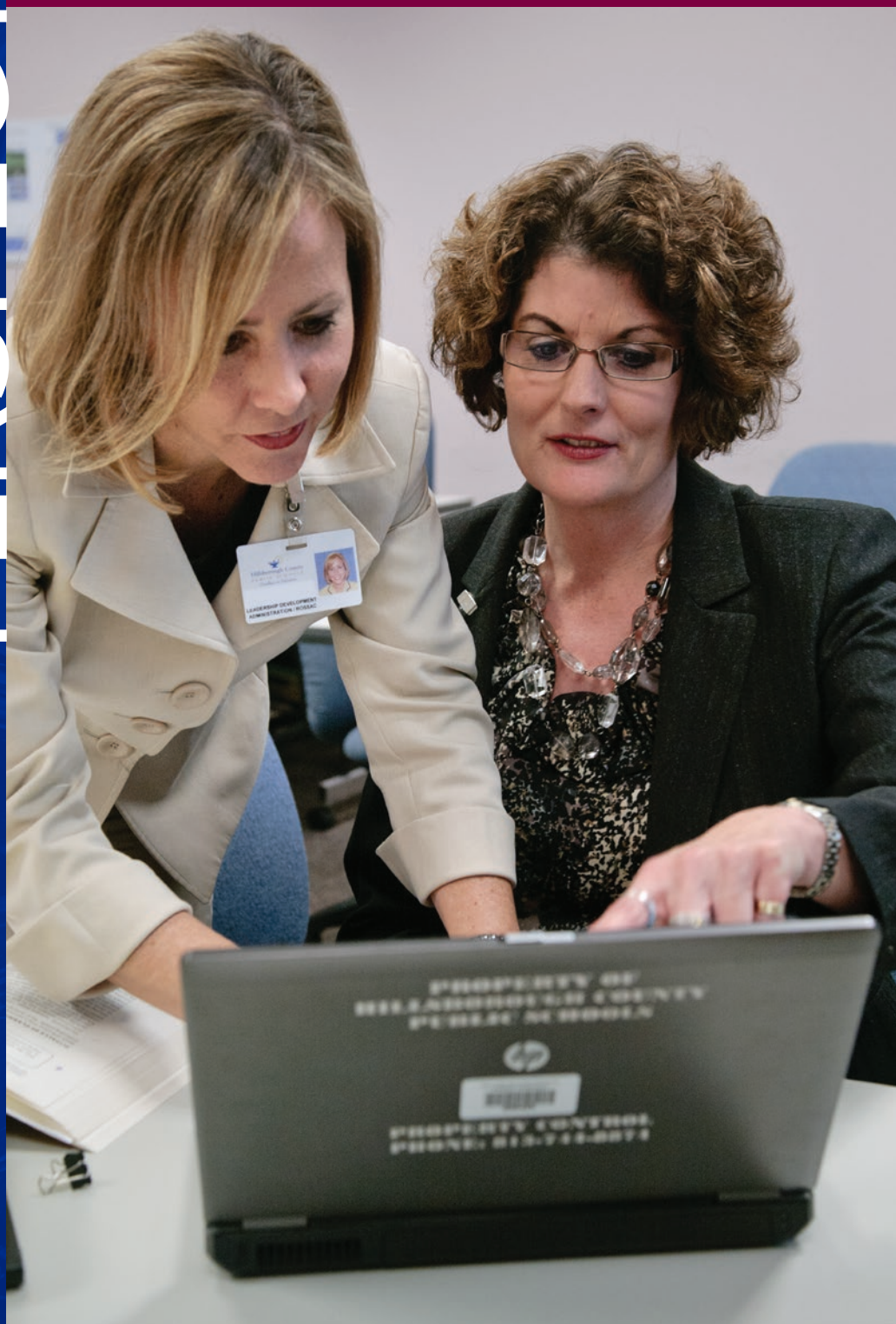
PERSPECTIVE

February 2013

DISTRICTS MATTER:

CULTIVATING THE PRINCIPALS URBAN SCHOOLS NEED



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This Wallace Perspective was produced as part of a commitment by The Wallace Foundation to develop and share information about how school leadership can contribute to improved student learning.

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This report and other resources on school leadership cited throughout this paper can be downloaded for free from www.wallacefoundation.org.

Cover photo: The Hillsborough County, Fla., school district has six "principal coaches" who work with school leaders to help them sharpen their skills. The coaches, including Laura Zavatkay (seated), meet regularly as a group with Tricia McManus (standing), director of leadership development for the district, so they can do some skill-burnishing of their own.

Photos, page 1: The central office for the Gwinnett County, Ga., Public Schools bears a name that stresses the district's focus on schools rather than compliance. Bottom left: Wendy Robinson, superintendent of schools in Fort Wayne, Ind., and Alvin Crawley, interim superintendent of schools in Prince George's County, Md., two districts with work under way to enhance school leadership.

Photos on front cover, pg. 6 and pg. 14 by John Morgan; pgs. 1, 9, 11, 19, 21, 26, 27 and 33 by Jerry Speier; photo of Gwinnett central office by Glenn Pethel.

Design by José Moreno

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT profoundly shapes the destinies of its principals: how they are trained, hired, mentored, evaluated and developed on the job. Yet until recently, many educators and policymakers overlooked the unique role districts can play to help principals shoulder their central responsibility: improving teaching and learning.

Armed with new evidence about the importance of school leadership and how it can best be developed, a growing number of large districts are seeking to cultivate first-rate principals for all their schools. Doing so requires that they carry out two big tasks.

First, build a large corps of well-qualified candidates for the principalship:

- Create job descriptions that clearly spell out what principals need to know and do to drive better instruction.
- Improve "pre-service" principal training.
- Establish selective hiring procedures that identify the most promising future leaders and match them to the right schools.
- Ensure that hard-to-staff schools get top-quality leaders.

Second, support school leaders on the job:

- Develop fair, reliable performance evaluations that hold principals accountable for student progress and inform their ongoing training.
- Offer mentoring to novice principals and professional development to all principals, so school leaders improve throughout their careers.
- Provide school leaders with timely, useful data and training on how to use it.
- Enable principals to devote sufficient time to improving instruction and to making the best use of that time.
- Plan for orderly turnover and leadership succession.

Districts Matter:

Principal coach Laura Zavatkay discusses lessons from a book about leadership, assigned reading for one of the regularly scheduled meetings of principal coaches in the Hillsborough County, Fla., school district.

Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need

By Lee Mitgang

I. The District Job: Shaping School Leadership That Works

To improve education in the nation's troubled urban schools, school districts must make the development of stronger school leadership a top priority.

A solid body of evidence has established that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related influences on learning. As researchers from the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto – authors of the largest study of the impact of school leadership on student achievement – put it: "To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership."[1]

Two things, then, stand to reason. First, solid leadership is a pre-requisite for turning around failing and low-performing schools in U.S. cities. Second, districts should place strong leaders in these schools and support them to the fullest so the schools improve.

Recent experience underscores that investing in better school leadership could make economic sense, too – not only because of what principals can do to boost instruction and student achievement, but because of how leadership can act as a magnet for drawing talented teachers to high-needs schools. "Over and over again, our highest-performing teachers told us that a highly effective principal would be the determining factor in a decision to transfer to a low-performing school," writes Ann B. Clark, deputy superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., school district, which began a push in 2008 to attract more highly qualified principals and teachers to its most challenging schools.[2]

Over the last decade, we have learned much about what effective school leadership looks like. Once a principal might have been considered a solid performer solely by being a competent building manager and keeping his or her school under the radar. Today, there is growing consensus that principals must do much more, most notably ensuring the spread of effective instructional practices to every classroom. Yes, principals need to master management practices, says Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

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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. The report, funded by The Wallace Foundation, can be found at www.wallacefoundation.org.

2 Ann B. Clark, "Strategic Staffing," *School Administrator,* American Association of School Administrators, Aug. 2012, 16-20. http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=24048

Still, he says, their "primary function is to be the educational leader of the building."[3]

School districts play a key part in nurturing this kind of leadership, but their role has long been underappreciated: bypassed by reformers who believe the antidote to mediocre schools is to free them to manage their own improvement efforts with a minimum of regulatory interference, and scorned by those who regard districts and their employees as money-draining bureaucrats more interested in rules than school renewal.[4]

That may be changing. From New York City to Gwinnett County, Ga., and Denver, school systems are viewing better leadership as a lever for school improvement and creating more supportive relationships with principals and their teams. Their efforts vary widely. What all have in common, however, is a belief that when it comes to school leadership, "*districts matter,*" as a report co-authored by longtime education authority Gene Bottoms asserts with italicized emphasis.[5]

This Wallace Foundation Perspective describes what districts can do to live up to their potential as cultivators of first-rate leadership for every school. It draws largely from Wallace's work since 2000, financing education leadership projects in 28 states and urban districts in them, as well as supporting some 70 research studies and other reports.

