**New Principal Standards Catch On**

Revised professional goals for principals push some states and universities to rethink and redesign preparation

**By** [Denisa R. Superville](http://www.edweek.org/ew/contributors/denisa.superville_7151043.html)January 24, 2017

Northwest Missouri State University graduates about 30 principal-candidates a year, most of whom work in small school districts that are near the university in Maryville, Mo.

But the university's school of education is seeking to broaden its impact beyond the region and even the state, and it has seized on using new professional standards for school leaders to do just that.

The school has redesigned its master's program in education leadership around the Missouri standards for aspiring principals, which are based on [national standards released in 2015](http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/ProfessionalStandardsforEducationalLeaders2015forNPBEAFINAL.pdf) that set new benchmarks for what school leaders are supposed to know and do. Principal-candidates in the Northwest Missouri State program will now spend considerable time learning how to lead "equitable" schools and how to nurture meaningful relationships with families and school communities—which are among the skills and knowledge emphasized in the revised standards.

The goal is to give would-be principals the rigorous and relevant preparation and pre-job experience that the profession now demands, said David Kiene, an assistant professor at the university and the program's coordinator.

"We took our existing program, and wiped the slate clean," Kiene said. "We started with the premise that if we can build the most effective preparation program for building-level principals what would it look like... We started building competencies from that question—what are the main things that you need to be able to do?"

"These new standards have rejuvenated our program," Kiene said. "It's given us a good way of focusing on what the most important things are for beginning principals to know and understand as they prepare to become school leaders."

Northwest Missouri State's redesign is just one way the state of Missouri is breathing life into the latest version of the benchmarks, previously known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards. Used across the country to help guide leadership-preparation programs, including those for principals and superintendents, the standards are also [used to set policies and regulations around school leaders' hiring, evaluations, and professional development](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2015/05/new_standards_for_school_leade.html).

Delaware, West Virginia, and Nebraska are among the states that forged ahead in using the revised professional benchmarks to revamp how they are preparing and supporting their next generation of principals and school leaders.

Lessons for a State

Northwest Missouri State's new curriculum for school leaders teaches would-be principals how to be instructional leaders, with a particular focus on developing their expertise in curriculum. In addition to teaching future principals how to ensure equity for diverse student populations, and the important role of building strong relationships with parents and the community, the program has also added on-the-job experiences into each module in the syllabus to ensure that principal-candidates can demonstrate the concepts they are learning and apply them in a school environment. The last two courses in the program are designed for on-the-job training and learning.

**See Also**

[“Teachers, What Makes an Ideal Principal? ”](http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/teachers-what-makes-an-ideal-principal.html)

Officials in Missouri's department of education are hoping that the redesign at Northwest Missouri State will provide lessons for the state's other leadership-preparation programs and will dovetail with a new emphasis on supporting school leaders through every stage in their career, from preparation, to early career, and continuing until they leave the job. Northwest Missouri State plans to eventually offer its program online to candidates across the country.

Missouri's quick turnaround from theory to practice is notable. But the state is hardly alone in pushing ahead to update rules and regulations relating to principal evaluations, professional development, certification, and licensing programs that train principals, according to the Council of Chief State School Officers, which oversaw the development of the new standards and is helping states put them to use.

Of the 24 states that responded to an unofficial CCSSO survey last fall, 83 percent said they have taken or intend to take steps to align state standards or licensure requirements to the new benchmarks, while another 71 percent indicated they planned to use the new standards as part of their principal evaluation and feedback systems. Fourteen percent said they are using them in informal coaching.

Whether states have already made concrete adjustments to reflect the new standards depends in part on whether those changes need approvals from state boards of education and legislatures, said Mary-Dean Barringer, the director of strategic initiatives at the CCSSO. But Barringer said that while the CCCSO expected states to adopt the standards in whole or adapt them for local use, she was pleasantly surprised at the pace at which some of the states were moving and that some intended to use the standards for coaching, evaluation, and feedback—something the CCSSO had hoped for.

Still, the timing of the revised standards—just a few weeks before the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act in December 2015—gave many states another opportunity to think about how they can improve training for school leaders and how they could deepen support for principals, Barringer said.

Support and Care for Students

Despite the program overhaul at Northwest Missouri State, the standards have not yet been approved by the agency that accredits principal-training programs across the nation. The agency—the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, or CAEP—is expected to greenlight the standards as early as February.

