

NSW Public Schools Leadership Excellence

Action Plan 2026–2028



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Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we learn, work and live, paying respect to Elders past and present as teachers of knowledge, songlines and stories. We strive to ensure every NSW Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander learner achieves their potential through education.



Forewords



Strong leadership is essential to the success of schools and the future of every student. Principals, school leaders and teachers inspire, encourage, and empower their school communities to ensure every child receives the best possible education.

That is why the work of the School Leadership Institute is important. School leaders are at the centre of our commitment to educational excellence across the NSW public education system.

Under this plan, parents and carers can be confident that leaders at their child's public school have access to high-quality development programs and the most up-to-date educational leadership research and resources.

We have a clear commitment to supporting leaders and teachers at all stages of their careers.

This complements our systemwide work to ensure every student benefits from the explicit teaching practices proven to lay strong foundations for future success. This includes an emphasis on phonics in the early years and the introduction of a Year 1 numeracy check, so we can track student development and develop the skills that are fundamental to life-long learning.

Prue Car MP
Deputy Premier of NSW
Minister for Education and Early Learning
Minister for Western Sydney



Principals and school leaders are critical to the NSW public education system. They set the direction for their schools and guide staff and students toward success.

Their leadership shapes the learning environment, creating a culture of excellence and equity where all students can thrive. A skilled and inspiring school leader can positively influence every aspect of school life, from student engagement and achievement to teacher satisfaction and professional growth.

There is no doubt that the role school leaders play is vital. It is therefore crucial that they are supported and continue to refine and strengthen their knowledge and skills through quality professional development.

As the Secretary of the NSW Department of Education, I am proud to support the NSW Public Schools Leadership Excellence Action Plan. It places the development of school leaders and teachers at the forefront of our efforts to provide a world-class education for every student in our system.

Importantly, it supports Our Plan for NSW Public Education in the focus areas of strengthening trust and respect for the teaching profession, delivering outstanding leadership, teaching and learning and advancing equitable outcomes, opportunities, and experiences.

The School Leadership Institute has a proven record of delivering high quality, evidence-informed leadership support and development, and I have every confidence it will continue to do so under this action plan.

Murat Dizdar
Secretary, NSW Department of Education



A new plan for school leadership

Great school leaders are essential for an outstanding and equitable public education system. Every school and every student deserve school leaders and teachers who are committed, capable, and driven by a strong sense of moral purpose. Having great school leaders enables more effective teaching and in turn improves student outcomes in every school and across the system.

The NSW Public Schools Leadership Excellence Action Plan is the NSW Department of Education's commitment to supporting and empowering all school leaders and teachers, helping them deliver high quality teaching and learning in every classroom. It sets out how the department will continue to identify and develop the leaders of tomorrow while supporting the leaders of today.

Under this plan, all NSW public school leaders and teachers will have access to free, world-class, evidence-informed, future-focused leadership development at every stage of their career, regardless of location, school context, or circumstances.

Equity is a fundamental principle that shapes our approach to supporting the professional growth of leaders and teachers. We are committed to making our programs and resources accessible to all leaders and teachers in an equitable manner, with a strong emphasis on fostering educational equity and excellence within and across our public schools.

The action plan will be implemented by the School Leadership Institute (SLI), in collaboration and consultation with other department teams. It will ensure that all school leaders and teachers have an opportunity to be comprehensively prepared, supported and enabled in their roles so they can lead their school communities with expertise, confidence and impact. It will provide a pipeline of future leaders so that students, teachers and schools can continue to thrive.

This action plan supports Our Plan for NSW Public Education's focus areas of:

- Strengthen trust and respect for the teaching profession
- Deliver outstanding leadership, teaching and learning
- Advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences

It will also help deliver a number of agreed actions under the plan, including:

- supporting staff development
- providing quality career pathways in public education
- strengthening development for school leaders and teachers at all career stages
- strengthening educational leadership.

The new action plan builds on the success of the SLI's School Leadership Development Strategy under which comprehensive programs of leadership identification, induction and development have been implemented.

