

CHURN: The High Cost of Principal Turnover



“We cannot hope to create a sustainable culture with any but sustainable souls.”

-Derrick Jensen

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE EDUCATION ECO-SYSTEM WHEN EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS LEAVE?

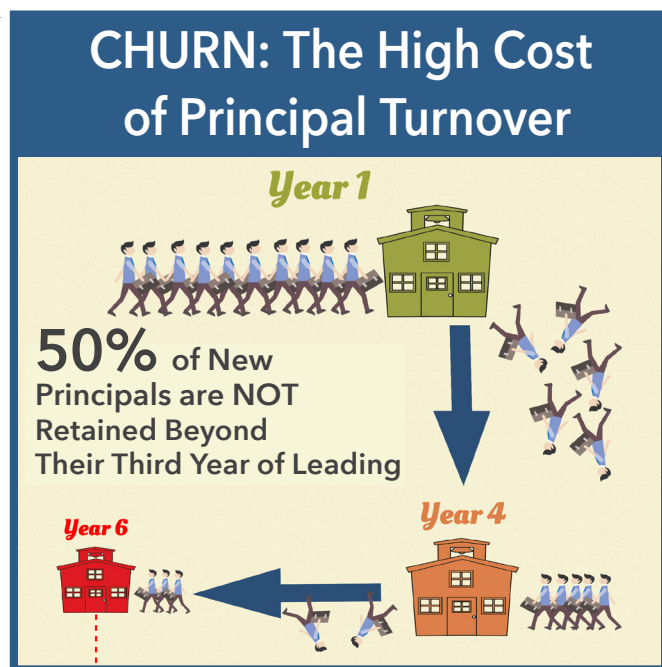
Twenty five thousand (one quarter of the country’s principals) leave their schools each year, leaving millions of children’s lives adversely affected. Fifty percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role. Those that remain frequently do not stay at high poverty schools, trading difficult-to-lead schools for less demanding leadership roles that serve more affluent populations.

These retention and persistence realities deeply hamper the ability for schools, particularly high poverty schools, to initiate and sustain school improvement efforts necessary to achieve real gains for students.

School leadership is an issue of national concern.

Funding excellent principal preparation programs that yield highly effective candidates is one solution. However, approaching the problem of ineffective school leadership with a focus almost exclusively on principal entry into the profession ignores the problems of “churn” – currently schools lose scores of experienced principals each year, requiring replacements with less effective, novice principals on an average of every three years.¹

The job is simply too complex, too poorly constructed, too isolating. School leaders lack the ongoing support and development required to maintain and foster sustained commitment.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report calls upon decision-makers and funders to value and prioritize principal *retention efforts* as much as principal pipeline development efforts, which research shows are necessary for the sake of students and schools.

School systems and others trying to improve America’s public schools have been focused over the last decade on getting talented, trained school leaders into schools, among other reforms. However, as this report shows, the narrow focus on the principal pipeline has significant, unintended consequences. In short: Leaders are effectively being thrown into the deep end of the pool without adequate continued support, impacting schools, teachers, students and our country.

Many studies show how important a good principal is to a school. CHURN, produced by the School Leaders Network, which has more than eight years of experience working in the trenches with principals, is the first to quantify and qualify just how important purposeful principal retention efforts are to schools.

This new report challenges the myth that developing a strong principal pipeline is where America should be focused. CHURN reveals the multitude of significant impacts principal turnover has on schools and school systems – including teachers and students, and highlights the cost implications of a typical system in churn. This report shows that investing in the backend of principal retention will carry front-end pipeline investments much further, proposing specific solutions to reverse the current flood of leadership out the door:

1. Continue to invest in leadership development beyond pipeline investments.
2. Engage principals in authentic peer networks where principals can learn from other principals the art and practice of leading schools.
3. Provide one-to-one coaching support to principals *beyond the first two years*.
4. Revise the structure and purpose of district office principal supervisors’ roles.

“‘No one knows who I am,’ exclaimed a senior in a high-poverty, predominantly minority and low-performing high school in the Austin area. She explained, “I have been at this school four years and had four principals and six algebra I teachers.” Elsewhere in Texas, the first school to be closed by the state for low performance was Johnston High School, which was led by 13 principals in the 11 years preceding closure.”

