it likely to make a difference?

[Slide: Tier IV requires a logic model to show connection]

Well, if you turn to Tier IV, they require a, a logic model to show the connections. So even if you don’t have evidence that your intervention has an impact, and if you’re not ready to evaluate whether your intervention affects student achievement, you certainly want to have a good idea of how it operates so that you are alert and aware and looking for evidence that is going in the right direction.

[Slide: Logic model]

So according to ESSA, the minimum standard for an evidence-based intervention is that the intervention should be represented by a logic model, by a rationale, which is defined in the non-regulatory guidance as “presents a well-specified conceptual framework that identifies key components of the proposed process or strategy”—so what are the key elements of it?—and describes the relationship among the key elements and the relationship between the key elements and outcomes. That’s your logic model.

[Slide: A logic model is of value to state and district leaders]

And it’s useful in several ways, especially at the stage where there’s not strong Tiers I through III evidence. To maximize the impact of education interventions, education policymakers might want to have a clear vision of how the investment is expected to lead to better student outcomes. What are the steps that it takes to get to student outcomes, so that you can see if you are on that path.

So state and district education policymakers, and also—although I don’t think any of you are those folks—people who are designing interventions and people who are implementing the interventions can use logic models to understand the theory behind the ways in which the intervention works, to identify the key components, and to be able to track whether those components are happening as you would hope they would happen, and then to evaluate.

So before you get to the point of evaluating your intervention, having a good idea of how that intervention should flow towards outcomes so that you can see if you are on that path, and then get to the point where, ultimately, in several years, you might be ready to do an

evaluation that meets Tiers I through III. And that is one of the requirements of Tier IV, is that there needs to be some evaluation at some point going on to build that evidence base towards Tiers I through III.

[Slide: Source programs]

So to develop this, I'm going to talk a little bit about where the information comes from, because I think that helps equip you to know how much you should trust that information. To develop this, we started with the programs that were in the report that we had just been discussing. All those that were featured, we included, but that was not enough, because we wanted to have logic models that showed different types of leader evaluation systems. For example, we think there's a very big difference...or principal preparation. That's my go-to example, sorry. But for principal preparation programs, we think that the logic model might look a little bit different if the program is offered by university or is offered by a district or is offered by an alternate provider. And so, we wanted to make sure that we were looking at a couple of examples for every key type within each of these categories. So we did go to other reviews that have followed this review to look for their logic models, or if they did not have one, to develop out a logic model that would allow us to, from their written materials. We also consulted with our panel of experts, both internal and external to RAND, to identify other models that we should include in this review.

[Slide: We don't name the models...]

We don't name the models that are included in this review, because it's not an evaluation of them, in particular. It's just an evaluation of the various paths that one can use to get from a program to an outcome.

[Slide: Source programs]

We did not include all school improvement programs that are out there. We just wanted to show enough variation to be able to...

[Slide: Road map to logic models]

...accurately capture a path from program to outcomes. As you can see, the elements that are in the logic models we put there, the problem statement, "What is the issue you're addressing"; the resources that would influence, that would affect the activities and how they roll out, the outputs, what happens immediately, and then the outcomes, the end goals.

[Slide: Tips]

It's important to start first with what do you want to accomplish, rather than this is a neat intervention, or this is one that I've heard is effective. First, what is it effective for? What do you want to, to get done, and then to start looking for, for the interventions that meet that. Starting from outcomes in order to solve your problem, what do you want to see, and then work you backwards to resources.

So, when you're talking about improving school leadership, you can be looking down the whole pipeline and you might as a state be thinking: What are we doing to improve preparation? What are we doing to improve placement? What are we doing to improve professional development? What are we doing to improve evaluation? What are we doing there? And in all of these different areas, and so how do you think through all of that? And I think you all said, "Well, you need one model that brings it all together," and, yes, you do need one model that brings it all together so that you have a coherent pipeline, or maybe even if you're just talking within, within say, professional development, a coherent set of initiatives that work together and that are complementary.