Our action plan aligns with and supports other key departmental priorities and strategies. These include:

- School Excellence Framework and supporting guidelines, including Guiding Principles in Leading Aboriginal Education
- Staff Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2027
- Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2023–2026
- High Potential and Gifted Education Policy
- Anti-Racism Strategy 2024–35
- NSW Skills Plan 2024–2028
- Regional, Rural, Remote and Unique Settings Strategic Excellence Plan 2025–2027

The SLI will work collaboratively with the Early Childhood Outcomes division to identify leadership resources to support early childhood leaders in the public school system.



About the SLI

The SLI provides leadership development programs and support for current and future school leaders, offering a range of leadership induction and development programs, on-demand learning, online resources and other opportunities.

- The SLI's vision is to enhance the capabilities of all educational leaders in NSW public schools, so they have the greatest impact on teacher and student learning.
- The SLI's mission is to provide world-class, evidence-informed, future-focused leadership development programs and resources to support school leaders at every stage of their career.

So far, more than 15,000 teachers and leaders in 2,150 schools have taken part in SLI programs or engaged with on-demand learning.

What does the research say?

There is clear evidence that educational leadership is crucial for improving student outcomes and driving overall school success.

High-performing education systems invest in leadership preparation and development as a key strategy to strengthen the practice of individual leaders and teachers and drive school and system improvement. To support the success of all students, the research shows that leadership development should be systematic, systemic and ongoing, and that educational leaders at all stages of their career should have access to formal, planned, and high-quality leadership learning opportunities.

This action plan delivers an intentional approach to developing leadership capabilities for teachers and leaders at all stages of their career, underpinned by research on effective leadership development.

The SLI's impact

Evaluation of our programs found:

- **96% rated the learning experience positively**
- **93% of principals identified several areas where their leadership had improved**
- **96% of teachers aspiring to leadership said it enhanced their leadership practice**
- **98% of aspiring principals/senior leaders highly rated their capacity to lead practices that impact on student learning.**

Our goal

For every leader and teacher in NSW public schools to have access to and engage with free, world-class, evidence-informed and future-focused leadership induction conferences, development programs and resources, delivered by the SLI, at every stage of their career.

So that

Students in NSW public schools have the opportunity to achieve their best thanks to a high-quality public education delivered in schools with great leaders. In addition, school leaders and teachers are respected and supported to grow and thrive throughout their careers in the NSW public education system.

Our approach to leadership development

The SLI has developed the SLI Leadership Learning Framework, the SLI Development Continuum, and the 3 Leadership for Learning models, which underpin a systematic and coherent approach to leadership development within our schools.

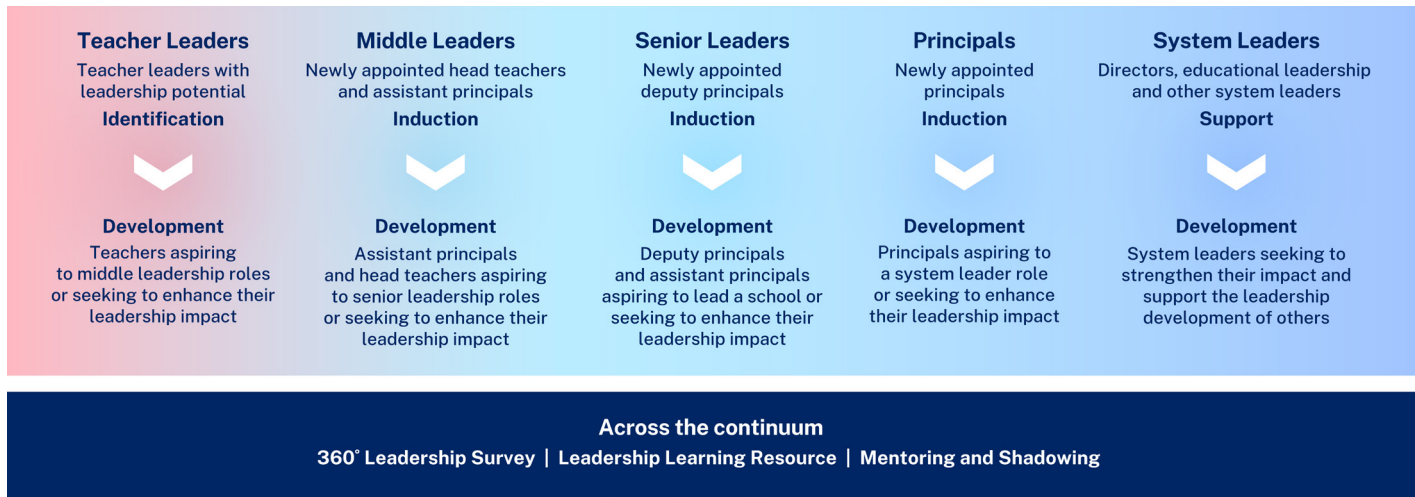
These are supported by comprehensive role descriptions developed by the SLI for middle leaders, deputy principals and principals. The role descriptions provide clarity and certainty for school leaders.

