

POLICY SNAPSHOT

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Supporting and Retaining Effective Principals

Introduction

Equitable access to effective principals is critical to student success. Estimates vary based on the model and measures used, but researchers generally agree that principals are second only to teachers in their influence on student learning (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2015). In addition, effective principals can:

- Shape the mission and vision of the school (Seashore-Lewis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010)
- Create school environments conducive to learning and teaching (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; Seashore-Lewis et al., 2010)
- Attract, support, and retain high-quality teachers (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Clotfelter et al., 2007)
- Decrease student absenteeism (Branch et al., 2013; Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009)
- Increase the school graduation rate (Coelli & Green, 2012)

Given the importance of the principal, high principal turnover may exacerbate inequities in schools and prevent the realization of change efforts. As states develop their [equity plans](#) to improve the equitable access to highly effective teachers and leaders, the states should give careful consideration to the policies and practices that can support and retain great school leaders. This policy brief provides an overview of the limited research on principal impact and the influences on principals' career paths, and then identifies potential strategies that states should consider to reduce principal turnover. This brief is not comprehensive, but highlights some important considerations for states. The brief highlights programs, initiatives, and policies that other states have implemented, but inclusion of these examples does not equal endorsement.

Principal Turnover: Why Is It an Issue?

The research body on the effectiveness of school leaders is limited, but in a summary of the research, Farley-Ripple, Solano, & McDuffie (2012) identified four negative outcomes associated with changes in leadership:

- Declines in student achievement
- Interruption of program or reform implementation
- Low teacher morale
- Development of a change-resistant culture

Other potential negative outcomes include an increase in teacher turnover (Punswick, Baker, & Belt, 2010) and the costs of hiring and supporting a new principal, which can be up to \$35,000—even excluding preparation (The School Leaders Network, 2014).

Research suggests that principals become more effective as they gain experience, and need to be in a school for five years for full implementation of new policies and leadership (Clark et al., 2009; Coelli & Green, 2012; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Branch et al., 2013; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). However, many principals leave their posts after less than five years. Research shows turnover rates to be higher in the following:

- Large urban districts (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012)
- Low-performing schools (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010; Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Burkhauser et al., 2012)
- Schools serving low-income students (Loeb et al., 2010; Béteille, et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2013; Clotfelter et al., 2007)
- Schools serving minority students (Loeb et al., 2010, Béteille et al., 2012; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown, 2006)

These findings are particularly salient when considering Branch et al.'s finding that the influence of principals on student growth as measured by value-added scores was nearly twice as large in high-poverty schools compared to low-poverty schools (Branch et al., 2013). In addition, schools serving students in poverty, minority students, and low-performing students are often unable to attract experienced successors, thus exacerbating negative effects of turnover (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012).¹

To date, research has identified multiple factors that may deter an educator from entering a principalship or influence a principal to move to another school:

- Stress (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Lankford, O'Connell, & Wyckoff, 2003)
- Time demands (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Gajda & Militello, 2008)

¹ Turnover in rural schools tends to be lower, but research suggests rural disadvantage when it comes to recruiting new principals because of small applicant pool (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009).

- Low salary and benefits differential (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Hancock & Bird, 2008; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011)
- Accountability mandates (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003)
- Increasing disrespect from students (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003)
- Increased paperwork (Hancock & Bird, 2008)
- Lack of autonomy (Hancock & Bird, 2008; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011)
- Bureaucracy (Hancock & Bird, 2008)
- Isolation (Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014)
- Individual characteristics (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011)

What Influences a Principal's Career Path?

In their review of recent research, Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) note that recent studies show that principal career behavior may be influenced by the following:

- School racial and socioeconomic composition
- School level (with higher mobility of middle and secondary administrators)
- Salary
- Urbanicity
- School size
- Percentage of uncertified teachers

So what can states do to stem the tide and retain principals longer? The following section identifies policy strategies that can increase principal retention.

