

Analysis of Equity-Centered Principal Pipeline Initiative (ECPI) Progress Reports

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Context of Research

The collage features several overlapping documents:

- Top Left:** A green document titled "Principal..." with the subtitle "A Feasible, Affordable... for Districts t...". It includes a photograph of a classroom and lists authors "Susan M. Gates, Matthew D. Baird, B...".
- Top Center:** A dark blue document titled "PRINCIPAL SELF-STUDY DISTRICTS" with the subtitle "SUSTAINING A PRINCIPAL PIPELINE". It is dated "UPDATED EDITION: FEBRUARY 2021" and lists authors "Ellen Goldring, Mollie Rubin, Laura R..., Christine M. Neumerski, Anna Moyer...". It is commissioned by "Wallace" and "The Wallace Foundation".
- Top Right:** A white document titled "A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Develop Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines". It is dated "July 2023" and lists authors "Mark Anthony Gooden, Muhammad Khalifa, Noelle W. Arnold, Keffrelyn D. Brown, Coby V. Meyers, Richard O. Welsh". It is commissioned by "Wallace".
- Bottom Right:** A dark blue document titled "Implementing for Sustainability: Principal Pipelines in Four Districts". It is dated "MARCH 2025" and lists authors "Ellen Goldring (Vanderbilt University), Mollie Rubin (Policy Studies Associates), and Kathryn James McGraw (Vanderbilt University)". It is commissioned by "Vanderbilt Peabody College", "Policy Studies Associates", and "Wallace".

Logos for "POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES", "VANDERBILT Peabody College", "College of Education THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH", and "Wallace" are visible at the bottom of the collage.

Context of Research



Research Questions for Analysis of Reports

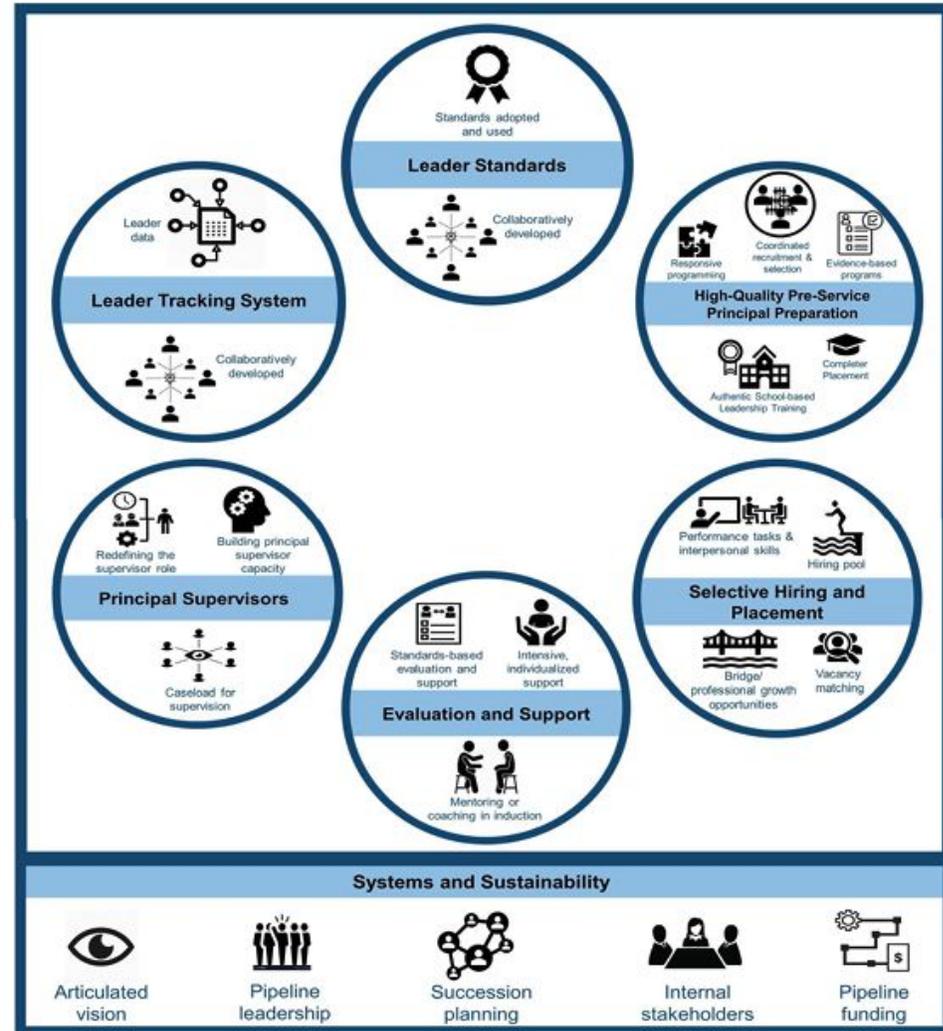
- Where are the areas that grantees are *making progress*?
 - Are some of the domains or activities showing more progress than others?
 - Are they calling out sustainability dimensions as grantees describe their progress?
- What are the kinds of *challenges* grantees are facing (and towards what)?
- What kinds of *support* do grantees ask of Wallace and why (what and for what end)?
- What do grantees see as the *most influential lessons learned/actions taken*?
- How are grantees *engaging with the community*?