We have learned much from this large body of work, but we are also the first to concede that our research and on-the-ground efforts do not answer many big questions about how to nurture professionals who can lead urban schools from failure to success. Most notably, we have yet to see a research-established link between specific district steps to promote leadership and improvements in student achievement as measured by standardized tests. That we haven't found such connections may be a measure of the magnitude and complexity of transforming chronically underperforming schools into schools where all children thrive. In leadership, as in so many aspects of meaningful school reform, there are few quick fixes and much hard work ahead.

II. Building a Large Corps of Well-Qualified Candidates for the Principalship

It starts with a clear job description

Drawing up a set of standards is the necessary prelude to building a corps of able principals. The standards spell out what leaders need to know and do to improve instruction, providing a clear description of the principal's job. They also undergird training for future principals, hiring practices and the way in which leaders are supported and managed on the job.

Today, nearly all states have adopted some form of what's known as the "ISLLC standards,"

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3 Interview with Domenech, Oct. 1, 2012. The American Association of School Administrators has received several Wallace Foundation grants since 2008 to disseminate research and lessons on school leadership.

4 See, for example, Gene Bottoms, Jon Schmidt-Davis, *The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership,* Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, 1. "Often, the school board and district staff are considered no more than middlemen in the education enterprise, passing federal and state funds on to schools — where the 'real work' of education takes place — and keeping track of school compliance with federal and state laws, regulations and policies." Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

5 Bottoms, Schmidt-Davis, *The Three Essentials.* Bottoms is senior vice president of the Southern Regional Education Board.

At a December 2012 Wallace Foundation meeting, educators discuss how to boost school leadership. From left: Wendy Robinson, superintendent, Fort Wayne, Ind.; J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/superintendent, Gwinnett County, Ga.; Tom Boasberg, superintendent, Denver; Alvin Crawley, interim superintendent, Prince George's County, Md.; Shael Polakow-Suransky, chief academic officer, New York City; Diane Rutledge, former superintendent, Springfield, Ill., now head of the Large Unit District Association, representing Illinois superintendents.

which lay out a set of competencies school leaders need to succeed in improving instruction.[6] Iowa, Illinois, Delaware and Kentucky are among the states that have used the standards to rewrite principal licensure rules, toughen accreditation for principal preparation programs, spell out requirements for mentoring newly hired principals and evaluate leader performance.

Many districts rely on their state's leadership standards. Others, especially those that have historically had the most difficulty attracting and keeping high-quality leaders, have enacted standards tailored to their specific needs and conditions. In Boston, for example, the Ten Dimensions of School Leadership serves as the basis for the curriculum of the district-run Principal Fellowship Program. The leadership standards in Fort Wayne, Ind., determine eligibility requirements for district-paid internships. Districts including Chicago and New York City give preference to graduates of training programs well-aligned to the district standards.[7]

New York City district officials have also concluded that the definition of "high-quality leadership" should be in close sync with the definition of a high-quality school, says Anthony Conelli, deputy chief academic officer for leadership in the city's department of education. That has led the district to bring its "School Leadership Competencies" into closer harmony with what's

6 Council of Chief State School Officers, *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008,* 2008. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org. Wallace provided funding for revisions of the standards, which were developed originally in 1996 by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, an array of state representatives and national educational organizations under the aegis of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. The 2008 revised standards call for: (1) setting a widely shared vision for learning; (2) developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth; (3) ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (4) collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; (5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and (6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts.

7 Margaret Terry Orr, Cheryl King and Michelle LaPointe, *Districts Developing Leaders: Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches from Eight Urban Districts,* Education Development Center, Inc., 2010, 43; also, Lee Mitgang, *The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training,* a Wallace Foundation Perspective, 2012, 17. Both available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

called the "Quality Review" rubric, the criteria used to evaluate school performance each year. Once completed in 2013, the revised standards are expected to provide the district with a more useful tool for informing decisions about training, assessing and supporting novice and veteran school leaders. "As the system becomes more and more clear about what we look for in schools, right under the surface of that is what good principals do," Conelli says.[8]

"An early investment in people becoming the leaders that our schools need will result in a higher degree of effectiveness for novice principals and a lower degree of turnover."

Districts that have drawn up standards have learned that the exercise isn't quick or easy, typically requiring months or even years of work by many hands. The latest version of Chicago's highly detailed Principal Competencies has undergone at least seven drafts "and counting," says Steve Gering, who, as chief leadership development officer, has overseen a standard-setting process that has included district staff members, principals, and local and national experts.[9]

Improve 'pre-service' principal training

Having codified their expectations of principals, school systems need to take a stronger hand in ensuring that aspiring school leaders are well prepared to meet the standards.

Nationwide, the quality of pre-service principal training has risen in recent years as the role of principals in improving schools has been more widely recognized and understood. Despite this, critics say that the curricula and methods at the majority of the nation's 500-plus university-based principal preparation programs remain subpar and out of step with district needs.[10] A growing number of districts have become more assertive with universities and other training providers about improving their offerings, because district leaders want enough well-prepared leadership candidates to meet local learning goals and to lessen the expense and damage of early turnover among poorly prepared novice principals. "An early investment in people becoming the leaders that our schools need will result, we are confident, in a higher degree of effectiveness for novice principals and a lower degree of turnover in the first two to five years of the principalship," says John Youngquist, director of principal talent management for the Denver Public Schools.[11]

How can a district use its clout to improve principal training? For starters, district standards can send signals about the traits, knowledge and skills the district demands from training program graduates if they expect to be hired. Some districts – St. Louis and Springfield, Ill., for example – have become active collaborators with area universities or other training providers to create programs more closely tailored to their needs. The districts then give hiring prefer-

8 Interview with Conelli, August 1, 2012.

9 Chicago's six principal competencies in draft as of January 2013 are: (1) champions teacher and staff excellence through a focus on continuous improvement; (2) creates powerful professional learning systems that guarantee learning for children; (3) builds a culture focused on college and career readiness; (4) empowers and motivates families and the community to become engaged; (5) relentlessly pursues self-disciplined thinking and action; and (6) leads school toward achieving the vision.

10 Mitgang, *The Making of the Principal,* 6, 14-15.

11 Interview with Youngquist, December 7, 2012.

ence to graduates of such programs. Other districts – such as New York City, Boston and Prince George's County, Md. – have established their own training programs, either through working with nonprofit training providers or creating "leadership academies" tailored to their needs.[12]

The Chicago Leadership Collaborative was set up by the district in 2011 to help meet its principal hiring requirements and to triple to 100 its number of annual high-quality "residencies," in which aspiring leaders get on-the-job experiences in local schools. The collaborative includes four training programs approved by the board of education based on their record of preparing principals, the rigor of their admissions and their alignment with Chicago's leadership standards.[13]

Gwinnett County, Ga., with more than 165,000 students, plans to introduce a "consumers' guide" to principal training programs to press area universities to improve their offerings. The 20-page "Guide to Leadership Education Programs in Georgia for Aspiring Leaders in Gwinnett County Public Schools," scheduled to be published in the 2012-13 school year, includes descriptions of four principal training programs judged by the district to share a commitment to preparing "world-class leadership." Each program also has an agreement with the district to provide enrollees with strong internships and site experiences and to offer a curriculum that meshes with district needs. The guide will describe the basics of each program, including application requirements, costs and coursework to enable would-be principal candidates to select a program that best matches their interests and needs.[14]

"We're using this guide as a tool to drive change and reform in leader preparation programs," says Glenn Pethel, Gwinnett County's executive director of leadership development. "There's been a proliferation of these programs and finding your way through that maze, you're left to your own resources and you can make less-than-good decisions. We are sending a very loud and clear message to universities that 'if you want your program to be described and shared [in the new guide], thenhere's the process that you follow.' If you're not in our guide, then the implication is pretty clear."[15]

Glenn Pethel, executive director of leadership development, Gwinnett County Public Schools

New York City uses a combination of approaches to influence training. The centerpiece is the Aspiring Principals Program (APP) at the New York City Leadership Academy, established by the city in 2003. Former New York City principals and principal supervisors make up the faculty, and the city department of education pays salaries and benefits of those admitted. The program features an intensive summer program that simulates the challenges of a New York City principalship and a 10-month residency under the mentorship of an experienced principal. As of the 2012-2013 school year, some 72 percent of APP graduates – 343 people – were serving as principals or assistant principals or in other leadership positions for New York City public schools.