(from Ed Fuller’s Blog: [Examining Principal Turnover](#) ²)

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

The most recent leadership literature has been definitive on the point of school leadership: it matters for youth outcomes. When strong principals are at the helm of schools, they positively influence the school culture and the instructional quality of whole systems of teachers.³ Leaders' effect on students contributes to 25 percent of the total school influences on a child's academic performance.⁴

What does this actually mean in the lives of children? In one study, Branch, Hanushek and Rivkin found the top sixteen percent of principals realized additional two- to seven-month gains in student learning above schools with less effective leaders. In order to accomplish better outcomes for students, principals must have the skills, strategies, practices, and beliefs to establish and maintain highly effective school settings where youth prosper.

To achieve the leadership effect described above requires tenacious efforts by the same leader, over multiple years. It is not enough for leaders to stay in the role, or persist passively at the same school. Rather, it takes tenacious instructional leaders, who build trust with a new faculty, set the vision for improvement and engage whole staffs in change efforts that are held *over-time*.

While highly effective principals create significant changes each year, it takes an average of *five years* to put a mobilizing vision in place, improve the teaching staff, and fully implement policies and practices that positively impact the school's performance.⁵ Furthermore, tenacious leaders help weak teachers leave and replace them with strong teachers – a process that shows results over years.⁶

As a result of principal churn, students achieve less in both math and reading during the first year after leader turnover, and schools that experience principal churn year-after-year realize serious cumulative negative effects on students – a condition that is exacerbated for schools serving underprivileged students.⁷

PRINCIPAL PIPELINE COSTS

	Lower Expenditure	Upper Expenditure	Typical
Preparation	20,000	150,000	40,000
Hiring	5,850	20,000	6,000
Signing	0	25,000	12,500
Internship	0	85,000	0
Mentoring	11,000	15,000	12,500
Continuing Education	0	8,000	4,000
TOTAL	\$36,850	\$303,000	\$75,000

THE COST OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP - AND CHURN - TO OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR CHILDREN?

Conservative estimates of the cost to develop, hire, and onboard each principal is 75K. For a typical urban school district with 110 schools, investments made to draw retention to the same rate as typical affluent schools (20% turnover) would save the district 330K annually.^a Increasing principal retention rates to that of affluent schools can save U.S. school districts \$163 million annually⁸. And applying these efforts to just the largest 500 districts (2.8% of nation's districts) would save nearly \$100 million annually currently allocated for principal replacement costs.^b

Unfortunately districts do not readily track or share the specific costs they incur to hire and onboard principal replacements. There is also limited information about the specific turnover rates per district. Because of this absence of data, it was necessary to rely on figures published for each distinct point underlying principal replacement costs, which we describe in the following section.

^a We assume an estimated turnover rate of 27% given urban districts tend to have higher poverty. This equates to a loss of 29.7 principal positions each year. If we reduce churn to 24% - 26.4 principals will need to be replaced. Each new principal is 144K (see table X) so \$476,602 is saved from having 3.3 fewer candidates to hire.

^b There are 15,412 schools in the 100 largest districts. Assuming 10 percent reduction of average turnover rates from 24 percent to 22.6 percent, this accounts for 370 principals replacements annually, at a conservative cost of 75K each.

COST BREAKDOWNS

General Pipeline Costs

According to extensive research, not a single school has ever been found to accomplish turnaround achievement without a powerful leader at the helm of the change effort.⁹ Highly effective school leaders can be produced in strong principal preparation programs that are funded extensively, but not sustainably, by philanthropy. Programs like KIPP's School Leadership Programs, New Leaders, and NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA), show excellent track records in producing effective leaders.¹⁰ These programs invest in careful selection of promising teacher leaders, extensive training in technical aspects of the job and accelerating leader competency development. They support emerging leaders in internships and with mentors or network support during the first few years of their principalship. Districts like Gwinnett County Public Schools and Hillsborough County Public Schools invest heavily in the entire preparation pipeline with foundation support, university, and nonprofit partnerships.

These types of investments in principal preparation programs, when done right, require a significant outlay of resources.¹¹ Figures from 2010 show average program costs range from \$20,000 to \$42,000 per aspiring principal,¹² and more current estimates from organizational insiders report costs of the most effective programs range from \$50,000 to upward of \$100,000 per leader.

