The Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) was established at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education in 2000 to prepare leaders for San Francisco Bay Area schools with students who are historically vulnerable and underserved. Students completing the program receive an M.A. in Education and a recommendation toward an Administrative Services Credential—Preliminary (Tier I) from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).

PLI’s fourteen-month preparation program is grounded in principles of equity and social justice at the intersection of research and practice. The Principal Leadership Institute graduates educational leaders who are well prepared for leadership positions in high-needs schools and districts in the Bay Area, and for these graduates to be efficacious so that they remain in these roles.

By 2015, the PLI successfully graduated 515 diverse and highly-skilled school leaders—98% of whom currently work in education, 90% of whom work in California, and 88% of whom work in the greater Bay Area. PLI graduates are consistently recognized by regional and state organizations for their outstanding achievements as school leaders and teachers. These awards include California Distinguished School Awards, California Department of Education Academic Achievement Awards, and Blue Ribbon School Awards.

For further program information and details about the admissions process and funding, visit our website at http://principals.berkeley.edu or email us at pli@berkeley.edu.
Program Features

Features of the Principal Leadership Institute include:

- A focus on social justice and equity
- Strong connections between educational theory and practice
- Diverse student population with demonstrated leadership potential
- Cohort model (25-35 students per year)
- 40 units of intensive coursework completed over four consecutive semesters (two summers, one academic year)
- Rigorous field work (255 hours minimum)
- Individual leadership coaching

Curriculum & Pedagogy

The PLI curriculum and pedagogy is firmly rooted in both research and practice. Instructors include both UC Berkeley faculty and practitioners from local districts, and courses are frequently team-taught by both. Over the course of the program, students have multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge of theory in practical settings through problem-based learning. This includes analysis of case studies, assessed role-plays, and the design and implementation of a Master's project—the Leadership Action Research Project. The PLI employs a variety of adult learning strategies including whole-class and small group instruction, with a focus on incorporating student voices. To support students in their leadership development, they also complete 225 hours of leadership field experiences under the supervision of a mentor and receive coaching from an experienced school leader throughout the academic year.

Admissions & Financial Support

The PLI is committed to recruiting and admitting students that are highly diverse in their professional experiences, race and ethnicity, and areas of specialization. Widely considered one of the most diverse graduate programs at UC Berkeley, PLI students are selected for their demonstration of excellence in teaching and evidence of their teacher leadership experience and potential. Ideal applicants have served in leadership roles, such as instructional coaches, instructional reform facilitators, department chairs, and lead teachers before entering the program.

While urban experience is not a formal requirement, the application process looks for evidence of commitment to serving historically vulnerable and underserved student populations.

Applications are required to:

- have a minimum of 5 years of full-time teaching or pupil personnel experience
- possess a valid California teaching or services credential including a Multiple or Single Subject Teaching Credential, a Designated Subjects Teaching Credential (provided the applicant possesses a bachelor’s degree), a Pupil Personnel Services Credential, a Health Services Credential, or a Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential
- hold a Cross-Cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate or equivalent
- pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST)
- complete the UC Berkeley Graduate Division and PLI Supplemental admissions applications (details available online)

There are three major scholarships for PLI students—Behring scholarship, Needs Based Scholarship, and Diversity Scholarship. All students receive the Behring scholarship. Applicants can apply for the Needs Based Scholarship and Diversity Scholarship at the interview. In addition, most applicants qualify for federal financial aid. Interested candidates are strongly encouraged to attend a PLI Information Session before applying (schedule available here). Updated scholarship opportunities are always presented at the Information Session. Limited departmental scholarships and grants are also available for select candidates.

The Leadership Support Program

PLI graduates who obtain an administrative position enroll in the Leadership Support Program (LSP). LSP is a two-year program that provides a high-quality induction experience for practicing school leaders that culminates in a recommendation for the California Tier II Administrative Services credential. LSP participants are supported in their continued leadership development through retreats, monthly meetings, and one-on-one coaching. LSP has been cited by the California Department of Education as an exemplary leadership induction program.

The PLI Alumni Network

As graduates of PLI, alumni have incredible access to continuous professional development opportunities and a network of colleagues committed to educational equity. Opportunities include professional development workshops, membership in the PLI LinkedIn community, online learning communities through our Leadership Connection Online, annual surveys and updates, and alumni unconfereces.

District Partnerships

The Principal Leadership Institute relies on strong relationships with Bay Area school districts, particularly its district partners: Berkeley Unified School District, Oakland Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, and West Contra Costa Unified School District. The PLI and districts maintain active communication in order to facilitate field experiences, receive feedback on the program, and ensure that there is a strong link between university coursework and urban school reality. The joint work undertaken by PLI and its partner districts has led to the development of a de facto leadership pipeline for these local districts that results in more high-quality candidates being hired and retained in school leadership roles in some of the Bay Area’s most underserved schools.