12 Orr et al., 42-43.

13 The programs are: Loyola University, Teach for America/Harvard, New Leaders and the University of Illinois-Chicago.

14 Interview with Charisse Redditt, assistant director for leadership development, Gwinnett County Public Schools, August 16, 2012; and draft copy of *A Guide to Leadership Education Programs in Georgia for Aspiring Leaders in Gwinnett County Public Schools*. The four programs reviewed in the guide are: University of Georgia, University of West Georgia, Mercer University and Georgia State University.

15 Interview with Glenn Pethel, August 16, 2012.

The Windy City Gives Would-Be Principals a Blast of Reality

Chicago Public Schools continues to refine the screening process for a school leader hiring pool that it introduced several years ago. Starting in the 2012-2013 school year, high-potential candidates experience a typical day as a Chicago principal. They might do several mock classroom observations, get an unexpected phone call from a parent who demands immediate attention and handle other curveballs.

The idea is to see how well candidates prioritize and manage the many responsibilities that an average principal juggles every day, according to Steve Gering, Chicago's chief of leadership development. "People can talk their way through an interview," he says, "but once you put them in a situation and observe them figuring things out on the fly, that's so much more real."

Along with the leadership academy, the city has designated "preferred" training programs, including the not-for-profit New Leaders and the department of education's own Leaders in Education Apprenticeship Program, which provides on-the-job, 14-month apprenticeships to aspiring leaders within the city's schools. Nonetheless, these high-quality programs meet only about 25 percent of the city's need to fill 150 to 200 principal vacancies per year, says Conelli. The district therefore has begun working with area universities willing to review their leadership programs to more closely align their curricula to district leadership standards and needs. In return, the city designates those programs "preferred providers," steers aspiring principals to them and gives preference to their graduates.[16] "What's interesting," says Conelli, "is that we've been approached by other colleges and universities. Some we've passed on." But, he notes, if providers show promise, the district will work with them to better mesh their programs to district expectations and work toward preferred status.[17]

A big question hangs over district-spurred ventures nationwide to improve leadership training: Will they ultimately pay off in providing well trained principals for high-needs schools and in having a measurable, beneficial impact on student learning? The New York City Leadership Academy was formed specifically to train effective principals for the city's most challenging schools. It is also one of the few training programs to date to commission an independent study of its placement record and the performance of its graduates. Early research findings are mixed and are being used to improve the effort.

The study looked at APP graduates from the program's beginning years. It showed that a greater percentage of APP graduates than novice principals as a whole became principals in higher-need, lower-performing schools. In examining student achievement at APP-led and non-APP-led schools, the research adjusted for student background differences. The research found that the students of the early APP principals did about as well in English Language Arts as students of other novice principals, but lagged behind in math.[18]

NYCLA has revised its curriculum to ensure that future leaders do not focus on literacy to the exclusion of math. It has also introduced new on-the-job supports to assist novice APP principals with literacy and math instruction in their schools.

16 The city currently has three such university partners: Baruch College; Bank Street College; and Teachers College, Columbia University.

17 Conelli interview, August 1, 2012.

18 Sean P. Corcoran, Amy Ellen Schwartz and Meryle Weinstein, "Training Your Own: The Impact of New York City's Aspiring Principals Program on Student Achievement," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* June 2012, 232-253. http://epa.sagepub.com/content/34/2/232

Hire the right people

Another key to building a sufficient corps of well-qualified school leaders is establishing more selective and systematic hiring procedures. "Not just anyone can be a successful principal today," says J. Alvin Wilbanks, Gwinnett County's superintendent. "The demands of the job are great and require exceptional expertise. With enrollments of 1,000 to 3,000 students, staffs as large as 300 people, sizable local budgets, and key performance goals that must be achieved, a principal in Gwinnett is essentially the CEO of a good-sized company."[19]

Yet in many districts, principal hiring takes place without a proper assessment of an applicant's training or motivation for the job. Also, many districts lack the tools and processes to create a good match between a candidate's qualifications and the needs of particular schools.

Some districts have been tightening their hiring practices. Gwinnett County, Prince George's County, Md., and Springfield, Mass., for example, are among those using screening tools, such as Gallup's PrincipalInsight, that allow them to quickly gather information on why a candidate wants to be a school leader and his or her likely ability to foster collegiality, or motivate teachers, students and parents.[20] To ensure that would-be candidates genuinely want to lead schools and not just get a salary bump that comes with an advanced degree, Chicago, St. Louis and Springfield, Ill., require would-be leaders to agree to serve as principals for a set number of years. In exchange, the district agrees to pay for their leadership training and internships. Jefferson County, Ky., is among districts that give hiring preference to graduates of leadership training programs whose curricula and teaching methods are well matched to district needs.[21]

In many districts, principal hiring takes place without a proper assessment of an applicant's training or motivation for the job.

Denver has been revamping its hiring process so it is in sync with new leadership standards. The district was already giving preference to graduates of the University of Denver's Ritchie Program, whose curriculum was jointly created by the district and university faculty to fill district needs. A remaining challenge has been to ensure consistency in how the district's 13 instructional supervisors interview and evaluate principal candidates. In 2012, Denver began testing new tools to help in that and to better place new principals. The tools include a detailed rubric for matching a candidate's skills and experiences to different school leadership openings and a "learning walk" protocol that gives district supervisors a way to observe and assess a candidate's point of view and interpersonal skills as the candidate observes and comments on actual school practices, teacher actions and student behaviors. *[See article on p. 20 for a look at how one district has created a pool for principal hiring.]*

Attract able leaders to struggling schools

"Business and industry leaders do not flinch at the idea of placing top talent in struggling departments and divisions," Ann B. Clark, deputy superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., school district, has written. "This is not always the case in public education."[22]

(continued on page 16)

19 Statement by Wilbanks appears on Gwinnett County Public Schools Web site: http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps-mainweb01.nsf/pages/MessagefromtheSuperintendentontheGCPSVisionforLeadership

20 Mitgang, *The Making of the Principal*, 9.

21 Orr et al., 43.

22 Clark, "Strategic Staffing," 16-20.

Hillsborough County Unveils

By H. J. Cummins

Tricia McManus, director of leadership for Hillsborough County Public Schools

Elementary school principal Woodland Johnson gets high marks for teacher retention. Ditto for spot-on assessments of his faculty. There is one thing, though: Teachers who have worked with Johnson would like him to offer more detailed feedback on how they can improve. So this year Johnson is training to do exactly that, in a new leadership course called Fierce Conversations. It's the result of a new job performance evaluation system for principals at Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, where Johnson has worked his way over 21 years and seven schools from music teacher to principal.

The system goes hand in glove with the district's redefined role of principals as the instructional leaders of their schools. Gone are the days of manager-in-chief, days filled with book orders, bus routes and class schedules. The new role is educator-in-chief, as principals turn their attention to the classrooms to see to it that students are mastering their academics.

"Everything revolves around creating a culture of student learning," said Tricia McManus, director of leadership development for the district, which encompasses Tampa and ranks among the country's 10 largest. "We have put that role in the forefront, so we needed to change principals' evaluations to capture how well they're doing what we say they should be doing."

a New Kind of Evaluation for a New Kind of Principal

Being a leader of teaching and learning is a role that Johnson has embraced in the six years he has served as a principal at two schools with large numbers of disadvantaged students – five years at Palm River Elementary School and most recently at Mort Elementary School, which he joined in July 2012. "We're looking at everything through a new lens," he said. "My job is to provide teachers the tools they need to be able to meet the instructional needs of each child in their classrooms."

The changeover in the evaluation system started in the 2011-2012 school year, McManus said. Before that, principals were evaluated based on the judgment of a single supervisor.

The new evaluations incorporate measures from many sources – for a more rounded view of the principal – and they rely on hard data, she said. School-wide student learning gains carry the greatest weight, at 40 percent of the total score. Teacher ratings of the principal add another 15 percent, as do ratings by the principal's supervisor. (Teachers and supervisors both use VAL-ED, an assessment tool developed by Vanderbilt University and University of Pennsylvania researchers with funding from The Wallace Foundation.) Measures of student attendance and behavior, teacher retention, and the principal's adeptness at assessing faculty members account for much of the rest of the evaluation. Only 10 percent of the score comes from "school operations" – a more traditional management gauge.

