

VaLIN 5.0: Program Impact

Full Report

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Introduction

The Virginia Learning Innovation Network (VaLIN) convened its Cohort 5.0 from October 2023 to June 2024. Facilitated by Commonwealth Learning Partnership and Advanced Learning Partnerships, VaLIN provides the ecosystem and resources to enable education leaders from every region of the Commonwealth to augment their leadership capacity through facilitated, application-based activities. Aligned to the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and other frameworks prioritized by Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Commonwealth Learning Partnership, VaLIN provides expanded opportunities for professional collaboration and networking within a vibrant communities of practice model.

With a shared vision of VaLIN 5.0 to unite educational leaders as a network to develop leadership capacity and to empower them to create conditions to transform learning communities, VaLIN 5.0 sought to enable educators to engage in deeper learning in schools and classrooms, ultimately resulting in students developing durable skills following Virginia's 5Cs (i.e., communicate, creatively problem-solve, think critically, collaborate, and engage in civic-mindedness) to thrive as future-ready graduates.

Following the success of capturing the growth and reflections among participants throughout the VaLIN 4.0 professional learning journey of the prior cohort, the VaLIN 5.0 cohort produced and shared outputs on a quarterly cycle to promote active collaboration in the network and document incremental growth as educational leaders.

Program Design

The scope of service of the VaLIN 5.0 program was comprised of the following:

1. Teams and individual participants (approximately 165 educators) from Virginia school divisions will enter a year-long engagement focused on leadership competency development aligned to the NELP Standards and the Profile of a Virginia Education Leader. Targeting site based and division leadership capacity, VaLIN 5.0 will supplement facilitated onsite experiences with individual/team coaching, goal aligned webinars, and self-assessment against validated metrics.
2. VaLIN 5.0 will prioritize applications from principals, assistant principals, and aspiring superintendents.
3. VaLIN 5.0 will work collaboratively with the Virginia Association of School Superintendents; inviting VaLIN 5.0 participants to engage in VASS

- webinars, in-person convenings and mentorship as applicable to the outcomes.
4. VaLIN 5.0 is a year-long commitment for all participants offering 4 in person convenings and monthly virtual and/or site based convenings for showcasing implementation of progress at the local level. Multiple webinars and virtual learning opportunities will occur using state and national educational experts for presentations/training.
 5. Participants will define their problem of practice and utilize this PofP to drive their customized coaching experience as a team and/or as an individual.
 6. Principals and aspiring superintendents will work in birds of a feather grouping and will also cross-pollinate across the cohort as they seek solutions and strategies to address the problem of practice specific to their community.

Coaching Process

The scaled implementation of VaLIN Cohort 5.0 began in September 2023. Coaches were assigned regional participant teams. Each participant undertook one of two pathways, as depicted in Table 1. For Pathway A, the coaching process involved identifying problems of focus within the division's participating communities of practice in order to facilitate an effective collaboration. For Pathway B, coaches collaborated with individual educational leaders around the formulation of professional goals aligned to National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards and a personalized leadership learning plan. Within their respective plans, Virginia education leaders identified one contribution per quarter (fall, winter, spring, and summer) and committed to fulfilling this through their involvement within their selected initiative. Coaching conversations took place throughout the entire VaLIN 5.0 program to provide customized learning and feedback for participants.

Table 1: VaLIN 5.0 Participant Pathways

	Pathway A Cross-Divisional Communities of Practice	Pathway B Empowered Educational Leadership Development
Goals	Identifying problems of focus within the division's participating communities of practice in order to facilitate an effective collaboration	Formulation of professional goals aligned to National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards and a personalized leadership learning plan
Coaching	Through a mix of cross-divisional onsite events and team-based coaching, teams will advance a local initiative associated with the focus of the Community of Practice.	Through cohort-wide experiences, competency-aligned webinars, and personalized coaching, participants exhibit demonstrable growth using validated metrics.
Measurable Outcomes	Perceptions of Community of Practices	National Education Leadership Program (NELP) Competencies

Survey Measures

At each convening (i.e., cohort launch, mid-year, and final), a survey was distributed to have participants reflect on their learning, set goals for the next quarter (for Time 1 and Time 2 only) and also provide feedback on the convening sessions. Below are the key measures that were included. All questions were included in all three surveys (unless specified otherwise).

Intention to Pursue Superintendency or Leadership Roles

We assessed participants' intention to pursue district superintendency and other leadership roles. Three questions were asked regarding their leadership role pursuit.

1. Which of the following best describe your current intent regarding pursuing superintendency?
 - I definitely intend to pursue superintendency in the next 1-3 years.
 - I definitely intend to pursue superintendency but later in my career.
 - I am considering the possibility of pursuing a superintendency but am not yet definite.
 - I do not foresee myself pursuing a superintendency in my career.
2. Which of the following best describe your current intent regarding pursuing other leadership roles?
 - I definitely intend to pursue other leadership roles in the next 1-3 years.
 - I definitely intend to pursue other leadership roles but later in my career.
 - I am considering the possibility of pursuing other leadership roles but am not yet definite.
 - I do not foresee myself pursuing other leadership roles in my career.
3. What types of leadership positions in your district that you are interested in pursuing? (open text box allowed for specific title/areas of focus)
 - District Departmental Director
 - District Executive Director
 - Superintendent cabinet (Associate or Deputy Superintendent, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Technology Officer, etc.)
 - District Departmental Coordinator or Specialist
 - Other (Please specify)

Perceptions of Community of Practice (Pathway A participants only)

Items for Perceptions of VaLIN Community of Practice were adapted from Wan's (2020) scale that measured teacher perceptions of professional learning communities (PLCs). Items were adapted to reflect district educational leaders work in PLCs, which was referred to as "Community of Practice" as that was the term used for PLC in VaLIN 5.0.

The response scale was comprised of the following levels: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - Neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree.

Participants responded to the following prompts:

In my VaLIN Community of Practice, we...

Collective Focus on Student Learning

1. learn and practice ways to build shared responsibility for student learning in our schools and districts.
2. learn about school and/or district-wide instructional strategies for building student confidence in their learning endeavors.
3. learn about design of school and/or district-wide student achievement goals.

Reflective Dialogue

4. have opportunities to share our evidence-based approaches to improve our practice as education leaders.
5. share our approaches for collecting and integrating relevant data into our decision making.
6. share our process for experimenting and innovating in our practice as education leaders.
7. have opportunities to reflect on our learning with one another.
8. collaborate in finding opportunities to improve our districts.

Based on your involvement with your VaLIN Community of Practice, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

9. I feel supported by my community of practice to explore my influence in important district decision-making opportunities.

10. Through my participation in the VaLIN community of practice, we are proactively working to address important needs of our district.
11. Our community of practice shares the responsibility and recognition for our collective work in VaLIN.
12. In my VaLIN community of practice, we maintain a supportive and inclusive culture with shared leadership responsibilities.

Additionally, ALP Coaches rated these questions at both mid-year and end-of-year reflections.

Also, participants responded to an open-ended question: “How have your cross-division Community of Practice/Professional Learning Community experiences in VaLIN 5.0 contributed to your experiences as Professional Learning Community within your own division?”

NELP Competencies (Pathway B participants only)

Participants in Pathway B selected one of the seven NELP standards that might be most aligned to their project work, goals, and areas to build their leadership capacity during the program. All overview descriptions below are excerpted from the NELP Preparation Standards for District Leaders (NPBEA, 2018) with corresponding page citations.

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement

Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to collaboratively lead, design, and implement a school mission, vision, and process for continuous improvement that reflects a core set of values and priorities that include data use, technology, equity, diversity, digital citizenship, and community (NPBEA, 2018, p. 11).

Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and wellbeing of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to understand and demonstrate the capacity to advocate for ethical decisions and cultivate professional norms and culture (NPBEA, 2018, p. 12).

Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness and Cultural Responsiveness

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and wellbeing of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to develop and maintain a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive district culture (NPBEA, 2018, p. 14).