Early investigations into the effects of strong preparation on principal retention are evident in Jefferson County Public Schools, Kentucky where bolstered principal preparation may have contributed to the reduction in principal turnover in the region by 70 percent between 2005 and 2010.¹³ Also, KIPP's \$150,000 per principal investment has shown a 44 percent higher retention than charter averages.^{c, 14, 15} Further studies are warranted to determine the full effect of preparation as a means to reduce principal churn, particularly given the steep cost of programs that appear to be having an effect.

^cRead the KIPP Case Study: A story of investment success on page 11 to learn more about KIPP's approach and impact.

Human Resources Costs

Most certified principals emerge from principal preparation programs and enter a prospective leader pool awaiting school placement. Some of these individuals are highly competent and capable, while others are less well suited or prepared for the role. The responsibility for selecting the best school leaders and then matching skills sets and competencies to appropriate school assignments falls to human resource offices at local education agencies (LEAs). Salaried professionals invest additional time and require funding to find, select, and hire new principals.

Human resource costs are extensive. Presently there are no easily accessible figures regarding the actual costs that districts invest. Feinberg & Jeppeson (2000) estimate the cost of employee replacement exceeds \$20,000 per senior leader.¹⁶ Most districts cut down these costs by hiring from within and not utilizing the services of recruiters – which leads to a lack of depth and diversity of the hiring pool available for principal selection.

Conservative estimates from our investigations with districts show they cost \$5,850 per hired principal. Given the average yearly principal churn rate of 22 percent, nationally, this means high poverty districts spend *\$36 million on just hiring costs*, not onboarding, and not training.

In some instances where candidates are hard to come by, particularly given the challenge of some of America's toughest-to-lead schools, districts offer signing bonuses to out-of-town hires. In Chicago, high quality out-of-town principals are offered \$25K to sign the contract,¹⁷ a practice common to 373 other districts in 2012.¹⁸

Transitional Training

There are three general forms of transitional training offered to emerging leaders; full-time job-embedded internships, detached internships, and course-embedded field experiences. Internships enable emerging leaders to try their hand at real leadership work that is smaller in scope than leading an entire campus, under the guidance and support of a more experienced mentor principal. Well-executed full-time job-embedded internships have shown the most promise at developing effective and tenacious principals.¹⁹

Ten Worst States

Lowest average years of principal leading the same school (2.7 years to 3.5 years)

North Carolina
Rhode Island
Alaska
California
Oregon
New Mexico
Delaware
Nevada
Idaho

How Much Longer Do Other Leaders Or School Personnel Stay In Position?

Field	% longer
CEO (small org)	11%
CEO (large org)	44%
Teachers	38%

Only three industries that have higher turnover than principals: Mining and logging, retail trade, and leisure and hospitality. And only leisure and hospitality workers leave more often than principals of high poverty schools. (Based upon Bureau of Labor and Statistics JOLT report)

In these programs, emerging principals are matched intentionally with strong host principals and given essential leadership tasks to build their expertise, thus enabling important exposure to what effective leadership looks like and requires. In some internship arrangements, host principals serve as the emerging principal's supervisor and mentor, while in other models a traveling mentor provides this support. Internships pay partial salaries to the interning principal and host school principal mentor and can cost as much as \$50,000 to \$85,000 per intern depending on the region. These costs can be even higher when they include full salaries for interns. Despite the benefits full-time internships can provide emerging leaders, because of their high cost these tend to be the least utilized by districts and university programs.

Onboarding

New principal hires require two types of training investments:

1) technical onboarding to learn district rules, regulations, and reform initiatives, and 2) early career support systems such as coaches or mentors for the first two years of the principalship.

District principal onboarding frequently takes the form of district-held meetings run during summer sessions preceding the year, and periodically during the year for new principals. These in-house trainings require talent management, time, and training facility costs that must be repeated each year for each new stock of incoming principals replacements. The costs of these investments are not typically published by LEAs, but are predictably significant.

As with other investments in principals, districts differ dramatically in the extent of these early career investments. Preparation programs and districts that utilize leadership coaches, like NYC Leadership Academy, invest as much as \$5,500 to \$7,500 per new principal, depending on the case load of full-time principal coaches.²⁰

These costs escalate when districts and programs pay careful attention to making the best match of coach/mentor to principal possible. Too frequently, cost-cutting methods, which include hiring part-time retirees, reduced mentor training, and increased mentor-to-principal caseloads, dramatically reduce the ability for mentors to build important skills in early career principals.²¹

Continuing Education

Other professions, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, all receive ongoing training and development. School districts would be considered incompetent if they did not provide teachers with ongoing learning opportunities once they completed teacher certification. Yet this is precisely the reality, as *most principals are left on their own to find relevant and personalized ongoing learning.*

In fact, the federal government gives local districts more than \$1 billion annually for training programs: 9 percent of funds are used to support principals, 91 percent for teachers.