Strategies for Setting Policy to Increase Principal Retention

Governors, state legislators, boards of education, and state education agencies (SEAs) can consider multiple strategies to implement policies that encourage retention of effective principals, including setting standards, managing accountability, providing funding and incentives, and implementing state programs. In addition, a coherent talent development framework for school leaders can help prepare, support, and retain effective principals. This section discusses policy strategies that may improve principal preparation, increase principal effectiveness, improve working conditions, and increase recognition of effective principals.

- 1. Improve leadership preparation.** The principal pipeline begins with preparation. Three potential policy levers for improving leadership preparation include taking actions to ensure that prep programs recruit and select strong candidates, increasing transparency of program outcomes, and funding high-quality preparation programs focused on producing principals who are prepared to work in high-need schools.

Lever 1: Reform teacher compensation structures and establish new candidate selection processes. Many district contracts continue to provide additional compensation to teachers with a master's degree regardless of the area of their degree. This practice may encourage teachers with no intention of serving as a school administrator to pursue a degree in school administration. For example, NCES data from 2007–08 show that approximately 191,000 teachers hold master's degrees in administration but do not serve as school administrators (Grossman, 2011). Unless districts reform compensation practices like this and preparation programs better screen candidates, preparation programs may continue to accept candidates who have no intention of becoming principals.

Lever 2: Increase transparency of principal program outcomes. It is important to ensure that preparation programs prepare prospective principals to be effective with teachers and students on day one. One emerging accountability method, annual preparation program report cards, can provide multiple stakeholders with timely and actionable information about preparation programs (Yoder, Freed, & Fetters, 2014). Potential candidates can use the data to inform their preparation program choice; preparation programs can use the data to inform changes to their practices; and districts can use the data to inform recruitment of principals from particular programs. States that have created preparation program report cards or indexes that include principal preparation programs include [Ohio](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [Tennessee](#).

Lever 3: Fund high-quality preparation programs focused on producing principals for high-need areas. Recognizing the unique challenges of working in high-need districts, states can fund or partially fund traditional or alternative preparation programs focused on preparing principals to work in high-poverty, high-minority, or low-performing schools. High-quality clinical school-based opportunities and residencies can help prepare principal candidates for the challenges of working in high-need environments.

Key Resource: Improving School Leader Preparation: Collaborative Models for Measuring Effectiveness

In this Ask the Team brief, Yoder et al. (2014) discuss the accountability measure data that most states say they collect about principal preparation programs, and discuss how these data are used. The brief also discusses new accountability models that states are piloting, and shares a tool states can use to inform the creation of a collaborative model of accountability.

Source: http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Principal_Preparation.pdf

Delaware

Since 2012, the Delaware Department of Education has supported the Delaware Leadership Project (DLP), the state's alternative certification program.

The program. Aspiring principals participate in a 14-month, full-time preparation program while being paid a teacher's salary as a teacher in Delaware. Upon completion of the program, principals commit to serving as a principal in Delaware for three years. The program is specifically tailored to the challenge of leading schools that serve low-income communities, and consists of four phases:

- A six-week summer intensive – In the intensive, participants develop and hone leadership skills as they work in project teams to prepare for leading a simulated school serving a high-need population. Activities include role play, mini-lessons, reflective consultancies, and team learning. To move on to the DLP residency, aspiring principals must show that they are making progress on each area of a leadership matrix used by the program.
- A 10-month residency – During the residency, aspiring principals work as a leadership team member in their assigned school four days a week under the direction of a mentor. Halfway through the program, aspiring principals are placed at another school for a month to gain experience in another setting and to work on a particular skill of need. Aspiring principals also work together in weekly professional learning sessions.
- A planning summer – During the summer, aspiring principals plan for their transition to their new role.
- Two years of coaching – Graduates of the program receive two years of post-graduate coaching.

Funding. DLP pays aspiring principals the same salary they would receive as teachers. The cost is split between Innovative Schools (a nonprofit funded by the Rodel Foundation), the state, and the district.