Data & Methods

- 16 progress reports from all 8 ECPI grantees, using two most recent reporting years (i.e., 2024 & 2025)
- Initial cycle of coding using a predetermined and iterative scheme in Dedoose, followed by analytic memos on categories (root codes) and prevalence counts
- Developed codebook
- Met with Research Officer & VP of Research to refine coding scheme and discuss emergent themes
- My positionality (and how it may have affected what I found)

Coding Reference

Exhibit 1: Domains of a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline



Coding Scheme

Code	Description
▼ Actions towards sustainability	Actions taken to build toward sustainability
▶ align-institutional-elements	Aligning institutional elements and supports (e.g.,
build-strategic-alignment	Building in strategic alignment (e.g., shared vision
communicate-clarity	Communicating with clarity (raising awareness, se
▶ maintain-priority	Maintaining priority (e.g., stakeholder engagemen
▼ Challenges	
cultural-climate	Climate/Climate: Buy-in, etc.
financial	Financial challenges: Budget, expenses, etc.
logistical	Logistical challenges: Time, etc.
other	Other challenges: Political capital, external influen
personnel-people	Personnel/People: Staffing, etc.
structural	Structural challenges: Coherence, integration, sys
▼ Domain 1: Leader standards	Leader standards
collaboratively-developed	Collaboratively developed: Adoption and revision
other	
standards-adopted-used	Standards adopted and used: The district has stan
▼ Domain 2: High-quality pre-service ...	High-quality pre-service principal preparation
coordinated-recruitment	Coordinated recruitment & selection: The district h
evidence-based-prog	Evidence-based programs: District policy calls for
other	
placement	Completer placement: Partner preparation progra

Data Limitations

- Nature of reporting to a funder
- Years 3 & 4 within a five-year funding cycle
- Variability in level of detail:
 - *“There have been numerous successes along the way. For the purpose of the mid year reflection, we have selected one for each domain to highlight.”*
- Contextual differences across districts & cities

Findings: Making Progress

1. Leader standards
2. High-quality pre-service principal prep
3. Selective hiring and placement of principals
4. On-the-job evaluation and support
5. Principal supervisors
6. Leader tracking systems
7. Systems and capacity to support and sustain a principal pipeline

Y3 Finding: Leader Standards

- Almost all grantees reported a range of ways in which they are adopting, localizing, or using leader standards and definitions of equity (7), which include merging with district evaluation rubrics or state evaluation systems and rolling out one disposition at a time at a standing meeting with school leaders.
- Some districts reported collaboratively developing the definition of equity and Portrait of a Leader with input from parent focus groups and cross-functional groups (3).

Y3 Quotes: Leader Standards

- “In Year 2, Equity Centered Pipeline Initiative (ECPI) actively sought input to craft the profile of an equity centered leader, fostering buy-in. Moving into Year 3, we leveraged the insights gathered during Year 2 input sessions, **facilitating seamless integration of this work across various offices** within the organization. Additionally, we **aligned the profile of an equity centered leader to the [District’s] Instructional Framework Rubric** which is used to evaluate school leaders.”
- “We have had success working to further the influence of our Portrait for Principal: The Equity Centered Leader so far this year. We have a standing virtual meeting with all administrators on the first Thursday of the month wherein we **introduce the disposition focus which is followed up with related learning activities** in Region Meetings later in the month. We worked through having buy-in of the activity within all region activities by focusing on the implementation in the Principal Coach's monthly meeting.”

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Y3 Finding: HQ Pre-Service Principal Prep

- Many actions were taken to tailor the principal prep programs to address the needs and specificities of the school district (7), such as hiring district leaders as faculty and aligning coursework to leader standards and focus on equity.
 - Details are vague in some progress reports.
- Fewer grantees reported actions around expanding evidence-based practices (5), strengthening school-based training (3), coordinated recruitment (3), and other themes (e.g., general course revisions, book study).
- No reporting addressed completer placement, which might be tied to stage of the pipeline and funding initiative.

Y3 Quotes: HQ Pre-Service Principal Prep

- “The three-stage project spans all five semesters of our programming and focuses on developing data analysis skills and strategic planning aimed at instructional improvement. Our students work collaboratively in teams examining a **diagnostic review for a school**, learning to read and understand the review and then use it as a base for recommendations of **evidence based instructional improvements**. The culminating project includes the creation of a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) and an intentional professional development plan aimed at supporting instructional staff to meet the goals of the CSIP.”
- “The [District-University] teams have had regular, productive meetings focused on piloting a new clinical practice model that includes supported sub-time for candidates to get out of their context and **experience authentic, hands-on leadership experiences in multiple settings**. The model is being built.”

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Y3 Finding: Hiring & Selection

- Grantees described dedicated efforts in the area of performance tasks in the interview process (6), such as a leadership walk and an instructional video assessment.
- Expanding the hiring pool (5) requires developing new materials, hosting outreach events (e.g., “explorer” programs), getting clear on representation gaps and priorities, and creating more entry points (e.g., candidate assessment days, expanded hiring pool dates).
- A few districts incorporated bridge/professional development protocols for candidates as part of the redesign of the selection process (3).
- Only 1 grantee reported developing a vacancy match tool.