Furthermore, despite the complexity of the principal job, according to a 2008 NAESP survey, less than 2 percent of principals prioritized continued learning amongst their job duties. Once principals move into their second or third year on the job, *they are frequently left to lead and learn in isolation.*²³

Most districts do host “principals meetings,” but these are most frequently used as opportunities to roll out mandates, initiatives, and expectations. According to research²⁴ and our interviews with principals in the field, these meetings often prepare principals with the “what” of district reform: such as *what* is expected for district teacher evaluation policies; paying little, if any attention, to the “how” of leading change: such as *how* to create the conditions that promote healthy teachers responsiveness to feedback generated by the evaluation process.

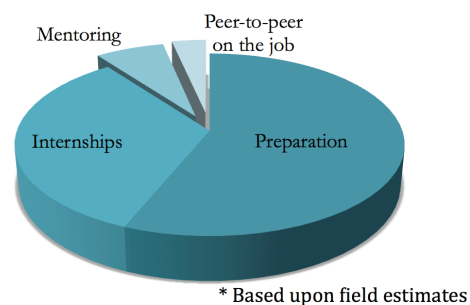
The inadequacy of school leadership has fueled new state and federal policies in two areas: improving principal preparation and increasing principal accountability and evaluation. The absence of attention to ongoing support and training is notable when searching the topic. Some 95 percent of principals report they learn *on the job.*²⁵

In 2011-12, \$90 million was used to develop principal leadership of high poverty schools using Title II funds while \$994 million was used to develop teachers. The allocation of funds for administrators has gone up from 2 percent of the total Title II budget in 2002 to a whopping 4 percent,²² despite all we have learned in the past decade about the principal “effect,” and the subsequent changing expectations for the role.

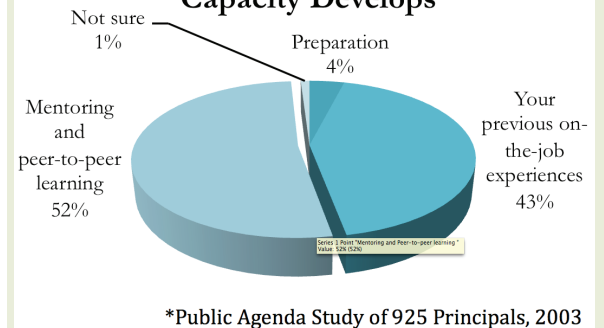
While 86 percent of principals agree they should be held accountable for student outcomes according to the 2012 MetLife survey, 84 percent report high stress two or more days per week related to the impossibility of the job; rife with long hours, limited authority to make important decisions, and intense pressure to raise achievement.

As a result, nearly one in every three principals of the 500 surveyed was actively considering leaving the profession.²⁶ In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics 2013 report, principals who reported receiving *no professional development* during the previous year left their school 1.4 times more often than principals who had some form of professional development.²⁷

Typical Principal Investments



Where Principals Report Their Capacity Develops



Effect on Student Earning Potential

We know that successful school leaders can affect whole systems of teachers, and these teachers in turn affect the learning and achievement of their students. Researchers Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff in 2011 calculated that one standard deviation increase in teacher effectiveness is associated with a 1.3 percent increase in earning for a child over their lifetime. We also know that turnover stymies the effect even the strongest principals will have on achievement.

So how important is investing in ongoing principal support and development? Based upon our calculations,^d a 10 percent reduction in principal turnover in high poverty schools (from 27.4 percent to 24.7 percent) while improving principal effectiveness (from ineffective – 25% percentile of all principals to somewhat effective - 50% percentile), *has the potential to affect a single child's earnings by \$30,024.07*. For an average urban district with at least 72,000 students, investments to increase principal tenacity potentially contribute an estimated \$469 million in additional taxable revenues to local coffers.^e

The following chart shows conservative estimates of the potential impact strategic investments in principals could achieve in terms of increased student life-time earnings. Our calculation assumes ongoing investment in the principal can yield \$30K of increased student earnings for children of color at high poverty schools. We therefore use the poverty rates per city for 5-17 year olds,²⁸ multiplied by the number of students in the district. These estimates are conservative in that we anticipate the investment would also yield increased earnings for more affluent schools and students as well.