Standard 4: Learning and Instruction

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and wellbeing of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to evaluate, design, cultivate, and implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, data systems, supports, assessment, and instructional leadership (NPBEA, 2018, p. 17).

Standard 5: Community and External Leadership

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and wellbeing of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to understand and engage families, communities, and other constituents in the work of schools and the district and to advocate for district, student, and community needs (NPBEA, 2018, p. 20).

Standard 6: Operations and Management

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and wellbeing of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to develop, monitor, evaluate, and manage data-informed and equitable district systems for operations, resources, technology, and human capital management (NPBEA, 2018, p. 23).

Standard 7: Policy, Governance, and Advocacy

Candidates who successfully complete a district-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the

present and future success and wellbeing of students and district personnel by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to cultivate relationships, lead collaborative decision making and governance, and represent and advocate for district needs in broader policy conversations (NPBEA, 2018, p. 26).

VaLIN 5.0 participants reflected on all seven competencies across three timepoints. At the Time 1 and Time 2 survey, they were asked to choose one competency area to focus on in their project work for more spotlight coaching and development.

All NELP Competency areas have been validated and used in the past (VaLIN 4.0 and VASS Coaching). The reflection scale is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: VaLIN NELP Progression Reflection Scale

Entry (1) - No past experience and/or opportunities with this standard or its components' competencies.
Approaching (2) - Some experience assisting and/or supporting larger initiative(s) and efforts related to the standard at school or district level based on assigned work. Has begun applying some content knowledge and understanding of some of the standards' components competencies.
Practicing (3) - Experience implementing initiatives at the school and/or district level. Leverages teams and larger scope of influence. Regularly demonstrates and applies working content knowledge and understanding of most standards' components.
Facilitating (4) - Demonstrated leadership in building supporting systems and facilitating community, district, and schools' effective implementation of standards' components. Advanced application of content knowledge and understanding of district systems' design, evaluation, implementation, and ongoing improvement as it relates to the standard's focus area.

Additionally, coaches rated participants using similar versions of the NELP competencies at both mid-year and end-of-year reflections.

Program Learning Goal Achievement

Participants also responded to prompts regarding their achievement of program learning goals using a similar five-point response scale (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - Neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree).

The following items refer to the project goal for community of practice and NELP leadership development for which the participant had a goal or wanted to learn about.

1. I met the goals and achieved the outcomes that I planned for this [area of focus OR competency].
2. I practiced for this [area of focus OR competency] at the planned place with the planned individual(s).
3. I implemented the actions that I planned for this [area of focus OR competency development].
4. I am satisfied with my growth and development for this [area of focus OR competency].

Feedback Quality

Participants also rated the quality of the feedback they received from their ALP coaches drawing upon prompts original developed by Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004), again using the five-point scale as with other subscales above.

1. My coach gives me useful feedback about my artifacts (e.g., project or other evidence of practice & growth).
2. The feedback I receive from my coach is helpful.
3. I value the feedback I receive from my coach.
4. The feedback I receive from my coach helps me move forward with my practice & growth goal.
5. The information I receive from my coach is generally very meaningful.

Professional Learning Evaluation with Kirkpatrick Model

Participants also rated their professional learning experiences and initial learning outcomes as well as longer term behavioral and impact outcomes using Kirkpatrick's (1994) model.

Level 1: Reaction

The PL facilitator...

1. was very knowledgeable on the content covered.
2. demonstrated understanding of groups' learning needs based on the session's learning goals, activities, and design.
3. kept me engaged in learning from the session's start to its finish.
4. was interesting and held my attention throughout the session.

5. delivered a well-planned session that was tailored to the learning needs of the group.
6. understood the learning needs of the group and adjusted the session accordingly.
7. managed time well and was organized.
8. facilitated an organized and managed flow of information and activities.
9. provided materials, handouts, and digital resources that contributed to my professional learning.
10. handled challenges with technology (if any) and quickly resolved issues.
11. facilitated participants' voices and choices to drive the session's learning outcomes and activities.

Level 2: Before and After Understanding

(Response scale of Not Familiar 2. Somewhat Familiar 3. Familiar 4. Good Understanding 5. Deep Understanding)

1. Indicate the statement that best describes your understanding of [chosen topic or competency] BEFORE you participated in professional learning.
2. Indicate the statement that best describes your understanding of [chosen topic or competency] AFTER you participated in professional learning.

Level 3: Before and After Application

(Response scale of 1. Never 2. Seldom 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Very Often)

1. Please describe the frequency with which you have correctly applied [chosen topic or competency], BEFORE you participated in the professional learning session, in your daily work as an educator.
2. Please describe the frequency with which you anticipate correctly applying [chosen topic or competency] (whether formally or informally) in your future daily work as an educator.

Commitment to the VaLIN 5.0 Change Initiative

Participants also rated their level of understanding and perceptions of the VaLIN 5.0 initiative across the Commonwealth of Virginia and how this initiative supported their work and contributions to their respective school divisions. Prompts included:

1. This professional learning session nicely supports my contributions to initiatives within my district.

2. I have sufficient resources (e.g., prep time, learning materials) to fully participate in the VaLIN 5.0 initiative.
3. I believe in the value of the VaLIN 5.0 initiative.
4. I am clear on how this professional learning session supports my work in my district.
5. My district/school provides me with support (time and resources) to effectively participate in VaLIN 5.0.
6. My participation in VaLIN 5.0 is good for my district.

Data Collection Timeline

We conducted program baseline, mid-point, and final data collection to allow for longitudinal repeated-measures analysis that informed program implementation and adjustments as well as overall impact. Table 3 lists all the events and data collection time points.

Table 3: VaLIN 5.0 Events and Data Collection

October 4, 2023: Cohort 5.0 Launch
● Demographics ● Pathway A - Perception of Community of Practice ● Pathway B - NELP Competency ● Documentation of aligned SMART GOAL ● Intent to pursue superintendency and other leadership roles ● Kirkpatrick professional learning reflection ● Time to Complete: 20 minutes
February 7, 2024: Mid-Year Convening
● Pathway A - Perception of Community of Practice ● Pathway B - NELP Competency ● Documentation of aligned SMART GOAL ● Goal achievement and feedback quality ● Intent to pursue superintendency and other leadership roles ● Kirkpatrick professional learning reflection ● Time to Complete: 20 minutes
Regional Coach Feedback 1
● Coaches complete team-level project-progress assessment and qualitative feedback on strengths and next steps.

June 27, 2024: Summer Onsite Convening

- Pathway A - Perception of Community of Practice
- Pathway B - NELP Competency
- Goal achievement and feedback quality
- Intent to pursue superintendency and other leadership roles
- Kirkpatrick professional learning reflection
- Time to Complete: 15 minutes

Regional Coach Feedback 2

- Coaches complete team-level project-progress assessment and qualitative feedback on strengths and next steps.

Analysis of Survey Results

Program Progress Monitoring

To inform program implementation, formative analysis was conducted throughout the cohort experience. We created the VaLIN 5.0 Reflection Cycle Dashboard, which provides data visualizations for real time data, both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (textual) data. The dashboard was used for coaches to inform their practices and program implementation in various ways, including but not limited to:

- Understand the demographic and professional composition of the participants, e.g., coaching region, school district, years of experience (educator, and educational leadership), job level, age, gender, and race/ ethnicity.
- Track and reflect on the participant's goal-setting journey.
- Track and reflect on participants' rating on their coach's feedback quality.

Program Effectiveness

In addition to the dashboard, quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted at the conclusion of all VaLIN 5.0 events to demonstrate program effectiveness through participants' reflection of learning and growth across three timepoints and coaches' reflection of participant learning at the midpoint and end of the program.

Participants in VaLIN 5.0

VaLIN 5.0 was comprised of 119 unique participants from 19 school divisions across Virginia. Table 4 depicts the participating school divisions, their focused learning pathway, and their VDOE designated Superintendents Region. About two-thirds (68%) of the participating school divisions (13 of 19) were in the pathway that involves team-based communities of practice working on a problem of focus collectively, and 8 divisions were in the Pathway B, such that individual participants focused on their own leadership capacity development. Two divisions had participants in both pathways.

