

Trends in Education Policy: School Leader Tracking Systems

BY KELLY LATTEMAN

School district personnel report spending an excessive amount of time and resources hiring and supporting school leaders. The current process is complicated and burdensome. School districts are building leader tracking systems to simplify and streamline this process. These systems assist school districts in making informed data-driven decisions to support principal pipelines.

What Are Leader Tracking Systems?

Leader tracking systems are a new and powerful tool for matching an applicant's background with the needs of the school. These online databases are used to collect information on teacher leaders, assistant principals, principals, and outside candidates who apply for leadership positions. The systems are multifaceted, tracking personnel data and cross-referencing it with the projected employment needs of the school.

When making a hiring decision, school districts consider the school itself—its culture, size, student performance, demographics, location and staff. Based on this information, the school district is able to determine the ideal qualifications to best serve the student population. Once the qualifications are determined, the tracking systems can be used to weed through applicants and narrow the pool based on data (see box). This streamlined approach to hiring decreases the time and expense of hiring and may increase the likelihood of a good match and longer-term retention.

Why Use Leader Tracking Systems?

Placing highly effective principals into schools where they are good matches reduces costs and benefits students. According to the School Leaders Network, approximately 25 percent of the nation's principals leave their schools each year, and nearly 50 percent leave by the end of their third year.¹ There is a high cost associated with each departure, with school districts spending an estimated \$75,000 on each principal for hiring, training, professional development and placement costs.²

Principals shape the vision and climate of their schools.³ A great leader will attract and retain great teachers. Twenty-four out of 25 teachers report that the No. 1 factor in whether or not they stay at a school is the principal.⁴ Principals are multipliers of student success. The professional development and support they provide for every teacher affects his or her students. When a principal leaves a school, students' achievement gains tend to decrease in the year immediately following the vacancy.⁵

Types of Information Collected in Leader Tracking Systems

- Educational background
- Employment history in and outside of the district
- Ratings by teachers and supervisors
- Specialized skills (turnaround, special education, English Language Learners)
- Standardized test scores of students
- Current and previous schools they have led
- Mentoring and residency
- Professional development completion
- Student absenteeism rate
- Other: ratings and survey results from parents, students and teachers

Source: Wallace informal survey of six Principal Pipeline Districts, July 2016.

Additional Roles of the Systems

- Develop differentiated professional development.
- Provide feedback to principal preparation programs about their graduates in order to improve the programs.
- Identify trends across all district leaders regarding skills and training needs.
- Make the linkages between teaching and learning, student achievement and effective leaders.

Source: Wallace Foundation Leader Tracking Systems Webinar, 2014.

Trending

The Wallace Foundation has launched and financed two nationwide initiatives using leader tracking systems to support the development of effective principals. The first, the Principal Pipeline Initiative, was a six-year, \$75 million effort focused on developing principals who enhance teaching and learning in six urban school districts. The second, the Principal Supervisor Initiative, was a five-year, \$30 million effort among 14 school districts to improve the effectiveness of principal supervisors so that they can in turn assist principals in improving teaching and learning. The initial six grantees from the Principal Pipeline initiative have fully adopted leader tracking systems. They include Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; Denver, Colorado; Gwinnett County, Georgia; Prince George's County, Maryland; New York, New York, and Hillsborough, Florida. Additional school districts have begun to phase in components of the comprehensive leader tracking systems.

Stories from the Field: Chock Full of Data

A new Wallace Foundation report, "Chock Full of Data," explores the ways six school districts are using leader tracking systems to make informed decisions using data. Recently, a small hiring team gathered in the Denver Public Schools district to discuss an opening for an assistant principal. The current principal wanted a candidate who would foster an inclusive school culture and make meaningful ties with students and their families. Rather than reviewing hundreds of resumes and scanning for key words that might indicate excellence in these areas, the group used the system's Vacancy Matching Tool. They filtered candidates whose performance evaluations demonstrated expertise in family engagement and culture. This narrowed the pool of candidates and quickly moved the process to phone interviews.

In a second illustration of how these systems work, both Hillsborough County, Florida, and Denver Public Schools are strengthening their partnerships with university preparation providers by sharing the performance data of graduates. The districts can discuss with university personnel how to improve their programs to increase graduates skills in specific areas. Administrators in Gwinnett County, Georgia, are using data to improve their own district-run preparation program. The district recently looked at its own data system when making a decision about the importance of a 180-day versus 90-day residency.

Source: *Chock Full of Data*, Jennifer Gill, Wallace Foundation, July 2016.⁶

District Spotlight: Hillsborough County Public Schools

Tricia McManus, executive director of leadership development for Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, is an advocate for leader tracking systems. "I think it is critical for every school district to have this data to assist in managing its talent and career mapping," McManus explains. Hillsborough personnel view the system as a way to improve hiring decisions, and to track the quality of professional development and principal preparation partnership programs. McManus reports that before implementing the system, it often took an entire day for someone to collect basic information for the hiring team. Now the hiring team has comprehensive data on each candidate at its fingertips. McManus explains, "Fit and match are so important as well as making sure our pre-service and job support are preparing candidates for their future roles." As the district invests in professional development resources, its tracking system can be used to store survey data from participants on the efficiency and value of professional development. In Hillsborough, populating leader tracking systems has become a priority as district personnel ask the question, "What could be more important than getting great leaders into our schools?"

State Policy Approaches

- 1) Engage in conversations with stakeholders about leadership challenges in your state.
- 2) Encourage districts to work together to establish school leader tracking systems and share lessons learned.
- 3) Consider whether leader tracking systems would be valuable by asking questions, such as:

- a. How are local districts currently managing their talent pool?
- b. Do your schools experience high principal turnover?
- c. How are university and school district partnerships currently evaluated?
- d. Are districts evaluating the effectiveness of their pre-service and professional development trainings with data?
- e. Are district-level hiring teams making data-informed decisions?

Notes

1. School Leaders Network, *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover* (n.p.: School Leaders Network, 2014), https://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf.
2. Ibid.
3. The Wallace Foundation, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (New York, N.Y.: The Wallace Foundation, January 2013), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/effective-principal-leadership/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf>.
4. New Leaders, *Experience Change: New Leaders Annual Report 2012* (New York, N.Y.: New Leaders, 2013), <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/2012-annual-report>.
5. School Leaders Network, *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover* (n.p.: School Leaders Network, 2014), https://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf.
6. Gill, Jennifer, *Chock Full of Data* (New York, N.Y.: The Wallace Foundation, July 2016), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Chock-Full-of-Data-Leader-Tracking-Systems-Principal-Pipelines.pdf>

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Additional School Leadership Resources:

The Wallace Foundation: www.wallacefoundation.org
NCSL School Principal's Website:
www.ncsl.org/research/education/schoolprincipals
New Leaders: www.newleaders.org

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