EXAMPLES OF ESTIMATED EFFECT OF HIGHER RETENTION/ACHIEVEMENT ON GDP [†]

\$5.8 billion	New York City, NY
\$8.2 billion	LAUSD
\$2 billion	Houston, TX
\$1.8 billion	Philadelphia, PA
\$1.4 billion	Broward County, FL
\$1 billion	Hillsborough County, FL
\$904 million	San Diego, CA
\$849 million	Gwinnet, GA
\$787 million	Charlotte Mecklenburg, NC
\$593 million	Wake County, NC
\$574 million	Jefferson County, KY
\$434 million	Prince George's County, MD
\$383 million	Montgomery County, MD
\$376 million	Fairfax, VA

^d See School Leaders Network Report: Effect of Principal Effectiveness and Attrition on Students. Found on at <http://www.connectleadsucceed.org>

^e All calculations are performed using the average annual income of a person of color (\$32,682) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, extrapolating the lifetime earnings using a modest inflation rate of 2.5 percent. We assume that today's students will experience a similar lifetime earnings growth profile to adults today. Our calculations assume robust raises of 3.5 percent annually from age 22 to 34, more modest raises of 3 percent per annum from 35 to 44, 2.9 percent from 45 to 49 and 2.5 percent from 50 to retirement at age 62. This follows recent trends of flat earnings after adult earnings peak in the late 40's to early 50's. Each child is assumed to work for 40 years and should serve as an upper bound in impact given workers typically take breaks for continued education, childrearing and during recessions. The findings from Branch, Hanushek and Rivkin (2012) Texas schools' principal effectiveness are used to calculate the impact of increasing principal effectiveness at high poverty schools (from 25% percentile to 50% percentile performance). Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2011) estimate learning losses of -.005 standard deviations in mathematics and -.001 standard deviations in reading attributed to principal turnover. Chetty, Freidman, and Rockoff (2011) calculate that one standard deviation increase in teacher effectiveness is associated with 1.3 percent increase in earnings for a child over their lifetime. We assume that principal effectiveness has a similar relationship on student earnings though Marzano et al. (2005) found that 25 percent of the variation in student performance is due to principals. Therefore, we use the ratio of teacher to principal influence and use .625 as a scalar or 0.8125 percent to model earnings increases from principal impact.

^f *The above calculation takes into account the expected increase in GDP for students of color in high poverty schools. NCES figures for the percent of students living under the poverty line, ages 5-17, were multiplied by published district student population figures. Expected cumulative life earnings of \$30,024 per child were used to calculate the dollar figures above.

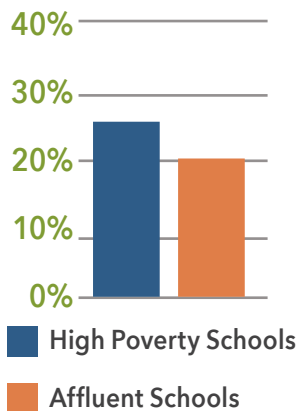
PRINCIPAL CHURN: PROBLEMS OF LEADER TENACITY

The problem of retention is greatest at high poverty schools where 27 percent of principals leave each year and are replaced most frequently with new, inexperienced leaders, as compared with 20 percent attrition at more affluent schools. Charters nationally take the cake in principal churn with an average of 29 percent leaving each year.³²

Despite the expensive investment in principal preparation, selection, and transition, a study conducted by Fuller and Young found that just over 50 percent of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30 percent stay beyond year five.²⁹ Unfortunately, the majority of states and preparation programs do not know with any certainty yet if principal preparation investments help sustain principals in the job.³⁰

Average districts lose anywhere from 15 percent to 30 percent of principals each year.³¹ Each school vacancy requires extensive costs to replace these individuals.

