March 2021

Evidence-based Considerations for
COVID-19 Reopening and Recovery Planning:
The Role of Principal Leadership in
School Recovery and Reopening

> "It is difficult to envision an investment with a higher return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership."
>
> - *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research,* 2021[1]

Recovering from the pandemic will be a years-long process, in which principals will play a key role both immediately and longer-term. Over the past two decades, a growing body of research has made it clear that effective principals matter for student achievement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and for overall school improvement.[2] Effective principals have nearly as great an impact on accelerating student learning as do teachers, but that effect is felt throughout an entire school, rather than a single classroom. Effective principals better retain teachers, especially high-performing ones.[3] Therefore, principals are essential for successful school reopening and acceleration of learning. **This, in turn, suggests districts should consider including two strategies in their reopening and recovery, one immediate and one longer-term**:

- Professional development and other supports *for current principals* to increase their effectiveness in the short term; and
- Building a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline *for new and aspiring principals* as a strategy to improve student achievement and schools district wide.

This section presents new evidence of the overall importance of principal leadership; several evidence-based strategies for improving the effectiveness of current principals; and descriptions of elements of comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines. A separate attachment provides an annotated set of selected "how to" resources available without charge on www.wallacefoundation.org to help implement these strategies.

The quality of principal leadership affects student learning, teacher satisfaction and retention, and equity

- **Evidence points to the key role of principals in improving student achievement, teacher satisfaction and overall school improvement.** A 2021 review of two decades of evidence – including six quantitative, longitudinal studies involving 22,000 principals – found that "principals have large effects on student learning, comparable even to the effects of individual teachers."[4] A separate 2016 review of 18 studies meeting ESSA's Tiers I-III evidence standards concluded that "school leadership can be a powerful driver of improved education outcomes."[5]

- **Replacing a below-average principal (at the 25th percentile) with an above average principal (at the 75th percentile) would increase the typical student's learning by nearly three months in math and reading.[6]** They noted that "if a school district could invest in improving the performance of just one adult in a school building, investing in the principal is likely the most efficient way to affect student achievement."[7]

- **Effective principal leadership is linked to more positive working conditions for teachers and teacher retention.** Effective principals improved teacher retention, especially more effective teachers, the synthesis of two decades of evidence concluded.[8]

- **Principals have important implications for equity.** Principals can have important impacts on key populations, including low-income students and teachers of color, directly and indirectly by establishing culturally responsive practices and by how they manage student disciplinary actions. The recent synthesis of two decades of research found that "equity-oriented principals can help diverse learners – including students who are Black, Indigenous, and students of color; low-income students; students with special educational needs; and English learners – feel valued and experience success."[9]

Professional development and other supports for current principals to increase their effectiveness in the short term

Behaviors and skills of effective leaders

According to the review of evidence, effective principals carry out four behaviors: *Instructionally-focused teacher interactions, building a productive school climate, facilitating collaborations and professional learning communities, and strategic personnel and resource management.* These behaviors are built on three skills: People, instructional and organizational. These behaviors can ground professional development efforts, especially when they are reflected in a state and district's leader standards. A state or district might wish to adopt or adapt the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders[10] (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) or create their own leader standards.

There are several evidence-based strategies described below that could be used to support principals in incorporating these four behaviors into their practice for reopening, recovery and equity. (The attached annotated bibliography also presents selected how-to resources.)

Mentoring for principals

Mentoring or coaching involves providing a wide range of support to current principals from experienced principals or former principals. Evidence indicates that mentoring or coaching is welcome, well-targeted, and a way of guiding principals to other helpful support.[11] In surveys and focus groups, principals reported strong positive views of their mentors as versatile, responsive sources of support. For example, 90 percent of survey respondents with mentors agreed that the mentoring support "addressed my specific needs" (based on data from a weighted sample of 345 respondents with mentors).[12]

Implementation Options
- Setting a high bar for selecting mentors
- Guiding and training for mentors in matching their support with the specific needs of a principal in relation to the district's principal standards

- Developing systems for monitoring mentors' work, such as logs of the content of their interactions with the principals they mentor
- Extending the work of mentors to serve more principals over time

