

Teaching & Learning/Educator Talent and Workforce Development/Leader Development

Principals Aspiring for Career Excellence (PACE) Overview

Expansion of Support for Louisiana's School Leadership Pipeline

Problem

There is an old adage that often describes the role of a school principal: "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one." This adage states that principals are not expected to be experts in multiple fields, but they do need to be better than average in most of them. One study found that the difference between a better-than-average school leader (>75th percentile) and a worse-than-average school leader (<25th percentile) is 3 months of academic progress per student. Essentially, better-than-average leaders achieve greater student attainment results than below-average leaders (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021). But how does the majority of school leaders become "better-than-average"?

First, there is the problem of preparation and support. Louisiana has developed multiple pathways into teaching and is working on developing more pathways into leadership. However, these multiple pathways mean that current and future leaders must address internal and external issues that previous generations did not have to.

- Uneven knowledge and skill levels regarding best practices in education require more dynamic development and support.
- Generational differences in career approaches and desires.
- Technological evolutions that require a greater variety in skill sets beyond just "leadership" and "curriculum and instruction."
- Greater recognition of students' needs and differences requires more adept approaches to instruction and teacher support.

Ultimately, this suggests that school leaders enter the field with uneven development and may be underprepared for the position despite their extensive preparation.

Solution

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)'s Role in Development and Support for School Leaders

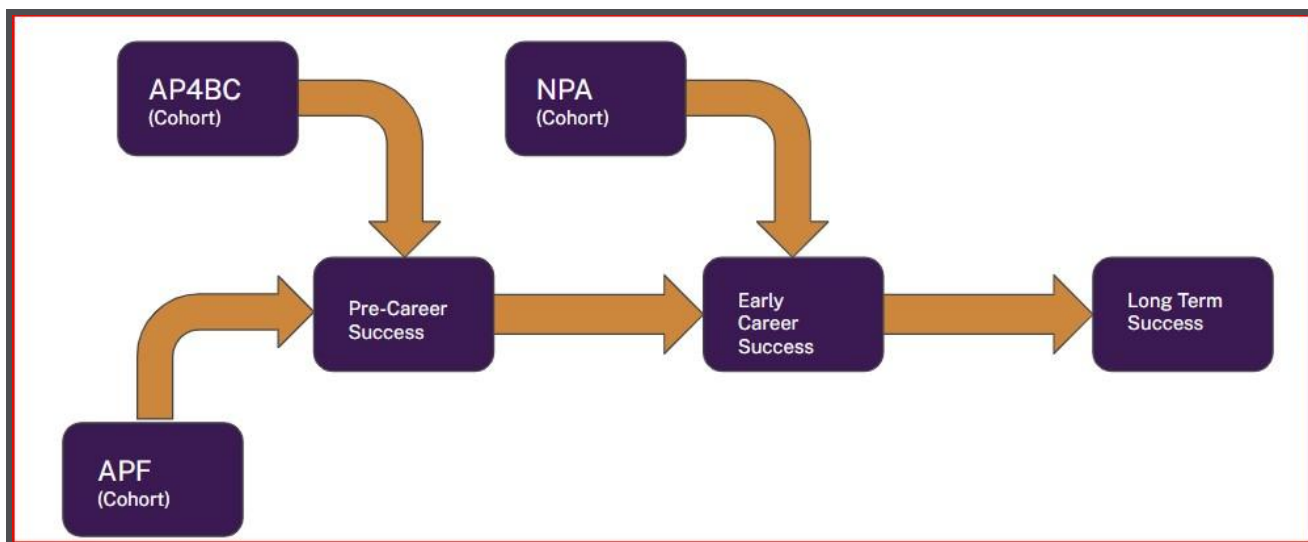
Each system and school has a primary responsibility for developing and supporting its current and potential school leaders, and many systems are pursuing multiple support pathways for their leaders. These pathways can include, but are not limited to, pre-leadership training programs, mentoring policies, and above-and-beyond coaching support through the LEADS program. However, these programs are limited in scope because systems must also supervise and evaluate leaders, which can undermine the relationship between leaders and their systems.