ANNUAL PRINCIPAL CHURN RATES AT AFFLUENT AND HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS



The resulting churn causes student achievement to drop in Math and ELA in the year following the vacancy, and it can take the next principal up to three years to regain forward progress for the school.³³

And states with the highest proportion of novice principals also have the lowest graduation rates. The principal-graduation rate relationship turns out to be as predictable as the relationship between SAT scores and college GPA.^{34,35}

As principals become more experienced, those that stay tend to move to schools that are easier to run: schools with higher income, higher achieving students, and fewer minorities.³⁶ It has become highly unusual for high poverty students to have the same principal throughout their enrollment at a given campus. High poverty schools are 50 percent less likely than middle-class schools to be led by the same principal over six years.³⁷ Even more troubling, one Texas study found that 12 percent of poor performing leaders were shuffled amongst underperforming schools each year but rarely moved out of the profession.³⁸

SLOWING PRINCIPAL TURNOVER

Principals leave for many reasons. In a study conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, principals identify the primary driver of exodus is their inability to make a difference for children given four key obstacles:

- Workload and extensive managerial tasks prevent more meaningful instructional leadership efforts,
- Expensive personal costs; long hours and a significant toll to their physical and psychological well-being,
- Local and state policies that tie principal hands in making critical decisions such as hiring, firing and funding allocation flexibility,
- Profound isolation on the job.³⁹

These work conditions are exacerbated at high poverty schools that present highly challenging and complex school issues coupled with high pressure to increase performance.

A NAESP study found that to support principal persistence in the job and keep them continuously driving school improvement efforts, the isolation and frustration they feel related to the challenges of their job must be reduced.⁴⁰ When linkages between preparation and in-service professional development are weak, the impact of the initial training is likely to “fade with time, particularly in challenging school contexts.”⁴¹ It is also essential to increase principals’ skills with on-the-job leadership demands so they can experience greater success. It is important to note that on-going principal professional development has received weak national investment and attention, and has a paucity of research. We therefore draw on dated research, and internal organizational findings to compile four important recommendations to increase principal tenacity.

1. Invest in Ongoing Professional Development

Given the high cost of putting effective principals into the job, and the higher cost to students whose future success depends upon tenacious leadership, we must do more to protect these investments. We need to create new policies and priorities to provide ongoing principal professional development. Principals need access to strong support and development, far beyond the first two years on the job. Like we do for teachers, doctors, and lawyers, we must continue to invest in principal skill development and support them in the complex work of leading schools.

Ongoing professional development should bridge tightly to preparation work and intentionally build skills aligned to district leadership competency frameworks. Additionally, stronger partnerships should be developed between districts, universities, and organizations, as well as partnerships between diverse non-profits that offer services at different points of the leader pipeline. Because the need to improve our schools is urgent, partnerships are essential to create whole systems of delivery that select, develop, and sustain effective leaders in this vital work.

The work of the principal is much more than any one leader can appropriately handle. Ongoing professional development should include building leader skill to distribute leadership to empowered leadership teams. Efforts to create teams of high functioning teacher leaders and administrators can do much to achieve important school improvement work, develop future prospects for leadership succession, and accomplish the sheer magnitude of leadership responsibilities necessary to improve schools.

2. Engage Principals in Meaningful Network Opportunities

Principals most frequently experience ongoing professional development through workshops and lectures-based vehicles, which is reported to be least effective.⁴²