Shifting the principal supervisor role to coaching from compliance

The role of principal supervisors can focus more on supporting principal growth and instructional leadership than on troubleshooting administrative issues or enforcing compliance with rules. Principal supervisors can frequently visit schools to observe and support principals, concentrating more of their attention on those principals and schools that are facing challenges.[13]

Implementation Options
- Revising job descriptions and criteria for hiring and retaining principal supervisors to focus on supporting principal growth and instructional leadership
- Developing systems of selection, induction, and professional learning for principal supervisors
- Providing opportunities for principal supervisors to learn together about how to evaluate principals and align their support with the learning needs revealed through evaluation

In-service professional development programs

Growing evidence suggests that interactive approaches to professional development that involve high engagement may be more effective than traditional, passive approaches.

Implementation Options
- Using a cohort model, where the same group continues to learn together and support each other
- Building professional learning communities in which principals meet regularly to discuss problems of practice and receive support from district staff—such as instructional facilitators, assessment specialists, or finance specialists—to develop or strengthen a skill
- Encouraging principals within a cohort or professional learning community to visit each other's schools

Building a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline for new and aspiring principals to improve student achievement and schools district-wide

Schools and districts need high-quality, effective principals to create and sustain a path toward equitable recovery. Pre-pandemic methods of recruiting and developing new principals can be improved. As the authors of the systematic review of evidence on how principals affect students and schools concluded, "our results suggest the need for renewed attention to strategies for cultivating, selecting, preparing, and supporting a high-quality principal workforce."[14]

Research has found that comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines are an effective, feasible, and affordable strategy to develop and support new and aspiring principals. They are also a major strategy to improve student achievement district-wide, including in the highest-needs schools; as an evaluation by RAND stated: "We found no other comprehensive district-wide initiatives with demonstrated positive effects of this magnitude on achievement."[15]

Comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines include the following seven domains, adapted to a district's local context.

- Rigorous job standards that specify what a principal needs to know and do and that determine how principals are trained, placed and managed[16]
- High-quality pre-service training developed in partnership between LEAs and IHEs,[17] as well as states, which have important roles to play according to a 2020 RAND study[18]
- Selective procedures for hiring principals and matching them to schools[19]
- On-the-job evaluation and support through coaching and mentoring[20]
- Principal supervision that shifts from an emphasis on compliance to an emphasis on professional development[21]
- Leader tracking systems – integrated data systems that collect career path information about teachers and others who aspire to be principals to aid in making hiring decisions and in providing feedback to preparation programs to improve them[22]
- Integration of the pipeline within other district systems to ensure sustainability[23]

See the annotated bibliography's list of resources to aid in developing pipelines, including an evidence-based self-study guide[24] that districts can use to identify gaps they can address.

A study of six, large school districts that implemented comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines found that: *Benefits kicked in early, typically within two years;* schools with new principals outperformed comparison schools by 5.01 percentile points in reading and 2.29 percentile points in math after three or more years; benefits also accrued to schools with sitting principals;[25] and pipelines were cost-effective for large districts, costing less than one-half of 1 percent (0.4 percent) of the districts' annual expenditures.[26] Pipelines meet the evidence standards for Title I and other federal funding under the Every Student Succeeds Act.[27] Pipelines also appear to be sustainable; as of 2019, two years after Wallace support ended, all six districts had maintained their pipelines.[28]

A nationally representative RAND survey of 175 large- and medium-sized districts found a substantial majority have some principal pipeline domains already in place *but few have all elements in place,* with a majority wanting to improve components from leader standards to principal hiring procedures.[29] As the study concluded, "Many districts… might benefit from some guidance and tools that would support strengthening their principal pipelines, given the strong interest among most districts for this."[30]

About The Wallace Foundation

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is a non-partisan independent endowed philanthropy working nationally to answer important questions that, if solved, could help strengthen practices and policies within a field. Our mission is to foster equity and improvements in learning and enrichment for young people, and in the arts for everyone.