"There's a lot in the new standards that the preparation programs have not emphasized in the past," said Joseph Murphy, the associate dean of the college of education at Vanderbilt University, who worked on the original Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium, or ISLLC, standards in 1996 and was part of the committee that worked on the 2015 revision. ([Murphy and the CCSSO had a disagreement](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/05/08/new-school-leader-standards-stir-dissent.html) toward the end of the development process.)

"We, as a profession, haven't really paid the kind of attention to children that we probably should," he continued. "What we have learned over the last 15 or 20 years is that setting up a school so that children and young people are deeply cared for is critical. ... We have been light on the care side in preparation programs, and the research tells us that we have to be much more aggressive in helping people to understand how to do that."

Digging In

Preparation programs had already started to adjust their programs in response to what research was showing. State policy action takes a bit longer, said Murphy, the author of a forthcoming book on the 2015 standards.

One of those states where policy change is moving along at a quicker pace is Delaware, one of the first states to adopt the national school leader benchmarks. There, universities are already reviewing their curricula to make sure they align with the new standards. State and university officials plan to meet in February to go over the state's performance-evaluation system for school leaders to ensure that the two sets of benchmarks are in sync, said Jacquelyn Wilson, the interim director of the Professional Development Center for Educators at the University of Delaware.

"I think there is a lot of discussion right now [about] getting familiar with the standards and thinking about what they are going to mean as far as curriculum changes and the clinical experiences we are going to be providing to aspiring leaders," said Wilson, who played a role in developing the standards.

Wilson envisions programs that put much more emphasis on the principal's role in building school communities, distributing leadership across school staff, and caring for students.

Programs will need to add research-based coursework and clinical experiences to help principals develop their skills in those areas before they graduate, she said.

Wilson, who runs an alternative principal-preparation program for candidates who already have a master's degree, said that programs like hers are also likely to add more real-world school challenges into their syllabus, which could include candidates working on building support structures in schools with high absenteeism rates, high-poverty rates, and large English-language learner populations.

The new standards home in on more detail on knowledge, attributes, and skills necessary to be a school leader in today's environment, she said.

"Yes, we need to focus on the academic press," she said, "[As a principal] I also need to know how to grow my teachers into leaders. I need to know how to develop a culture where teachers take risks… But I also need to know how to engage the community and take care of the whole child."

In Nebraska, the local standards, which are called "effective practices," were enhanced to reflect the higher degree of accountability for student learning and for continuous self-learning that rests with principals, said Janine Theiler, an educator effectiveness program specialist in the Nebraska department of education. By embracing the professional standards for school leaders, the state is saying that it has the same expectations for growth from its principals as it does from its students, she said.

While the "effective practices" are not mandatory in Nebraska, Theiler expects that districts will move to adopt them on their own.

"If the trend is the same as we have seen for teachers, we expect to see districts adopting [the standards] and using them to guide professional growth and evaluations," she said.

Multiplier Effect

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive early undertakings is in Missouri, where the state is using the revised standards to build a "leadership development system" for all principals. The leadership development system is based on the Missouri Leadership Academy, a program that trains and supports an average of 100 to 120 early-career principals annually and has existed for 30 years. But it has only ever directly affected a small percentage of the 2,200 principals and 1,300 assistant principals who are now leading the state's K-12 public schools.

The state convened a commission comprised of principals, superintendents, and representatives from higher education, who worked to develop a model of what all principals should know to be effective, how they can be coached to demonstrate those skills, and how those skills would be measured, according to Paul Katnik, the assistant commissioner in the state's office of educator quality.

By developing a beginning-to-end development and support system for all school leaders, the state will be able to multiply the number of principals who benefit from training and support systems that are based on the standards, and scale up the impact, Katnik said.

This approach is very different from the path taken after the original ISLLC standards were published in 2006, in which principals were not necessarily drilled on the skills they needed to demonstrate.

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The strategy this time around is to not leave success to chance, Katnik said.

"You can move toward leadership development on a pathway, or you can walk the edge," said Jim Masters, the director of educator evaluation and training in the office of educator quality and a former district superintendent, who is working with Katnik.

"What we have now is a path where we can support our principals, target their learning to the specific aspects of the job that we know will lead to better opportunities for their faculty, staff, and ultimately, their students."

*Coverage of leadership, expanded learning time, and arts learning is supported in part by a grant from the Wallace Foundation, at* [*www.wallacefoundation.org*](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/)*. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.*

Vol. 36, Issue 19, Pages s3, s4, s5, s6

Published in Print: January 25, 2017, as **New Career Standards Are Catching On**