Y3 Quotes: Hiring & Selection

- “The priorities through June 30th are **designing and executing candidate assessment day experience**, designing recruitment processes that attract a diverse pool, and improving processes to recruit and select Latino/x leaders to close the representation gap. The support needed includes finalizing the logistics, evaluation support with scoring tasks as well as defining the district-wide strategy.”
- “We have revised our principal selection process by making it **more rigorous and incorporating all levels of the organization**, including Assistant Superintendents of School Leadership, the Deputy Superintendent, Superintendent and Campus Advisory Councils. It is noteworthy that after the principal candidates pass the initial interview phase, they engage in a **leadership walk** at a school.”
- “ECPI will host an **Aspiring Leaders event** to communicate the new selective hiring and placement process and garner interest in principal, assistant principals and principal residents.”

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Y3 Finding: Evaluation & Support

- Mentoring and coaching (5) were provided most commonly via mentoring pairs and broad-based programming (e.g., PD sessions). This was also extended to Assistant Principals.
- Intensive individualized support was described in limited or developing terms (3). Structures may be in place, but the individualized quality is lacking.
- A few grantees reported on using standards-based evaluation tools (3), which offer shared language and calibrated expectations across school sites.
- Other actions in this domain included launching an affinity group for men of color (1), formulating an onboarding handbook (1), and providing PD on implementing a culturally responsive literacy curriculum (1).
- No clear distinction in PD between aspiring/new and sitting principals.

Y3 Quotes: Evaluation & Support

- “We are close to the development of our **common learning walk and school visit protocol** as we continue monthly inter-departmental school visits. We worked with relevant academic areas to develop and refine the Elementary Reading and Secondary tools that focus on our equity efforts ensuring that each student has a teacher who utilizes the district curriculum. Getting all leaders on the same page is a continued effort and we are being explicit with our expectations to ensure implementation.”
- “This year, we have been able to operationalize a **Peer Buddy system** where experienced Assistant Principals volunteer to be a support person for a new Assistant Principal. This provides a **leadership opportunity for experienced Assistant Principals as well as support for the new principal**. Last year, we started monthly coaching for new Assistant Principals and the Peer Buddy system adds an additional layer to the support of these novice leaders. We also realized that new assistant principals need intentional professional learning to help build their capacity and executive functioning skills.”

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Y3 Finding: Principal Supervisors

- All grantees devoted efforts to build principal supervisor capacity (8). This included getting feedback on coaching from external trainers, using a common coaching framework or theory of action, and holding PD sessions on alignment for principal supervisors.
 - Very little to no detail on what alignment exercises look like.
- A few grantees reported refining the supervisor role (3), because there was either a lack of dedicated infrastructure or a need to clarify the core functions and standards for the role.
- No evidence of revisiting caseload for supervision.

Y3 Finding: Principal Supervisors

- “Big success is aligning the 4 principal supervisors so principals are experiencing alignment. This has been huge. The expectations are all the same. We are saying the same things. Principals are hearing the same things. **Principals are enjoying the cross-areas walks with levels** (elem, middle, high). More principals are becoming adept and comfortable with Relay practices -observation and feedback, and culture.”
- “This academic year has witnessed the strategic appointment of Human Resources Assistant Superintendents to collaborate with each Principal Supervisor (SOS). This collaboration enables the SOS to **concentrate on the instructional development of their Principals**, while HR Assistant Superintendents provide **substantial support for a wide array of personnel issues and concerns.**”
- “The team has completed a draft of **standards for the principal supervisor** and is currently working on developing a **rubric for observation, evaluation and growth.**”

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Y3 Finding: Leader Tracking System

- Setting up the Leader Tracking System (8) entailed working with technical assistance providers (e.g., developing use cases), merging data systems, and deciding how it would be built and maintained.
 - University partners often developed their own LTS that supported efforts in this domain.
- Developing the LTS required gathering input from principals, hiring managers, and other stakeholders (5).

Y3 Finding: Leader Tracking System

- “Members of the IT department, Accountability, Research and Evaluation and Testing (ARET) department and School Leadership collaborated with a specialized firm in order to **create the shell for the LTS** that ensures [the District] will maintain all rights to the system and data and be set up to maintain the system in the future.”
- “A success of [District] was working with the vendor to **finalize the design plans** to jumpstart the building of the LTS. Key strategies included the start of the data **integration process from multiple systems** as well as continuing to analyze current structures, data points, or engaging key stakeholders that might be currently under-utilized in the design process.”

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Y3 Finding: Systems & Sustainability

- Grantees described various forms of an articulated vision in developing systems and sustainability (6), such as exploring an internal principal prep program, creating a memorandum of agreement with a university partnership, and implementing a set of guiding principles.
- Most grantees reported benefits from clear leadership assignments (5).
- Engagement with internal stakeholders include strengthening communication around goal implementation and closing the loop (3).
- Little to no attention on pipeline funding (1) and succession planning (1).

Y3 Finding: Systems & Sustainability

- “The **implementation of the Guiding Principles** signifies a steadfast dedication to cultivating a system of equity. Throughout the developmental phase, diverse perspectives emerged regarding the nuance in language. During the discussions there was a consensus that we as a system need to provide a bold stance on our practice and policies that do not support the growth of our most marginalized staff and students.”
- “[District] has embarked upon starting the process of **creating its own internal principal preparation program**. To date we are in negotiations with a vendor to support the development of this program. Strategy: Creating an internal principal preparation program will allow [District] to develop its own candidates and custom the supports needed to become an equity centered leader. The sustainability of this program will be cost effective and increase leadership development opportunities for [District].”