Just as groundbreaking is the new system's second step, its emphasis on improvement. With each evaluation, principals receive a "Professional Growth Plan" – which refers them to any one of 40-plus trainings assembled by the district to cover identified weak areas, according to McManus. The catalog of offerings, including Fierce Conversations, debuted in the summer of 2012 and includes some courses of two to three hours and others up to two to three days.

"The old system just pointed out deficits and did not include a specific plan for improvement," McManus said. "I'm seeing excitement in the principals. We are working very hard to give principals training and tools to be more effective."

Variations on this new system are spreading across the country – partly encouraged by federal programs such as Race to the Top grants and No Child Left Behind waivers, according to Mary Canole, a consultant on school leadership for the Council of Chief State School Officers in Washington, D.C.

Canole expects that with experience schools will add or subtract various measures, or weigh them differently. She also expects that, over time, districts will address concerns that include the accuracy of various student achievement scores, the quality of training for evaluators, and the need to capture school differences. It stands to reason that principals in stable, high-achieving schools will be more beloved than those in the throes of a turnaround, she said.

For Johnson, the wealth of data in the evaluations is important. That's how, for example, he could see that he was on track with his evaluations of teachers – because his scores jibed with others from a teacher's faculty peers and mentors.

Most importantly for Johnson – who was evaluated when he was still at Palm River and plans to apply what he learned to his new assignment at Mort – the new system is about always aiming higher. "In any given school, with any given needs, there are things to work on," he said. "To me, the evaluation reflects how well I'm doing on those – have I identified the right needs and have I figured out how to focus on them?

"We all have things to continue to develop and improve," he said. "It's a constant growth process. And it should be."

Clark's assertion is borne out by research. Many studies have shown an "inequitable distribution of teacher quality, which disadvantages poor, non-white, and low-achieving students," according to one research article, whose authors go on to find evidence of a similar "inequitable distribution" of principal quality in a large urban school district they examined.[23]

That's not to say that recruiting top principals for high-needs schools in large districts, where school leaders face added demands and often-inadequate incentives, is an easy task. These schools "tend to attract fewer candidates, with generally weaker credentials and less experience," concluded a Wallace Foundation report.[24] Indeed, in Chicago as few as two applicants vie for vacant principal slots in the most challenging schools compared with as many as 100 applicants for posts in higher achieving schools.[25]

New York City, Chicago and Charlotte-Mecklenburg illustrate how districts have worked to place well-qualified leaders in the hardest-to-staff schools.

But if first-rate leadership is key to turning around schools, that picture needs to change. The starting point is recognition that struggling schools typically require a greater investment in staffing than others, according to a University of Washington report that described how districts might allocate resources more equitably.[26]

New York City, Chicago and Charlotte-Mecklenburg illustrate how districts have worked to place well-qualified leaders in their hardest-to-staff schools:

- The basic rationale for founding the NYC Leadership Academy was to prepare a cadre of new principals capable of turning around the city's most challenging schools.

- Chicago's Leadership Collaborative has as its core goal preparing a strong pipeline of new principals to turn around low performing schools. In addition, Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced in 2012 that as part of a national search for top-notch principals, the city will pay signing bonuses of $25,000 to up to 50 such school leaders selected to serve in the district's most challenging schools.

- In 2008, Charlotte-Mecklenburg launched a "strategic staffing initiative" giving incentives to top-flight principals and teachers to take on the task of turning around the district's lowest-performing schools. A central tenet of the initiative, writes Clark, the district's deputy superintendent, is that "a great leader is needed – a principal with a proven track record of success in increasing student achievement. Also, great teachers

23 Susanna Loeb, Demetra Kalogrides and Eileen Lai Horng, "Principal Preferences and the Uneven Distribution of Principals Across Schools," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, June 2010, 205-209. http://epa.sagepub.com/content/32/2/205

24 Lee Mitgang, *Beyond the Pipeline: Getting the Principals We Need, Where They Are Needed Most*, 2003, 5. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

25 Orr et al., 28.

26 Margaret L. Plecki, Michael S. Knapp et al., *How Leaders Invest Staffing Resources for Learning Improvement*, University of Washington, 2009, vii. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org. Findings were based on a two-year study of four districts pursuing more equitable funding practices to address their achievement gaps: Atlanta Public Schools; New York City Department of Education/Empowerment Schools; Portland, Ore., Public Schools; and Lane County District Number 4J in Eugene, Ore. Each district has participated in The Wallace Foundation's education leadership work, launched in 2000.

Districts have a responsibility to support principals – particularly when they are newly hired, but also throughout their careers.

will not go to a troubled school without a great leader as principal."[27] With that in mind, the district allows principals with strong track records who take on these tough assignments to recruit their own seven-member team of high-performing teachers, literacy facilitators and assistant principals. Team members receive salary increases and bonuses; in exchange, they agree to stay in their new schools for at least three years and produce strong student achievement gains. The results so far: Nearly all 24 of the participating schools have been successfully turned around, with single-year state test scores up as much as 20 points.[28]

III. What Districts Can Do to Support School Leaders

Once principals are on the job, districts have a responsibility to support them – particularly when they are newly hired, but also throughout their careers. That can require a shift in how central office employees conceive of their work, so that they focus less on what they are used to – compliance – and more on "strengthening principals' instructional leadership as a key lever for teaching and learning improvement in schools," as University of Washington researchers put it.[29]

Here are key actions districts can take:

Develop fair, reliable performance evaluations to help principals improve their work and hold them accountable for their students' progress

An evaluation of principal job performance should accomplish two things. First, it should provide a factual basis on which the district can make decisions about a person's hiring or firing, on-the-job training, tenure, salary and promotions. Second, it should give districts credible information on the strengths and weaknesses of their principals, individually and collectively.

What are some of the main attributes of high-quality principal performance assessments? Research and experience point to the following:

- A focus on the most important behaviors and actions that improve instruction, anchored in leader standards.
- An emphasis on school change.

27 Clark, 17.

28 Ibid, 18.

29 Meredith I. Honig, Michael A. Copland, Lydia Rainey, Juli Anna Lorton, Morena Newton, *Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement,* University of Washington, 2010, 3. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

- Tools and processes that pass the tests of reliability and validity, and that are flexible enough to take different school contexts into account (leading a large suburban high school, for example, is different from leading a small rural elementary school).

- Professional development that addresses weaknesses or needs identified by the process.[30]

- Multiple measures of student and school performance, including but not limited to standardized test scores.[31]

In practice, creating assessments with these quality features and then using them appropriately are among the most difficult challenges in the relationship between districts and principals. Often, the problem begins with assessment tools and processes that haven't kept pace with the changing definition of school leadership. A 2007 review of 66 principal assessment instruments in use in large urban districts found that 26 failed to evaluate principals' engagement with the curriculum. None of the instruments examined covered the quality of the curriculum; 25 were silent on the quality of instruction; and 22 didn't evaluate whether a culture of learning and professional behavior existed in the principal's school.[32]

Fortunately, principal assessment is changing. Since 2005, some 35 states have enacted new legislation on principal assessments aimed at putting less emphasis on "inputs," such as how well particular leadership tasks are met, and more on student "outcomes" and the leadership behaviors likeliest to improve instruction, according to research by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Many of those laws were prompted by a desire to win competitive federal grants, notably the 2009 Race to the Top program, intended to induce states to mandate changes in the way districts assess both teachers and principals. Some states – Delaware and Tennessee, for example – have developed new statewide assessment systems that all districts must use. Others, such as New York, Colorado, Florida and Illinois, give districts varying degrees of local control over their design and implementation.[33]

The spirit behind the Gwinnett County evaluation process is to provide a fair, fact-based baseline for constant improvement. It's "not a gotcha kind of system."

