EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The importance of capable leadership is difficult to understate. Relative to education, Kenneth Leithwood (2004) notes, “…there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst.” In light of the reality that a typical principal cohort in Missouri will lose 50% of its members within five years, the following statement takes on additional importance, “While highly effective principals create significant change each year, it takes an average of five years to put a mobilizing vision in place, improve teaching staff, and fully implement policies and practices that positively impact the school’s performance.” (Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover, 2014)

“Effective leadership is the hallmark of successful schools. Cultivating that capacity in every Missouri principal is essential to the success of each student. The Missouri Leadership Development System is the right approach, at the right time, for the right reasons.”

Dr. Roger Dorson, Interim Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS)

The purpose of the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) is to develop and support effective school leaders. In 2014, 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 identified competencies were clustered into 5 categories:

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.

The MLDS continuum fosters development of leadership competencies in a comprehensive and progressive sequence (Aspiring, Emerging, Developing, and Transformational). Each level represents advancement in leadership growth across a principal’s career beginning with pre-service preparation.
EXAMPLE:

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 1: Critical Firsts**

In **Critical Firsts**, administrators will examine best practices, tools and protocols for designing successful first opportunities typical of the opening of a new school year. In addition, they will develop an awareness of the large and persistent effects of first impressions, identify key windows of opportunity for building positive momentum, and learn 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. The Transformational Level includes twenty-eight additional treatments. Participating principals engage in these learning experiences at individual, regional or state levels.

**MLDS LEARNING EXPERIENCES (LE)**

- LE 1: Critical Firsts – Building positive momentum by succeeding at key initial leadership tasks and opportunities.
- LE 2: Recognizing and Developing Excellent Instruction – Cultivating strong instructional practices and developing an emphasis on skillful teaching through observation and feedback.
- LE 3: Understanding Self and Others – Understanding how self-knowledge and a customer focus creates success for all stakeholders.
- LE 4: A Primer on Decision Making – Getting things done, empowering others, and making 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 – Recognizing the art and science of patterns, connections, and relationships that make navigating and sustaining productive change possible.

LE 8: Communication and Influencing Skills – Building better communicators through understanding the complexities of public and personal communication.


The framework of the MLDS has been firmly established. During the 2016-17 school year, nine regionally located leadership development specialists engaged 150 principals in the MLDS learning. As the 2017-18 school year drew to a close, over 1000 Missouri principals took advantage of MLDS learning opportunities. Continued development of the System will include:

- Utilizing Developing Level content 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 grounded, and practically relevant.
- Complete design and development of the Transformational Level content (October 1, 2018). With the inclusion of twenty-eight additional treatments, this step on the MLDS journey offers true “next level” leadership capacity building.
- Working through the Missouri Professors of Educational Administration (MPEA) to 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, in time, 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.
- Maintaining productive working relationships with statewide professional associations and policy makers remains critical to MLDS and student success
  - MAESP, MASSP, MASA, RPDC personnel, MPEA, DESE, and national consultants are at the table guiding the advancement of this vital 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.
  - Financial resources, available under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have allowed DESE to initiate this comprehensive system of leadership development and support, however, under current funding levels it will not be possible to address full scale implementation. Securing revenue streams,
sufficient to expand and sustain the MLDS as a true statewide program, will be an ongoing challenge.

EARLY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

While it is too soon to accurately determine the specific impact of MLDS learning on faculty/staff, and ultimately, student outcomes, clear evidence of the positive influence of MLDS participation is emerging. In just the second year of implementation, over 1000 (45%) Missouri principals regularly engaged in regional MLDS sessions. With 264 (47%) school districts represented in that number, the notion of cultivating leadership capacity, at scale, is more than aspirational. Further, the effect on principal retention rates is notable. National retention rates nearly mirror Missouri where, across all levels of the principalship, approximately 77% of first year principals return for a second year. After three years, 51% of Missouri’s principals leave their position. By year five, just 30% of that first year cohort remains. In strong contrast to those realities, principals engaged in the MLDS Emerging Level (Years 1 and 2 combined), 92% have moved into their second or third year as a building leader.

As powerfully as this data suggests the potential for a variety of positive outcomes, it is not surprising. The MLDS addresses three aspects of principal retention that research and experience emphasize as critical: Ongoing professional development, Meaningful network opportunities, and Individual support that extends beyond the first two years.

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 effective leadership. The MLDS serves as a blueprint for developing and supporting transformational school principals. Through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders, 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.

Leadership is...

- ... the capacity to translate vision into reality.
  
  Warren G. Bennis

- ... the art of giving people a platform for spreading ideas that work.
  
  Seth Godin

More information available at:  https://dese.mo.gov/educator-quality/educator-development/missouri-leadership-development-system

Missouri Leadership Development System – Executive Summary – July 23, 2018