Sources: <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/delaware/78351-a-small-ed-experiment-in-delaware-looks-to-grow>
<http://www.delaware-leadership-project.org/training.html>

- 2. Study local hiring and assignment timelines and practices.** Late hiring timelines and passive recruitment practices can limit the pool of potential candidates. Inadequate evaluations of candidates' competencies and a lack of intentional matching of schools' needs to candidates' strengths can also limit a district's ability to find the right principal for the job (Doyle & Locke, 2014; The New Teacher Project, 2006). State education agencies can work with districts to collect and study district hiring and assignment timelines and protocols, and provide suggestions on how to improve such practices. Governors, legislators, and SEA staff can work to identify potential state barriers to staffing and revise policies as necessary.
- 3. Invest in professional learning and support for practicing principals.** Even the most effective principal preparation programs cannot supply candidates with everything they need to know as principals and for all of the different types of schools they may be assigned. Providing principals with job-embedded, ongoing, and tailored professional learning and coaching can increase competence and self-efficacy and also reduce the likelihood that the principal will leave (Tekleselassie & Villareal, 2011). However, evidence suggests that principals may lack access to high-quality, coherent professional development (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). To address current shortcomings, states can review their current policies and programs related to induction, mentoring, coaching, and professional development.

Lever 1: Provide, support, or fund high-quality induction, mentoring, and coaching.

According to the Wallace Foundation (Mitgang, 2007), about half of U.S. states had adopted mentoring requirements for new principals by 2007. However, induction programs, if not properly implemented, can become compliance exercises with little impact on principal practice (Mitgang, 2007). States can review current programs and work to ensure that induction and coaching are aligned to standards, have clear goals, are focused on instructional leadership, are provided by trained mentors, and are sustained over time—ideally two years (Mitgang, 2007; Behrstock-Sherratt, Meyer, Potemski, & Wraight, 2013).

State
Spotlight

Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Education offers three role-specific induction academies—one for supervisors, one for principals, and one for assistant principals. All beginning leaders must successfully complete an induction academy to advance from a beginning administrator license to a professional administrator license.

Participants attend four two-day sessions over the course of two years. During the academies, principals design and implement a professional learning plan aligned to the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards. They also earn credit toward certificate renewal and advancement.

Sources: <http://www.tn.gov/education/teaching/tasl.shtml>
http://www.tn.gov/education/teaching/tasl_induction_academies.shtml

Lever 2: Offer ongoing professional learning tailored to school leadership. State- and district-offered professional learning opportunities should meet principals' needs. Professional learning should be differentiated to meet principal needs. For example, a recent survey found that while all principal respondents had participated in professional development on the Common Core, such opportunities were not tailored to leadership tasks and did not provide guidance on how to implement instructional and assessment changes (Clifford & Mason, 2013). Providing principal-specific professional learning may make it more relevant.

- 4. Assess working conditions of principals and support improvement.** As noted earlier, working conditions are an important influence in a principal's decision to stay at or leave a school. States can help districts collect and analyze data on working conditions, increase coherence among state priorities and initiatives, and support central office transformation.

Lever 1: Administer a statewide working conditions survey. Working conditions surveys can provide valuable insights into the perceptions of conditions in schools and document changes over time. State and district leaders can use survey results to inform decisions about targeted interventions and policy changes.

Quote to Note

Given the rigidities of the salary schedule for teachers and school administrators in most districts, there are few opportunities to increase one's earnings outside of acquiring more experience or further credentials. The career trajectories of school personnel therefore may be more affected by non-pecuniary benefits such as positive working conditions than are other workers.

(Béteille et al., 2012, p. 916)

The Cahn Fellows Program

The Cahn Fellows Program for Distinguished Public School Principals provides a cohort-based model of professional development to principal fellows. To date, over 15 percent of New York City principals have participated in the program. Cahn Fellows serve in New York City as well as Newark, New Jersey; and Chicago, Illinois.

Selection. Applicants must have three or more years of experience as a principal and a track record of success. Selection criteria include commitment to serving all students, evidence of effective leadership demonstrated through student achievement, leadership qualities, and a history of professional accomplishments. The process is competitive; fewer than 2 percent of public school principals are invited to receive a Cahn Fellowship.

