The Kentucky Leadership Institute for School Principals

Businesses Changing the Face of Education

Sector: Education
The Kentucky Chamber Foundation and the state’s business leaders know that for Kentucky to compete in the 21st century, it is imperative that the state’s future leaders be better educated and more skilled when they enter the workforce. Well-educated workers, with the ability to solve problems, work together, and continue to learn throughout their careers, are the key to the state’s future economic competitiveness.

Complicating this fundamental economic reality are pressures for the state’s schools to perform well on new, more rigorous academic standards known as the Common Core. Kentucky was the first state in the country to adopt the more demanding standards, which meant that students, teachers, and school systems were also grappling with changes in their curricula and assessments. Success on these new standards presents an important challenge, but also a vital opportunity to accelerate learning in Kentucky schools.

The Kentucky Chamber understood that the most powerful lever for education improvement is leadership, beginning with the school’s principal. Research shows that strong, effective leadership cascades through a school, changing the culture to one of greater collaboration, driving more effective instruction, and ultimately impacting student learning. Furthermore, a cadre of highly effective school principals could form the core of the next generation of school leadership in the state, as school system superintendents and other senior school administrators typically come from the ranks of principals. This would help ensure sustainable change. The Chamber envisioned a program that would accelerate leadership development and drive positive change within the schools, as principals developed strong professional networks across school systems to support each other professionally and to share best practices.

Traditional models of leadership development often fail to address the complex challenges of an interdependent school system that demand self-awareness, communication skills, strategic leadership, and political savvy. For this reason, the Chamber turned to the Center for Creative Leadership, a global nonprofit provider with an over-40-year track record of innovation in developing leaders in industry, education, government, and the nonprofit sector.
Solution

In working with the Chamber, CCL drew upon its global and proven experience in working with school systems and built a leadership development program with a customized focus on Kentucky’s needs. The program will span multiple years and engage a new cohort of principals each year. Admission to the program is competitive, with a rigorous application process. Since 2011, 158 principals from schools in 64 counties across Kentucky have graduated from the program.

The program, known as the Kentucky Leadership Institute for School Principals, includes individual and 360-degree assessments of the principals’ leadership behaviors, three face-to-face leadership development sessions, and professional one-on-one coaching. Those elements are combined to build high-impact leadership skills in the participants. In particular, the program is designed to help principals:

- Increase their personal leadership effectiveness
- Develop stronger conflict-management and conflict-resolution skills
- Improve their decision-making skills
- Strengthen their ability to influence others
- Enhance their strategic leadership abilities
- Lead the transformation of their schools into high-performing centers for learning

Unlike traditional K-12 professional development programs, the Kentucky Leadership Institute for School Principals is designed to help school leaders deal with the complex and sometimes ambiguous environment in which they work, help bring about organizational cultures that foster innovation and excellence, and create the conditions that will lead to improvements in student performance.

Key Objectives

- To develop strong leadership skills among Kentucky principals through cutting-edge training.
- To equip principals with tools to help them build a high-performance school culture that would ensure the highest-possible student achievement.
- To enable principals to examine their individual strengths and developmental needs to have a positive impact on their students and schools and build better communities.
- To provide strategic and effective approaches that yield positive results as they undertake the challenges of K-12 education.
Results

Through the Institute’s work, Kentucky is building a new cadre of leaders who are creating student-centered environments and improving outcomes in schools across the state. Surveys and interviews show that program graduates are putting lessons learned into practice.

Principals who have been through the program report they are more effective leaders and better able to drive meaningful change throughout their schools to improve student performance. They also said the program helped them develop stronger professional networks through which they can share best practices.

Results by the numbers:

In a survey of Kentucky Leadership Institute alumni:

- 89% say the program prepared them to lead effective school change.
- 88% report a change in their school’s culture as a result of their participation.
- 91% say their participation has made them more effective at influencing others to ensure student success.
In interviews and surveys, principals cited ways in which the leadership program has positively impacted their performance. They reported several key outcomes.

Principals were able to better understand their own decision-making, working and communication styles, and how those behavior preferences can positively or negatively influence others.

“It taught me more about myself and who I am as a leader, and my strengths. It really taught me how to better communicate with others.”
—Jennifer Hutchison, Principal Picadome Elementary School Lexington, KY

The experience increased how much work the principals delegated, how much teamwork took place in their schools, and how much information they shared with teachers and others.

“I realized the value of delegating—not just for me to manage my time, but also to get buy-in from staff members.”
—Barbara Harris, Principal Stonestreet Elementary School Louisville, KY

Graduates moved leadership responsibilities down through the organization, giving teachers and others more control for various programs and initiatives within schools.

With Principal Rob Carroll’s blessing, two teachers at South Heights Elementary School in Henderson are developing a new curriculum based on research that identified grit—perseverance in the face of resistance—as a key success trait.