However, the LDOE can enhance systems approaches by leveraging several advantages not available to the school system. The LDOE has access to a greater number of exceptional school leaders to serve as mentors for aspiring and novice leaders, and can draw on and pool resources from a larger demographic and geographic area. Finally, while systems are limited because their resources must be dedicated to the actual work of leadership, the LDOE can dedicate specific human capital to researching and developing best practices in leadership that further enhance and support the system's practical leadership.

Current Pipeline

[Video Articulating the Images Below](#)

The LDOE recognizes that leaders need support and direction in their development before becoming effective leaders in their early years of school leadership. Therefore, the LDOE has dedicated considerable time and resources to these endeavors. Currently, the department offers 3 programs to meet the needs of aspiring and novice leaders.



Programs for Aspiring Principals

Prior to Certification

The LDOE currently offers two programs for aspiring principals. First, prior to certification as a school leader, individuals with leadership experience are eligible to pursue an alternative pathway into leadership. [The EDL Alternative Pathway 4 Boot Camp \(AP4BC\)](#) allows anyone who currently holds a graduate degree in Public Administration, Business Administration, a Juris Doctorate, or anyone who has been honorably discharged as a commissioned officer of a U.S. Military Branch, to become a principal.

This five-day intensive support program is divided into two distinct activities. The first is a three-day in-person, intensive training in which participants dive deeper into the Louisiana Leader Rubric and Educator Rubric, the policies and expectations governing school leaders' behavior, and, most importantly, a direct, concentrated effort to improve student outcomes through instructional leadership. During the final two days of the boot camp, participants will attend two on-site observations and feedback sessions with an assigned mentor.

After Certification but Before Leadership Appointment

Once a leader is certified (regardless of pathway), they are eligible to join the LDOE's [Aspiring Principal Fellowship](#) (APF). This program aims to equip aspiring school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to confidently step into the principal role and effectively support students and teachers.

Participants in the fellowship will engage in multiple immersive, full-day school visits, during which they will collaborate closely with exemplary practicing principals from across the state. In addition, they will attend three full-day professional learning sessions aligned with current state initiatives. All content is designed to align with Louisiana's education priorities and the Louisiana Leader Rubric, emphasizing the principal's role in instructional leadership that drives student achievement.