Findings: Challenges

What challenges are grantees facing and towards what?

Y3 Finding: Challenges

- Challenges were mainly logistical (8). The most commonly reported challenge was lacking time.
- In some instances, logistical challenges may be concealing or mixing personnel (6) or structural (6) challenges. For example, turnover can slow down the work.
- Technology challenges (4) were centered around creating, refining, and adopting technology platforms such as the leader tracking system.
- Less reporting on cultural/climate (3) and financial (3) challenges.

Y3 Finding: Challenges

- “The **difficulty of coordinating across multiple institutions, finding time, and figuring out how to finance/resource/sustain the work in the long term.** We have carved out regular meetings/work time around this project, which has been helpful. We also have started to identify action items, persons responsible, and what other teams/individuals need to be part of developing the plan to get this project out of the planning/ideation stage and into implementation.”
- “A few challenges we've faced include 1) a **lack of IT capacity** to support implementing a new platform which we were able to mitigate by partnering with Crocus and an implementation partner to provide technology expertise; and 2) **finding time** within the recruitment/hiring cycle to engage Talent team experts or within the school year to engage school leaders, which we have mitigated by being flexible in our order of steps and being creative about either combining conversations together to leverage people's attention when we had it or chunking larger conversations into small tasks that could be completed asynchronously.”

Findings: Support from WF

What, why, and for what end?

Y3 Finding: Support from WF

- Outside of the communications technical assistance (TA), many grantees leveraged TA (5) to develop data use cases, lead domain team and affinity group meetings, and receive critical feedback on work plans.
- Most did not articulate emerging needs for support from Wallace (5).
- Emerging needs (3) included:
 - Guidance on maximizing TA support
 - Guidance on developing a robust and tailored communication strategy for different audiences and formats
 - Incorporating AI into equity-centered leader preparation
 - Connecting to other districts or universities with strong clinical practice models and leader tracking systems

Y3 Finding: Support from WF

- “Continued **connection with people or resources in the network who have done the subsidized clinical practice model well**, including information on both the [university] and district sides. Specifically, we seek to know how it is funded and what infrastructures are in place to support it on the district and the [university] side.”
- “Guidance regarding the development of a **differentiated communication strategy that is high-impact and bite-sized** so that it is accessible to a variety of audiences and available in multiple media formats/platforms. Collect examples from across the ECPI districts and beyond related to what equity-centered leadership can look like at the classroom, school, department and district level. Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents unique, unexplored opportunities. How can we capitalize upon AI by incorporating it into the preparation of equity-centered leaders and utilize it as a tool to help enhance leadership practices?”

Findings: Most Influential Lessons

Lessons learned & actions taken

Y3 Finding: Most Influential Lessons

- “Socializing” or propelling the work forward by fostering “buy-in” across the district (4)
- Developing infrastructure and ownership of activities (3)
- Fostering two-way community feedback (2)
- Being flexible or open to adjustments (1)

Y3 Finding: Most Influential Lessons

- “Our biggest lesson learned is the importance of **utilizing community feedback**, as well as intentionally sharing with the community **how you used their feedback** and its **impact on practices** to demonstrate how they were an asset and why they should continue to partner with you.”
- “Having an equity framework is not enough. The **framework must be socialized** and this cannot be done by simply explaining the components. Each leader, not just campus administrators, must be able to **make personal connections to the framework** and easily share and discuss how their leadership and the choices they make on a daily basis are grounded in equity.”
- “We have learned to be **as flexible as possible**. From working with the researchers, working within and across departments, and with outside partners, we have noted at times **we are moving too fast and at other times, too slow**. It is the nature of the creation of a sustainable project to look back and want to change, we are trying to look forward to what is needed in the lives of our students.”

Findings: Community Engagement

What forms?

Y3 Finding: Community Engagement

- Forms of community engagement include:
 - getting community input in defining equity-centered leadership & expanding recruitment efforts (6)
 - asset mapping (1)
 - pursuing corporate sponsorships (1)
- Details are limited, which may be related to the way the question is posed.

