BUILDING PRINCIPAL PIPELINES

A STRATEGY TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

The Wallace Foundation®

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WHY INVEST IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

If children are to stand a fighting chance in today's knowledge-based economy, they need a solid education. And to get a solid education, they need great instruction. But how can school districts provide a first-rate classroom experience to all children, including those in the country's poorest urban and suburban communities? How can they turn around struggling schools? And how can they ensure teachers get the support they need to help kids succeed?

An essential ingredient is a great principal.

Research has shown that school leadership is second only to teaching among school influences on student success. Effective principals can do what effective teachers cannot. They can create a climate that encourages learning and achievement, not just in a single classroom but throughout a school. They can foster better instruction school-wide. Informing their work by sharp analysis of good data, they can employ the kind of management savvy that nurtures talent. And they can attract and retain effective teachers in troubled schools. Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without the intervention of a powerful leader.[1]

Efforts to improve the recruitment, training, evaluation and development of school leaders "should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement," according to a landmark study of school leadership.[2] Yet the principalship frequently gets overlooked as a means of accomplishing worthy reform efforts and producing results for students.

The upshot is that school districts in high-poverty cities and suburbs often struggle to find principals who can make a positive difference in their schools. Many training programs still teach principals to be administrators of "buildings, boilers and buses" rather than become what the field calls "instructional leaders"—i.e., professionals who can cultivate better teachers and improve learning. Districts, then, too often place principals in schools they are ill-prepared to lead. Once on the job, the new leaders fail to receive the support they need. Left to improvise on their own if students underperform, they are nonetheless held accountable by the district for improving education — and test scores. Little wonder, then, that in many districts principal tenure is shorter (an average of 3.6 years) than some models suggest is advisable (five to seven years).[3]

To help change this picture, The Wallace Foundation began investing in school leadership in 2000. Over the years, the foundation has funded work by states, school districts and others to tap the potential of the principals' jobs as well as sponsored research about a range of school leadership matters. Among other things, Wallace-funded studies have yielded evidence about what goes into shaping effective principals, including the elements of good pre-service training for those who aspire to become principals and the supports they need once they are on the job.[4]

Drawing on this body of work, the foundation has in recent years launched two major efforts: the Principal Pipeline Initiative and the Principal Supervisor Initiative. The idea is twofold: to see if districts can apply, on a wide scale, the lessons learned over more than a decade of work in order to create a large enough corps of instructional leaders to improve education districtwide, not just in individual schools; and to generate new insights that can help districts nationwide.

THE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE INITIATIVE

The Principal Pipeline Initiative, launched in 2011, is a six-year, $84-million investment in six districts: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.; Denver; Gwinnett County, Ga. (outside Atlanta); Hillsborough County, Fla. (encompassing Tampa); New York City; and Prince George's County, Md. (outside Washington, D.C.). Each district is working to establish a sturdy principal "pipeline" – i.e., a system to produce a large and steady supply of effective school leaders. Ideally, these pipelines have four strong, interlocking parts:

Discussions of how to be an effective principal take center stage at the NYC Leadership Academy, a training program for aspiring principals. (opposite page.)

1   Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, Stephen E. Anderson et al., *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2010, 9.

2   Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2004, 14.

3   Seashore Louis et al., 2010, 168-171.

4   Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, and Margaret Terry, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007, 6; see also *Becoming a Leader: Preparing School Principals for Today's Schools*, The Wallace Foundation, 2008.

Standards. Clear, rigorous job requirements detailing what principals and assistant principals must know and do.

High-quality training. Pre-service training programs that admit only high-potential candidates and then provide them with training suitable for district schools.

Selective hiring. A set of procedures enabling districts to hire well-trained candidates as school leaders and match them to the right schools.

Leader evaluation and on-the-job support. Regular evaluation of principals by districts along with the provision of professional development that helps school leaders overcome weaknesses pinpointed in the assessments.

An ongoing study by independent researchers is helping to establish whether and how the districts can put these components together and if the resulting pipelines make a difference in schools.[5]

1. Standards: Defining what principals need to know and do. A sound principal pipeline starts with clear performance standards that reflect district needs. Unfortunately, few school districts have taken the time to create such standards, relying mostly on broader state standards. The Pipeline districts are testing whether they can create rigorous leadership standards that reflect local needs and, crucially, guide principal training, hiring and on-the-job support.