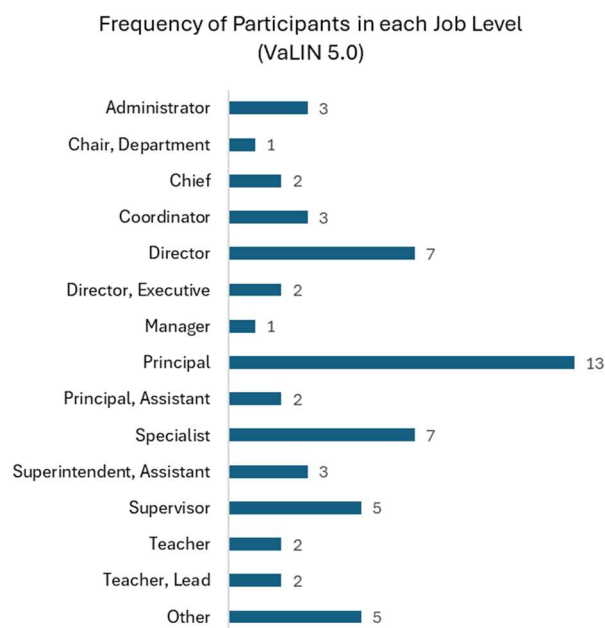
Table 4: Participating Divisions by region and their learning pathway and topic of focus.

Region	Division	Learning Pathway (# of participants)	High-Level Topic of Focus
Region 1 - Central Virginia	Chesterfield	Pathway A (8)	A3: Innovate Approaches to Teacher Professional Learning
	Goochland	Pathway B (3)	B1: Principal Leadership Capacity
	Henrico	Pathway A (12)	A4: Integrate and Leverage Balanced Assessment Systems
	Hopewell	Pathway B (2)	B2: Division Leadership Capacity
	Powhatan	Pathway A (10)	A5: Engage with Families and the Community
	Richmond	Pathway B (1)	B2: Division Leadership Capacity
Region 2 - Tidewater	Virginia Beach	Pathway A (3)	A4: Integrate and Leverage Balanced Assessment Systems
		Pathway B (1)	B1: Principal Leadership Capacity
Region 3 - Northern Neck	Fredericksburg	Pathway A (8)	A4: Integrate and Leverage Balanced Assessment Systems
		Pathway B (1)	B1: Principal Leadership Capacity
	Stafford	Pathway A (9)	A1: Activate Local Learner Profile, Durable Skills, and 5Cs
	Westmoreland	Pathway A (3)	A1: Activate Local Learner Profile, Durable Skills, and 5Cs
Region 4 - Northern Virginia	Fairfax	Pathway A (8)	A4: Integrate and Leverage Balanced Assessment Systems
	Loudoun	Pathway A (7)	A4: Integrate and Leverage Balanced Assessment Systems
	Manassas	Pathway B (1)	B1: Principal Leadership Capacity
Region 5 - Valley	Louisa	Pathway A (8)	A5: Engage with Families and the Community
	Lynchburg	Pathway A (7)	A1: Activate Local Learner Profile, Durable Skills, and 5Cs
Region 6 - Western Virginia	Salem	Pathway B (8)	B1: Principal Leadership Capacity
Region 8 - Southside	Cumberland	Pathway A (9)	A5: Engage with Families and the Community
	Greensville	Pathway B (1)	B2: Division Leadership Capacity
Postsecondary Institution	Virginia State University	Pathway A (8)	A3: Innovate Approaches to Teacher Professional Learning

Note. Pathway A: Team-based Communities of Practice; Pathway B: Individual Leadership Development

As depicted in Figure 1, the VaLIN 5.0 cohort was comprised primarily of school principals.

Figure 1: Participants by Position



Participation in and Perceived Effectiveness of VaLIN 5.0 Convenings and Activities

VaLIN 5.0 is a year-long commitment for all participants offering four in-person convenings and monthly virtual and/or site-based convenings for showcasing implementation of progress at the local level. Multiple webinars and virtual learning opportunities occurred using state and national educational experts for presentations/training.

Relevance and Effectiveness of Coaching Experiences

As depicted in Figures 2 and 3, across three regional convening professional learning, participants reported improvement in their understanding of and intent to apply the focused topic area(s) in their daily work, signaling the effectiveness of the VaLIN 5.0 convening and collective learning experiences in contributing to their project design and leadership development.

Figure 2:

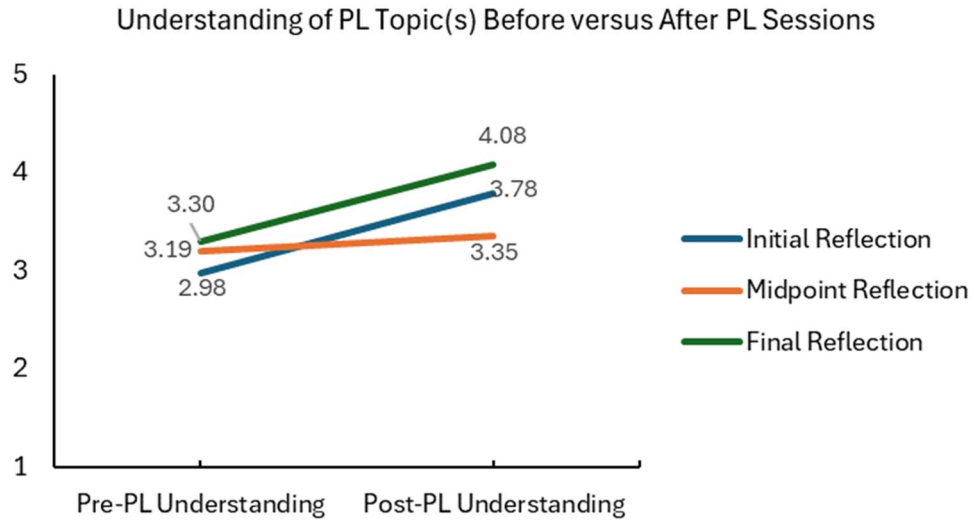
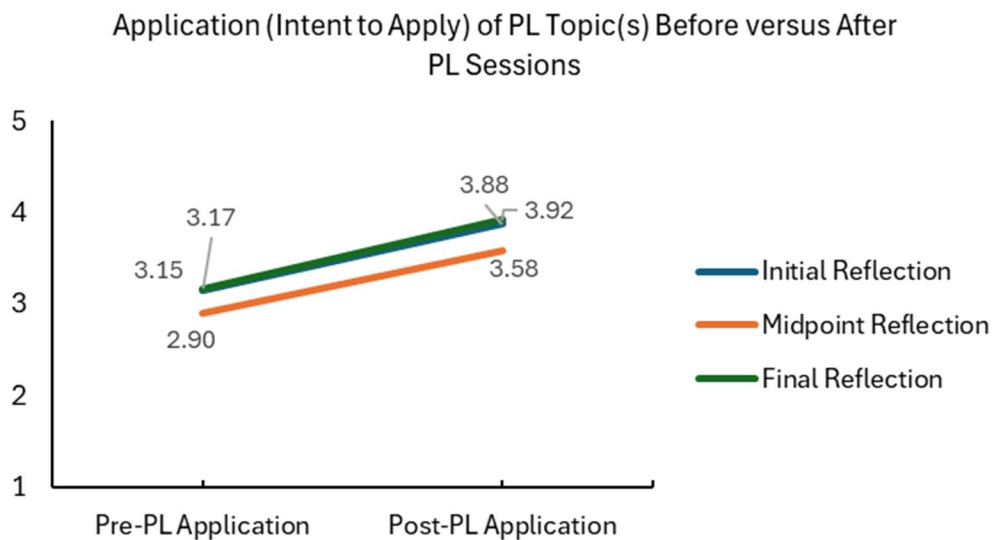


Figure 3:



Participants' Development of Educational Leadership Competencies

Figure 4 depicts participants' self-reflection and coaches' reflection on three dimensions of perceptions on communities of practice. These three dimensions are collective focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, and shared and supportive leadership. On average, participants reported positively towards all three aspects of perceptions of the community of practice. Moreover, coaches provided relatively higher ratings for participants at the end of the program, representing the improvement of collaborative learning in division's projects.