“If you have a great idea that connects with our vision, you have the ability to lead that idea and everybody else follows you. Leadership here is a key tool in school improvement.”
—Rob Carroll, Principal South Heights Elementary School Henderson, KY
The CCL program helped them better understand and navigate political issues they frequently faced in their schools and communities.

“This experience has helped me better understand the perspectives that business professionals, parents, elected officials and others bring to the educational system, and as a result I am more deliberate in how I communicate with different groups and individuals as we work together to improve education at my school in Fayette County and across the state.”

—Ron Chi, Principal
The Learning Center at Linlee
Lexington, KY

The experience created a network of strong relationships with other principals from within their cohorts, which they maintained after graduating from the program.

“It’s just given me some feedback that I can get from people who are doing the same job I am, but they’re in totally different communities. . . You really develop a trust (such) that you’re willing to say ‘Hey, give me your honest opinion, what do you think?’”

—Gary Fields, Principal
Bowling Green High School
Bowling Green, KY
All principals interviewed reported that the program was very beneficial and that they would recommend it to colleagues. Though most of them had been through professional development programs that focused on matters such as curriculum changes, the CCL experience was frequently cited as the first time they had a chance to work on their own leadership skills and effectiveness.

“It was the best professional development that I have ever had in my life,” said Tiffany Stith, Principal of Smyrna Elementary School in Louisville. “They made each of us feel special and that we were worthwhile, and you don’t often feel that in this profession.”

Principal Michael Rowe persuaded teachers to have more students take tougher classes, meaning more would take—and some would pass—Advanced Placement courses that provide college credit. "We removed all the barriers; that way we opened up the curriculum to everybody. The percentage passing (AP exams) goes down, but more students overall are passing. It’s exposing them to new study habits.”

—Michael Rowe, Principal
Pikeville Junior High/High School
Pikeville, KY

After the program, principals more effectively implemented and managed change in their schools, including driving positive change in student performance.

Principals learn the value of effective communication, skillful planning, leadership roles, coaching and success through teamwork by participating in the Electric Maze activity.
Survey Shows an Increase in Leadership Effectiveness

Principals were asked to respond to statements regarding their CCL leadership experience, using a scale of 1-5 (from 1 meaning “Strongly disagree” to 5 meaning “Strongly agree”). (The graphs indicate percentages of respondents who selected either “Agree” or “Strongly agree.”)

As a result of my CCL leadership development experience, I . . .

- Achieve more positive outcomes for students, schools, and community: 93%
- Am more effective as a leader: 89%
- Am able to influence others to ensure student success: 91%
“The Kentucky Leadership Institute Program was a dynamic and powerful educational experience that transformed my life and work. I received world-class training equivalent to a corporate CEO. This program provided me not only with tools for the trade, comprised of a wealth of resources, contacts, materials, support and opportunities for growth; they also taught me about a leadership mindset. Individuals contemplating leadership, newly appointed leaders and [leaders] at any stage of life would exponentially benefit from these strategically crafted leadership programs.”

—Tara L. Isaacs, Principal
Dixie Magnet Elementary
Lexington, KY
Principals Attest to Improving Their Schools and Leadership Skills

Asked for feedback on the Kentucky Leadership Institute for School Principals, participants gave these responses:

“My school moved from a Focus School to a Distinguished School in one year. We experienced gains in all five accountability areas and are labeled a high-performing school.”

—Amy Waggoner, Principal
Marshall County High School
Benton, KY

“With several changes throughout my building due to some setbacks on the state assessment, we have improved instructional practices and have already seen improved results.”

—Charles Rowe, Principal
Allen Elementary School
Allen, KY

“I have greatly improved my interpersonal communication skills. I am direct and unambiguous more frequently now. My boss has commented positively about how well I am communicating my expectations to our teachers. . . I am asking everyone in our organization to look at their roles in the light of student achievement, which is beginning excellent dialogue in our building.”

—Sally Stevens, Principal
Lexington Catholic High School
Lexington KY

“I am a more active listener and try to anticipate things that may occur as a result of decisions made by me or by my Instructional Leadership Team. I have worked hard to develop the capacity of my teachers as instructional leaders in our school, so they can share their talents with their colleagues. I am much more confident in my ability to provide honest feedback to employees and be frank with them about areas in which they need growth.”

—Susan Glenn, Principal
Blake Elementary School
Louisville, KY
Principals learn a method for supporting collaborative, creative conversations to help them develop ideas and insights into useful dialogue with CCL’s Visual Explorer tools.
The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world’s Top 10 providers of executive education by Bloomberg Businessweek and the Financial Times, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; New Delhi-NCR, India; and Shanghai, China.

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