Under this action plan, all school leadership offerings across the department will align with the SLI’s approach.

SLI Development Continuum

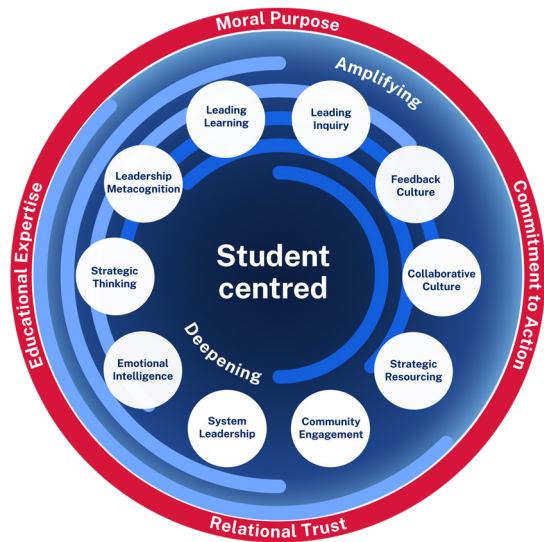
The SLI Development Continuum sets out how we support current and aspiring leaders at every stage of their career. We identify potential future leaders, offer comprehensive induction programs to new leaders, and

provide ongoing development programs and resources for all leaders. This means all educational leaders in NSW public schools can continue to learn and develop every year.



SLI Leadership Learning Framework

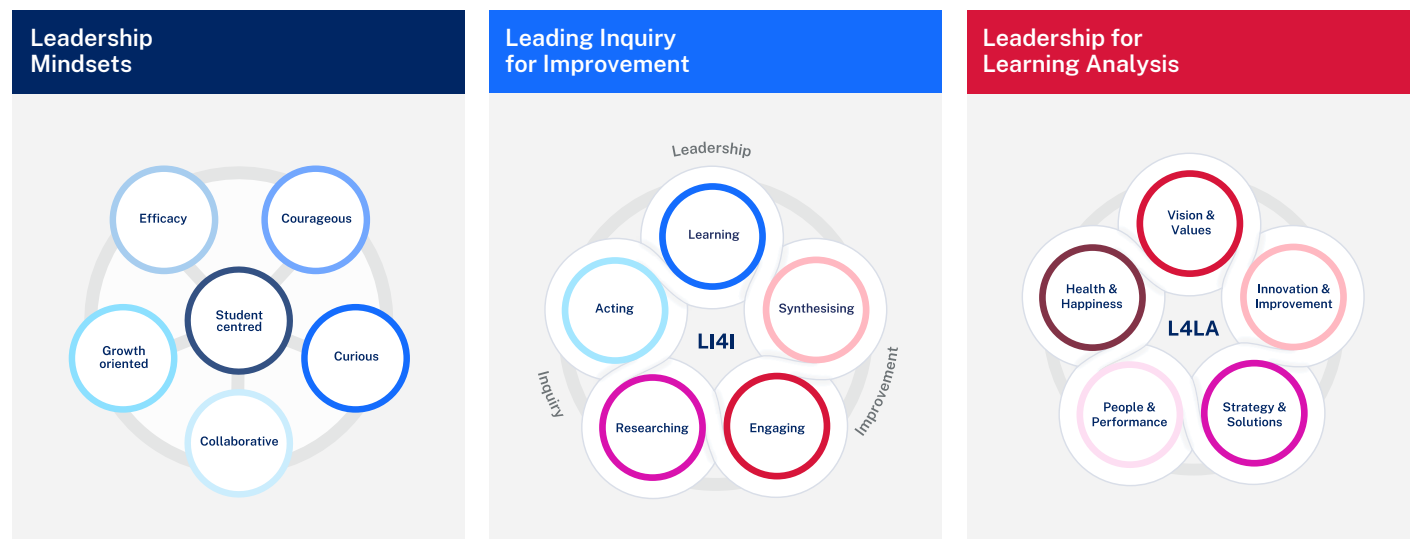
The Leadership Learning Framework provides the foundation for the development of current and future school leaders. It comprises the 4 Core Leadership Principles and 10 Key Drivers of leadership effectiveness which describe the ways in which leaders enhance their leadership capabilities to deepen and amplify their impact and influence.