Figure 4: Self- and Coach Reflection of Perceptions of Community of Practices across Three Dimensions

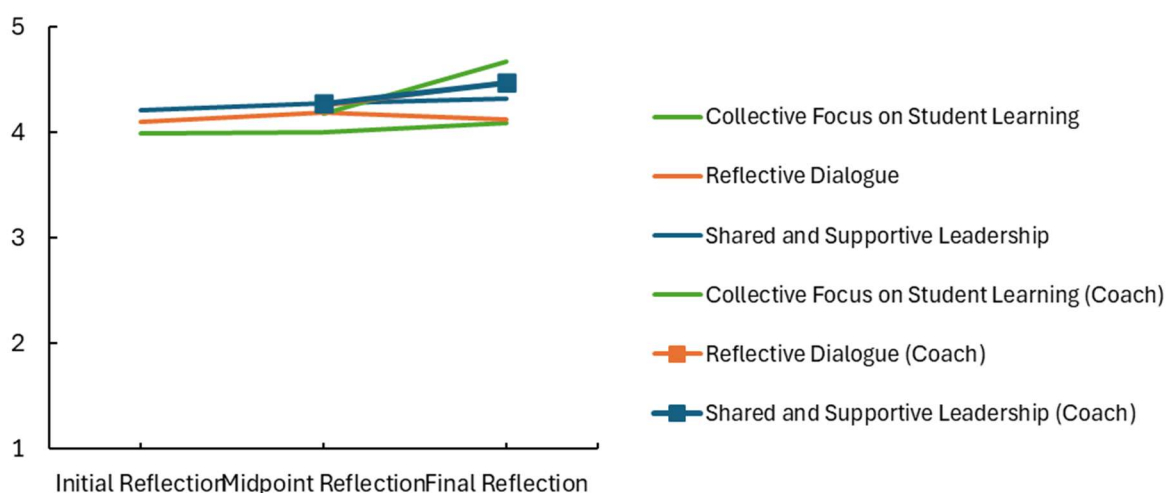
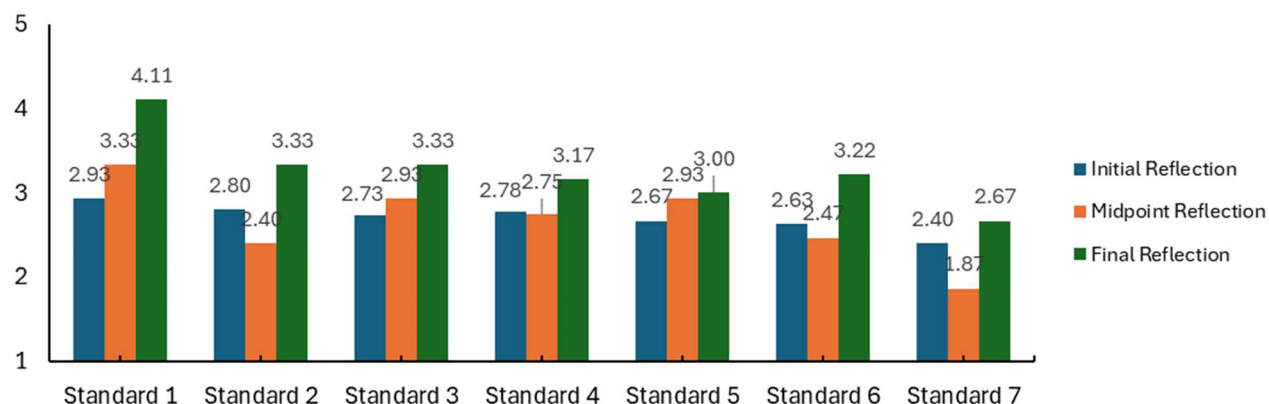


Figure 5 depicts individual reflections on their development of various leadership competencies from the NELP Standards for those in Pathway B. Overall, all participants demonstrated improvements in enhancing their experiences and skills in all competencies. Specifically, Standard 1 focusing on mission, vision, and improvement and Standard 6 focusing on operations and management had the most significant improvement across time. Many of VaLIN participants were leaders either at the school or at the district level, so choosing to develop competencies in areas like strategic planning and overall management was critical to their professional learning.

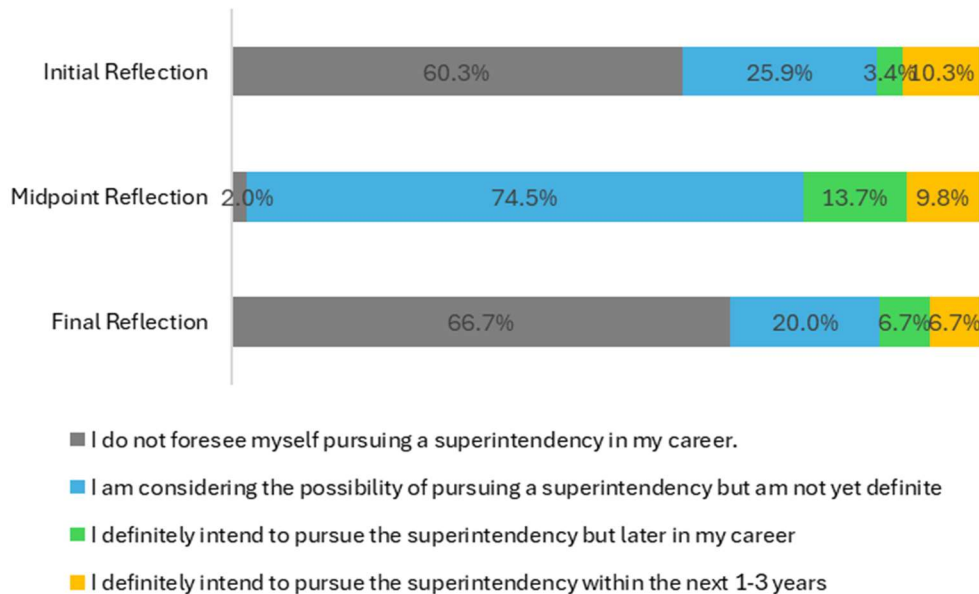
Figure 5: Self-Evaluations of Participants' Development of NLP Competencies



Intent to Pursue the Superintendency or Other Leadership Role

Figure 6 depicts that across three timepoints we surveyed participants, we found that more than 75% of participants of each timepoint reported they either do not foresee themselves pursuing a superintendency or they might consider the possibility but not yet determined.