But you also might want to think about whether you need logic models for each piece to be able to unpack each of those pieces and provide guidelines on how that's being implemented, and is that piece performing as you had expected it to. So that's what we suggest; there's no right or wrong way here, but just suggests that it's a very complex landscape and to think about how are you going to handle the coherence, as well as the detail.

And then, of course, to adjust your model as needed, because reality never ever reflects what you had intended exactly.

[Slide: Linking leadership interventions with outcomes]

These are the outcomes that are commonly targeted by school leadership improvement interventions, and what we found was, when we looked across all six types of interventions, that they tended to have common types of outcomes, so we only really unpack the outcomes once. We didn't unpack it for each type of intervention. But we did look at long, medium, and, and short-term outcomes, and you may see that when you get into certain kinds of interventions that the short-term outcomes may differ, but ultimately, sort of want to end up at the place that you're improving student-level outcomes. So the long-term outcomes tend to be...

[Slide: Long-term outcomes]

...from the models that we reviewed, tended to be at the student level. What were your students accomplishing at the end of this intervention? As I said before, it takes a very long time to get from principal to student, and so a lot of the evidence focuses on medium-term outcomes.

[Slide: Medium-term outcomes]

Has there been a change in the school? Has there been change in instruction? Has there been change in climate? Has there been a change in the classroom? Has there been a change in staff? So, that's what seems to be common across the interventions.

[Slide: Short-term outcomes]

And then the short-term outcomes tended to be, what has changed in terms of the principals' capacity—their ability, and their actually using these skillsets to set direction, vision, and

goals, to adapt to school needs, to use data, to drive practice. So this is a set of capacities that have been linked with medium and long-term outcomes. And so, in your short-term...

[Slide: Question: How to measure the principal competencies laid out in the short-term outcomes?]

...some subset of this may be what you're hoping your intervention would accomplish. I think the best of the best, they're doing performance-based evaluations, so there may be like a, a task that principals do, and they may do that in their, say, in the hiring process, or in the entry to a preparation program, or as a result, but they'll be doing something that's a performance-based task, like an in-basket task, you know? How do you handle a lot of pressure in having to make decisions quickly? Or like an interacting with a teacher task, you know, how do you deliver a hard evaluation in a way that's constructive, or how do you receive a hard evaluation in a way that's constructive? So performance-based tasks, that's the best of the best.

[Slide: Resources]

As with outcomes, we found that resources...was hard to talk about type of model by type of model, but for a different reason. There were very few descriptions of interventions that talked very coherently about the resources you need, so instead of summarizing what the documentation showed about the resources that were used in each of these models, instead, what we did was we identified key questions that you would want to ask to see whether you have the resources to implement this kind of intervention.

So key questions, basically, are: What do you need to implement the intervention, and are those resources available? Thinking about different kinds of resources. Money's important, but it is definitely not the only thing. In fact, people, far and above, seems to matter quite a bit. Facilities, funding, materials, and data. Those are all types of resources.

[Slide: Logic Model - Principal Preparation Programs (1 of 3)]

But I wanted to now walk through one example of principal preparation programs; I selected that because my head is very much in principal preparation programs right at the moment, and it's a very good example, I think.

So you'll see, we've already talked about the outcomes—the green box at the end. We've already talked about resources—the orange box at the beginning. So let's start with the problem statement...

[Slide: Logic Model - Principal Preparation Programs (2 of 3)]

...and I'm just going to walk you through what this looks like before asking you to think about your own context.

So, let's start with the problem statement, and the problem statement for principal preparation programs—and this is the one we wrote, you may write a different one yourself—is really focusing on, there are principal preparation programs out there. It's not a question of

whether there are programs, it's a question of the programs producing the kind of principals that you want to see in your schools, and maybe even especially in low-performing schools.

So many states and districts struggle with the shortage of new principals who possess the competencies needed for effective leadership. So the training programs do not always give the academic coursework and clinical experiences that really prepare principals for the principalship today. Principalship has evolved quite a bit, and not all programs have evolved with the changes in the role. In addition, after graduation, new principals don't always receive the support they need to be able to implement what they learned in the program in the real-world context.