The initiative began with each participating district establishing a single set of leadership standards that addressed its students' needs. Some districts adapted state-mandated standards to fit their circumstances; others started with research-based recommendations, most notably the widely used Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards; one started from scratch. All districts engaged people across a

range of interests—including principals, representatives from principal training programs and central-office staff members—to make sure the standards they developed were right for local schools. The purpose, as one New York City leader put it, was "to create consistency of language around leadership," from the moment school leaders are trained to the moment they leave their jobs.[6]

These standards aren't static.[7] Districts continue to refine them as they put them to use, see their strengths and weaknesses, and learn of new developments in the field of school leadership. They are also finding that this work is far from an empty exercise. In fact, the standards have "proved to be a more powerful policy instrument than many expected," according to a report from the ongoing study. The authors add that "rather than sitting on shelves," the standards have been "put to work in job descriptions, in the curricula of preparation programs and, crucially, in assessments and support systems for aspiring and novice principals."[8]

2. Pre-service training: Equipping principals with the skills they need to meet district standards. Once districts define their needs, they must find candidates who can meet them. But many districts have struggled to locate such leaders, largely because principal training programs often fall short in several areas: focusing on building management rather than teaching and learning in the classroom; dwelling on theory without demonstrating its applicability in the everyday work of the principal; and employing faculty members with little experience as principals themselves. In addition, many programs are too lax with admissions, failing to screen out candidates who are less interested in leading a school than receiving the salary bump that often goes with an advanced

5   Policy Studies Associates, the research organization studying the initiative, has completed three of five projected implementation studies as of August 2015. For the third in the series, please see Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline. Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 3*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2015.

6   Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley, Erikson R. Arcaira, Leslie M. Anderson, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Six Districts Begin the Principal Pipeline Initiative. Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 1*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., July 2013, 12.

7   Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline. Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 3*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2015, 17.

8   Turnbull et al., 2015, 69.

degree. The Pipeline districts are working to address such shortcomings.[9]

One way is to test whether training shaped by partnerships between districts and nearby training programs (typically at universities) can lead to preparation that better ensures aspiring principals meet local standards and needs. Partnerships are relatively affordable, eliminating the time and expense required when districts set up their own training academies. They also provide some measure of protection for the enhancements, as it is easier for partnerships to weather improvement-unfriendly changes in leadership, whether in the district or the university, than it would be for either party alone.[10] To encourage programs to enter partnerships, some districts are trying to use their clout as the employers of the programs' graduates; if a district is to hire

people from a program, the program must make clear that it is training people in ways that can lead to improved instruction in local schools.

Prince George's County, for example, is developing training programs with institutions such as Johns Hopkins University in nearby Baltimore. The partnership allows the district to benefit from a program tailored to fit its needs at one of the country's most respected universities; Johns Hopkins benefits by deepening its market share in Prince George's County. Gwinnett County, Ga., is using another market-based approach to attract training programs into closer partnerships. It started publishing "A Guide to Leadership Programs in Georgia," which directs aspiring principals toward programs that meet the county's standards and offers training programs incentives to work with the district.

Some districts are also strengthening their own programs. The Leaders in Education Apprenticeship Program in New York City, for example, identifies potential school leaders and works to build their skills while they're still on the job. Al-

At a 2013 meeting of the Principal Pipeline Initiative professional learning community, Glenn Pethel and Frances Davis of the Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools confer with Gale Hulme of the Georgia Leadership Institute for Student Improvement.

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9   Lee Mitgang, *The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training*, The Wallace Foundation, June 2012, 8.

10   Margaret Terry Orr, Cheryl King, Michelle LaPointe, *Districts Developing Leaders: Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches from Eight Urban Districts*, Education Development Center, Inc., 2010, 52-53.

though it can sometimes be difficult for in-house programs to secure state certification for their graduates, such programs allow districts to tailor training to their needs without having to depend on other organizations.

3. Selective hiring and placement of principals in the schools that need them. Once principals are trained, districts must place them in the schools most in need of their particular skills and experience.