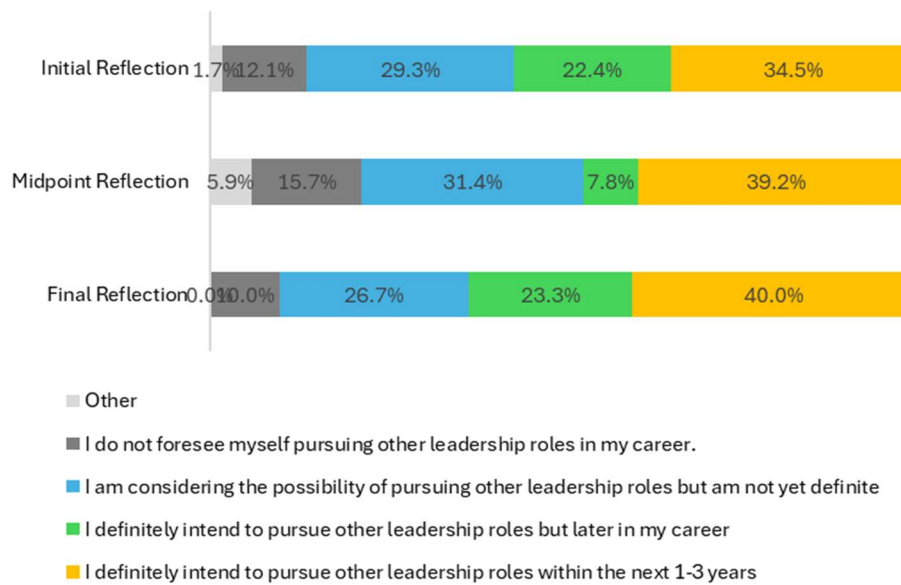
Figure 6: VaLIN 5.0 Results for Intention to Pursue the Superintendency



In addition, one important reflection we had from VaLIN 4.0 was that educators may have interest in pursuing other education leadership roles. We included questions on participants' intent to pursue other leadership roles. Figure 7 below shows that, on

average, about 50% of participants across all three reflection timepoints reported they intended to pursue other leadership roles either within the next 1-3 years or later in their career. This demonstrates that participants of the VaLIN program are driven to leverage this professional learning opportunity for their career development.

Figure 7: VaLIN 5.0 Results for Intention to Pursue Other Leadership Roles



Focus Group Results

In this section, we present the evaluation findings and recommendations derived from two focus group interviews, which for the purpose of analysis, are combined as one focus group. A pool of more than 30 high-activity participants in the Virginia Leads Innovation Network (VaLIN) 5.0 were identified by the VaLIN leadership team, and this sample of possible focus group participants were invited by e-mail to participate in the focus group. The focus group was important to include in the program evaluation as it offered valuable insight into participants' experiences regarding the quality, utilization, and satisfaction of the activities, support, and resources provided to educators in leadership positions. Through this method, we gathered insights, feelings, and experiences from a small sample of participants who shared their experiences, which aided in identifying successful aspects of the program and areas for improvement.

Four members of the evaluation team conducted the focus group, which lasted approximately 50 minutes. One member served as the moderator, facilitating participant responses, guiding contributions to the discussion, and summarizing key takeaways for clarification. Two other members took field notes. A fourth member was responsible for the virtual Zoom session, and they posted prompts, launched poll questions, and monitored participants' responses in the chat box. We did not audio or video record the focus groups to ensure an environment conducive to sharing experiences. We subsequently analysed their real-time notes using an inductive content approach.

Demographics of Focus Group

Four educators from four different school divisions participated in the VaLIN 5.0 focus group. As indicated in Figure 8, participants' experience in the profession ranged from 13 to 36 years, with an average of 26 years of experience. As shown in Figure 9, three of the eight VDOE Superintendent Regions were represented in the focus groups. For the protection of the participants, no other demographic data were collected. It is also important to acknowledge the relatively low participation rate. Despite multiple e-mail invitations to the pool of potential focus group participants and the offering of multiple dates and times for the focus group, the participation rate was low. Anecdotally, a number of invited VaLIN 5.0 members who did not participate in the focus group indicated that the dates conflicted with other professional and personal obligations but that they would otherwise have participated in the focus group.

Figure 8: Participants' Years of Experience in Education

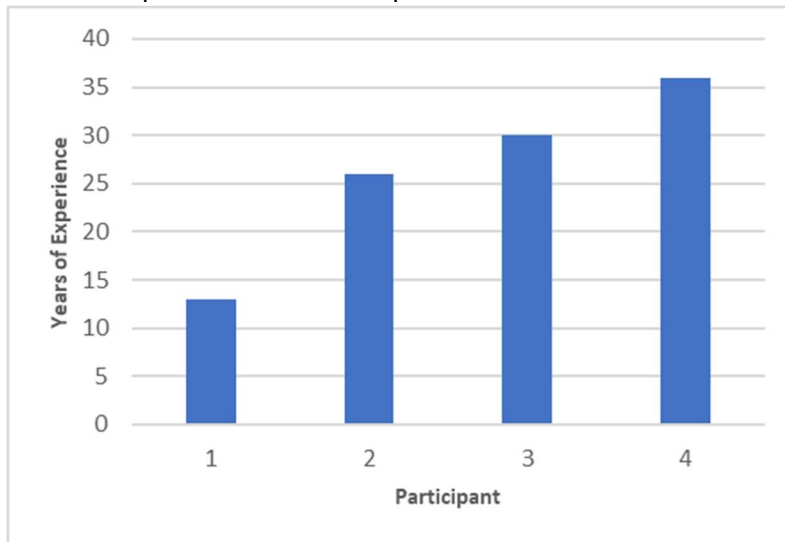
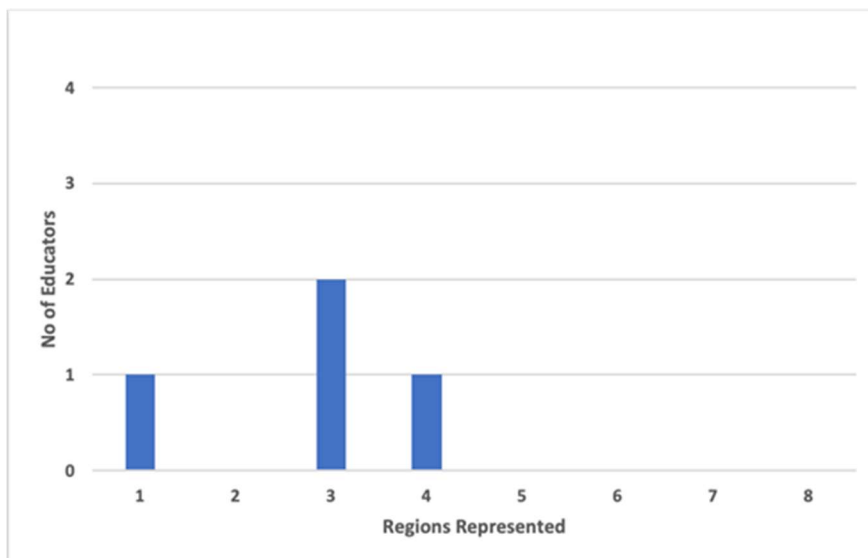
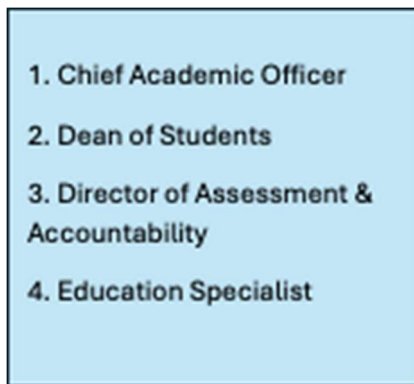


Figure 9: Focus Group Participant Representation by VDOE Regions



The focus group participants represented a variety of educational positions within the system of their respective school divisions. Figure 10 provides a list of the four participants' different positions. It is important to note that each school division's leadership titles are different, and the localities can choose their roles based on their needs. Therefore, some titles may be present in one division while others might not be used in other school divisions.

Figure 10: Focus Group Participants by Positions Titles



Findings

The moderator asked the participants the following questions concerning the VaLIN 5.0. These experiences included: division and individual coaching sessions; in-person Convenings (which occurred in September, February, and June); a virtual convening (November); online professional learning experiences (e.g., fall webinars, winter podcast series); leadership competency breakout sessions; and presentations by state or national experts on special topics. Probing questions were also posed by the moderator to prompt thinking and encourage discussion. Questions included:

1. Which VaLIN experiences were most impactful for you and why?
 - a. Which activities were most impactful in terms of positively contributing to your sense of self-efficacy for “leading from the seat you’re in”?
 - b. What characteristics about the content, timing, and/or format of these activities contributed to their impact for you?
 - c. Did you participate in any events hosted by VASS (the Virginia Association of School Superintendents), such as its Fall or Spring conference? If so, how impactful were the events for you?
2. What problem of practice did your team address, and briefly state the innovation that your team worked on through VaLIN.
 - a. Using the following innovation implementation framework, identify the current status of your team’s project (Polling question with a multiple-choice answer).
 - b. Which VaLIN activities contributed to your or your team’s work on developing innovative practices in your division?
3. To what degree has your participation in VaLIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your sense of self-efficacy for leading from the seat you are in? (Polling question with multiple choice answers).