We hope this document will be helpful to states, districts, schools, and others as they reopen and recover from the pandemic. We believe this to be a critical moment for evidence-based guidance in order to support students, teachers, principals, and education systems in creating and

supporting high-quality learning and development opportunities for young people, and particularly for those who are most marginalized and face the greatest adversity. More information can be found at www.wallacefoundation.org.

[1] Grissom, Jason A., *et al.*, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*, New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2021., page 91.

[2] Ibid, pages 91-94.

[3] Ibid, page 71.

[4] Ibid, page 4.

[5] Rebecca Herman, *et al.*, School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review, RAND, 2017, page 1.

[6] Grissom, Jason A., *et al., How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*, New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2021, page 39.

[7] Ibid, page 40.

[8] Ibid, page 71.

[9] Ibid, page 3.

[10] National Policy Board for Educational Administration, Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015.

[11] Leslie M. Anderson, et al, *Building a Stronger Principalship Vol 4: Evaluating and Supporting Principals,* Policy Studies Association, 2016, pages 44-47.

[12] Ibid, page 43.

[13] Ellen Goldring, *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative,* Vanderbilt University, 2020.

[14] Grissom, Jason A., *et al., How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*, The Wallace Foundation, 2021, page 9.

[15] Susan Gates, *et al.*, *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools,* RAND, 2019, Page xx.

[16] Brenda Turnbull et al, Building a Stronger Principalship Volume 3: Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline, Policy Studies Associates, Inc, 2015, pages 17-23.

[17] Elaine Lin Wang, *Launching a Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs: Partners Collaborate for Change,* RAND, 2018.

[18] Susan M. Gates, *et al., Using State-level Policy Levers to Promote Principal Quality: Lessons from Seven States Partnering with Principal Preparation Programs and Districts*, RAND, 2020.

[19] Brenda Turnbull et al, *Building a Stronger Principalship Volume 3: Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc, 2015, pages 41-53.

[20] Leslie M. Anderson, *et al.*, *Building a Stronger Principalship Vol 4: Evaluating and Supporting Principals,* Policy Studies Association, 2016,, pages 44-47.

[21] Ellen Goldring, *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative,* Vanderbilt University, 2020.

[22] Leslie M. Anderson, *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data Into Information for School Leadership,* PSA, 2017.

[23] Leslie M. Anderson and Brenda J. Turnbull, *Sustaining a Principal Pipeline*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc. 2019.

[24] Daniel K. Aladjem, *et al.,* Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide for Districts, Policy Studies Associates, 2021

[25] Susan Gates, et al, *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools,* RAND, 2019, page xviii.

[26] Julia H. Kaufman, Susan M. Gates, *et al.*, *What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources*, RAND, 2017, page xvi.

[27] Cristofer Price, Barbara Goodson*, Memorandum: ESSA Evidence Review of the Principal Pipeline Initiative*, Abt Associates, 2019, page 2.

[28] Leslie M. Anderson and Brenda J. Turnbull, *Sustaining a Principal Pipeline*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc. 2019.

[29] Susan M. Gates, Julia H. Kaufman, *et al.*, *Taking Stock of Principal Pipelines*, RAND, 2020, pages 41-43.
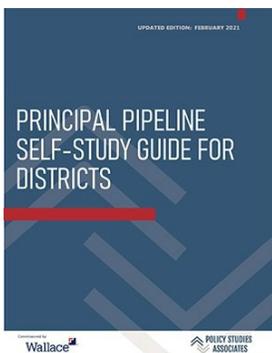
[30] Ibid, page 43.

Principal Leadership:

Annotated Bibliography of Selected Knowledge Products

March 2021

All publications are available without charge at www.wallacefoundation.org

= Evidence-based Tool

Principal Pipeline Tool

Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide for Districts, **by Daniel K. Aladjem, Leslie M. Anderson,** *et al.*, **Policy Studies Associates, 2021**

Many districts have already put in place key principal pipeline elements and want to know where there is room for improvement. The guide can help districts reflect on their policies, processes and infrastructures related to school leadership and begin planning for improvement. It provides a set of evidence-based indicators of pipeline functioning and a framework for applying the indicators through self-study. For each of the seven domains of effective principal pipelines, this guide identifies indicators of implementation; for each indicator in the domain, it suggests discussion questions and local evidence for districts to consider as they rate the current state of their principal pipeline along a developmental progression.