But districts often struggle to match principals to the right schools. Many lack a clear understanding of both principals' abilities and schools' needs. In addition, one study has found an "inequitable distribution" of principals across schools; the least experienced principals often end up in the highest-needs schools, a result that takes a toll on poor, minority and low-achieving children.[11] Districts in the Principal Pipeline Initiative are testing whether more thoughtful hiring procedures can help address inequities and place prin-

cipals in the schools to which they can bring the greatest benefit.

Each of the Pipeline districts has adopted uniform sets of activities to gather information about aspiring principals and make the best matches. Hiring decisions are no longer based solely on personal recommendations. Community input is collected through comprehensive surveys, not candidate interviews poorly attended by the community. Most districts are making greater use of talent pools, groups of pre-screened candidates known to meet basic leadership standards. Florida's Hillsborough County has also started asking standardized sets of questions in interviews to ensure district officials can more accurately compare and contrast the abilities of different candidates.[12] As a result, hiring has become an area in which districts feel "particular confidence" that they have made "critical improvements."[13]

The emergence of "leader tracking systems"
Among other activities, the districts have set up databases that store information about the train-
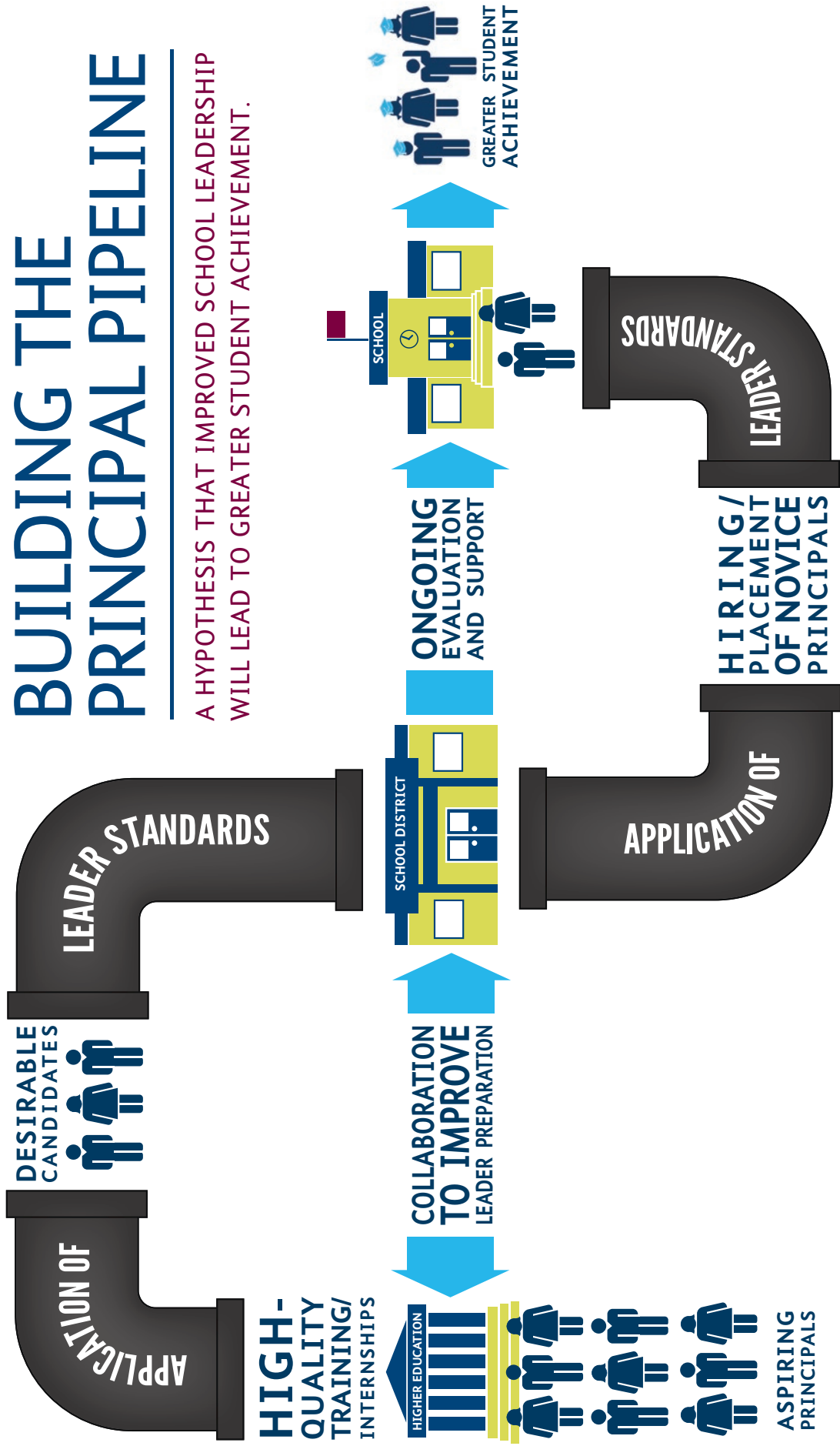
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11   Susanna Loeb, Demetra Kalogrides, and Eileen Lai Horng, "Principal Preferences and the Uneven Distribution of Principals Across Schools," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32, June 2010, 205-209.