4. To what degree has your participation in VALIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your interest in pursuing a formal leadership role in education (e.g., moving from teacher to department chair or assistant principal) or moving into a leadership role of great scope and/or responsibility? (Polling question with multiple choice answers).
5. To what degree has your participation in VaLIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your possible interest in one day leading a school division as a superintendent? (Polling question with multiple choice answers).
6. One goal of VaLIN 5.0 was to provide opportunities for individuals (in similar roles) to collaborate with other individuals in other school divisions in similar roles.
 - a. Did you participate in this kind of opportunity for collaboration between school divisions?
 - b. If you did participate in such an opportunity, how effective was it in helping you to exchange ideas on how to address a problem of practice?
7. VaLIN will continue this coming school year as VaLIN 6.0.
 - a. What would you absolutely NOT want to change about VaLIN? (In other words, what would you definitely keep?)
 - b. What would you recommend to strengthen VaLIN program and activities?
8. Those are all of our focus questions. Is there anything else that you would like to say before we conclude today?

The findings are presented in three parts: (1) participation in and value of VaLIN 5.0 activities, (2) project progress on problem of practice, (3) goal attainment of the VaLIN 5.0 initiative, and (4) recommendations emanating from the focus group.

Participation and Value of VTLA Activities

Table 5 provides an overview of the participation and value of VaLIN 5.0 activities, including the number of focus group participants who participated in each VaLIN activity, what participants affirmed about the activities they participated in, and their recommendations for VaLIN moving forward to VaLIN 6.0 to further improve their activities in the upcoming 2024-2025 academic year.

Table 5: Overview of Participation and Value of VaLIN 5.0 Activities in the 2023-2024 Academic Year

Activity	Number of (n=4) participants who attended	Participants' affirmations of VaLIN 5.0 activities (i.e., what participants valued about the activity)	Participants' recommendations related to each specific activity
Division and Individual Coaching Sessions	2	Of the two members who discussed their interaction with an Advanced Learning Partnerships (ALP) coach, they found the coach to be professional and someone that they "liked." However, only one participant was able to verbalize how their interaction was professionally conducive to their problem of practice.	The participants felt the interactions were productive when the coach provided autonomy and probing questions when necessary.

In-Person Convenings (i.e., September, February, and June)	4	● All four participants preferred to attend the in-person convenings, as they expressed value in leaving their own spaces to connect with other school divisions and with colleagues from their own divisions. ● Innovation within collaboration was front and center in the comments from all four participants. ● One participant voiced concerns about their division team's composition, noting that (a) they were not certain how or who identified the team and (b) they hoped team members would be permitted/encouraged to participate in the upcoming year for the sake of continuity... ● Another participant expressed concern about how the problem-of-practice teams were created by the VaLIN facilitators during the in-person session, as similar school divisions were paired up from previous years. For example, one school division had been paired with another school division over the years rather than collaborating with a third school division, between which collaboration might not have occurred before. ● Three participants voiced concerns about the organization of how the problem of practice presentation was structured. By the same token, they felt that VaLIN provided them with space and time to work on the project. ● The surveys at the end of the in-person convening were too long and caused fatigue. ● One participant was unclear on how VaLIN was structured overall, as it was "thrown" at them. Therefore, they attended the in-person convenings but were unaware of other VaLIN services.	● Participants expressed the benefits of continuing to recruit innovative people to be part of VaLIN. ● Participants indicated it would be beneficial if the internal division teams attending VaLIN were to be consistent over the years. ● Participants suggested that it would be helpful to reorganize the problem of practice delivery so that it is defined within the first in-person convening. ● Participants were aware of their ability to connect for collaboration but would have appreciated having more time and space to connect with whom they saw as an asset for networking their problem of practice. ● Participants suggested to shortening the surveys at the end of the in-person convenings to avoid redundancy and to respect participants' time. ● One participant mentioned that scheduling conflicts were an issue for the June in person convening, as June is a busy month for most divisions and many professional conferences are also held at the end of June.
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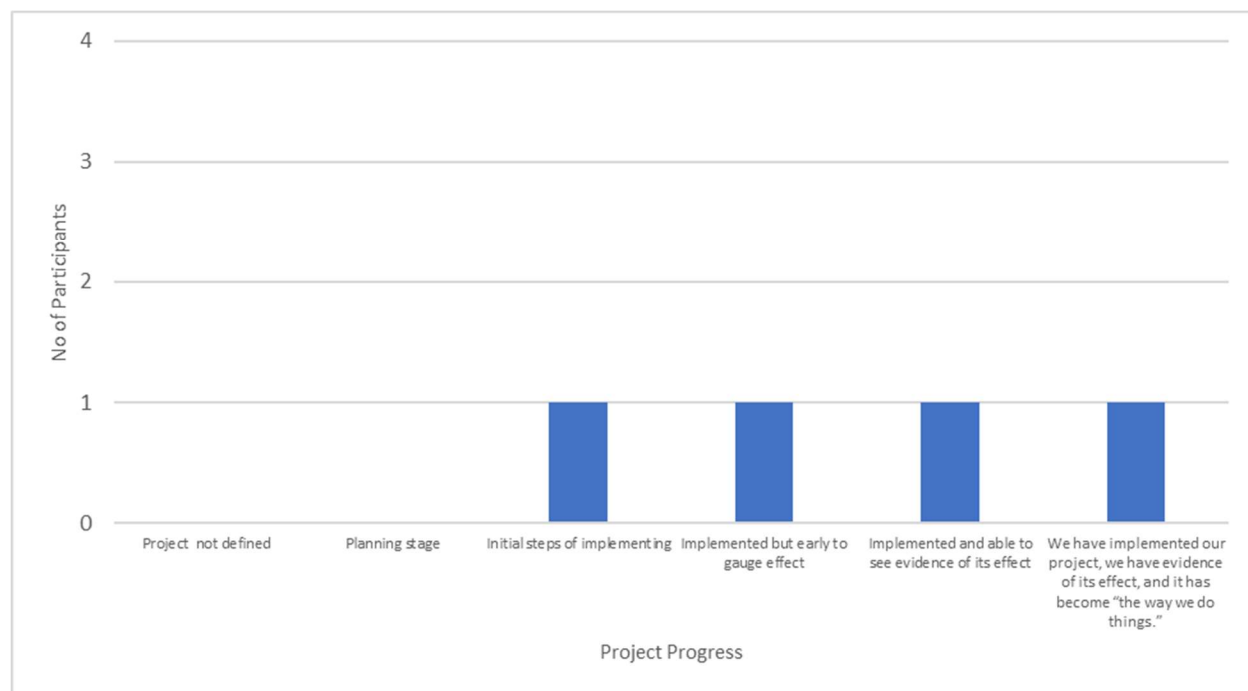
Activity	Number of (n=4) participants who attended	Participants' affirmations of VaLIN 5.0 activities (i.e., what participants valued about the activity)	Participants' recommendations related to each specific activity
Virtual Convening (November)	0	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>
Online Professional Learning Experience (e.g., fall webinars, winter podcast series)	0	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>
Leadership Competency Breakout Sessions	0	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>	<i>No comments related to this activity.</i>
Presentations by state or national experts on special topics	3	● Three participants took part in the presentations during the in-person convening. ● No participants took advantage of the VASS Fall or Spring Conferences. ● Some participants mentioned that certain presentations were irrelevant to their specific problem of practice.	● Participants expressed that shorter and more relevant presentations would be beneficial.

