

Technical Assistance Response

This technical assistance response has been prepared in response to a request for information about what actions state education agencies are taking to recruit and retain quality school leaders in rural schools. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) addressed this request as a two-pronged question: The first question focuses on recruitment and retention of principals in rural areas; the second question deals with recruiting and retaining quality principals in general. To address both questions, AIR examined Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan analysis documents, interviewed experts in this area, and performed an internet search. The response that follows provides a summary of the research on the topics; a table outlining the actions that states are taking to recruit and retain principals in rural areas (including links to resources, where available); and a list of resources on recruiting and retaining quality principals, along with a brief description of each resource.

What the Research Says

Principal turnover in rural schools is higher than the national average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This turnover is especially harmful to student achievement scores in high-need schools (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). In addition, the availability of principal training programs is lacking in rural areas; only 14% of rural districts have professional development programs for aspiring principals compared to 38% of urban districts (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). Even when principal training does exist in any local education agency—rural or urban—it is often of low quality. Principal preparation programs generally do not use robust selection criteria, are not rigorous, and use curricula that tend to be outdated and overly theoretical (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Levine, 2006). Furthermore, conventional administrator preparation programs tend to be “well-intentioned, but insufficient,” and “lacking vision, purpose, and coherence” (Orr, 2006).

Principal Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Rural Areas

Although the research on rural principal recruitment is limited, many states are still trying to address this need. Table 1 highlights states that either have begun to address principal recruitment and retention or are undertaking this important work. These states are the states to watch. Table 2 highlights general recruitment and retention strategies. Some of these strategies are specific to rural areas, and other strategies are general but can be applied to rural areas. If you have any questions, please contact Tammie Knights at tknights@air.org

Table 1. State Resources for Recruiting and Retaining Principals

State	Resource	Description
Arkansas		<p>Arkansas prioritized principal preparation and support in their ESSA plan. A career continuum will be developed to support the development of educational leaders. The Arkansas Department of Education adopted the 2016 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and is currently working to redesign state-approved leader preparation programs with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. The standards will guide leadership efforts in school leader preparation, in school leader development, and in promoting professional standards. The standards will be used for all areas of leadership, including support for new principals, principals in low-performing schools, and turnaround leaders. Beginning administrators will receive support for the first 3 years of licensure.</p>
Kentucky	<p>Kentucky Principal Pipeline Profile</p>	<p>The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) will continue to provide an electronic platform for posting certified vacancies and hiring information through the Kentucky Educator Placement Service. This system provides KDE with valuable data about the educator workforce and informs critical shortage and minority educator reporting. The TELL (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) Survey results provide data to be analyzed for trends related to professional learning, working conditions, and other constructs. These results are provided at the state, district, and school levels. The data inform KDE planning related to the type, format, and frequency of professional learning, as indicated by educator input.</p> <p>In addition, the electronic platform that houses the equity diagnostic yields valuable data to KDE about student, teacher, and principal demographics and assignments, as well as school- and/or district-determined information such as equitable opportunity and access, educator experience, and educational attainment and/or turnover. KDE will use this information to review school and district needs and plans to inform staff decision making and planning about the type and nature of technical assistance that is needed.</p>

State	Resource	Description
Montana	I LEAD	Montana State University developed the Indian Leadership Education Development Project to recruit, educate, certify, and place American Indian educators into administrative positions in schools with high populations of Native American students. The Montana Office of Public Instruction will continue to collaborate and increase these efforts that will prepare educators and administrators, aid in retaining quality educators, and recruit and place qualified educators and administrators in rural areas.
Tennessee	Transforming Principal Leadership Principal Pipeline Partnership	Tennessee is implementing a plan to transform principal leadership that includes professional development opportunities for rural school leaders. This program creates a professional network for 50 rural principals and scholarships for rural principals to attend state-led conferences and training opportunities. Tennessee is awarding more than \$1 million in Principal Pipeline Partnership grants to support leadership models that develop or improve innovative and high-impact school leader programs. The nine principal pipeline models that have been approved for funding will train a total of 160 aspiring school leaders through federal Title II, Part A funds.
Texas	Grow Your Own Principal Preparation Program	The 2018–19 Principal Preparation grant program supports the Texas Education Agency’s strategic priority to recruit, support, and retain teachers and principals. The goal of the grant program is to support efforts that provide an opportunity to build strong campus leaders through principal residencies. This initiative is an outcome of the Texas Rural Schools Task Force. The 2018–19 Principal Preparation grants can be used by districts to cover preparation and certification costs for their aspiring principals. Both grants support the agency’s strategic priority to recruit, support, and retain principals.

Principal Recruitment and Retention Strategies—General

Table 2 provides general recruitment and retention strategies. Some of these strategies are specific to the rural context, and other information can be applied to a rural setting.

Table 2. National Rural Recruitment and Retention Resources and Resources to Recruit and Retain Quality Principals

Resource	Description
Building the Capacity of Human Capital Leaders	As many school districts struggle to recruit and retain top talent and to ensure equitable access to excellent educators, the need for knowledgeable and skilled human capital leaders in schools is evident now more than ever. Battelle for Kids created resources to recruit and retain talent for this important function, including standards for human capital leaders. Battelle for Kids also collaborated with the American Association of School Personnel Administrators to create a Professional Human Capital Leader in Education certification program.
National Policy Board for Educational Administration Professional Standards for Educational Leaders	The new principal professional standards are foundational to all levels of educational leadership.
Building a Strong and Diverse Teacher and Principal Recruitment Pipeline	This document shares the research and strategies that can be used to build a strong and diverse principal pipeline.
Tackling Teacher and Principal Shortages in Rural Areas	This brief describes the challenges of rural recruitment and strategies that can be implemented at the state and federal levels.
Hiring Quality School Leaders: Challenges and Emerging Practices	High-performing and dramatically improving schools are led by strong principals. The Quality School Leadership (QSL) services developed by AIR give educators the tools they need to hire and assess their leaders. Our Quality School Leadership Identification (QSL-ID) process is a standardized hiring procedure built from research-based tools that local hiring committees can use to reach consensus when selecting a new school principal.

Resource	Description
Building a Stronger Principalship	<p>This is the fifth report from an evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, in which six large, urban school districts received support for strengthening novice principals' capabilities through specific strategies. Although this study is focused on urban districts, many of the lessons learned can be applied to rural districts.</p>
Rural Collaborative Network	<p>In 2017, 14 rural education collaboratives joined forces to create the Rural Collaborative Network. Together, with network support from Battelle for Kids, these collaboratives focus on innovative approaches to essential rural education challenges.</p>
Teach For America Rural School Leadership Academy	<p>Teach For America created the rural school leadership academy in response to the need for effective school leaders in rural areas.</p>

References

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