12   Turnbull et al., 2013, 31-36.

13   Turnbull et al., 2015, 70.

BUILDING THE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

A HYPOTHESIS THAT IMPROVED SCHOOL LEADERSHIP WILL LEAD TO GREATER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

LEADER STANDARDS

DESIRABLE CANDIDATES

APPLICATION OF

HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING/INTERNSHIPS

HIGHER EDUCATION

ASPIRING PRINCIPALS

COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE LEADER PREPARATION

SCHOOL DISTRICT

ONGOING EVALUATION AND SUPPORT

SCHOOL

GREATER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

LEADER STANDARDS

APPLICATION OF

HIRING/PLACEMENT OF NOVICE PRINCIPALS

In 2010, The Wallace Foundation launched a six-year initiative to test whether strong, district-managed principal pipelines can produce large corps of principals who can improve teaching, learning and student achievement in schools. These are the components of the districts' pipelines.

ing, qualifications and performance of all principals and aspiring principals. Although these "leader tracking systems," as they have come to be called, were established to determine the Pipeline Initiative's ultimate effects on student achievement, they are emerging as an important tool in helping to direct qualified principals to the schools that most need them and are seen by the districts "as an especially important addition to district capacity."[14]

By assembling all of the information about principals in a single, searchable, district-wide system, districts are finding they can sift through all potential candidates for open principalships and locate the ones who best meet the needs of particular schools. "Thus, for example, district leaders said in interviews that they might look for a candidate who had experience in particular grade levels or with English language learners and whose measured competencies matched the needs that they saw in the school," according to the initiative study, which also noted that one of the districts started using electronic fact sheets on potential candidates.[15]

Moreover, the data systems may bear benefits beyond hiring. Candidates not selected for principal jobs, for example, can now receive highly specific explanations for the decision (e.g., "Your planning skills were undeveloped" or "We needed someone with experience working with non-native English speakers") and can then work to overcome these deficits for the next time they apply. Districts can plumb the data to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of sitting principals in order to create individualized training plans for them. Or, they can aggregate data about principal performance and share it with the university or other training programs from which principals graduated, providing the programs with valuable indicators of their own strengths and weaknesses. Still, much remains to be learned about leader tracking systems, which are new and, for use in

principal hiring, still unproven.[16] In addition, they require time and expertise to set up. All six Pipeline districts found that pulling together the right data and designing the right user interfaces was tough work.[17]

In addition, numbers, databases and standardized questions alone cannot provide a complete picture of a candidate for a principalship. Districts are therefore also putting in place processes that help officials to get to know candidates for principalships even before they turn in their job applications. New York City trains district officials to look for emerging talent at city-wide meetings of teacher leaders. Denver is offering assistant principals residencies in part so decision-makers can get to know them better. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy's Aspiring Principals Program, a year-long program for assistant principals with an eye on the principalship, serves a similar purpose in Gwinnett County.[18]

4. Systematic evaluation and support that builds on principals' strengths and addresses their weaknesses. The district's work doesn't end with the placement of a solid principal in a needy school. Once principals are on the job, districts must regularly assess them to identify their strengths and weaknesses as instructional leaders; this information then shapes the support they receive to help improve their performance. Many of the country's principal evaluation systems, however, misfire because they focus on the old, administrative aspects of a principal's job; a 2007 study of 66 evaluation systems found that 26 didn't measure a "principal's engagement with the curriculum," 25 didn't measure the quality of instruction, 22 didn't measure the "culture of learning and professional behavior" and none measured quality of curriculum.[19] Many simply use test scores as a proxy for principal perfor-

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14   Turnbull et al., 2015, iv.

