

# National Institute for School Leadership™ (NISL)

## Intervention Report | School Leadership Topic Area

WHAT WORKS  
CLEARINGHOUSE™  
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This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC's School Leadership topic area, examines research on the effects of the National Institute for School Leadership™ (NISL) program on student, teacher, and school leader outcomes. No studies of NISL that fall within the scope of the School Leadership review protocol meet WWC standards. Because no studies meet WWC standards, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions at this time about the effectiveness of NISL on student, teacher, and school leader outcomes.

### Intervention Description<sup>1</sup>

Research has shown that school leaders can influence student outcomes, including student achievement, and that some school leaders improve student outcomes at a faster rate than others do<sup>2</sup>. The NISL program (formerly the NISL Executive Development Program) is a professional development program that aims to develop effective, strategic school leaders focused on preparing schools to provide high-quality instruction in a supportive learning environment.

NISL is organized around 12 two-day professional development course units that are offered over 12-15 months. Each unit offers tools and diagnostic instruments to assess participants' leadership skills and school climates. As part of the program, school leaders learn how to apply NISL's instructional coaching model with teachers in their schools. The coaching model is a formal process in which school leaders work with teachers over multiple cycles of coaching to improve teacher effectiveness. The model is designed to support teachers in core content areas like English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.

### Research Summary

The WWC identified six studies that investigated the effectiveness of NISL:

- Four studies do not meet WWC standards. Each of these four studies used a quasi-experimental design (QED), meaning the intervention and comparison groups were formed using a method other than random assignment (Corcoran, 2017; Nunnery et al., 2010a, 2010b; and Nunnery et al., 2011). In the absence of random assignment, QEDs must demonstrate that these two groups had similar characteristics at the outset of the study. None of the four studies provided the information the WWC needed to assess the similarity of their intervention and comparison groups, so they do not meet WWC standards.
- Two studies are ineligible for review. The WWC reviews studies that use designs with the greatest potential to yield credible evidence about the efficacy of an intervention, including group designs, regression discontinuity designs, and single-case designs. These two studies did not use a design eligible for review under the WWC's standards.

For more information on how the WWC assigns study ratings and determines study eligibility, please see the [WWC Procedures and Standards Handbooks \(version 4.0\)](#), [WWC Standards Briefs](#), and [WWC Process Briefs](#), available on the WWC website.

Full citations for the six studies reviewed for this report are listed in the References section. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions could change as new research becomes available.

### References<sup>3</sup>

#### Studies that do not meet WWC group design standards

- Corcoran, R. (2017). Preparing principals to improve student achievement. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 46(5), 769-781. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1155106>. The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the equivalence of the clusters in the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary but the requirement was not satisfied.
- Nunnery, J. A., Ross, S. M., & Yen, C. (2010a). *An examination of the effect of a pilot of the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program on school performance trends in Massachusetts*. Norfolk, VA: The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University. Retrieved from [https://www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/tcep/docs/16582\\_3\\_Mafinal\\_interim\\_report\\_08\\_23\\_2010.pdf](https://www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/tcep/docs/16582_3_Mafinal_interim_report_08_23_2010.pdf). The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the equivalence of the clusters in the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary but the requirement was not satisfied.
- Nunnery, J. A., Ross, S. M., & Yen, C. (2010b). *The effect of the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program on school performance trends in Pennsylvania*. Norfolk, VA: The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531041>. The study does not meet WWC group design standards because

the equivalence of the clusters in the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary but the requirement was not satisfied.

**Additional source:**

Nunnery, J. A., Yen, C., & Ross, S. M. (2011). *Effects of the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program on school performance in Pennsylvania: 2006-2010 pilot cohort results*. Norfolk, VA: The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531043>.

Nunnery, J. A., Ross, S. M., Chappell, S., Pribesh, S., & Hoag-Carhart, E. (2011). *The impact of the NISL Executive Development Program on school performance in Massachusetts: Cohort 2 results*. Norfolk, VA: The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531042>. The study does not meet WWC group design standards because the equivalence of the clusters in the analytic intervention and comparison groups is necessary but the requirement was not satisfied.<sup>4</sup>

### Studies that are ineligible for review using the School Leadership review protocol

Bunch, K. S. (2017). *Impact of nationally recognized professional development program for school leadership on leadership behavior*. (Doctoral dissertation, Western Illinois University). Available from ProQuest LLC. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582486>. This study is ineligible for review because it does not use a study design eligible for review under the WWC's group design standards, regression discontinuity design standards, or pilot single-case design standards, as described in the [WWC Standards Handbook \(Version 4.0\)](#).

Wang, E. L., Schwartz, H. L., Mean, M., Stelitano, L., & Master, B. K. (2019). *Putting professional learning to work: What principals do with their Executive Development Program learning*. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606171>. This study is ineligible for review because it does not use a study design eligible for review under the WWC's group design standards, regression discontinuity design standards, or pilot single-case design standards, as described in the [WWC Standards Handbook \(Version 4.0\)](#).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The descriptive information for this intervention comes from the developer's website (<https://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-system-leadership/high-performance-schools/nisl-program/>). What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) requests that developers review the intervention description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The WWC provided the developer the intervention description in June 2020 but did not receive a response. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this intervention is beyond the scope of this review.

<sup>2</sup> Several studies describe differences across school leaders in their impacts on student achievement, including [Dhuey and Smith \(2018\)](#); [Branch et al. \(2012\)](#); and [Leithwood et al. \(2004\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> The literature search reflects documents publicly available by October 2019. Reviews of the studies in this report used the standards from the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbooks (version 4.0) and the School Leadership review protocol (version 4.0). The WWC searched for studies that examined the effectiveness of NISL on the student, teacher, and school leader outcomes that are eligible for review under the School Leadership topic area protocol. For student outcomes, the eligible outcome domains are general literacy achievement, general mathematics achievement, general science achievement, general social studies achievement, general achievement, English language proficiency, staying in school, progression in school, completing school, student social interaction, observed individual behavior, student emotional status, and student engagement in school. For teacher outcomes, these domains are instructional practice, teacher attendance, teacher retention at the school, teacher retention in the school district, teacher retention in the state, and teacher retention in the profession. For school leaders, these outcome domains are leadership practice, school leader retention in the school district, school leader retention in the state, and school leader retention in the profession.

<sup>4</sup> In a prior review, this study was rated *Meets WWC Group Design Standards With Reservations* under a prior version of the WWC standards (version 2.1). The study is rated *Does Not Meet WWC Group Design Standards* in the review of evidence for this intervention report (using version 4.0 standards). The difference in the assigned rating is a result of the updated review standards. This study is reviewed for effects on clusters (schools), and under the version 4.0 standards, the study must demonstrate that the samples of students contributing baseline and outcome data to the analytic samples were representative of all students in those schools and this criterion was not met.

## Recommended Citation

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