Hillsborough County Public Schools, a large district encompassing Tampa, Fla., has recently replaced a principal evaluation in which principals were assessed by a single supervisor with one that uses measures from many sources and gives great weight to student learning gains. *[See story on p. 14 for a closer look at Hillsborough's evaluation system.]* Over the border in Georgia,

30 *Assessing the Effectiveness of School Leaders: New Directions and New Processes*, A Wallace Foundation Perspective, 2009, 7-8. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

31 This caution against overreliance on standardized student test scores in evaluating principals was emphasized in a 2012 report, *Rethinking Principal Evaluation*, by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. http://www.naesp.org/rethinking-principal-evaluation

32 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. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

33 Catherine Jacques, Matthew Clifford, Katie Hornung, *State Policies on Principal Evaluation: Trends in a Changing Landscape*, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2012, 3-7. http://www.tqsource.org/publications/StatePoliciesOnPrincipalEval.pdf

Foreground: Douglas Anthony, acting chief human resources officer, Prince George's County Public Schools

Gwinnett County has developed a "Results-Based Evaluation System," in which fully 70 percent of the score for schools and their principals is tied to student achievement, as assessed by indicators including standardized test scores and measures of where schools are in closing the achievement gap. Three other factors – "initiatives to improve student achievement" (which includes a school leader's prowess in data-driven decision making and staff development), "customer satisfaction," and "school management" – account for the remaining 30 percent.

The driving spirit behind the process is to provide a fair, fact-based baseline for constant improvement tied to each school's circumstances. It's "not a gotcha kind of system," says Associate Superintendent for School Leadership Steven W. Flynt, who supervises the five area superintendents who work with the principals of the district's 132 schools. "It's about finding your weaknesses and trying to identify things that you can do in your school or as an individual to get better."[34] Indeed, the assessment calls for documentation that a principal has undergone at least 20 hours of professional development during the review year.[35] Along with addressing weaknesses, the Gwinnett County evaluation process rewards excellence: The district gives top performing schools a cash incentive that principals can spend as they wish.

The pursuit of high-quality principal assessment reached a milestone in 2006 with the development of the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education, or VAL-ED, a research-validated process created by a team from Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania, and supported by Wallace as an effort to address the lack of valid and reliable principal evaluation systems. VAL-ED, which places much greater emphasis than most other assessments on leadership behaviors that promote better instruction, received by far the highest marks for reliability (consistency and stability) and validity (measuring what it is designed to measure) among eight publicly available principal assessments evaluated in a 2012 study by the American Institutes for Research.[36]

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34 Interview with Steven W. Flynt, August 16, 2012.

35 Gwinnett County Public Schools Office of Research and Evaluation, "2011-2012 Weighted Principal Assessment" form.

36 Christopher Condon, Matthew Clifford, *Measuring Principal Performance: How Rigorous Are Commonly Used Principal Performance Assessment Instruments?*, American Institutes for Research, 2012, 8. http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/QSLBrief2.pdf

Want to Be a Principal? In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, First You Have to Make It Into the Pool

By Jennifer Gill

Fill out an application.

Until 2011, that's all aspiring principals and assistant principals seemed to have to do if they wanted to be considered for work in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., school district. "People really didn't know how a principal got hired," says Rashidah Lopez Morgan, the district's director of leadership strategy. "They thought it was because someone was pushing for a particular person. That's certainly not the case now."

Indeed, the district has implemented a rigorous screening and selection process for would-be school leaders. It begins when candidates submit three years' worth of performance reviews, a transcript listing the continuing education courses and workshops they've completed, and data that show their impact on student achievement at their current school. Those who make the cut are invited in for an interview, a case-study discussion and a writing exercise that might ask the candidate to

Some 615 school districts in 44 states have used VAL-ED since it became available commercially in 2009, according to Hardin Daniel, vice president of Discovery Education Assessment, which handles its distribution.[37] In a 2011-12 pilot project involving 50 of its 200 principals, Prince George's County, Md., began using VAL-ED as a supplemental source of information about strengths and weaknesses in school leadership. Early VAL-ED data have revealed that principals need additional support in generating community involvement in their schools, a finding that points to a good topic for on-the-job training. The pilot is also providing the district with new information about the needs of assistant principals. An analysis of VAL-ED results suggests that principals should provide more genuine leadership opportunities to the APs.[38]

Invest in early mentoring and continuing professional development

A distinguishing trait of the world's best school systems – systems that regularly outperform the school systems in the United States – is that they "invest in high-quality preparation, mentoring and professional development for teachers and leaders, completely at government expense," according to an international analysis.[39] If U.S. school districts were to heed that finding, they would, for starters, provide mentoring for all novice principals for at least a year. They would use the information from principal assessments to shape the professional development they offer. Finally, they would provide regular expert help to principals individually or in networks to improve their performance as instructional leaders. *[See article on p. 26 for an example of such district-level staff support for principals.]*

The fact is, however, that historically principal professional development has ranked low on the priority list for many districts, especially in tough times when school systems may face the alternative of reductions in areas more immediately linked to classroom life. "You go back over the years and you see that every time budgets have to be cut, the first to go is professional development," says Domenech of the American Association of School Administrators. Adding

37 Interview with Daniel, Aug. 29, 2012; e-mail from Daniel, Jan. 28, 2013.

38 Interview with Douglas Anthony, Prince George's County acting chief of human resources, Sept. 7, 2012.

39 Marc S. Tucker, *Surpassing Shanghai: An Agenda for American Education Built on the World's Leading Systems,* Harvard Education Press, 2011, x. The nations cited in the study are Shanghai, Finland, Japan, Singapore and Canada.

write a mock letter to parents about a certain issue. About 30 percent of applicants clear the hurdles and make it into a "talent pool," allowing them to seek leadership roles in the district. Once accepted in the pool, candidates receive training in how to hit the ground running, should they be hired for a leadership position.

Morgan says the district's six zone superintendents lobbied for the screening process because it was taking them too long to vet and hire high-quality candidates on their own. When a candidate didn't work out, there wasn't a reserve of qualified applicants waiting in the wings. The district made sure to seek input from the "zone sups" when developing the new process. "Buy-in doesn't just happen because you roll something out," notes Morgan. "This had to be owned by the hiring managers."

Top left: Rashidah Lopez Morgan, director of leadership strategy for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

to that vulnerability has been a long-held sink-or-swim attitude toward principals, even new hires, who are likeliest to fail without adequate guidance.

Fortunately, the last decade has seen markedly greater willingness by states and districts to invest in the support of school leaders, especially new hires. Reasons include evolving understanding of the principal's role as instructional leader, accountability pressures from states and the federal government, and worries about turnover and leadership shortages in high-needs schools. Since 2000, more than half of the states have adopted requirements for mentoring novice principals.[40] And a number of districts have stepped up their emphasis on professional development and principal coaching despite harsh countervailing budget pressures. Novice principals in Gwinnett County, for example, attend a summer institute to hear from national experts on topics such as how to close the achievement gap. They, as well as all new assistant principals, receive two years of mentoring from retired principals with strong records of improving schools. Elsewhere:

- In New York City, new principals get an average of 72 hours of one-on-one coaching over the course of their first year on the job. As soon as they are hired, principals use a self-assessment tool developed by the NYC Leadership Academy to identify three top coaching goals and guide mentoring and professional development.[41]

- Despite persistent budgetary stress, the Providence school system now considers coaching and professional development a "right" firmly embedded in its culture, says Ed Miley, director of leadership support and development of the 23,000-student district. The district offers extensive coaching and professional development to its principals and even to teacher-leaders. District leaders credit this with sharply lowering principal turnover.[42]

40 *Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons from the Field*, The Wallace Foundation, 2007, 5-6. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

41 The "Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet," developed with Wallace Foundation support, has been used outside of New York City, too, in 12 states by some 450 coaches.

42 E-mail correspondence with Ed Miley, Sept. 23-24, 2012.

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg relies heavily on coaching to bolster new and veteran principals. Because of its success in developing a stronger corps of principals, the district has shifted emphasis in coaching from "intervention" for principals who are not meeting performance expectations to help for principals to move from "good to great" and develop strategic plans for their schools, says Rashidah Lopez Morgan, the district's director of leadership strategy.[43]

Some school districts have invested, as well, in training the people who help shape the principals. Hillsborough County Public Schools, a large district covering the Tampa, Fla., area, has six full-time coaches who work weekly with some 45 novice principals and provide intensive coaching for veteran principals who need support in specific areas. The coaches meet bi-weekly with Tricia McManus, director of leadership development for the district, to burnish their skills by discussing common problems of practice and how to better support principals. Often, the sessions have required reading. In the summer of 2013, the district plans to send the coaches to Harvard University's National Institute for Urban School Leaders to learn from experts in the field. "We are hoping that they will come back with more tools to further develop principals in our high needs schools," McManus says.[44]

Districts can also help principals develop instructional leadership muscle by flexing some of their own. "Modeling or demonstrating particular ways of thinking and acting are essential strategies for helping people such as school principals change their work practices," write University of Washington researchers.[45] One way to do this is to create high-quality opportunities for principals to serve as resources for one another.[46] Unfortunately, districts rarely establish such professional networks, or, when they do, not in a way particularly valued by principals. In the Minnesota-Toronto study, nearly 60 percent of principals surveyed indicated that their districts only occasionally provided them opportunities to work productively with colleagues from other schools. And close to half reported that district leaders infrequently provided "quality staff development focused on high priority areas of instruction." [47]

Having mountains of data isn't the same as having useful information to act on.