15   Turnbull et al., 2015, 50.

16   Turnbull et al., 2015, 52.

17   Turnbull et al., 2015, 50.

18   Turnbull et al., 2013, 33.

19   Ellen Goldring, Andrew C. Porter, Joseph Murphy, Stephen N. Elliott, and Xiu Cravens, *Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections to Research, Professional Standards, and Current Practices*, Vanderbilt University, 2007, 18.

mance. Moreover, many evaluations are more often than not used to penalize principals who fall short rather than help to identify the support they need to improve.
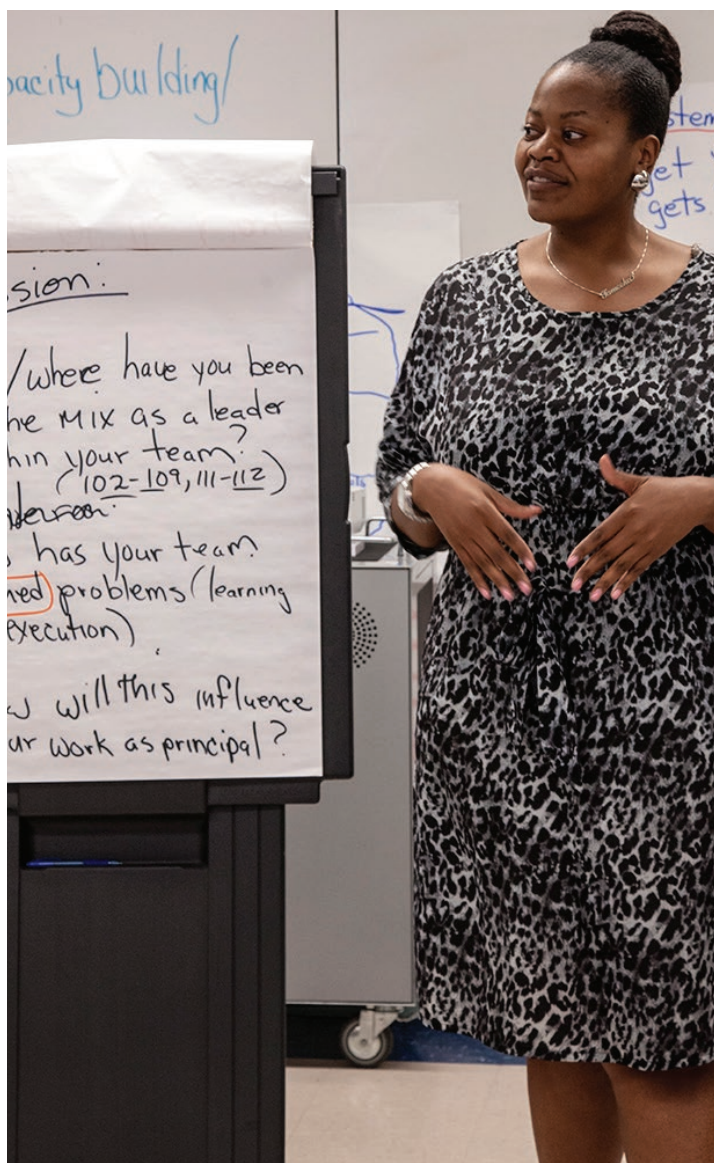
The six Pipeline districts are now working to set up principal evaluation systems that assess school leaders on what matters: teaching and learning in classrooms. Five of the six have started using VAL-ED, an evaluation tool developed with Wallace funding by Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania that assesses principals based on well-researched indicators of good performance.[20] They are also working to collect more precise data about principal performance from more diverse sources, including supervisors, administrative staff members, assistant principals and teachers.