SLI Leadership for Learning models

The SLI has developed 3 Leadership for Learning models that can be adapted to support different stages of leadership development.

The models support leaders to reflect and make decisions. They help develop insights into what makes a difference to the learning of leaders, teachers, and most importantly, students.



Together, the continuum, framework and models provide the foundation for the development of current and future school leaders, leading to further teaching and learning improvements in schools and across our system.





“Excellence in public education emerges when schools and systems work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning for all students.”

Michael Fullan



Delivering our action plan

The SLI, in partnership with other department teams, will deliver new and ongoing initiatives to implement the NSW Public Schools Leadership Excellence Action Plan.

Teachers and teacher leaders

Teacher leaders are teachers who are not in formal leadership positions and whose sphere of influence has expanded to impact positively on the learning of students beyond their classroom, and on colleagues.

Teachers and teacher leaders are critical to providing a high quality education and ensuring a future pipeline of school leaders.



Our actions

- Continue to deliver programs of leadership development for teachers aspiring to leadership roles.
- Ensure our work is informed by our recent review of current global research.
- Continue to design and deliver resources and professional learning for all teachers on teacher leadership.
- Pilot and evaluate a series of resources and professional learning sessions for early career and experienced teachers on leadership development.

Middle leaders

Middle leaders — assistant principals and head teachers — play a crucial role. The 13,000 middle leaders in our public schools have a direct impact on teaching and learning, manage teams and influence student outcomes within and beyond their classrooms.



Our actions

- Expand the Regional, Rural and Remote Leadership Program for aspiring and middle leaders.
- Continuously evaluate and refine our comprehensive Middle Leader Resources which are available on-demand to all school leaders.
- Continue to deliver the Middle Leader Induction Conference every semester, ensuring newly appointed assistant principals and head teachers receive a comprehensive orientation into their role.
- Continue to deliver the Middle Leadership Development Program, which enhances student achievement by developing the capabilities of leaders who have a direct impact in classrooms.

“I am not aware of any high-performing school system, or one that is rapidly improving, that leaves leadership development to chance. It is too big a risk for the future.”

Steve Munby



Senior leaders

Senior leaders — deputy principals and experienced assistant principals — implement their school's strategic vision and develop a positive school culture in partnership with the principal, teachers, staff and the school community.



Our actions

- Deliver the Deputy Principal Induction Conference to help newly appointed deputy principals meet the key responsibilities of their role.
- Continue to offer the Senior Leadership – Aspiring Principals Leadership Program to ensure a future pipeline of great school leaders.

Principals

Principals play a vital role in leading, developing and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and wellbeing in their schools. They foster community engagement and have a significant influence and positive impact on teacher and student learning and whole school improvement.



Our actions

- Deliver a new Voices for Public Education program to support principals and school leaders in promoting their schools.
- Deliver the Principal Induction Conference to help newly appointed principals meet the key responsibilities of their role.
- Deliver a strengthened Growing Great Leaders program for all principals, with a focus on student-centred leadership and supporting ongoing growth of teachers.
- Continue to deliver the Insights Series featuring national and global experts on leadership and education.
- Continue to invest in Scholarships for School Leaders which support principals, directors, educational leadership (DELs), and SL-APLP Alumni to undertake postgraduate or higher degree study.

System leaders

System leadership is leading beyond the boundaries of individual schools to support improvement across multiple schools or networks within a system.