School leadership institute. Fellows attend a two-week institute grounded in the study of leadership across organizations and the leadership at the school level. Fellows engage in seminars and examine specific challenges facing urban school administrators and potential solutions. During the institute, fellows develop and submit an action plan designed to address an individual leadership challenge they are facing.

Faculty study groups. The program organizes principals into study groups based on the challenges they have identified. Study groups meet bimonthly throughout the school year, led by a Columbia University faculty advisor.

Leadership summits. Fellows attend a weekend retreat designed to foster strong mentorship mentor relationships between the fellows and Cahn Allies.

Impact. The fellowship gives exemplary principals an opportunity to further advance their practice. Clark et al. (2009) found that the schools of Cahn Fellows outperformed schools with non-fellow principals before the future fellows began the program, but also found that the margin of performance widened after principals completed their fellowships.

Source: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/cahnfellows/index.asp?Id=About+the+Program&Info=Home>

Lever 2: Reduce state priorities and improve coherence. Principals are often charged with overseeing and implementing multiple, fragmented initiatives, which can place considerable strain on the principal's and school's capacity (Hatch, 2001). During an Urban Principals' Academy in Connecticut, participating principals expressed concerns about their ability to be effective instructional leaders given the number of state and district initiatives they were asked to implement in their schools; as part of the discussion, principals identified 62 different initiatives currently being implemented (Houle, 2006). Hatch (2001) notes that coordinating initiatives cannot be left to the schools alone; district and state staff must coordinate initiatives and ensure that implementation is feasible given other demands placed on schools. Creating coherence will give principals more time to serve as instructional leaders in the school.

Lever 3: Support central office transformation. District central offices are key to establishing a culture and working conditions that support the work of the school principal. Action steps in transforming a central office may include clearly outlining and differentiating job responsibilities for school leadership roles, revising hiring practices, protecting principals'

time, and ensuring that principal supervisors have sufficient knowledge and resources to evaluate and support principals.

- 5. Invest in the creation and implementation of strong principal evaluation systems.** States and districts often rely on proxy measures of principal effectiveness—years of experience, preparation program reputation, and certification test scores—when examining the distribution of principals. In order to better understand the distribution of principals, we first need better indicators of principal effectiveness. Reliable data from principal educator evaluation systems can provide more insight into the hiring, transfer, and retention patterns of principals. Furthermore, strong principal evaluation systems will provide principals with important feedback on their practice that can be used to inform future growth and development.

Lever 1: Require training and certification. Training is critical to maximizing implementation fidelity for principal evaluation. Initial training, certification, and recalibration helps ensure that principal supervisors evaluate principals consistently—thus increasing the accuracy of the data collected. In addition, the principal supervisor needs to know how to help principals use feedback from the evaluations to improve their practice; Goldring, Mavrogordato, & Haynes (2014) found that principals struggled in analyzing and using teacher survey data from their evaluations—often because the data were conflicting.

Lever 2: Monitor, study, and revise principal evaluation systems. Through ongoing monitoring, study, and revision of principal evaluation systems, states can identify implementation issues and take corrective action steps as needed. Actions might include providing more training,

Key Resources

The Center for Educational Leadership provides a set of resources focused on district support of principals. The *Principal Support Framework* identifies three action areas for districts to ensure they are adequately supporting principals:

- A Shared Vision of Principals as Instructional Leaders
- System of Support for Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders
- Making It Possible for Principals to Be Instructional Leaders

Each action area is accompanied by key ideas that identify important conditions for success. The accompanying tool, *Building on the Principal Support Framework: District Self-Assessment and Planning Template*, is intended to be used by districts to assess current levels of support for principals and prioritize next steps for improving support for principals.

adopting new communication strategies, providing targeted support or coaching to evaluators in specific districts, or revising the system to include more robust measures of principal performance.

6. Review and reform school leader compensation.

Given the increased demands placed on administrators, policymakers should reconsider school leader compensation structures. The average daily pay rate for new principals may actually be less than for experienced teachers (Lankford et al., 2003). Research also suggests that differences in compensation across schools and district can influence turnover patterns (Papa, 2007; Tekleselassie & Villareal, 2011); in 2007, Papa found that schools in New York State paying one standard deviation below the mean salary were 9.5 times more likely to lose their principal compared to schools paying one standard deviation above the mean.