Four of the six districts say they intend to use their new evaluation system not for punitive measures but to tailor support for each principal.[21] Three years into the initiative, school leaders appear to welcome the approach. In a 2014 poll, 88 percent of first-, second- and third-year principals in the six districts said support from mentors or coaches led them to make changes in their work.[22]

Measuring Effects and Early Lessons

Theory suggests that the four pipeline components (standards, training, hiring and evaluation)—coupled with on-the-job support for principals—can help raise the quality of schools districtwide. To find out for sure, the ongoing study will examine the effects of the Principal Pipeline Initiative. This research, expected to be published in 2018, will track school leaders emerging from the districts' new principal pipelines, examine student achievement in their schools and determine whether the pipelines do, in fact, help improve teaching and learning in classrooms.

In the meantime, one major finding from the ongoing study regards the importance of assistant

A 2014 participant in the New York City Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program takes part in an exercise on leadership styles. The Leadership Academy manages the Pipeline professional learning community for district leaders.

principals. The initial initiative design included an effort to nurture aspiring assistant principals (APs) but ignored those who are already on the job and could remain in the position for three to six years.[23] The research and further conversations with district leaders suggested that because APs are likely to become principals themselves, a
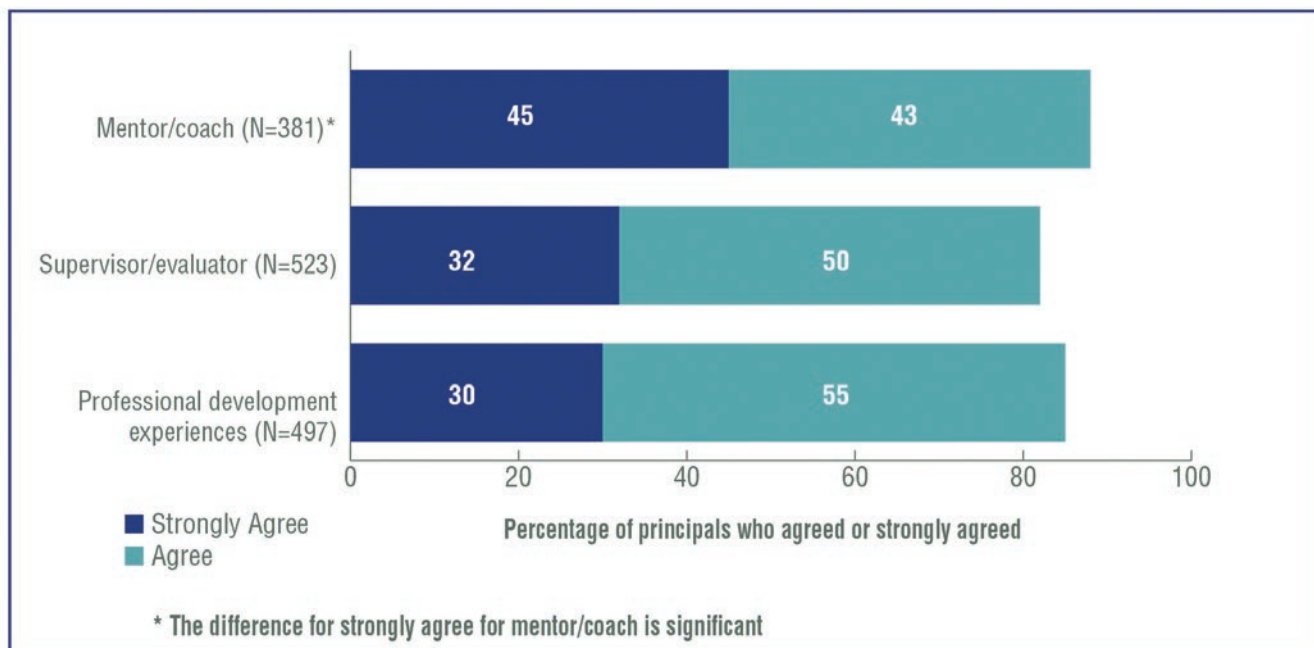
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20   Turnbull et al., 2015, 58.