System leaders have expertise in building the professional capabilities of other leaders and fostering collaboration.

System leaders in formal roles hold key strategic responsibilities for supporting the continuous improvement of principals, schools, and groups of schools across the NSW system. They include DELs and other Education Support Staff.



Our actions

- Co-design a new System Leadership for Principals program, to begin in 2026, for principals who seek to strengthen their impact and may aspire to formal system leadership roles.
- Strengthen the SLI Alumni program to enable facilitators and mentors in our programs to continue to learn together and foster strong collaborative networks between colleagues and across the system.
- Facilitate professional leadership learning opportunities and resources for system leaders.
- Develop SLI leadership resources for system leaders as they lead professional learning across networks.
- Collaborate closely with operational directorates to support professional learning opportunities for system leaders.



Mentoring and Shadowing

We are establishing a holistic approach to mentoring and shadowing. This will ensure that teachers and leaders within our system benefit from the knowledge of experienced colleagues, contributing to staff retention and wellbeing.

The SLI has published a position paper on mentoring and a research paper on shadowing, which together provide the foundations for all mentoring and shadowing programs and resources.



Our actions

- Support newly appointed, first-time deputy principals through mentoring from an experienced deputy principal as an extension of the Deputy Principal Induction Conference.
- Offer a new Shadowing for Success program from 2026, to deliver a consistent and evidence-informed approach to shadowing.
- Provide experienced leaders with the skills and resources to mentor aspiring leaders through the Lead and Aspire Mentoring Program.
- Continue to develop a Mentoring Resource Hub to support a systemic approach to mentoring future leaders.

SLI Leadership Learning Resource

The SLI has developed an interactive, on-demand Leadership Learning Resource to support the professional growth of school leaders at all levels. This dynamic resource includes a rich collection of research papers, evidence-informed frameworks, practical strategies, videos, podcasts, reflective questions, discussion guides, and more.



Our actions

- Enhance the Leadership Learning Resource through the redevelopment of a new online learning platform and expand the learning content to meet the needs of all educational leaders in all school contexts.

SLI 360° Leadership Survey

The SLI 360° Leadership Survey is a free tool that helps leaders focus on areas of development and build on their strengths, using feedback from their nominated peers and supervisors.



Our actions

- Continue to make the survey available to all NSW public school leaders and teachers.
- Continue to provide participants with a feedback report so they know where to focus their professional development.

Responding to emerging needs

School leadership requires agility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Under this action plan, the SLI will develop practical, tailored learning opportunities in response to emerging needs and system priorities.



Our actions

- Develop practical, and subject-specific professional learning opportunities that address needs as they arise.
- Liaise with the SLI Advisory Group and other key stakeholders to identify new professional learning opportunities that support leaders in effectively leading and managing their schools.
- Continue to offer leadership expertise on cross-department committees.



Research and evaluation

The SLI has a dedicated research team, with evaluation embedded into all offerings to ensure evidence-based practice, continuous improvement, ethical data use, and alignment with best practice. We conduct independent research and partner with academic institutions to commission formal research into leadership development in NSW public schools.

We engage with multiple partners across the department to inform this work.



Our actions

- Ensure our programs and resources are underpinned by high quality research and informed by evaluation practices that provide robust and insightful data.
- Contribute to the educational leadership evidence base through a growing suite of research and reports developed by the SLI's research team.

