

School Leadership: A Key to Student Success

Introduction

Bring in an effective school leader and teachers will stay and students will learn. The positive effect of a successful school leader has now been proven to aid in the growth of student learning. The cyclical nature of school leadership intersects with all facets of a school—from the budget to the newest literacy strategies. “Principals are multipliers of effective teaching,” says author Paul Manna in his report, “[Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning](#).” Investing in the preparation of quality leaders will have a return that will not only help stem teacher turnover, but also provide students with a platform to learn, prosper and grow. There is no indication that a school can be turned around without the guidance and leadership of an outstanding school leader.

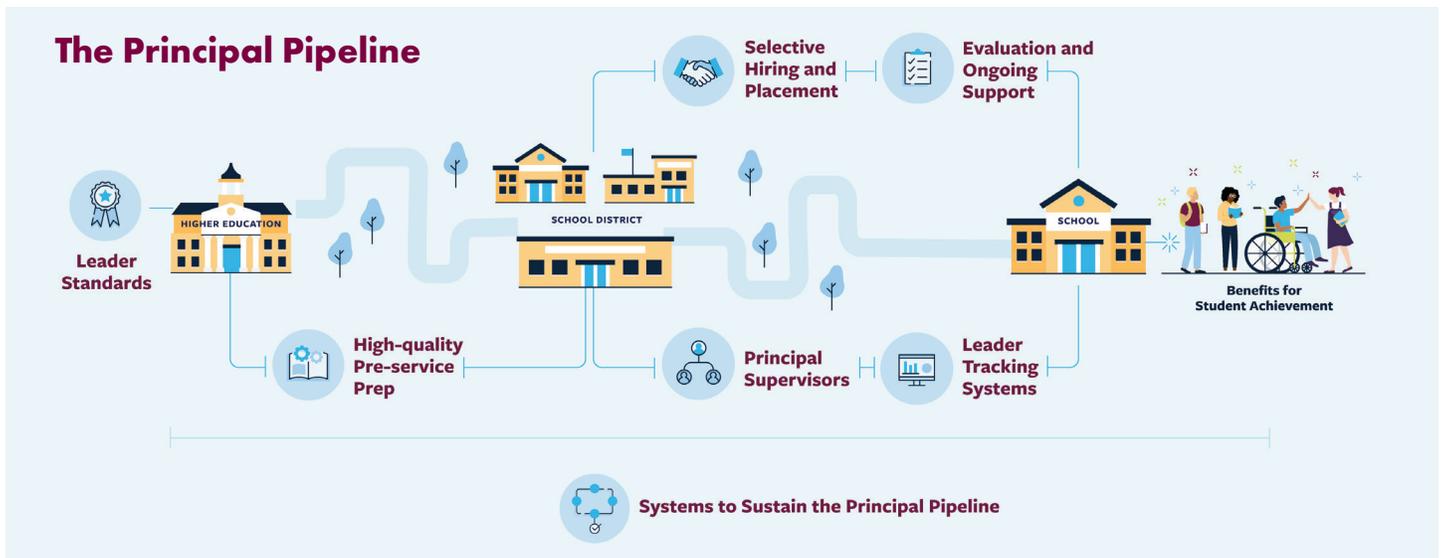
Keeping Good Teachers and Principals

Teachers stay for good principals. In fact, [24 out of 25](#) teachers say the No. 1 factor in their choice to stay at a school is the leader. The quality of school leaders matters because it affects the entire school. These leaders attract and retain the most effective teachers. Not

only is teacher turnover [considerably lower](#) in schools that are led by high-quality principals, when principals leave, that turnover negatively affects both teachers and students.

The school leader’s vision and positive relationship with educators are what make them so effective. In research studies throughout the United States, teachers valued working with an effective school leader over salary increases. One [study](#) revealed that improving the quality of school leadership in a district was related to decreases in teacher turnover. Though school leaders cannot be in every classroom every day, their presence through their positive relationships with the educators they lead ultimately increases retention and eventual success of the students.