21   Turnbull et al., 2013, 37-38.

22   Turnbull et al., 2015, 66.

23   Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley, and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Cultivating Talent Through a Principal Pipeline. Building a Stronger Principalship: Volume 2,* Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2013, 13.

Forty-five percent of first-, second-, and third-year principals in the six districts strongly agreed and 43 percent agreed that the support they received from their mentor/coach led them to make changes in their work.

principal pipeline would be incomplete without additional professional development for them. The districts have since added supports for sitting assistant principals.

THE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR INITIATIVE

In addition, the districts have come to the realization that a dramatic change in the principal's job is unlikely to stick unless principals get adequate support. The Principal Pipeline Initiative districts report that if principals are to focus on instruction in classrooms, the principal's bosses in the central office must help them do so. That means changing and unleashing the potential of another job: the principal supervisor.

As it now stands in most districts around the country, principal supervisors spend most of their time dealing with bureaucracy in the central office rather than bolstering principals in schools. A Wallace-commissioned study by the Council for the Great City Schools found that principal supervisors are often stretched for time, insufficiently staffed, poorly matched to the needs of

their schools and assigned to too many schools.[24] Another Council survey of administrators in 41 large districts found that principal supervisors manage 24 principals on average and that their duties typically extend beyond helping principals. Eighty percent of respondents said their responsibilities included "district administrative issues," while 62 percent put "district compliance issues" among their job tasks. Further, supervisors stay in their positions for an average of just two years, requiring principals to frequently adapt to new managers.[25]

These reports and the Pipeline districts' experiences led Wallace to an important question: If principal supervisors in districts shift from overseeing compliance to sharpening principals'

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24 Amanda Corcoran, Michael Casserly, Ricki Price-Baugh, Denise Walston, Robin Hall, Candace Simon, *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*, Council of the Great City Schools, 2013.

25 Michael Casserly, Sharon Lewis, Candace Simon, Renata Uzzell, and Moses Palacios, *Principal Evaluations and the Principal Supervisor: Survey Results from the Great City Schools*, Council of the Great City Schools, 2013, 7.

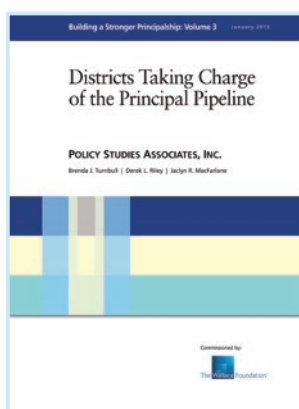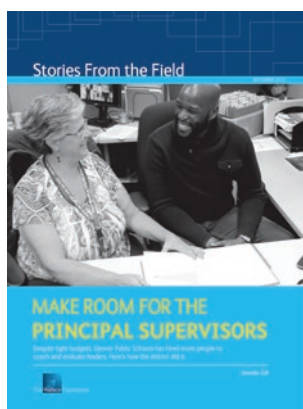| Tasks	Current responsibility	Responsibility 2 years ago
Address district administrative issues	80	76
Address district compliance issues	62	60
I do not have any additional responsibilities	16	14
Responsible for district's special education program	1	1
Serve as district testing coordinator	0	1
Responsible for district's gifted and talented program	0	2

instructional leadership capabilities, and if they are provided with the right training, support and number of principals to supervise, would this improve the effectiveness of the principals with whom they work?

The Principal Supervisor Initiative, a $30-million effort in 14 districts to improve the supervision of principals, is seeking answers. The bulk of the work is taking place in six districts: Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Fla.; Cleveland, Ohio; DeKalb County, Ga. (near Atlanta); Des Moines, Iowa; Long Beach, Calif.; and Minneapolis, Minn. The districts will seek to fill gaps identified through the Pipeline work and the Council of the Great City Schools studies by: revising their principal supervisors' job descriptions to focus on instruction; providing better training and support to supervisors; ensuring each supervisor oversees a manageable number of principals; building systems to ensure a steady stream of new supervisors as current supervisors leave; and forming plans to reorganize central offices to support supervisors as they support principals. The efforts will be studied in an independent evaluation that will help answer whether and how boosting the supervisor post leads to more effective principals.