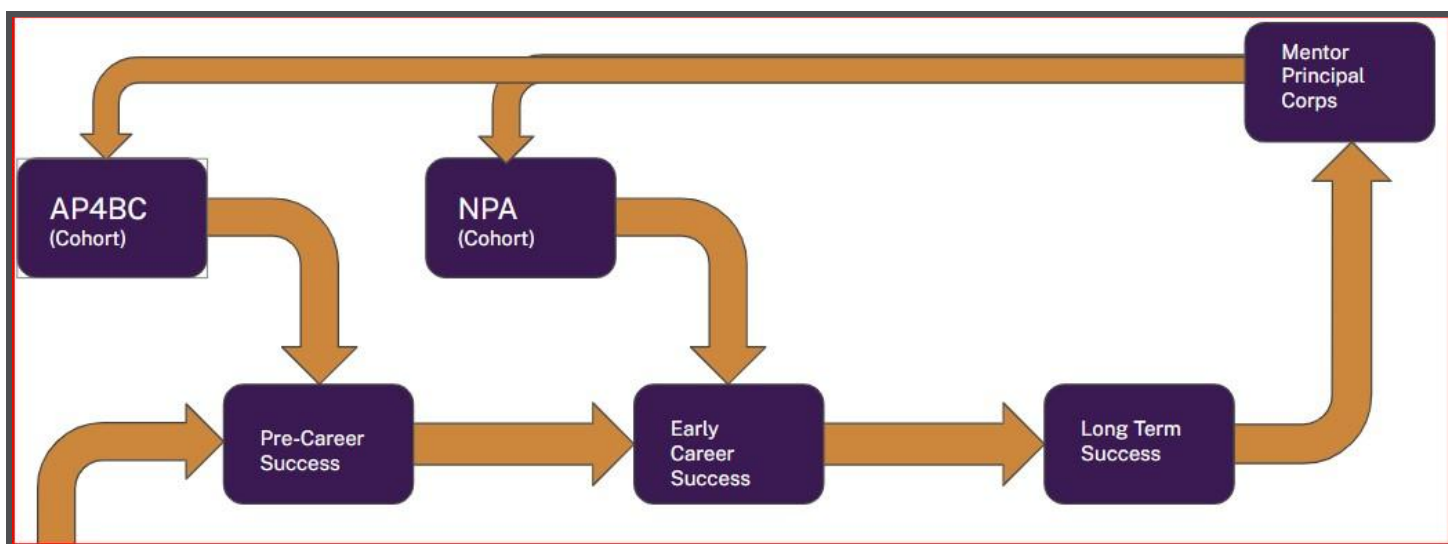
Novice Principal Program

To help new principals quickly improve student achievement, the LDOE has created the Novice Principal Academy to support principals throughout their first year of school leadership.

The [Novice Principal Academy \(NPA\)](#) is a year-long cohort focused on leadership development through self-reflection, long-range planning, and analysis of school data. Ultimately, each component is studied, analyzed, and explicitly implemented to improve student achievement in Louisiana schools.