Leadership for equity and excellence

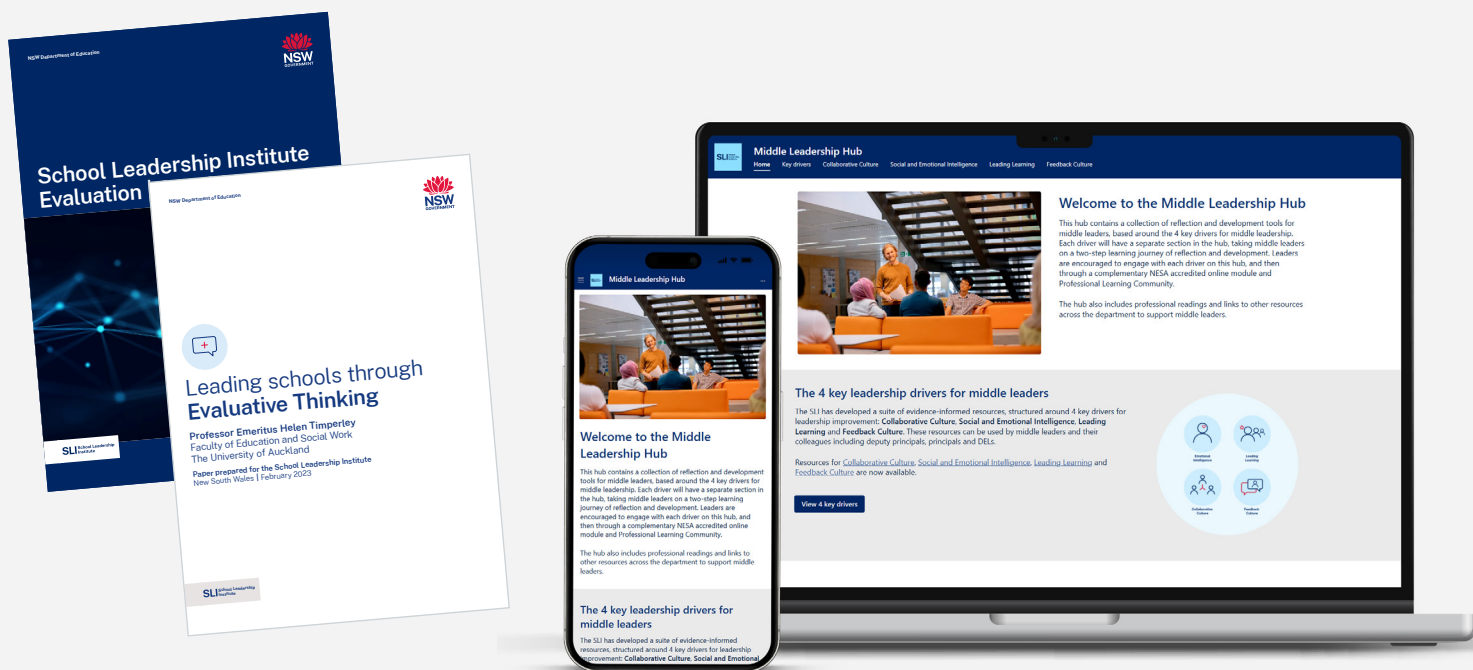
Equity is a key principle that guides the way we work to deliver and support professional development of school leaders. We will ensure our programs and resources are equitable in their availability to all leaders and have a strong focus on leading for educational equity and excellence in our public schools.



Our actions

- Develop new resources that help leaders focus on equity and excellence when leading teaching and learning.
- Ensure all leadership programs, professional learning and resources are evaluated for equity in line with Our Plan for NSW Public Education.
- Ensure all leadership learning events and resources have a strong focus on equity and excellence in their content and delivery.





Governance

The action plan will be implemented by the SLI in partnership with other teams in the DoE. The SLI executive director will share regular progress updates with the department's Teaching and Learning sub-executive committee.

The SLI will provide a report card on implementation which will be publicly available. The action plan will be evaluated towards the end of the implementation phase and the results used to develop the next leadership plan for NSW public schools.

What does success look like?

- Participation in SLI programs will continue to grow.
- Newly appointed leaders will understand the key responsibilities of their role and are ready to lead from day one.
- All school leaders and teachers will have access to SLI resources to support their leadership.
- There will be a cohesive and understood approach to leadership development in NSW public schools.
- Evaluations will show high levels of participant satisfaction, strong relevance of programs and resources, and impact on leadership knowledge, skills and capabilities.
- Research and evidence will inform leadership development across the system, strengthening leadership practice and pathways and supporting positive outcomes for students and schools.



Great leaders in every school

Every public school is unique, but all great schools have one thing in common. They have a committed school principal working with leaders and teachers at all stages of their careers, who share a deep commitment to giving every student in their care the opportunity to learn and thrive.

This action plan, together with Our Plan for NSW Public Education and other strategies, will support excellence in leadership, teaching and learning in every public school across the state.

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