Leader Standards
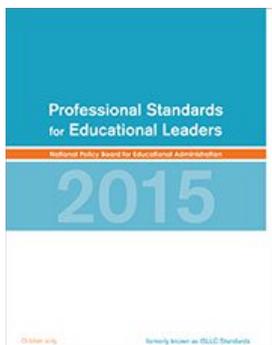
Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015, **National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015**

The publication lists and describes 10 standards for effective principals, assistant principals and other school leaders. These student-centric standards range from the ability to "develop, advocate and enact" a mission, vision and core values for a school to "act as [an agent] of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being." The standards were expanded from six to 10 in 2015 with a stronger focus on students and student learning.

High-Quality Pre-Service Principal Preparation

UConn Principal Preparation Program Blog Series, The Wallace Foundation, 2020

The five-part blog series profiles the University of Connecticut's efforts to strengthen its principal training program. The university is one of seven institutions participating in Wallace's University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI), which seeks to improve training of future principals so they are better prepared to ensure quality instruction and schools. Posts explore why the university participated in the initiative, efforts to redesign curricula and internships and ways in which the university works with community partners to ensure it is meeting their needs.
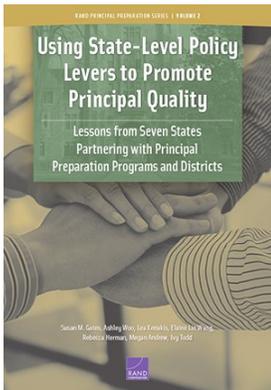
Using State-level Levers to Promote Principal Quality, by Susan M. Gates, RAND Corporation, 2020

Based on an examination of seven states, this RAND study identifies key levers that states can pull to try to improve the principalship, including: standards for the job; recruitment of aspiring principals; oversight of principal preparation programs; principal licensure; evaluation of principals; professional development; and development of "leader tracking systems" that capture longitudinal data about the characteristics and experiences of aspiring and current school leaders. The study also identifies challenges, including reluctance to interfere with local control, and suggests several agenda-setting strategies including bringing stakeholders together and piggy-backing on other initiatives.

Selective Hiring and Placement of Principals
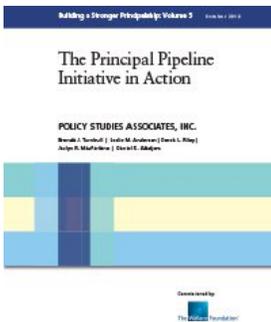
***Building a Stronger Principalship Vol 5: The Principal Pipeline Initiative in Action*, by Brenda J. Turnbull, Leslie M. Anderson, *et al.,* Policy Studies Associates, 2016, pages 25-35**

The report is the last in a series examining the efforts of six large school districts to develop a large corps of highly qualified school principals. Pages 25-35 focus on hiring and placement processes. Top district leaders viewed the changes implemented for these processes as successes. While some changes, such as incorporating simulations as part of the hiring process, offered quick wins for districts, other changes took longer to develop. Over the study period, new principals' perception of their fit with their school improved and district leaders spoke highly of the capabilities of incoming principals.

[Quality Measures: Partnership Effectiveness Continuum](#), by Cheryl King, Education Development Center, 2009 and 2013

Research suggests that principal preparation programs are more effective when school districts and training providers work together to improve principal performance. This tool is designed to help guide discussions between districts and preparation programs with the goal of helping both work together constructively.


[Quality Measures: Principal Preparation Program Self-Assessment Toolkit](#), by Cheryl King, Education Development Center, 2009 and 2013

Designed to help principal preparation programs assess the quality of the training offered, this kit was developed originally for use by states and districts taking part in Wallace-funded efforts to improve school leadership. It includes rubrics on course content, candidate recruitment and other matters. A related Principal Preparation Program Self-Assessment Handbook is available to guide people through effective use of the tool.