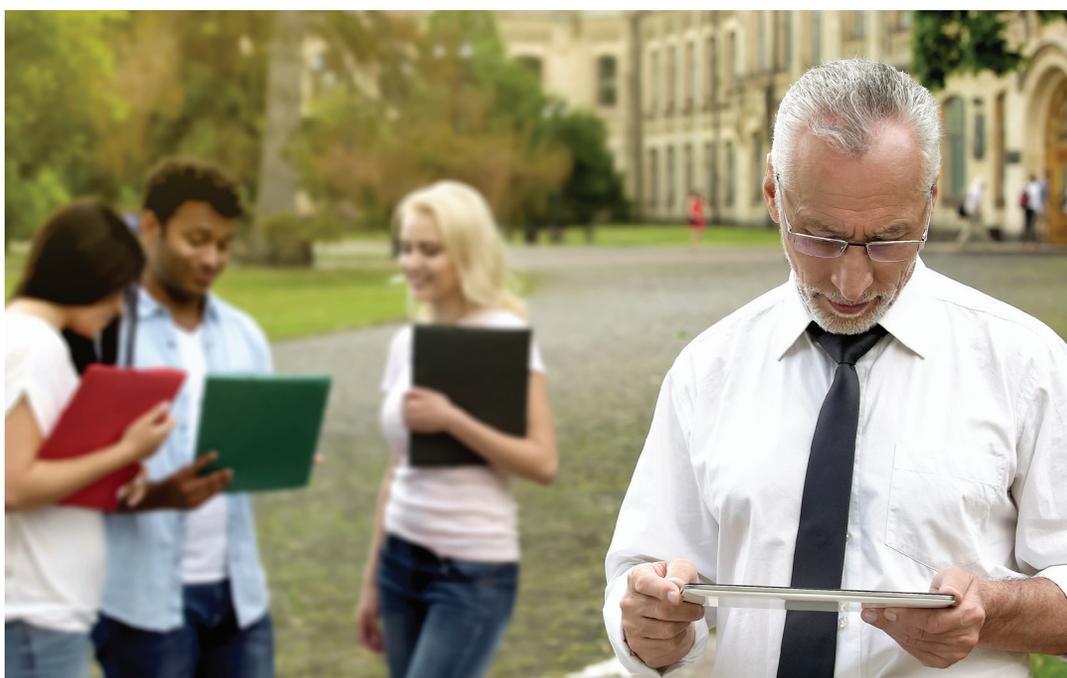
Retaining school leaders is just as imperative as teacher retention when examining employee turnover in education. Principal turnover is unsettling for the school, community and district because it causes disruption within a school. It is estimated that principal turnover costs school districts approximately \$75,000 per resignation. This is a heavy cost to bear in a system that is already strapped and one that can be avoided through purposeful preparation and continuous support once a leader is placed in the school.



RAND Corporation, 2019

Using “principal pipelines” is one approach showing promise to create effective school leaders. A principal pipeline enables school districts to prepare, recruit and place leaders. The Wallace Foundation, a philanthropy working on the issue, describes a principal pipeline as a districtwide strategy to develop a large, ongoing supply of effective school leaders through a partnership with a local university. With Wallace Foundation support, six large school districts built pipelines with four aligned components: leader standards, preservice preparation, hiring, and on-the-job support and evaluation.