Provide principals with timely, useful data – and the training to make the most of it

Just a decade ago, "it was disconcertingly easy to find education leaders who dismissed student-achievement data and systematic research as having only limited utility for improving schools or school systems," according to the Minnesota-Toronto researchers.[48] Lately, the pendulum has been swinging sharply the other way. Many school systems have gotten the message that they need to be more data driven, and they are now awash in data – not just yearly student test scores, but figures on how different groups of students are doing in particular subjects or grade levels, how successful a school is at attracting and retaining teachers or closing the achievement gap among disadvantaged students, or how equitable funding is from school to school.

43 Interview with Rashidah Lopez Morgan, Aug. 10, 2012.

44 Interview with Tricia McManus, December 7, 2012.

45 Honig, Copland, et al., 33.

46 Honig, Copland, et al., 47.

47 Seashore Louis et al. 141-142.

48 Seashore Louis et al., 179.

But having mountains of data isn't the same as having useful information to act on. Nor will data alone reveal the best way to address particular problems. That requires time and skilled interpretation – and unfortunately central office staff members and school leaders often lack the know-how to collect, analyze and make the best use of data.

The potential for misuse is considerable. Researchers from the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington singled out two problems: "The first is that, faced with piles of confusing and sometimes contradictory data, all shrug and throw up their hands. The second is that one or two discrete and readily understandable pieces of data will be seized upon as definitive evidence that the schools are 'failing' or, alternatively, 'turning the corner.'"[49]

Conelli, New York City's deputy chief academic officer for leadership, points to another common problem: "When principals see a set of data and see a group of students who aren't doing well, some will think that what they need to do is create something to 'fix' those kids. So they'll create an after-school program or some form of intervention that is good and necessary but it doesn't get them to the question of 'what are we not doing as a school that allows those kids to fail.' We address the symptom but not the problem."[50]

There are a number of steps that district officials can take to help schools and their leaders make the most of data. For starters, they should demonstrate appropriate data gathering and use in their own decision making. As the Minnesota-Toronto researchers found, "[T]he scope and complexity of data use in schools mirrored the data use orientations, practices, expectations, and support shown by district office leaders."[51] Districts also need to help principals and teachers figure out how the data given to schools "might help them do the job they are trying to do."[52]

Districts should also consider:

- ***Investing in strong data systems***
  Created as the backbone of a citywide, data-based "accountability initiative" in 2008, New York City's $81 million Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) has gone a step beyond most district data "warehouses" by offering a single interactive online system allowing principals, teachers and other educators to explore data to improve student outcomes, share what they have learned, take part in discussions and blogs, find others facing similar challenges, and create communities to solve problems together. Parents also have access to much of the ARIS information that pertains to their child. A 2009 evaluation found that nearly two out of three city principals thought ARIS would help improve teaching and learning at their schools. Nearly three out of four considered it a good use of their time.[53]

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49 Mary Beth Celio and James Harvey, *Buried Treasure: Developing a Management Guide from Mountains of School Data,* University of Washington, 2005, 5. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

50 Interview with Anthony Conelli, August 1, 2012.

51 Seashore Louis et al.,193.

52 Seashore Louis et al.,195.

53 Betsy Gotbaum et al., *ARIS on The Side of Caution: A Survey of New York City Principals on the City's Accountability Computer System,* Office of the New York City Public Advocate, August 2009, 19. Along with the positive findings, the report noted some skepticism among survey respondents concerning the system's benefits relative to its high development costs: Some 69 percent of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the local Department of Education had spent too much money on the system; another 14 percent "somewhat agreed." http://publicadvocategotbaum.com/pages/documents/ARISFINAL.pdf

Some districts encourage schools to create structured time for principals and their staff members to work in teams to use data to identify and address learning problems of underachieving students.

- ***Providing training and support to the school staff in effective data use***
  One of the most important roles for districts is to provide school employees with the skills to use data to identify and solve pressing instructional challenges. In Portland, Ore., the district assigns its research and evaluation department to help principals and their teams gather, analyze and use data appropriately.[54] New York City principals can request help from district instructional staff and coaches in expanding data literacy in their own staffs.[55] The district also helps principals and their teams design and use their own tools to keep tabs on student performance throughout the year.[56]

- ***Adding to the variety of data***
  Taken alone, standardized test data offer little guidance on the causes of learning problems or how to address them. Districts should make available a wider variety of information to help schools pinpoint teaching and learning problems and arrive at promising solutions. Besides using state test data, Gwinnett County created two local data sources – "My Students" and "Elements" – to help teachers, principals and their teams measure student progress and the effectiveness of instruction. "My Students" gives teachers and administrators access to current and trend data for students from grades 1-12, which can be disaggregated for particular groups of students. "Elements" allows classroom teachers and others in the school to disaggregate district- and school-generated assessment results by a range of variables, guide instruction strategies, and enable teachers to pinpoint and give instant feedback on students' areas of mastery or weakness.

- ***Increasing opportunities for school teams to use the information***
  Some districts are encouraging schools to create structured time for principals and their staff members to work in teams – widely known as "professional learning communities" – to use data to identify, address and take collective responsibility for learning problems of specific groups of underachieving students. Fort Wayne actually requires its schools to set aside blocks of time each week for these data-driven discussions.

Since 2008, New York City has made "inquiry teams" a cornerstone of its improvement efforts in all of its schools. Each team, consisting of the principal and at least two other school staff members, is charged with using data to identify a change in instructional practice that will accelerate learning for a given group of underperforming students, then work with others to implement and monitor the change.[57]

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54 Plecki, Knapp et al., *How Leaders Invest Staffing Resources,* 55.

55 Ibid., 56.

56 Conelli interview; ARIS Web site.

57 New York City Department of Education Office of Accountability, *Children First Intensive Inquiry Team Handbook,* July 2008, 3-4. http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/spa/researchcenters/documents/Inquiry_Team_Handbook.pdf

A guiding principle for these inquiry teams is to "stay small." That means concentrating on how to improve a specific skill for no more than 15 to 30 underperforming students – for example, 6th-graders with weak understanding of phonics resulting in below-grade-level English Language Arts scores. Along with test scores and other data, the team's inquiry could include a review of student work and curricular materials as well as classroom visits to observe how students are responding to the curriculum. The team then identifies an instructional strategy to test out, setting performance goals to judge it.[58] The ultimate goal is to translate what's learned from the subset of students into an instructional strategy that benefits many more students in the school.[59]

Help principals focus more time on instruction – and develop the expertise to do so well

Time to focus on improving instruction can be maddeningly short when a school leader's typical day includes a string of crises and non-instructional routines: the lunch menu, the angry parent, the fight in the schoolyard. Indeed, research has found that a principal is apt to spend one-third or less of his or her daily or weekly time on instructional matters.[60] Increasingly, districts are recognizing that they can't fairly expect school leaders to concentrate on meeting learning goals unless they also provide them training and support to use their time differently.

Principals first need help in recognizing how they are actually spending their time each day and week. They then need coaching on how to delegate distracting non-instructional tasks that they still feel responsible for or attached to. Other employees need to learn how to work effectively as a team with the goal of protecting the principal's time so the principal can focus on improving student achievement.

Districts need to make sure not only that principals have time to focus on instruction but also the skills to use that time to help teachers improve.

One response has been the School Administration Manager (SAM) process, created in 2002 in Louisville, Ky., with Wallace Foundation support and in use in 82 districts across the country as of 2012.[61] Participating schools either hire a SAM to assume non-instructional tasks from the principal, or more commonly, the principal designates a person or persons from the staff – typically an assistant principal and/or administrative assistant – to function as a SAM. Guided by tools such as a high-tech calendar that charts the time the principal is spending with teachers and others, the SAM or SAM team meets regularly with the principal to schedule instructional leadership time, reflect on whether and how changes in time allocations are affecting instruction, and designate other school staff members to tend to busing or other matters that don't need to be handled in most cases by the principal.