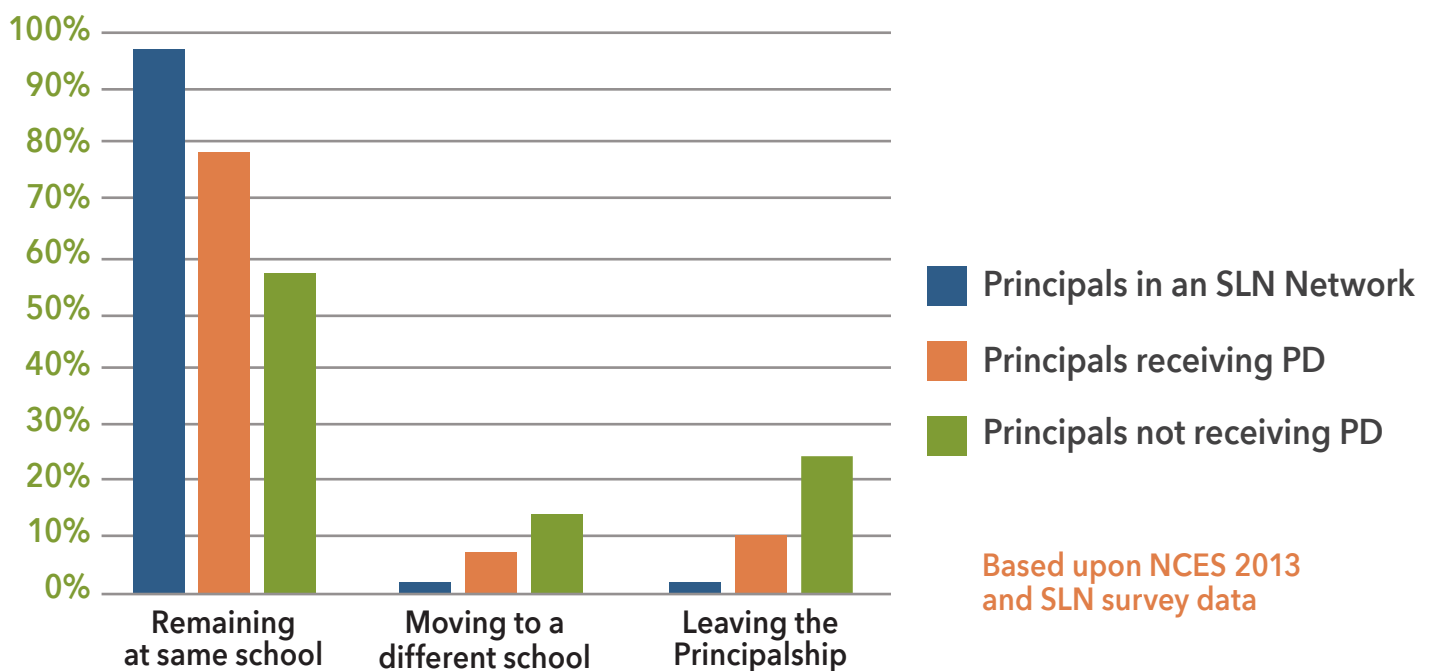
When principals are asked about what they need in order to sustain in the profession and impact their schools, principals overwhelmingly report ongoing support with peers. They prefer learning in context relevant, collaborative settings, where they have the ability to influence the learning agenda.⁴³

Given that 95 percent of leaders report more competencies were learned on the job and with peers⁴⁴, peer networking for practicing principals holds promise for

building leader capacity. Networking enables administrators of different schools to collectively enhance professional performance.⁴⁵ Programs differ somewhat in structure, but share common features: collaborative settings, regular meetings, focus on leader questions of practice, and reflective activities.⁴⁶ Typically, network participants analyze their assumptions and beliefs about power, authority, and leadership in settings that are non-competitive and confidential.⁴⁷ The potential pitfall of networking programs is for a loose focus to devolve into informal social get-togethers and sporadic attendance by members. These problems are ameliorated with effective facilitators and clear program design.⁴⁸

Limited studies indicate that principal peer networks increase their job satisfaction and retention. In the 2012 MetLife survey, where 1 in 3 principals were thinking of leaving the job, principals who experienced professional learning with peers were 14 percent more satisfied with their job and 7 percent less likely to anticipate leaving the profession.⁴⁹

PRINCIPAL RETENTION BASED UPON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



School Leaders Network, an organization that employs a tightly organized network model with groups of fifteen principals meeting monthly throughout the year, has found similar satisfaction and retention results. In 2014, 98 percent of surveyed principals reported the Network met their professional development needs. Only two of 163 surveyed principals who participated in School Leaders Network anticipated leaving the profession. Additionally, 97 percent returned to lead at their current school, 41 percent higher than persistence rates for principals who are not receiving any professional development and 20 percent higher than national persistence rates assessed in 2012.⁵⁰

In addition to the increased retention, Networks can produce better leadership tenacity by utilizing peer accountability within the network design to keep principals continually engaged in school improvement efforts. In our surveys of School Leaders Network members, 91 percent made significant progress, attaining or exceeding school improvement targets they set with network peers at the start of the year. Network principals who engaged with Network peers and the School Leaders Network program made statistically significant improvements to school-based leadership practice.

Additionally, investing in principal Networks paid off for student achievement. In Hillsborough, Florida, school leaders who reported attaining and exceeding the student improvement target they set with network peers, outgrew similar schools in Florida by nearly 40 points.

These results were attained through very modest investments by principals and districts. The average cost of annual principal participation in School Leaders Network provided networks cost on average \$2,750 – 91 percent less expensive than average investments of \$31,000 for principal preparation.