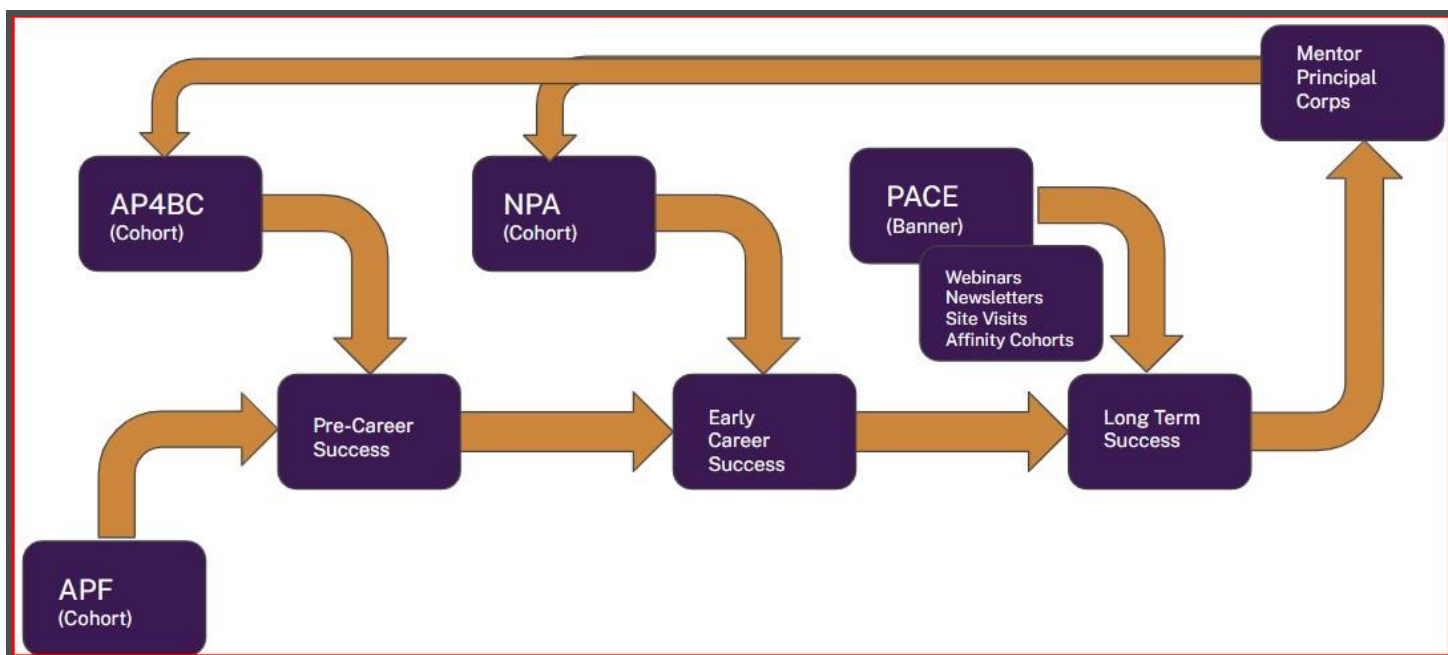
Long-Term Success Program

Louisiana has a history of celebrating success in our schools, and one of the most prominent ways the LDOE has recognized school leaders is through the [Principal of the Year Program](#). Recognizing that the nominees and winners in our Principal of the Year program have a documented history of long-term success, the LDOE believes these individuals are best suited to serve as mentors to our pre-career and early-career program participants. The [Mentor Principal Corps](#) is specifically designed to recognize these exceptional leaders and put them in direct contact with our program participants.



Future Pipeline Development

In reviewing the image above, there is an obvious gap. While the LDOE has developed a number of programs to address the needs of leaders in their Pre-Career and Early Career stages, and the LDOE has developed a program to recognize leaders who have achieved long-term success, there is currently no organized support to help leaders with 3+ years of experience in achieving long-term success who have not yet achieved this success on their own. This is where the future of the LDOE’s support for school-level leaders begins with the creation of the Principals Aspiring for Career Excellence (PACE) banner.



PACE as a Banner

What makes PACE different from other LDOE support models is that it is not only a cohort model but also includes other avenues for current school leaders to participate and expand their skills and knowledge.

These other avenues include, but are not limited to: Principal Webinars, Monthly Newsletters, in-person site visits to exceptional schools, and affinity cohorts built around individual leader needs.

At the core of all these support modules is the PACE Program's Mission and Vision.

Vision

Every student, teacher, school, and community deserves an educational leader who is highly competent, capable, and determined to provide an education focused on high-quality instruction, safety, and strong, effective management.

Mission

School leadership faces many challenges in its needs and functions, but all school leaders aim to improve student achievement across all benchmark measures, both internally and externally to the state. The Principals Aspiring for Career Excellence program aims to support the individual needs of school leaders across Louisiana by providing consistent, focused leadership development. The program defines, models, and clearly communicates effective leadership practices while offering meaningful opportunities for personal growth aligned with the needs of students, teachers, schools, and communities. In this way, the LDOE supports all in achieving the success they so richly deserve.

Components of PACE

There are four main components of the PACE program, each serving a specific purpose aligned with the needs of experienced principals.

Principal Newsletters

The LDOE currently offers two newsletters designed for school leaders. The first is our **Monthly Principal Newsletter**. This newsletter is designed to put the various opportunities for growth and knowledge at the fingertips of acting school leaders. It is released on the third Wednesday of each month and contains links to upcoming events and the information all principals need to successfully meet expectations. This newsletter can be considered a window into the LDOE, as each division is responsible for updating and maintaining this important communication tool. School leaders should go here first to learn more about the various supports available to schools, teachers, leaders, and students.

The second newsletter, the **Principles for Principal's Monthly Newsletter**, is posted on the first Monday of each month, and this newsletter is much more specific in its content, generally including a brief overview of a book, chapter, or article related to the needs of acting school leaders. More importantly, it includes a specific model of practice that acting school leaders can implement immediately in their schools, along with guiding reflective questions to help them determine how best to implement it. Each monthly Principles for Principals Newsletter is aligned to a specific domain and indicator from the [Louisiana Leader Rubric](#) to help principals see direct connections with their work and how they are evaluated each and every day.

Additionally, each month's newsletter (both the Principles for Principals and the Principal Monthly Newsletter) is posted on the LDOE's website and available on the [Principal Development Opportunities Landing Page](#).

Principal Webinars

Four times a year, the LDOE will host a webinar specifically designed to support principals not only in acquiring new information but also in developing its implications for their campus. Each principal webinar will follow the same basic format:

1. General introduction of the content
2. 20-30 minutes for an overview of content
3. 15-20 minutes of development time
 - a. During this time, participants are divided into multiple rooms and
 - b. With the presence and guidance of LDOE members, participants have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss what this content means to them and for their campus.
4. 10-15 minutes per group to share and discuss the meeting content, further extending the learning experience for participants.