Project Progress on Problem of Practice

Focus group participants were asked to respond anonymously to identify the current status of their team's project. Participants were given six options via Zoom's poll function to identify the current status of their team's project. The six choices included: (a) Our project is not yet defined; (b) We are in the planning stage; (c) We are in the initial steps of implementing; (d) We have implemented our project but it is too early to gauge the effect; (e) We have implemented our project, and we are able to see evidence of its effect (or lack of effect); and (f) We have implemented our project, we have evidence of its effect, and it has become 'the way we do things'. Figure 11 presents the findings regarding the project's status. One participant reported they were in the initial steps of implementing, another indicated they had implemented but it was too early to gauge the

effect, a third noted they had implemented and were able to see evidence of its effect, and the fourth participant stated their project had been implemented, evidence of its effect was available, and it had become 'the way we do things'

Figure 11: VaLIN 5.0 Project Progress



Goal Attainment

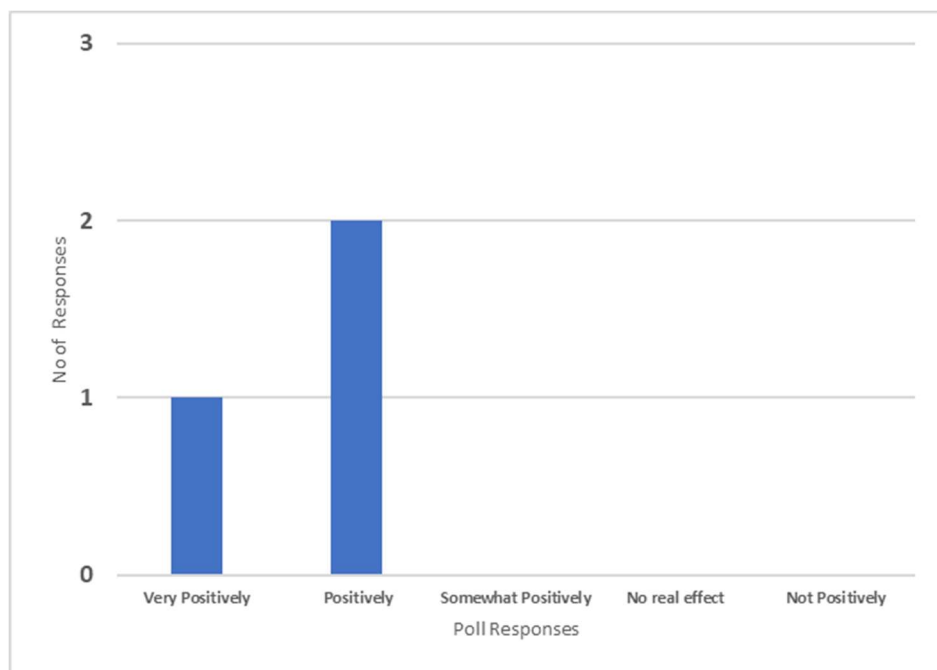
Focus group participants were asked to anonymously respond to three questions: one about how their participation in VaLIN 5.0 has influenced their sense of self-efficacy for leading in their current roles, another about their interest in pursuing formal leadership roles in education, and a third about their intention in potentially leading a school division as a superintendent. They answered these questions using a five-point Likert scale through Zoom's poll function. The five answer choices included "very positively," "positively," "somewhat positively," "no real effect," and "not positively."

Sense of Self-Efficacy for Leading

Figure 12 shows the results of the question about participants' sense of self-efficacy, specifically in answer to the question: "To what degree has your participation in VALIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your sense of self-efficacy for leading from the seat you are in?" All respondents felt that VaLIN 5.0 had a positive effect on their sense of self-efficacy for leading from their current position. One (33 %) participant responded that their self-efficacy was 'very positively' affected by participating in VaLIN

5.0 this past school year. In comparison, two (67 %) participants responded that VaLIN 5.0 'positively' contributed to their sense of self-efficacy. Note that one participant did not answer this particular question, so the results reflect the feedback from those who did respond.

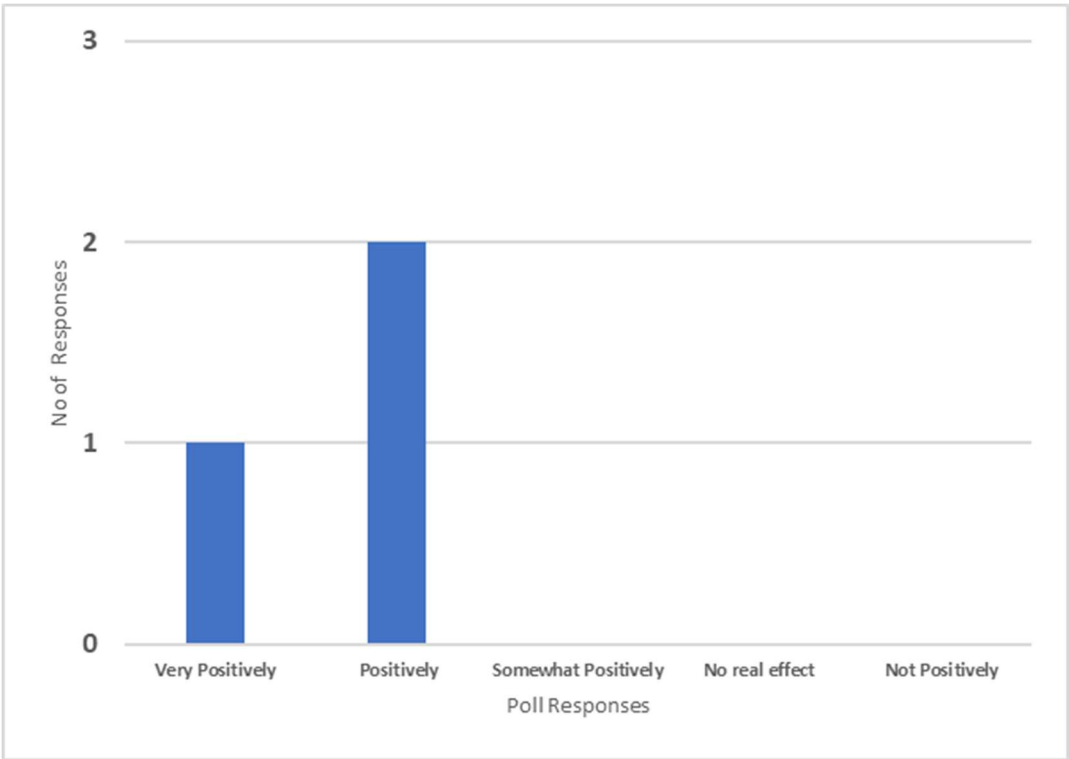
Figure 12: VaLIN 5.0 Poll Results for Self-Efficacy for Leading in Current Role



Interest in Formal Leadership Roles

Figure 13 presents the results of the question about their interest in pursuing formal leadership roles in education, “To what degree has your participation in VALIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your interest in pursuing a formal leadership role in education or moving into a leadership role of great scope and/or responsibility?” Two (67%) participants responded that their interest in pursuing a formal leadership role in education (e.g., moving from teacher to department chair or assistant principal) or moving into a leadership role of greater scope and responsibility was 'somewhat positively' affected, while one (33%) participant said there was 'no real effect'. None of the participants reported that VaLIN 5.0 had a very positive or positive effect on their interest in pursuing a formal leadership role in education. It is important to note that one participant was not asked this question, so their response is not represented in the results.