Y3 Finding: Community Engagement

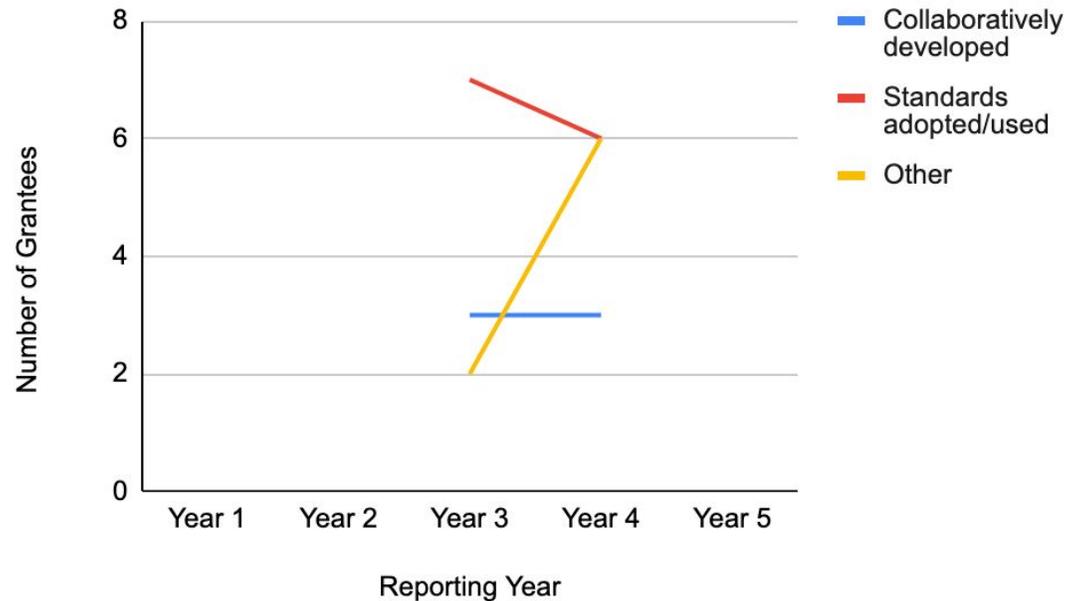
- “A crucial factor of this developmental process involves soliciting valuable feedback from our community partners and parents. Leveraging platforms, we have incorporated the **perspectives of our Hmong, Spanish-speaking, and Black/African American parent groups**. The collaborative input from these diverse educational partners serves as a resource in defining the dispositions of educational leaders.”
- “As we continue to undertake the redesign of the principal selection process and include **community members in the overall selection process**, we want to elevate engagement with organizations that can support the district’s strategy with recruitment of underrepresented groups such as aspiring Latino/x. This will impact the district by not only diversifying the candidate pool but more importantly, developing Latino/x leaders that our community desires.”

Year 3 to Year 4

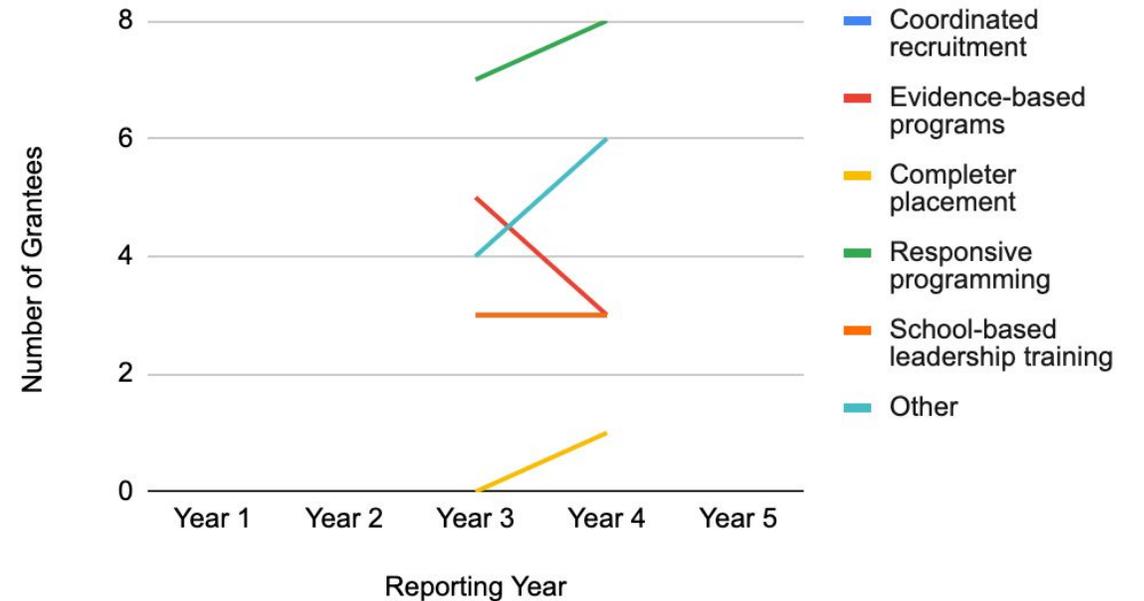
Plotting changes & high-level differences