To effectively produce tenacious leaders, network designs matter. In the School Leaders Network approach, trained facilitators focus principal discussion on current leadership challenges, high-leverage leadership practice, and support principals as they define and enact strategic school improvement efforts. When surveyed, participants reported School Leaders Network's four most important characteristics contributing to their learning and change were:

- Strong trusting relationships with peers,
- Setting a school-based leadership goal collectively,
- Learning effective methods to enhance teacher collaboration,
- Problem solving opportunities with other leaders.

3. Provide One-to-One Support

Mentors and coaches are typically reserved for early career principals and principals in need of intervention. They have been proven highly effective at building principal instructional skill when the following components of the program are in place:

- Tight match between the expertise, needs, leadership style, and school experience of the coach and protégé principal
- Coach focuses specifically on improving instructional leadership ⁵¹
- Sufficient training and resources for the coach
- Coach work is integral to the professional development continuum; building leadership knowledge within an existing framework ⁵²
- Supported the specific needs of their principal protégé ⁵³

Only New York City has policies in place allowing principals to select coaching support beyond the first three years on the job, paid for out of principal school budgets.

Because coaching has historically only been offered to new principals, it is currently unknown if coaching increases principal retention. However, we believe that effective coaches likely reduce churn given their services reduce principal isolation and build leadership competencies – two underlying causes of early departure from the profession.

4. Restructure Central Office Roles and Policies

Principals frequently express, “If only I was allowed to...” and “I am not adequately supported to do this job...”⁵⁴ No manner of additional training and add-on support will ultimately keep principals in the job if district and school conditions make effective leadership impossible. Two efforts are needed: address policy barriers that hamper principal success, and develop more supportive structures within the district that enable principals to learn and improve. Because this paper is focused on mechanisms to enhance leader tenacity, we do not address problems associated with district policy here, though emerging research in the field promises important recommendations.⁵ Instead we focus our attention directly on district roles that may effectively support, develop, and sustain principals.

Currently districts around the country are re-envisioning the role of principal supervisor, supported in large part by efforts from The Gates Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, and research from the University of Washington. Research suggests the principal supervisor be tasked with leading both one-to-one coaching and principal peer networks, in addition to previously held supervision responsibilities.⁵⁵ A recent Council of Great City Schools study show principal supervisors in this redesigned role support average caseloads of 24 principals through five key work streams:

1. Coaching one-to-one based upon individual principal needs.
2. Facilitation of collaborative principal-peer learning in networks.
3. Holding principal’s accountable-to-performance expectations with rubrics, goal setting and evaluation practices.
4. Supporting principal access and acquisition of community resources and relationships.
5. Developing specific school improvement target expectations with principals.⁵⁶

It is an open question how freely principals will vulnerably risk sharing problems of practice during supervisor led networking and coaching. Time will tell if these revised principal supervisor roles will achieve better retention and leader effectiveness.

⁵ See New Leaders and the Bush Institute AREL recent release of “*Great Principals at Scale: Creating the District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Successful*” <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/great-principals-at-scale/>.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the education investments in five countries that consistently outperform U.S. students show government investment in “high-quality preparation, mentoring, and professional development for teachers and leaders.”⁵⁷ Not only do these investments appear to contribute to higher performing schools and better prepared students, but they also significantly lower teacher and leader churn. Given how long it takes to improve whole organizations, it requires sustained efforts by tenacious leaders. To achieve this goal, we necessarily must invest in both strong principal preparation programs and ongoing principal professional development. It is essential to reduce the rapid rate of turnover, while simultaneously increasing principal effectiveness to create the robust learning environments that every child deserves.

KIPP CASE STUDY: A STORY OF INVESTMENT SUCCESS

The national based Charter Management Organization extensively invests in developing all levels of leadership (teacher leader, leadership team, successor leaders, and practicing principals) with three key investments: 1) Continuous learning opportunities; 2) Leader retreats and the KIPP school summit; and 3) Individualized leadership coaching. The \$150,000 investment per principal has paid off - increasing principal retention at the same KIPP campus 41.4 percent over typical charter leader turnover (average charter: 29 percent, KIPP leader 17 percent).

These investments have not only increased retention, but they also have effectively leveraged leadership to attain profound impacts on student achievement. Serving 88 percent children in poverty, and 95 percent children of color:

- KIPP students successfully complete four-year college at more than four times the rate of average students from low-income communities.
- On average KIPP students every year gain 1+ years of learning: outperforming national, state and district averages.

(<http://www.KIPP.org>)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <http://shankerblog.org/?p=6196>
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