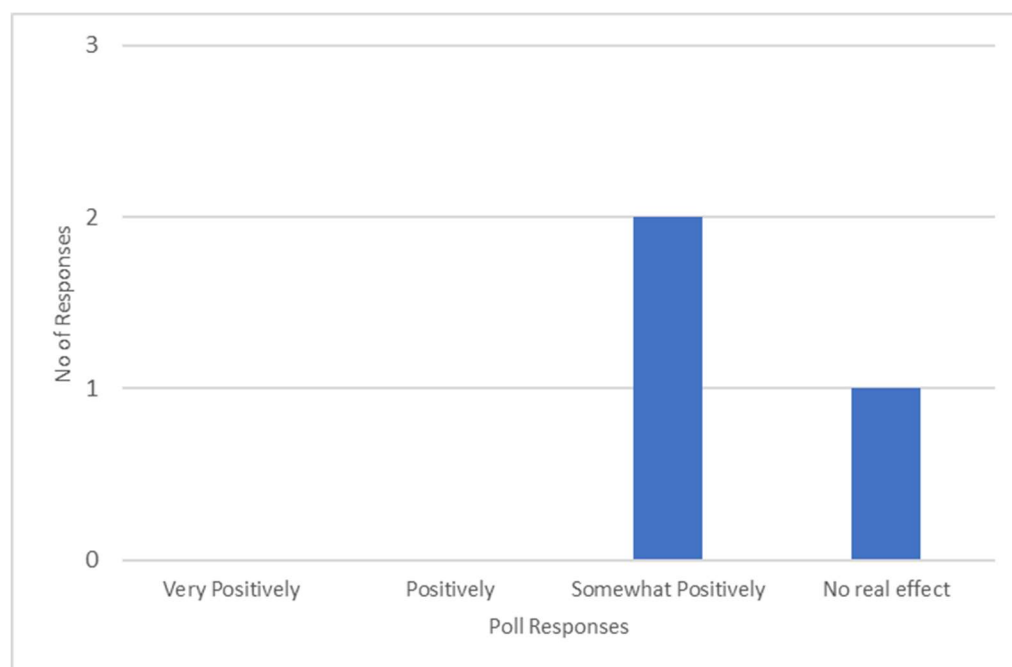
Figure 12: VaLIN 5.0 Poll Results for Interest in Formal Leadership Roles



Intention to Pursue Superintendency

Figure 13 presents the results of the question about intention: “To what degree has your participation in VaLIN 5.0 this past school year positively contributed to your possible interest in one day leading a school division as a superintendent?” As shown in Figure 7, one (33 %) participant agreed that the VaLIN 5.0 “somewhat positively” contributed to their intention to pursue the superintendency. Meanwhile, two (67 %) participants indicated that VaLIN 5.0 had “no real effect” on their intention to pursue superintendency. None of the participants reported that VaLIN 5.0 had a very positive, positive, or negative effect on their intention to pursue the superintendency. Additionally, one participant was not asked this question, and therefore their response is not reflected in these results.

Figure 13: VaLIN 5.0 Poll Results for Intention to Pursue Superintendency



According to the findings in Figures 11, 12, and 13, participation in VaLIN 5.0 activities appears to have a minimal to modest effect on participants' intention to pursue superintendency or on their interest in formal leadership roles. However, it has a stronger, more positive impact on enhancing participants' sense of self-efficacy for meeting the demands of any position of educational leadership.

Recommendations Stemming from the Focus Group

As noted, focus group participants offered specific recommendations relative to their experience in VaLIN 5.0 activities. Furthermore, additional recommendations for future VaLIN cohorts emerged for consideration through the evaluators' further analysis and integration of responses and discussions from the focus group.

Guidance and Recruitment of Selection for Participants

Participants' responses suggest a need for providing guidance for school divisions to select future VaLIN participants and to recruiting participants with an eye toward innovation. First, school divisions should be provided guidance from the VaLIN leadership on how to constitute their teams so as to consider maintaining fairly consistent teams in consecutive years when it is appropriate. VaLIN leaders may offer guidance to school divisions on how to form their teams, such as when it is suitable to have a consistent team for consecutive years or when it is appropriate to reconstitute a team. Additionally, school divisions should be encouraged to consider which individuals in leadership roles (e.g., including but not limited to central office personnel, principals,

teachers, etc.) within a division should participate to ensure that work from VaLIN is embraced, pursued, and put into action within the school division. Similarly, including individuals in the team based on the problem of practice is another point to consider as it could provide for the need for diverse stakeholder perspectives and input. On a related note, participants emphasized the benefits of the VaLIN network. Therefore, it is recommended that VaLIN continue to fortify this by recruiting participants with a mindset toward innovation across school divisions. This is essential to maintaining and strengthening the VaLIN network's reputation as an innovator and a hub of innovative thinking.

Evaluation of VaLIN Speakers

VaLIN needs to ensure that speakers present topics central to the problem of practice, as the themes of some presentations were not felt to be directly relevant to the problems of practice and work of the division teams. Similarly, it would be beneficial to create shorter presentation sessions that align with the participant's specific problem of practice.

Restructure the First In-Person Convenings to Benefit the Problem of Practice Journey

Before the first in-person meeting, VaLIN should outline the purpose of the meeting in a preview format for the division to be aware of the theme and/or focus of the year. School divisions would share their problem of practice focus with the entire group at this initial convening to allow for networking with others focused on a similar problem of practice for the year and/or with school divisions who have made strides in the problems of practice in the past. This will guide the division teams on what to expect in the upcoming year as part of the VaLIN network and how they want to connect with colleagues at other school divisions. The preview should also suggest possible challenges so that the school divisions have an idea of what problems of practice could be the target of their work and start thinking about networking opportunities.

During the first in-person meeting, each division should self-assess and identify where they currently stand in addressing their identified problem of practice in order to provide a baseline for implementation. This may then serve as a pre-assessment, which could use an implementation scale to gauge progress. For instance, the six-point implementation framework used in the focus group could be used, which is comprised of the following levels: (1) Our project is not yet defined; (2) We are in the planning stage; (3) We are in initial steps of implementing; (4) We have implemented our project, but it is too early to gauge the effect; (5) We have implemented our project and we are able to see evidence of its effect (or lack of effect); and (6) We have implemented our project, we have evidence of its effect, and it has become "the way we do things."

Continue to Provide In-Person Convenings

Participants expressed high satisfaction with the fact that the in-person convenings were indeed in a physical location. VaLIN participants found it productive to step away from their divisions and work together with their teams. Therefore, VaLIN is encouraged to continue with the in-person convenings multiple times a year and to continue to have them in physical locations conducive to participation and professional work. However, participants recommended that the final in-person session not be in June as it seems to be a busy month for most divisions, and team members had to choose between VaLIN and other commitments.

Secondly, VaLIN leadership should be cognizant to ensure enough time and support for division teams to engage in substantive work by themselves to share and provide ideas, as there are few venues where participants can collaborate in their own divisions.

Thirdly, VaLIN leadership should be cognizant to provide more time and opportunities for different school divisions to collaborate with one another. Meeting days need not be longer, but time could be apportioned differently within the days. This structure of the experience is where VaLIN networks can drive innovation by providing enough time, space, and support for different divisions to work on similar problems of practice.

Continue and Provide Support for the Coach Role

VaLIN leadership should be cognizant to continue to provide designated coaches for each division team, whose role is to facilitate the work both during in-person convenings and between them. Participants reported having a positive relationship with the ALP coaches and valuing coaches' probing questioning to advance their work on problems of practice. (Of note, the 2023 VaLIN 4.0 focus group noted that coaches tend to bring benefits in two ways: (1) by facilitating teams during in-person convenings, and (2) by serving as a resource to individual division contacts and as a professional or personal 'coach' to the individual division contact.)

Put Emphasis on Self-Assessment and Monitoring for Divisions

As previously recommended, the use of a pre-assessment by school divisions will be helpful in establishing a baseline for each divisions' work, as well as providing a sense for the incoming experience/expertise of various divisions relative to problems of practice. Such an assessment (e.g., the previously described six-level implementation framework) could serve as a mid-point formative check-in as well as a summative self-assessment by each division of their year's work.

Shorten ALP Survey

While the monitoring and evaluation of program processes and outcomes is essential, it is recommended that the ALP survey be reduced in length (and time to complete) in order to allow participants to complete it during each in-person meeting, rather than at the end or after a long session. Participants reported that the current length and timing of the survey make it difficult for participants to complete it thoughtfully. A shorter survey is likely to provide more honest, reliable responses from participants who are weary at the end of the full day of in person convenings.

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