(continued on page 28)

58 Marion A. Robinson et al., *School Perspectives on Collaborative Inquiry: Lessons Learned from New York City, 2009-2010,* Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2010, 3. http://www.cpre.org/school-perspectives-collaborative-inquiry-lessons-learned-new-york-city-2009-2010. The report was funded under a grant from The Wallace Foundation through the New York City Department of Education.

59 New York City Department of Education Office of Accountability, *Children First Intensive Inquiry Team Handbook,* July 2008, 5-7.

60 Brenda J. Turnball, M. Bruce Haslam et al., *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project,* Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2009, 21. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

61 Interview with Mark Shellinger, creator of the SAM process, August 3, 2012. The SAM project is operated by the National SAM Innovation Project, an independent 501.c3 organization, led by Shellinger. For more information, visit www.SamsConnect.com.

Help From, Yes, the Central Office:

A typical day for Lynne Wheat, an assistant superintendent for Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky., goes something like this: Starting at 7 a.m. sharp, she "works the bus and car line" to greet arriving students with a middle school principal who parents say is distant. Once the bell rings, she heads to a high school to mentor a principal dealing with an older teacher who doesn't want to follow the new curriculum. After lunch, she visits an elementary school and tags along with the principal on classroom observations. In the car, she squeezes in a pep talk with a talented school leader who's disappointed by her students' marginal gains in test scores. Then, she's back at the middle school where she started her day to ensure an orderly dismissal alongside the principal. PTA meetings, professional development workshops and other school functions round out her schedule.

All of which leaves Wheat little time to sit behind a desk in the central office. Not that she minds. A 24-year veteran of the district, Wheat is in her first year as one of its six assistant superintendents. Her job description says she's responsible for the academic achievement of the 22 schools she oversees. For Wheat, that means spending nearly all of her time with her principals – role-playing difficult conversations, helping them analyze data, even teaching them how to make small talk with parents at pick-up. "There's no guidebook on how to do this," she says. "Principals are still in charge of their buildings, but they can no longer do the job in isolation. It takes a total team effort."

School districts across the country share that sentiment. Under pressure to raise academic performance, many central offices are creating new positions – or redefining old ones – that charge administrators like Wheat with helping principals do their job better. The titles vary and include principal supervisor, managing principal, executive director and assistant superintendent. Job duties differ, too. Some, including Wheat, both coach and formally evaluate principals, while others do not.

There's so much emerging interest in the job that the Council of the Great City Schools has been working with The Wallace Foundation to get a better sense of what the position typically entails. An online council survey completed by 41 big-city districts in fall 2012 found that the tasks most commonly carried out by their principal supervisors were: visiting schools (93 percent of the districts); conversing with principals about school performance data (90 percent); and visiting classrooms with principals (82 percent).

Some 72 percent said that the job included evaluating principals, the same percentage that said it included coaching. "Ensuring that principals have the support they need to guide and inform instruction has the

Supervisors Work With Principals on Instructional Leadership

By Jennifer Gill

potential of being quite critical," says Council of the Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly. "We're curious to see what part these people play in the overall improvement of large school systems."

Meredith Honig, associate professor for educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Washington, says that the best people for the job approach the work more as teachers than managers or evaluators. With Wallace support, Honig and a team of researchers studied what they called "instructional leadership directors" in three urban districts. The most effective ones "get their hands dirty and work alongside principals," she says. Instead of just asking a principal if she has talked with her staff about school data, for instance, the instructional leadership director actually sits in on data meetings, joining in to demonstrate how to conduct the conversation and providing the principal with feedback.

Honig cautions that other central office functions such as instructional services have to line up behind the new approach in order for it to succeed. "This flips the traditional way of a central office working on its head," she says. "It puts the principal on top."

It also means that principal supervisors assist with the full spectrum of issues confronting school leaders. Ask Ivan Duran, who supervises principals in 17 different elementary or K-8 schools in southwest Denver. One day he's helping the head of a school with many Spanish speakers plan for a new approach to English language instruction. The next day, he and another principal are wrestling with the details of introducing an extended day schedule. Before the week is out, Duran might have assisted school leaders with matters ranging from teacher professional development to time management. "I see my job as helping our principals navigate systems and structures to support the best learning environment for their teachers and students," says Duran, one of 10 "instructional superintendents" in the Denver public school district.

Wheat, meanwhile, feels that her hands-on coaching is working. She says principals welcome her input and that they see her as an ally, not a monitor coming to check up on them. Indeed, some keep tally and jokingly complain that she visits other schools more than theirs. "I never thought I would hear that," she says.

Michael Casserly, executive director, Council of the Great City Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg has used SAMs as one aspect of its induction for novice principals since 2012 in 22 schools. "We decided first to develop the practices of new principals," says Lopez Morgan, the district's director of leadership strategy. The idea, she adds, is that eventually all principals will be trained in the SAMs process.[62] The district also often assigns high-potential assistant principals to do the data collection for SAMs in schools other than their own so that they have the experience of shadowing principals with different leadership styles.

An independent evaluation found that among 93 principals using the SAMs process for two or more years, the mean percentage of time spent on instruction rose from 32 percent to some 52 percent after two years. That translated into more than an hour and a half extra each day on instruction by principals in that study.[63]

At the same time, it's important to point out that research has so far found little connection between principals' participation in the SAMs project and improvement in student achievement on standardized tests.[64] Does this negate the contention that the amount of time a school leader spends on instruction matters? More research is surely called for, but our suspicion is that the finding is a lesson about expertise: Districts need to make sure not only that principals have time to focus on instruction but also the skills to use that extra time well, that is, the expertise to help teachers improve. Among the SAMs schools they examined, the researchers found only a few that gave the impression "that the principal had strategically selected a set of high-leverage leadership activities that would serve specific purposes in school improvement."[65] In response to such findings, the SAMs project has changed in recent years to focus not just on time allotment but time use.

How can districts lessen the likelihood of rapid leader transition and its damage?

Plan for orderly leadership succession and turnover

"Principal turnover is a problem districts help to create, and so must help to resolve." That's the blunt message from the Minnesota-Toronto report.[66]

A good deal of principal turnover is inevitable, stemming from retirements, promotions or transfers, and districts should be able to remove weak principals who can't or won't improve over time. The real concern is frequent, unplanned changes in school leadership – whose consequences are far from trivial. Schools with abrupt leadership disruptions on average experience "significant negative effects" on student achievement.[67] Furthermore, such schools "are often reported to suffer from lack of shared purpose, cynicism among staff about principal commitment, and an inability to maintain a school-improvement focus long enough to actually accomplish any meaningful change," according to the Minnesota-Toronto report.[68]

62 Interview with Rashidah Lopez Morgan, August 10, 2012.

63 Brenda J. Turnbull, Erikson Arcaira and Beth Sinclair, *Implementation of the National SAM Innovation Project: A Comparison of Project Designs,* Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2011, 10. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

64 Brenda J. Turnbull, Richard N. White and Erikson Arcaira, *Achievement Trends in Schools with School Administration Managers,* (SAMs), Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2010, 15-18. The study found, for example, that: After two years of participation in SAMs, a minority of schools examined (13 of 54) had higher (and statistically significant) gains in student achievement than comparison schools; and that the 25 schools that achieved the SAMs goal of an increase of at least 13 percentage points in principal time devoted to instruction did not significantly outperform matched schools after two years.

65 Ibid, 4.

66 Seashore Louis et al.,165.

67 Ibid., 173.

68 Ibid., 165-6.

Studies suggest that optimally, a principal needs to be at the helm for at least five years to establish bonds of trust and have changes take root.[69] On average, however, schools experience principal turnover every three or four years. Some policies may worsen the problem – for example, arbitrarily rotating principals to other schools after a certain number of years to "reinvigorate" those leaders or having "a one-size-fits-all approach to principal succession."[70]

How can districts lessen the likelihood of rapid leader transition and its damage? One step is to identify, early in their careers, talented teachers who have the potential to become principals.[71] Better training and mentoring for novice principals may also help reduce unwanted turnover. Jefferson County district leaders credit a high-quality training program developed in 2002 with the University of Louisville with a 70 percent drop in principal turnover between 2005 and 2010. Similarly, in Providence, R.I., a successful principal training collaboration between the district and the University of Rhode Island has placed graduates in leadership positions in roughly half of the district's 49 schools since 2002, without a single termination to date.[72] And yet, training alone is unlikely to be the answer. The researchers studying the New York City Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principal Program (APP), for example, found that APP principals had a higher rate of turnover than other new principals in similar schools.[73]

There is also evidence that distributing leadership and building strong leadership teams in schools can help foster continuity in reform efforts even if a principal leaves. At the least, districts have a responsibility to provide training and support to school staff members to assume new leadership roles.[74] Some districts go a step further by allowing some transferring principals to bring in their own leadership teams to smooth the transition and speed school improvement.