On-the-Job Evaluation and Support
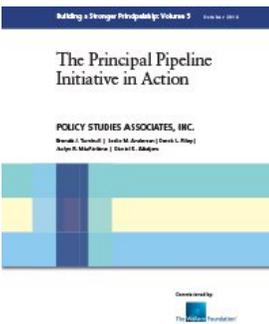
[Building a Stronger Principalship Vol 5: The Principal Pipeline Initiative in Action](#), by Brenda J. Turnbull, Leslie M. Anderson, *et al.,* Policy Studies Associates, 2016, pages 46-47

The report is the last in a series examining the efforts of six large school districts to develop a large corps of highly qualified school principals. Pages 46-47 focus on support and professional development principals received while on the job. Researchers found that principals appreciated their supervisors and expressed "particular enthusiasm" for mentors and coaches. Group-based professional learning was less highly rated.
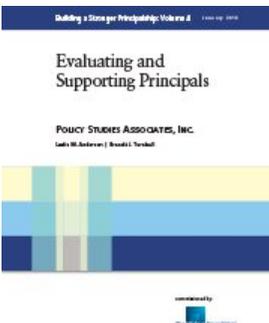

[Building a Stronger Principalship, Vol. 4: Evaluating and Supporting Principals](#), by Leslie M. Anderson and Brenda J. Turnbull, Policy Studies Associates, 2016, pages 47-50

The report is the fourth in a five-part series examining the efforts of six large school districts to develop a large corps of highly qualified school principals. Pages 47-50 focus on professional development, which was a work in progress for the districts. Indeed, principals did not rate professional development as a significant source of support. Districts instead focused more on strengthening individual support from mentors, coaches and supervisors, and principals rated these supports highly.
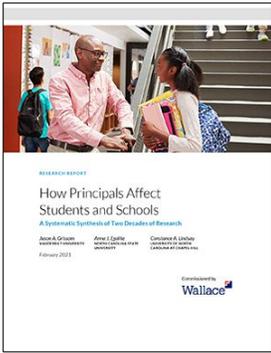
[*How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*](#), **by Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay, The Wallace Foundation, 2021**

The groundbreaking synthesis of two decades of research on school principals provides evidence linking four principal behaviors to positive outcomes for students. Those four behaviors are: engaging in "high-leverage" instructional activities, such as teacher evaluation and feedback; establishing a productive climate; building collaboration and professional learning communities; and managing personnel and resources strategically. These behaviors rest on three skills—people skills, organizational skills and instructional skills—suggesting that effective principals employ a broader toolkit of strategies than often assumed.
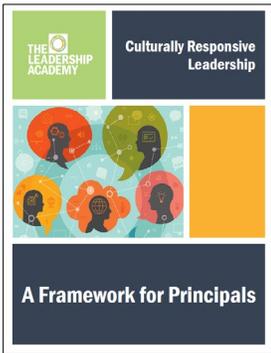
[*Culturally Responsible Leadership: A Framework for Principals*](#), **The Leadership Academy, 2021**

The framework is a set of leadership actions and behaviors which research and experience has shown support creating more culturally responsive learning environments for every student. Eight interdependent actions are built from and align with national education leadership standards and integrate the specific skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to lead for equity. Within each action are several dimensions—a collection of behaviors or qualities necessary to meet the action.

Principal Supervisors
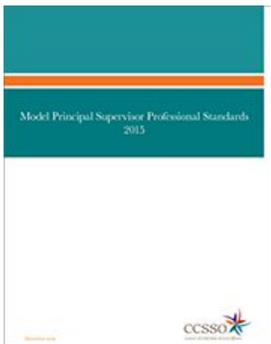
[*Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards 2015*](#), **Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015**

The document contains what are believed to be the first-ever set of standards for the job of principal supervisor. Based on the idea that supervisors can help shape effective principals—who, in turn, can improve teaching, learning and, ultimately, student achievement—the eight standards emphasize the aspect of the job involving developing principals as professionals who can boost student learning. The standards, which are voluntary, are intended to assist state education agencies and local school districts, which can adapt them to their needs, in molding the job of principal supervisor.

Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative, **by Ellen Goldring, Melissa A. Clarke, *et al.*, Vanderbilt University/Peabody College/Mathematica Policy Research, 2020**

In 2014, six large school districts around the country embarked on a four-year initiative to redesign the supervisor position so it focused primarily on supporting principals in their role as instructional leaders. This effort, the Principal Supervisor Initiative, was effective at changing the job so that it centered on developing and evaluating principals to help them promote effective teaching and learning in their schools. Over the course of the initiative, principals' ratings of their supervisors' effectiveness rose from 3.88 to 4.10 on a scale of 1-to-5, a statistically significant increase. The report includes a series of lessons for districts considering changing the supervisor role, among them the value of investing in rigorous selection and training of supervisors and building buy-in for the new role from stakeholders such as school board members and central office staffers.

Leader Tracking Systems
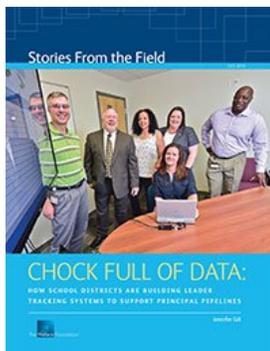
Chock Full of Data: How School Districts Are Building Leader Tracking Systems to Support Principal Pipelines, **The Wallace Foundation, 2016**

This journalistic account looks at how Denver and five other school districts have constructed and are using leader tracking systems—databases of information about the training, qualifications and performance of principals and aspiring principals—as they seek to better train, hire and support school principals. Key considerations for other districts looking to implement their own leader tracking systems include establishing cross-departmental teams and accounting for the time and effort required to determine what information to collect and find it.
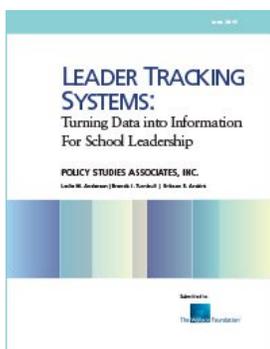
Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data into Information for School Leadership, **by Leslie M. Anderson, Brenda J. Turnbull and Erikson R. Arcaira, Policy Studies Associates, 2017**

The report offers insights from six large school districts who developed data systems to track the training, hiring, evaluation and support of principals and principal candidates. These include forming a development team headed by a single person with project management experience and working initially with data already in hand rather than gathering new data. These "leader tracking systems" have proved particularly useful for school leader hiring.

Systems and Capacity to Support and Sustain a Principal Pipeline
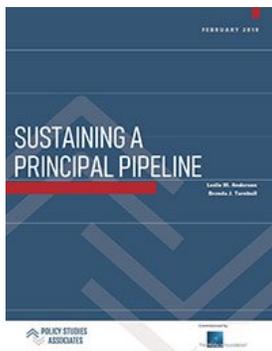
Sustaining a Principal Pipeline, **by Leslie M. Anderson and Brenda J. Turnbull, Policy Studies Associates, 2019**

In 2011, six large school districts set out, with support from The Wallace Foundation, to build a "principal pipeline"—a set of policies and procedures to help cultivate a large corps of effective professionals who could lead schools to better teaching and learning. The study, which examined the districts' pipeline work in 2018, two years beyond foundation funding, finds that pipelines remained both intact and valued, demonstrating their "staying power". It also finds some changes in pipeline activities and reorganization of some responsibilities.
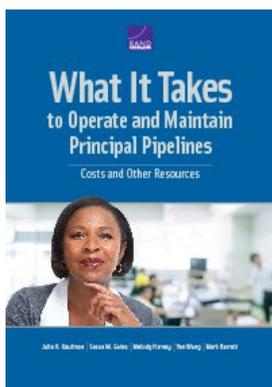
What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources, **by Julia H. Kaufman, Susan M. Gates, *et al.*, RAND Corporation, 2017**

What does it cost school districts to build and run a principal pipeline? The study seeks to answer that question by examining the resources that six large urban districts drew on as they built and operated pipelines with the goal of building a corps of highly qualified school leaders. The study found that costs were affordable, representing less than .5 percent of districts' annual expenditures; the cost to large school districts of recruiting promising candidates for pre-service training to become principals was a relatively modest $203 per district principal.