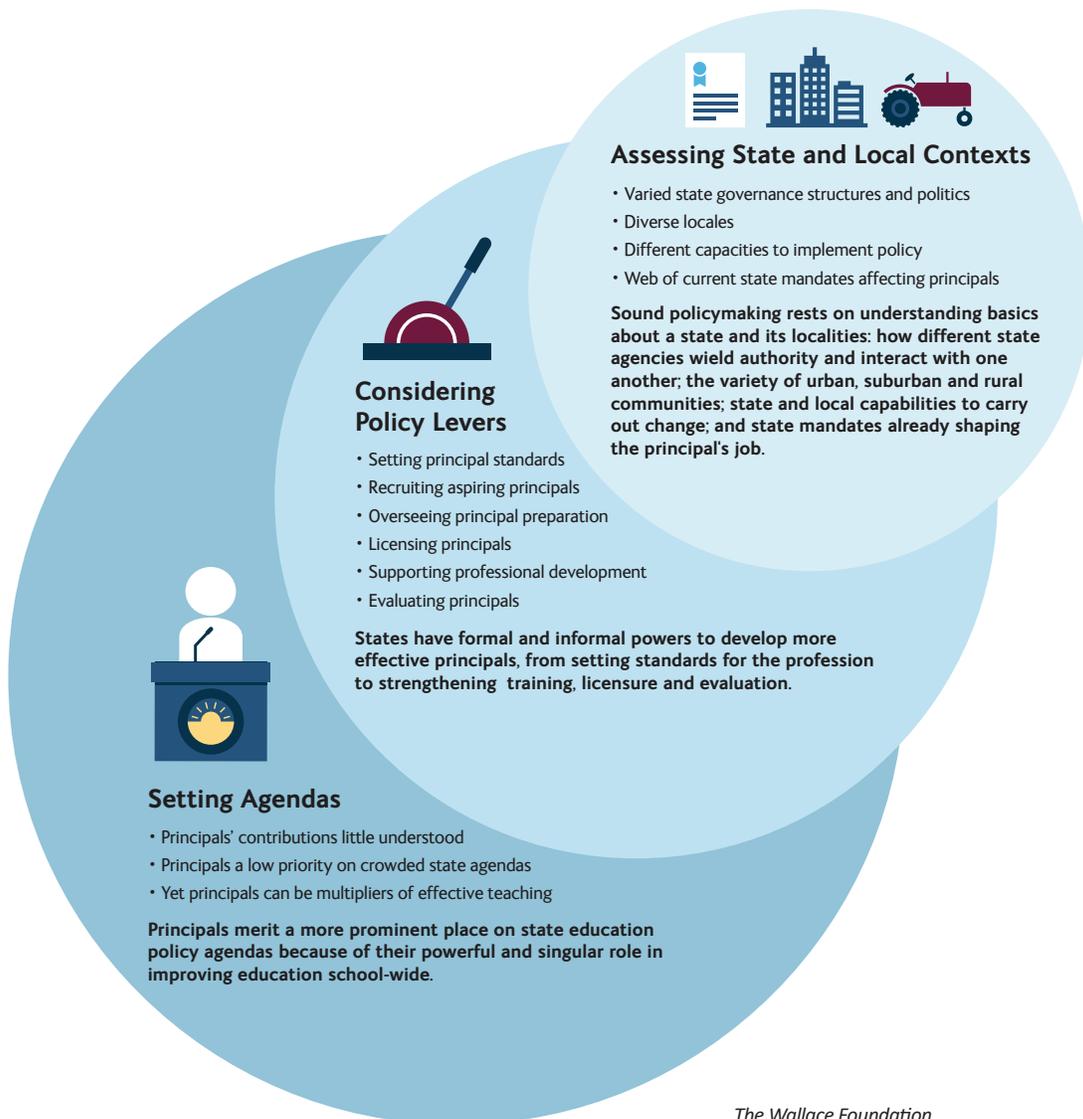
The [Principal Pipeline Initiative](#), which started in 2011, has created an influx of highly prepared principals that received training to ensure educators, students, staff and their respective communities are supported in a variety of ways. Pipelines within school districts across the U.S. provide a greater pool of effective candidates because of the [Professional Standards for Educational Leaders \(PSEL\)](#), intentional preparation, and their relationship with surrounding universities. They allow districts to be selective in their hiring practices. They also provide ongoing support through [Leader Tracking Systems](#), which provide data to hire and place effective leaders in specific schools, and [Principal Supervisors](#), who provide continuous support to current school leaders—all with the intention to provide continuous student achievement.



The Principal Pipeline Effect

In [Principal Pipelines](#), The Wallace Foundation, in partnership with the RAND Corporation, put into place systematic processes for school leaders in six school districts in Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, New York and North Carolina. Researchers looking at the initiative “found no other comprehensive district-wide initiatives with demonstrated positive effects of this magnitude on [student] achievement.” To be even more specific, students in the six school districts outperformed their peers in other school districts in math in elementary, middle and high school. These effects were not only positive but also statistically significant for schools in the lowest quartile of student achievement.

As mentioned previously, principal turnover is extremely costly for school districts when leaders leave. However, when states and districts implement principal pipelines, the cost and return on investment considerably outweigh the cost of principal turnover. For the six principal pipeline initiative school districts, it cost approximately \$42 per pupil per year, or less than 0.5% of the district’s annual budget per-school year. Additionally, it must be noted that school districts that used the pipeline model replaced between 6% and 8% fewer principals per year than nonpipeline comparison schools.



State Options and Recommendations

One policy option state legislators might consider is to adopt national standards at the state or local levels to ensure that all principals meet the minimum criteria. Forty-eight states have adopted or in some way adapted the [National Leader Standards](#), which provide specifications regarding performance expectations for school and district leaders. Of those 48 states, 12 states have adopted the 2015 [PSEL](#). In 2018, 36 states introduced or passed legislation related to school leadership and 22 states have enacted legislation.

Another policy option for state legislators is to create a space in which universities and school districts can come together to ensure that leaders are being prepared with the skills necessary to lead students currently in school. Strategically aligning university preparation with the needs of school districts within each state will yield results for principals, teachers and most importantly, the students.

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