

Capitol Hill Briefing
The Principal Factor in School Improvement: *Implications for Federal Policy*
10 to 11 a.m., Wednesday, March 30, 216 Hart Senate Office Building

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

More than ten years of research and experience make it clear that our nation cannot create a world-class public education system without an effective principal in every school. Although school leadership has often been overlooked as an education improvement strategy, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without effective principals. Leadership influences student achievement, and the principal is the single most important factor in determining whether a school can attract and keep the high-quality teachers necessary to turn around struggling schools. At a time of fiscal restraint, it's notable that strengthening school leadership, experts believe, is one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving public education.

Federal policymakers can help ensure that our children – particularly those in distressed neighborhoods – get the principals they need and deserve by:

Making school leadership a national priority. If there is a national imperative to improve our failing schools, then there is also a national imperative to strengthen the preparation and support of school leaders.

Recognizing that leadership is a cost-effective education improvement strategy. Because principals are uniquely positioned to ensure that excellent teaching and learning spread beyond single classrooms, investments in recruiting, training, developing and evaluating principals are a particularly cost-effective way to improve public education.

Promoting and supporting exemplary leadership training. Many principal training programs don't adequately prepare principals to meet the demands they face. Federal investments should be directed to programs that share the attributes of exemplary programs. Federal policy need not prescribe program design, but should reward evidenced-based programs and encourage accountability for producing effective principals.

Building federal-state partnerships that emphasize effective leader training. States play a key role in supporting effective leadership training through funding and regulatory oversight. Federal investments should target programs that advance clear, ambitious expectations for high-quality training and that hold states and districts accountable for producing effective leaders. Federal policy should support valid, instruction-focused principal assessments.

Acknowledging the critical support role that school districts play in principal effectiveness. Districts are essential to improving school leadership, but too often focus on compliance. Federal policy should take into account the emerging role of districts as "service centers" that help principals be effective. Federal funding should give districts flexibility to train, attract and retain the best candidates for low-performing schools.

A digital library of publications on educational leadership and other topics is available from The Wallace Foundation's Knowledge Center, at www.wallacefoundation.org.