That's the problem, is that there are some principal preparation programs that have not evolved to prepare principals for the job as it is today, and have, and to provide support for principals as they start down that path.

[Slide: Logic Model - Principal Preparation Programs (3 of 3)]

The middle two columns of the logic model talk about activities and output. So let's start with activities, and here's a little key. The circles mean that in all of the information we reviewed for all of the programs, they all said this was important. And the little triangles and the italics mean some of them—more than one, less than all—said that this was important. And the arrows there show you that, in some cases, it's sequential. These things happen in a certain order. Sometimes they weren't sequential. They could all happen concurrently, so we didn't put arrows in there.

So, there are these sets of activities that were common to principal preparation programs, and you would put these in your logic model, or some version of these, and it may not be these exactly, but this is a starting point for you to think. There's, all of the programs we reviewed indicated that they developed or selected research-based standards and curricula for preparing effective principals. They all had that, standards at the beginning. It may be your state standards for principals, it may be your state standards for principal preparation programs. It may be NELP. It may be some other national-level standard, but it started with that point of standards, and then a curriculum that helped realize those standards.

Then programs turn to recruiting and selecting highly qualified principal candidates—real big shift. So in this logic model, this is not what people do now. This is what you hope your effective program will do. So a lot of programs take all comers, and a lot of programs enroll teachers who want to get an advanced degree, because that increases their salary. But they're maybe not going in the direction of becoming an effective principal. So changing that take-all-comers approach to recruiting and selecting highly qualified individuals who are directed towards becoming principals, that is something that appeared in some of the programs as part of their thinking, part of their logic model.

Providing them with adequate training that includes coursework, academic instruction, and clinical learning opportunities. So that's a big, big bucket. Sure, coursework; not a given that they'll have clinical opportunities, and more and more research suggests that that's important, and the programs all included that as part of what they were thinking, that there should be

clinical opportunities. There are online programs that do not offer that kind of clinical work, but there's a lot of research evidence, and the, the better programs do offer some kind of clinical work.

Placing graduates in leadership positions; not all programs that we looked at did that, but some of them did actively engage in the placement process. And then providing them with constructive feedback and support after they achieved that position. Not all programs do that, but of the programs we reviewed, that was a common approach. So those are the activities that would form the core of what your intervention is in your logic model.

[Slide: Logic model - Principal preparation programs: Details on activities reviewed in evidence-based programs (1 of 2)]

We also provided some detail to unpack those activities—again, drawing on the programs that we had reviewed. For example, in recruiting and selecting highly qualified principal candidates, these are in italics, so these are two things that are common, but not in all of the programs that we looked at. Many of the university-district partnerships involve the district in outreach, recruitment, and selection, so rather than the teacher saying, “I want to be a principal. I’m going to sign up for a program. Will you write my recommendation,” the districts helped identify the highest quality candidates and ensured that they were put into that pipeline and connected with the programs.

And some programs used a centralized process with selection criteria. Some programs might have a selection day, or some other activity to choose the most highly qualified candidates from the pool. So those are some of the details that are part of the activities. So there, there are those kinds of details for all of the activities.

[Slide: Logic model - Principal preparation programs: Details on activities reviewed in evidence-based programs (2 of 2)]

And then turning to outputs. The outputs are, they're not your outcomes; they are what you expect to happen immediately as a result of your having implemented these activities. How do you hope that the program will touch the principals? Like, principal preparation program standards and structures are research-based and are aligned. That was your goal. You developed activities with that intent, and when you look at them, do they look that way? Do they, are they aligned with standards, and are they research based? So it's a very traditional logic model design.

[Slide: Logic Models for Selecting, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based School Leadership Interventions]

But what we tried to do was pull information from all of these programs, and from a variety of programs, to be able to say, “Here are some important things to be thinking about as you're putting together a logic model, as you're looking at your own program and thinking, ‘How does it flow from program to outcomes?’”

But I think having a big picture like this that says, “Here’s the big picture of what we’re trying to accomplish and how we’re going to get there,” helps you maintain your direction when you’re faced with the day-to-day hammering of no funding, changes in legislation, changes in personnel.

[Slide: End Slide]