Recorded Principal Webinars will be posted to the LDOE's website and can be located on the [Principal Development Opportunities Landing Page](#).

Site Visits

Through the [Principal of the Year Program](#) and the [Louisiana Models of Excellence](#) award programs, the LDOE has recognized schools, systems, and leaders who are at the forefront of leading the charge for programs and endeavors that are fundamentally altering how we educate in an effort to expand opportunities for students to achieve and grow beyond the norm. However, historically, while the awarding of these programs came with great fanfare, other systems, schools, and leaders were required to seek out more information on their own, because little was done to support schools and systems in replicating the innovative work of these exemplary school leaders. This is no longer the case with the advent of PACE and **Principal Site Visits**.

Through this program, the LDOE will contract with leaders and schools that have distinguished themselves by implementing various school programs that accelerate student achievement. This program will enable the LDOE to host 3-4 school site visits per year at schools across the state, allowing individual leaders to register to participate in a way that best serves their needs.

Essentially:

- The LDOE will identify school leaders implementing innovative yet successful school programs that could be emulated in other schools.
- The LDOE will contract with that leader to host other school leaders on their campus for a full day of activities.
- Enrollment opportunities will be posted to the PACE: Site Visit landing page, and principals will be able to register for attendance. Attendance will be offered at NO COST TO PARTICIPANTS.
- The tentative outline of the day would be as follows:
 - Introduction of the school leader and the program
 - School leader deep dive into the program
 - School leaders tour the campus to observe the program in action.
 - Observation debrief with contracted school leader and other responsible parties from the host campus.

- Lunch on your own
- The afternoon will be devoted to structured time for school leaders to meet in groups, debrief the program, and begin collaborative planning for implementing the program or a variation on their own campuses.

Through this program, the LDOE hopes to address many of the needs that principals regularly express when asked, “What can the LDOE do to help you be a more successful leader?” Through this question, principals regularly state that they would like more time to collaborate with peers and to be presented with best practices without having to do deep dives into content or research; that they want practical applications that they can turn-key and replicate on their own campus.

Affinity Cohorts

The last component of the PACE program will be the Affinity Cohorts. The LDOE has developed a cohort designed to fit the needs of acting school administrators. These cohorts are designed to improve the way school leaders lead. These cohorts will be offered at a low cost (~\$1,000) and will include five meetings over several months to help school leaders identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop behavioral strategies to enhance the former while addressing the latter. In this way, the LDOE will help school leaders grow beyond their current knowledge and experiences to have a more robust understanding of what it takes to be an advocate for change on a school campus.

These sessions are built on each participant's StrengthsFinder Assessment Results and are designed to provide a structured, high-trust peer environment for principals aspiring to career excellence. The focus is on harnessing individual strengths, maximizing time, delegating, deepening relationships with staff, and giving effective, supportive feedback.

Principals interested in participating in our Principal Development Affinity Cohorts [should register as soon as possible](#). Cohort applications close on July 13, 2026, or whenever all cohorts are filled, whichever comes first.

In Summary

Currently, the LDOE offers a robust set of resources and supports designed to meet the needs of aspiring and early-career principals. Additionally, principals who have reached a certain level of success are encouraged to serve as mentors and role models for aspiring and novice leaders. Yet, the vast majority of school leaders in Louisiana do not fit into any of these categories (aspiring, novice, or publicly recognized as “successful”).

To address this gap in support, the LDOE has created the Principals Aspiring for Career Excellence banner, designed to provide additional opportunities for leaders to grow their skills and knowledge to benefit schools and students. The available avenues for support to school leaders under this banner comprise four distinct pillars: Principal Newsletters, Principal Webinars, Site Visits, and Affinity Cohorts. These options are available to all leaders in Louisiana, regardless of tenure, and any leader interested in participating in one of these program components can register via the [Principal Development Opportunities Landing Page](#).

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *What great principals really do*. *Educational Leadership*, 78(7), 21–25. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/what-great-principals-really-do>