Lever 1: Review and reform school leader compensation. States can collaborate with professional associations to determine a competitive salary point and consider state initiatives to provide additional compensation and incentives. For example, the Wisconsin Department of Education releases an administrative salary report annually. North Carolina has a state salary schedule. State salary schedules may reduce inequities in compensation across districts, but may also result in additional attention to non-pecuniary benefits like improved working conditions between schools.

Lever 2: Provide opportunities for recognition and reward. Just as we need to find leadership opportunities for teachers wishing to remain in the classroom, we need to find opportunities for experienced, effective principals who wish to stay in the profession to be recognized and rewarded. For example, states can create leadership academies and offer incentives for master principals who work in high-need schools. States can also use Title II, Part A funds to support the development of performance-based compensation systems for principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Key Resources

[Evaluating Evaluation Systems: Policy Levers and Strategies for Studying Implementation of Educator Evaluation](#) – This policy snapshot highlights the importance of studying evaluation implementation and shares state strategies for prioritizing and funding studies.

[Get the Information You Need: How to Design Educator Evaluation Studies for Continuous Improvement](#) – This Ask the Team brief draws on reports from educator evaluation studies to highlight strategies and examples for designing educator evaluation studies as part of a continuous improvement process.

[High Fidelity: Investing in Evaluation Training](#) – This policy snapshot explores how states are providing evaluation training to districts, educators, and evaluators on new teacher and principal evaluation systems.

[Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Principal Evaluation Systems](#) – This revised guide shares important research and policy context, provides information about state and district roles in design and implementation of principal evaluation systems, and identifies essential components and critical phases of the system design process.

Arkansas

In 2003, the Arkansas general assembly passed **Act 44**, which created and allocated funding for a Master Principal Program. The program is open to full-time practicing principals with at least one year of experience. Applicants must hold a principal/standard building level administrator license, complete an application, and have a signed statement of support from the district superintendent. If selected to participate, principals enter a four-phase process that, if completed, results in a Master Principal designation. Each phase includes a leadership institute that includes between three and four multiple-day sessions.

Once participants receive the Master Principal designation, they are eligible for additional compensation. Master Principals serving as full-time principals in Arkansas public schools receive \$9,000 annually from the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) for five years. Master Principals who are selected and agree to serve in “high need” schools as defined by ADE receive \$25,000 annually for five years.

Since its creation, the Arkansas Master Principal Program has received national recognition. In addition, a recent study of the Arkansas Leadership Academy Master Principal Program found that Master Principal candidates increased their leadership knowledge and skills over the course of the program, as demonstrated by significant increases in Master Principal Program rubric scores between the phase 2 and phase 3 portfolios submitted by applicants. In addition, qualitative analysis of portfolio narratives suggested that Master Principal candidates’ reflection process became both more holistic and more interpersonal as they progressed through the program (Bengston, Airola, Peer, & Davis, 2012).

DID YOU KNOW...?

States and districts can use federal funding to support efforts to improve equitable access to great teachers and leaders. Recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (2014) identifies the following funding streams and potential uses:

	LEAs	SEAs
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I, Part A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives to attract and retain effective educators • Induction programs • Professional development • Activities used to improve school climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and technical assistance on strategies to increase the equitable distribution of educators
ESEA Title II, Part A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs assessment to identify local human capital needs • Recruitment and retention strategies • Professional development aligned to educator evaluation systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central clearinghouse to help high-need LEAs locate and recruit educators • Performance-based compensation system • Professional development
ESEA Title III, Part A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for principals working in schools with English language learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and technical assistance on implementation of educator equity strategies designed to improve the instruction of English language learners
School Improvement Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing strategies to address inequitable distribution as part of a SIG intervention model 	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development enabling educators to deliver interventions and supports to students with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel preparation and professional development for educators to address personnel shortages

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I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

For more information or resources on recruiting and retaining school leaders, please contact gtlcenter@air.org

Lauren Matlach is a consultant providing technical assistance for the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders.