Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
With approximately 2,200 principals and 1,300 assistant principals currently serving in Missouri schools, an estimated 1,100 administrator certificates issued annually and roughly 300 new principals hired each year, the implications for teacher and student success are significant.

“Supporting and developing effective building principals is a critical component in helping all students reach their potential. Through broad-based collaborative effort, Missouri is moving beyond simply identifying leadership standards and competencies by intentionally building leadership capacity in support of our students, schools and communities.”

Missouri Commissioner of Education, Dr. Margie Vandeven

The Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS)

The primary purpose of the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) is the development and support of effective school leaders. In the fall 2014, a group of key stakeholders, currently engaged in principal development and support, were convened by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to identify the essential competencies of a transformational principal. These main competencies of transformational leadership were clustered into 5 categories:

[Diagram showing the competencies of a transformational principal:
- Visionary Leader
  - Develops a vision
  - Implements a vision
- Innovative Leader
  - Continues professional growth
  - Actively engages in reflective practice
  - Applies new knowledge understanding to drive appropriate change
- Instructional Leader
  - Ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum
  - Guarantees effective instructional practice
  - Coordinates the use of effective assessments
  - Promotes professional learning
- Relational Leader
  - Interacts professionally with students
  - Interacts professionally with staff
  - Interacts professionally with family and community
- Managerial Leader
  - Implements operational systems
  - Oversees personnel
  - Ensures the equitable and strategic use of resources]
These domains, summarize the main roles a principal must assume, often times simultaneously, to effectively lead a school that is focused on teaching and learning. Each domain is described through a particular set of competencies.

The competencies or specific skills associated with effective leadership were identified and organized across the MLDS Continuum. The Continuum extends from aspiring, to emerging, to developing and then to transformational levels of leadership. The MLDS fosters development of leadership competencies in a comprehensive and progressive sequence. Each level represents advancement in leadership growth across a principal’s career beginning with pre-service preparation.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Competency #4</th>
<th>Aspiring Leader</th>
<th>Emerging Leader</th>
<th>Developing Leader</th>
<th>Transformational Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engages and supports staff to vertically and horizontally align curriculum to state/district standards (PSEL 4a,b;6d; 9;10a,e)</td>
<td>Understands standards as they apply to horizontal and vertical alignment of local curricula and content areas.</td>
<td>Examines and becomes familiar with the existing curriculum and learning standards.</td>
<td>Facilitates staff discussions to ensure curriculum is comprehensive, rigorous, aligned, and engaging and supports continuity and fidelity across all grades and content areas.</td>
<td>Ensures staff regularly collaborates to continuously monitor and adjust the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum to improve student learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The **Principal as the Instructional Leader** ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Competency #5</th>
<th>Aspiring Leader</th>
<th>Emerging Leader</th>
<th>Developing Leader</th>
<th>Transformational Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports staff use of a variety of research-based practices appropriate to the intended content. (PSEL2b; 4b,c,d,e; 10a,f)</td>
<td>Understands a variety of research-based instructional practices and how to appropriately match learning content</td>
<td>Identifies existing instructional practices and reinforces those that are appropriate to the learning content</td>
<td>Builds teacher capacity with a variety of instructional practices appropriate to the learning content</td>
<td>Facilitates opportunities for collaboration and modeling of instructional practices appropriate to the learning content</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Competency #6</th>
<th>Aspiring Leader</th>
<th>Emerging Leader</th>
<th>Developing Leader</th>
<th>Transformational Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observes classroom instruction and provides meaningful and timely feedback on teacher practice and student response. (PSEL2b; 4b,d,6a,e,f,10c,e,f)</td>
<td>Understands and engages in meaningful feedback related to effective teacher practice</td>
<td>Observes classroom instruction and provides meaningful and timely feedback to build teacher practice and student response</td>
<td>Observes classroom instruction and provides meaningful and timely feedback to intentionally meet individual teacher strengths and areas for growth</td>
<td>Develops a systemic process for the continuous improvement of all teachers’ instructional practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The **Principal as the Instructional Leader** ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum.
In addition to significant research supported methods and practices, each leadership competency has been cross-walked with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Individual competencies are not addressed separately or in a specified sequence, but are embedded in distinct Learning Experiences across the five identified domains. A description of Emerging Level Learning Experience 1 is noted below.

**Emerging Level Learning Experience 1:**

**Critical Firsts—** *How successful school leaders build positive momentum by succeeding at key initial leadership tasks and opportunities.*

In **Critical Firsts**, the school administrator learns the importance of making a positive impact as an emerging leader. The experience helps school administrators be more proactive and purposeful as they plan initial school engagements. Participants will examine best practices, tools and protocols for designing successful first opportunities typical of the opening of a new school year.

The learning experience **Critical Firsts** seeks to:

A. Increase emerging level leaders’ awareness of the large and persistent effects of first experiences.
B. Identify key windows of opportunity for creating success and positive momentum in typical, beginning of the year school experiences.
C. Provide school leaders with practical and timely strategies for creating successful and future-shaping initial school experiences.

Each Learning Experience is divided into specific “Treatments” that engage participants in activities and approaches designed to foster mastery of the related competencies. The Emerging and Developing Levels include nine learning experiences that utilize a total of sixty-one embedded treatments. Participating principals engage in these learning experiences at individual, regional or state levels.

**MLDS LEARNING EXPERIENCES (LE)**

- LE 1: Critical Firsts – How successful school leaders build positive momentum by succeeding at key initial leadership tasks and opportunities
- LE 2: Recognizing and Developing Excellent Instruction – How successful school leaders cultivate strong instructional practices and develop an emphasis on skillful teaching through observation and feedback.
- LE 3: Understanding Self and Others – How successful administrators cultivate self-knowledge and customer focus to create success for all stakeholders.
- LE 4: A Primer on Decision Making – How to get things done, empower others, and make the right call on tough issues.
• LE 5: Reading and Shaping School Culture – How to see and shape the invisible but powerful forces that fuel or freeze a school’s improvement efforts.
• LE 6: Making Time for Instructional Leadership – Managing the management so principals do the instructional work necessary to move teaching practice forward.
• LE 7: Designing and Leading Change – How successful change leaders position the need for change as an active navigation toward intended outcomes through learning, growth, improvement, development, adaptation, and reinvention.
• LE 8: Communication and Influencing Skills – Building better communicators through understanding the complexities of public and personal communication, and enhancing personal communication skills.
• LE 9: Human Resource Leadership: How successful leaders optimize personnel performance through the processes of recruitment, selection, development, and retention.

The MLDS serves as a blueprint for developing and supporting transformational school principals through a comprehensive system of learning that is engaging and relevant. Productive learning environments require skillful leadership. Through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders and applied understandings, the aim of putting a capable leader in every building across Missouri shifts from wishful thinking to purposeful action wherein effective leadership is achieved by design.

With the framework of the MLDS firmly established, the capacity for significant widespread application and influence is no longer a vision. It is a reality. Starting with the 2017-18 school year, a team of regionally located leadership development specialists, competent not only in MLDS related content, but trained in facilitating adult learning, expanded principal participation from 150 in 2016-17 to over 500 acting principals 2017-18. Additional engagement, scheduled to take place after January 1, 2018, through the rollout of Developing Level learning experiences is projected to move that number beyond 750 principals statewide. To fully realize the promise of this effort, continued development of the System will include:

• Completion/Implementation of the Learning Experiences and Treatments for the following components on the MLDS Continuum
  o Developing
    ▪ Statewide introduction of the Developing Level learning after January 1, 2018 in preparation for full scale implementation during the 2018-19 school year.
    ▪ With the completion of the Developing Level content, steps are being taken to knit MLDS learning and Missouri’s Leadership Academy together in a manner that enhances Leadership Academy’s thirty-three year legacy through the construction a comprehensive system of leadership learning that is philosophically sound, fundamentally and practically relevant
Transformational

- Design and development of this final stage of the MLDS continuum will begin in March 2018 with statewide implementation, similar to the Developing Level rollout, slated for Fall 2019.
- A representative committee of college and university administrative preparation programs has been convened to review current practice and identify ways to align degree work, MLDS competencies, internship expectations, leadership assessments and certification requirements.
- Answering the question, “How do you know this is working?” It is expected that the effect of the MLDS learning will eventually be reflected in student achievement outcomes, teacher and principal mobility/retention rates, association membership, and sustained participation in the MLDS. Currently, a multi-tiered evaluation process has been developed to gauge the response and perspectives of MLDS participating principals and superintendents. Additional metrics of effectiveness are being explored.
- Recognition that preparation “pipelines” are insufficient to meet the demand for capable and effective building leaders. Ongoing support, development, and retention are essential
- Maintaining the productive working relationships with statewide professional associations and policy makers remains one of the hallmarks of the MLDS
  - MAESP, MASSP, MASA, RPDC personnel, IHE leaders, DESE, and national consultants are at the table guiding the advancement of this critical work.
- Anchoring the language and intent of the MLDS in the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP 6) standards and indicators for governance and leadership.
- Securing sustainable resources to support MLDS implementation.
  - Current funding, available under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has allowed DESE to offer comprehensive leadership development and support to every principal in Missouri, however, federal financial resources are subject to changing political priorities and the allocation of federal dollars in support of the resulting agendas. Sustaining effective leadership development underscores the importance relevant high quality professional learning opportunities and the critical nature of dependable funding resources.

Just as the degree of a child’s educational success should not be a product of zip code, neither should the likelihood that a capable and effective principal serves in any given Missouri school. Equitable access to meaningful educational opportunity requires the effective leadership. Traditional administrator development and support has lacked the sustainability necessary to create the environment essential to the success of each student. Through the MLDS, that is changing.

21st century skills… are not new, just newly important.

_Elena Silva_

What’s new today is the degree to which economic competitiveness and educational equity mean these skills can no longer be the province of the few… _Andrew Rotherham_