Two other districts—Tulsa, Okla., and Washington, D.C., which have already made significant progress in reforming the role of their principal supervisors—have joined the initiative to expand their efforts and inform work under the initiative.

So far, the six supervisor districts have each managed to redefine the job of supervisor and most have (or are on track to) reduce the number of principals the supervisors oversee. Much hard work lies ahead, however, as each district begins thinking about how its central office can support the newly defined supervisor position over the long term. Wallace plans to document the work in a series of reports in coming years.

Gill, Jennifer. *"Make Room for the Principal Supervisors."* **The Wallace Foundation, December, 2013.**

This article details how Denver Public Schools put a new focus on the people who coach and evaluate principals—despite tight budgets.

Corcordan, Amanda, Michael Casserly, Ricki Price-Baugh, Denise Walston, Robin Hall, and Candace Simon. *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*. **Council of the Great City Schools, October 2013.**

How can school districts ensure that principal supervisors are able to help principals meet the demands of their jobs? This report provides some early answers.

Building a Stronger Principalship Series. **The Wallace Foundation, July 2013–January 2015.**

A series of reports documents the experiences of the six districts participating in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative and highlights lessons that may be of use to others.

Gill, Jennifer and Lee Mitgang. *Districts Matter: Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need*. **The Wallace Foundation, February 2013.**

This major Wallace Perspective describes key steps that school districts can take to improve school leadership.
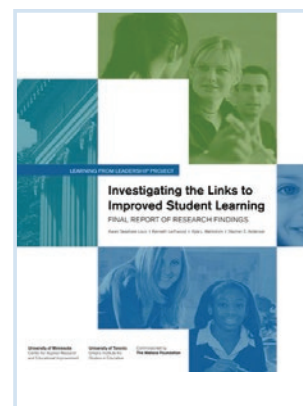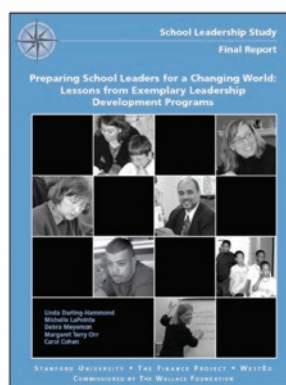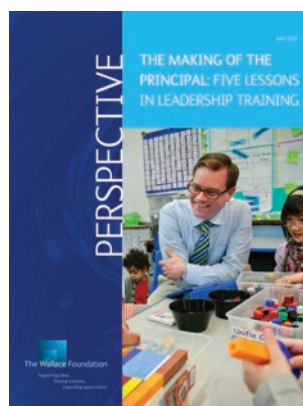
The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning. **The Wallace Foundation, January 2013.**

This Wallace Perspective describes the characteristics of effective school principals and identifies five practices as key to their work.

Mitgang, Lee and Jennifer Gill. *The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training*. **The Wallace Foundation, June 2012.**

This Wallace Perspective describes essential steps in improving training for future principals and those new to the job.

Visit www.wallacefoundation.org for these and other reports and resources about school leadership.

Louis, Karen Seashore, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, and Stephen E. Anderson.
Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning. **The Wallace Foundation, July 2010.**

The largest study of its kind examines how school leadership affects student learning.

Honig, Meredith I., Michael A. Copland, Lydia Rainey, Juli Anna Lorton, and Morena Newton.
Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement. **Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington, April 2010.**

University of Washington researchers explore how three district central offices shifted focus from compliance to instruction.

Darling-Hammond, Linda, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, and Margaret Orr. *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*. **Stanford, The Finance Project, April 2007.**

A groundbreaking report provides case studies and practical guidelines to help district and state policymakers reinvent how principals are prepared for their jobs.

Leithwood, Kenneth, Karen Seashore Lewis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom. *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. **Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, September 2004.**

Leadership is second only to teaching among school influences on student success, and its impact is greatest in schools with the greatest need, according to this landmark examination of the evidence on school leadership.

The Wallace Foundation®

The Wallace Foundation seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children and foster the vitality of arts for everyone. The foundation has an unusual approach: funding efforts to test innovative ideas for solving important public problems, conducting research to find out what works and what doesn't and to fill key knowledge gaps—and then communicating the results to help others.

Wallace, which works nationally, has five major initiatives under way:

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