Plotting Domains Over Time

Domain 1: Leader Standards

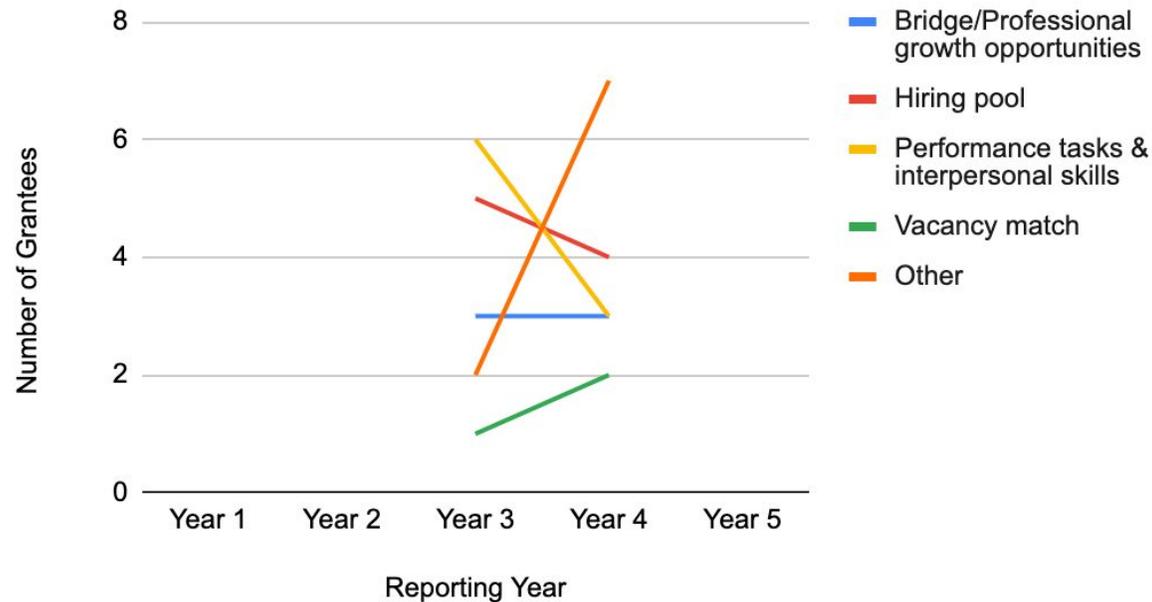


Domain 2: HQ Principal Prep Programs

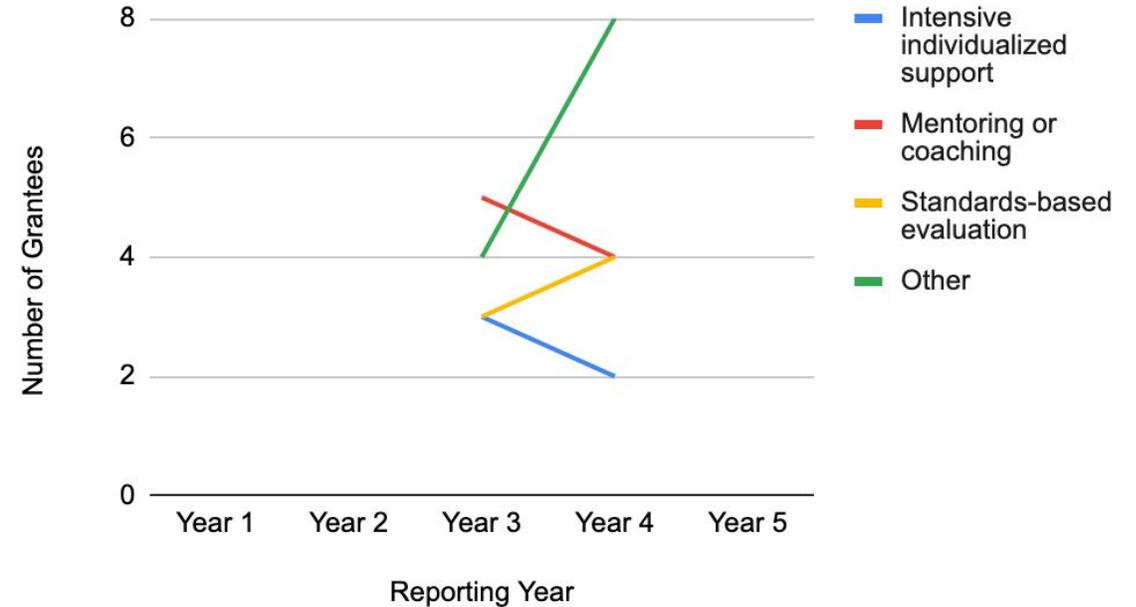


Plotting Domains Over Time

Domain 3: Recruitment & Selection

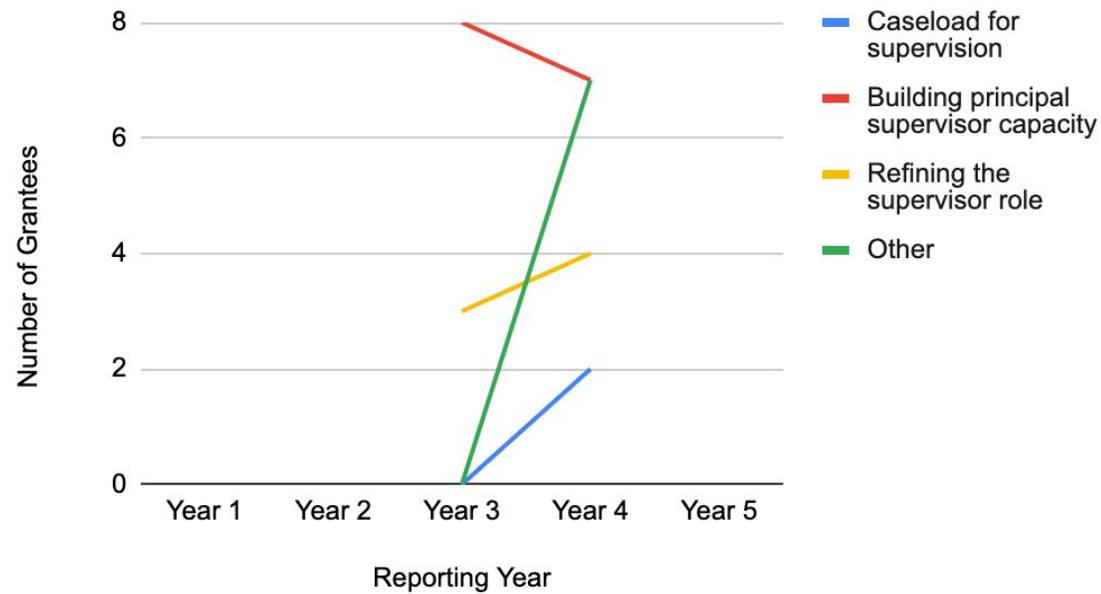


Domain 4: Evaluation & Support

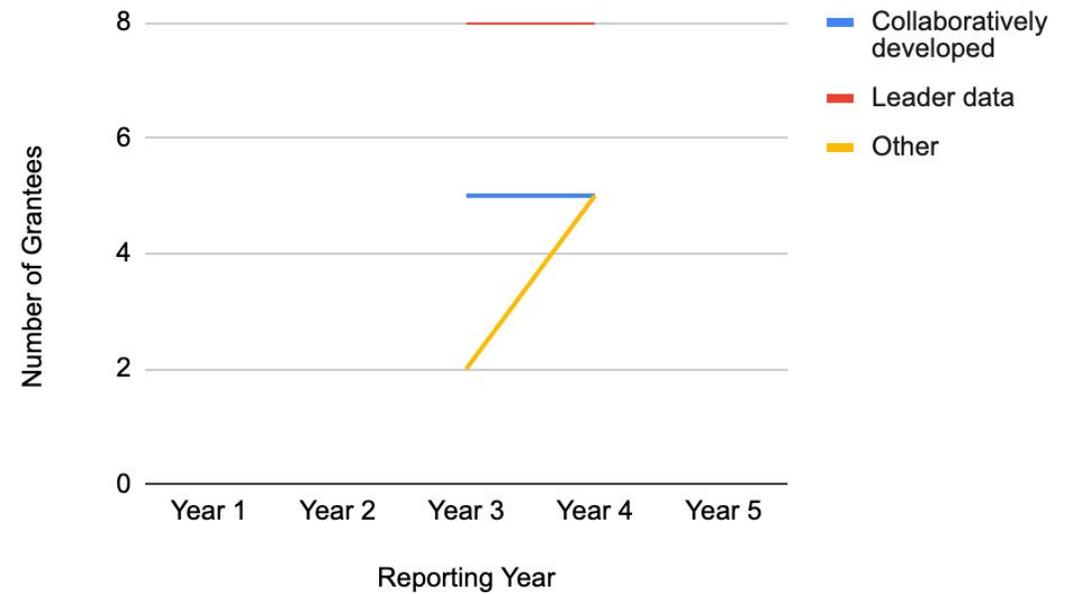


Plotting Domains Over Time

Domain 5: Principal Supervisors

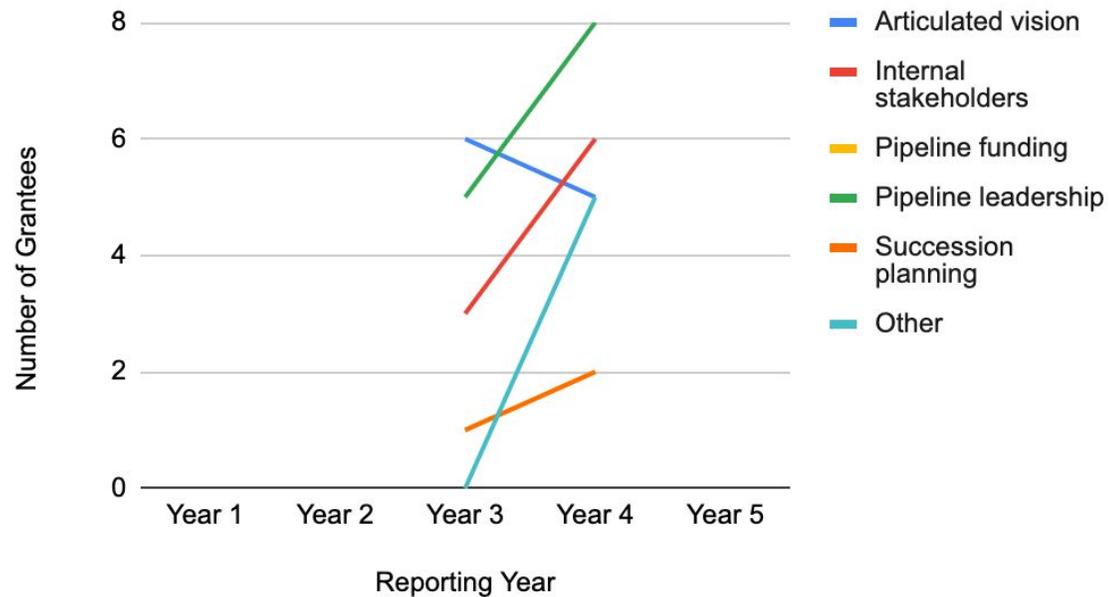


Domain 6: Leader Tracking System

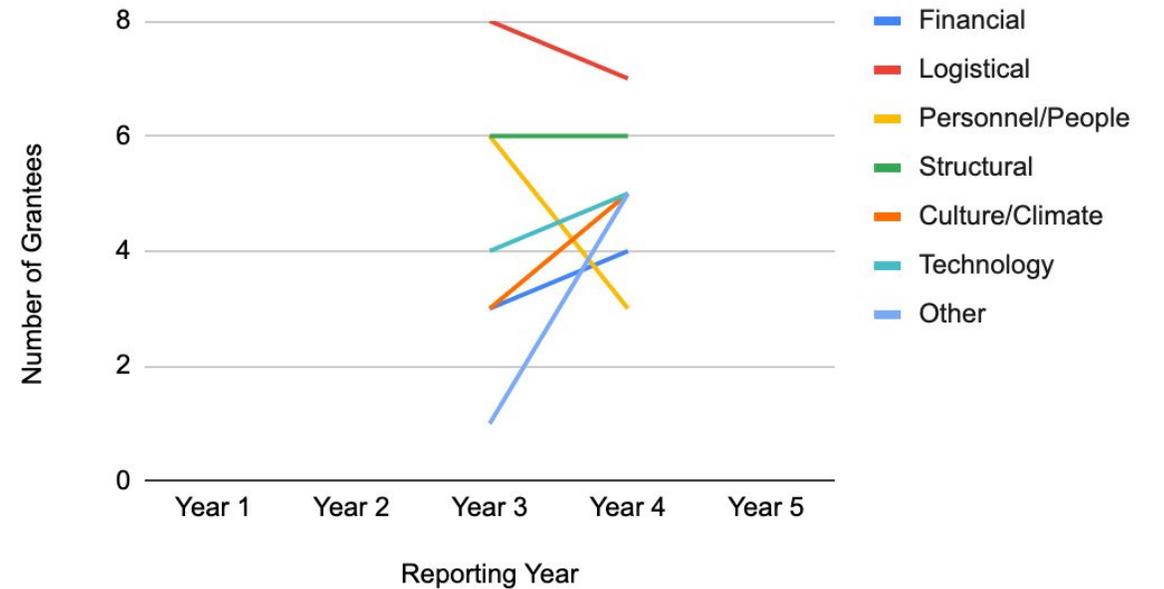


Plotting Domains Over Time

Domain 7: Systems & Sustainability



Challenges



Year 3 to Year 4 Differences

- More applications of “other” codes within domains, which indicate divergence from the self-study framework (e.g., creation of dispositions, use of equity screeners in hiring).
- Many instances of cross-domain coding, which suggest that districts are applying elements from one domain to another domain of relevance.
- Greater attention and level of details in regards to the development of principal supervisors (e.g. theory of action, coaching models) and to forms of community engagement (e.g., Student Advisory Council, Principal for a Day).
- Emerging “other” challenge (3): Responding to shifts in political climate & external influences.

Y4 Quotes: Cross-Domain “Other”

- “With assistance, the creation of a **Theory of Change for School Leadership** was created to guarantee the leadership skills articulated in the above framework are being **actualized across all facets of the district**. Status: This Theory of Change will be **socialized throughout all domain work** as it is part of the **Change Management Plan** that will be part of the sustainability plan.”
- “We began standardizing practices and supporting the [Principal Supervisor] process through a **co-created Theory of Action, alignment to an office-wide goal**, and the development of a comprehensive framework... **Weekly PLC sessions** for [Principal Supervisors] centered on instructional leadership versus operational responsibilities. Including the use of **See It, Name It, Do It, and CEIQ as coaching and feedback models and frameworks**.

Y4 Quotes: Community Engagement

- “The community engagement plan is connected to multiple domains, including High Quality Pre-Service Principal Preparation and Systems and Sustainability. **By involving community and business leaders in initiatives like "Principal for a Day,"** the district can strengthen relationships and gain diverse perspectives that inform equitable leadership practices. Engagement strategies also provide **feedback to refine recruitment processes** and ensure the leadership pipeline aligns with the district's equity goals.”
- “One part of the plan is connected to Domain 2 where our **university partners are doing community outreach to bring more awareness of what the universities are doing with racial equity** through their principal preparation programs. The other part of the plan is connected to Domain 3 where **school/community groups are part of the principal selection process.**”

Opportunities & Next Steps

Alignment between the purpose and form of progress reports

Purpose of Progress Reports: Compliance and/or Curiosity?

- Notable codes with fewer than 3 excerpts from Year 3:
 - *Domain 2: Completer placement*
 - *Domain 3: Vacancy match*
 - *Domain 6: Caseload for supervision*
 - *Domain 7: Pipeline funding; succession planning*
- At times, lack of detail and quality of localization across districts (e.g., Portrait, definition of equity)

Considerations for Future Progress Reports

- What does Wallace need from the progress reports? Who needs what?
- Could the questions be tweaked to prompt deeper reflections or storytelling?
 - *Create targeted opportunities to describe localization or operationalization efforts*
- Could the phrasing of questions capture district experiences better?
 - *Shift toward problems of practice (either current or recent), rather than challenges.*
- Could additional evidence better illustrate the pipeline in action?
 - *Incorporate artifacts: Training or meeting agenda and/or slide decks, district magazine/newsletter, leader profile videos, infographics, testimonials*

Questions?
Comments?

Thank you!