This proved to be an effective strategy for Springfield, Mass., when the state classified the district as "underperforming" in 2010 and ordered it to replace all principals and instructional staff members who had served two or more years in its 10 lowest performing schools. District officials tapped some of Springfield's most successful principals to take on these tough turnaround assignments, but also realized that much of the principals' past success stemmed from the strong leadership teams each had built over the years. The upshot? The district allowed several transferring principals to bring along their English Language Arts and math coaches, one or two high-performing teachers to serve as models for other teachers in their new schools, and an assistant principal in the case of middle and high schools. "It made sense to us to move the entire team into the new situation, rather than just bring in the leader and have to wait for a couple of years while that leader assessed members of the school, the organization, and could build a new team," said Mary Kate Fenton, the district's chief instructional officer. The results so far, according to Fenton: Three of the five schools where entire leadership teams were transferred have outperformed state averages in math and English Language Arts.[75]

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69 Ibid., 168.

70 Ibid., 168-9.

71 Bottoms et al., v.

72 Mitgang, *The Making of the Principal,* 6; e-mail from Miley, Jan. 30, 2013.

73 Corcoran, Schwartz and Weinstein, "Training Your Own," 250.

74 Seashore Louis et al., 178.

75 Interview with Fenton, Sept. 6, 2012; e-mail from Fenton, Jan. 23, 2013.

IV. Conclusion: Setting a Districtwide Vision for Leadership Success

In this report, we've described actions districts can take to ensure that principals are well trained when hired and fully supported on the job. But the evidence also underscores three other points:

- In successful schools, leadership and authority don't reside in any single person or position. The most enduring improvements occur through the consistent, shared exercise of leadership by many in the school community and the district central office.[76]

- Leadership-building actions are interdependent and will likely fall short if done haphazardly or in isolation. For example, standards matter only if the district uses them to govern principal training, hiring and assessment, and little good will come of data unless districts train principals in data's proper use.

- The steps described in this report – such as creating data systems, providing high-quality mentoring to new principals, and assigning district staff members to work closely with school leaders – involve costs and, just as often, tough choices for districts, especially when budgets are tight.

An important corollary to this last point is that district leaders need to summon the fortitude to make sometimes controversial decisions if principals of the neediest schools are to receive the resources and backing required for success. At a Wallace Foundation conference in 2009, Jerry Weast, then-superintendent of Montgomery County, Md., schools, alluded to the stiff opposition he had faced when he took steps including "differentiated funding" to promote greater equity for the district's disadvantaged students. He called on education leaders to find "the will and the courage" to make necessary changes.[77]

The good news is that more states have been taking more aggressive steps to build strong school leadership.

District leaders should also be willing to grant principals enough flexibility and authority to bring their vision to life in the unique context of each school. Districts that invest heavily in better training and support for their principals, only to treat them as ciphers once they are hired, are a long way from cultivating the brand of leadership described in this report, which holds that authority and responsibility must be broadly exercised in order to create sustainable learning improvements schoolwide.

It's also important to acknowledge that districts don't operate in a vacuum. State actions that take place in tandem with district efforts tend to reap the best results. The good news is that states have been taking more aggressive steps to build strong school leadership. For example:

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76 Seashore Louis, Leithwood et al., *Learning from Leadership;* Bradley S. Portin, Michael S. Knapp et al., *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools,* University of Washington, 2009. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

77 Richard Lee Colvin, "A 10-Year Climb: Education Leadership Reaches the National Reform Agenda," *Education Leadership: An Agenda for School Improvement,* The Wallace Foundation, 2010, 15.

- Iowa, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi and New York are among states that now require university- and non-university principal training providers to redesign their programs and reapply for accreditation in keeping with leadership standards.

- To raise the quality of principal candidates statewide and improve retention rates, Arkansas offers incentive bonuses to those who achieve "master principal" status or who serve for at least five years in high-needs schools. Georgia compensates educators for their professional training only if they actually assume leadership positions.

- States including Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois and New Mexico now gather a wider range of data that allow districts to track the performance of school leaders from their pre-service training on.[78]

This report suggests that a well-crafted district strategy to promote better school leadership makes sense because effective principals offer perhaps the surest route to effective teaching. Still, major unanswered questions remain: What does such a strategy look like in action? It's one thing to say that districts should, say, take a more active role in the training of aspiring principals or change hiring practices or introduce new evaluation systems. But how do such efforts play out? What works and what doesn't? And what concrete actions ultimately lead to measurable movement in student achievement?

Then there's the question of ultimate purpose: Would an investment in a districtwide leadership-building strategy bring gains for students districtwide, in high-needs and lower-needs schools alike?

To probe these questions, The Wallace Foundation in 2011 launched a five-year, $75 million initiative to help six large districts build stronger principal pipelines by (1) creating clear job requirements detailing what principals and assistant principals must know and do, (2) ensuring high-quality training for aspiring leaders, (3) developing more selective hiring procedures, and (4) using well-crafted evaluations to identify the needs of principals and ongoing support to address them.[79] Over the life of the initiative, it is expected that participating districts will have filled at least two-thirds of their principal slots with graduates of high-quality training programs – enough to enable independent researchers to gather meaningful evidence on whether and how better leadership can transform the academic fortunes of children.

Stay tuned.

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78 Sara Shelton, *Preparing a Pipeline of Effective Principals: A Legislative Approach*, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012, 5-10. This report was prepared with support from The Wallace Foundation. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org.

79 The districts are: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.; Denver; Gwinnett County, Ga.; Hillsborough County, Fla.; New York City; and Prince George's County, Md. For details, visit www.wallacefoundation.org.

Balancing Autonomy and Accountability in School Leadership: An Interview With Shael Polakow-Suransky

Shael Polakow-Suransky, chief academic officer for New York City's Department of Education, oversees principals and instruction in the nation's largest school district, with about 1,700 schools and 1.1 million students. He was interviewed by Janice Fuld, outreach producer of the WNET public television station in New York City, in October 2012, as part of the Wallace-sponsored "Critical Conversations" series, looking at school leadership. New York City is one of six urban school districts taking part in Wallace's principal pipeline initiative to develop a large corps of highly effective school leaders. Here are edited excerpts of the interview.

Q. What prompted New York City to focus on boosting the quality of school leadership?

A. We've believed strongly that if you have a great principal, a lot of what flows from that leads to great schools.

We started our work with the basic concept that if we put a lot of resources and depth into training principals, over time we'd get really talented people asking to take on the role of principal and asking for training. From there, we'd be able to support them once they took on new schools or existing schools.

What we didn't anticipate – and it is a very real challenge in New York City and all over the country – is that a lot of good teachers don't want to be principals right now. Part of my job each week is looking at the recommendations from superintendents across the city on who should be principal in a school where there's a vacancy. Sometimes I see a candidate who's really great, but we have to continue to do better at identifying and cultivating the strongest possible principal candidates for our schools.

That means finding teachers who are strong both at the instructional side of the work as well as the side of the work of developing adults. It means beginning much earlier in people's careers – when they're a third- or a fourth- or a fifth-year teacher. It means

"If you have a great principal, a lot of what flows from that leads to great schools."

Shael Polakow-Suransky

including them in teacher leadership programs – where they take on opportunities within their existing jobs to be leaders as a department chair or grade team leader – and in that work, supporting them.

Q. What's promising about the results and changes so far in how New York is approaching leadership?

A. When we started, we quickly came upon a big challenge: getting all these very talented leaders who wanted to take this on. They were going into some of our most difficult schools, or creating new schools on campuses that had been failing for decades, and they were running up against a lot of resistance from the bureaucracy.

Folks were telling them what to do: how long their classes are, what their bulletin boards should be, what meetings they should go to, what professional development they needed for their teachers, whom to hire, what they should spend their money on. All of those are the critical decisions that a principal needs to make to create a great school.

"In exchange for autonomy, the deal we've made with principals is, 'You're going to be accountable for how your kids do.'"

We've tried to flip the normal district structure, so that principals can say to us, "Here's where I need extra training for my staff. Here's where I need advice on where to use my budget. Here's where I need some training in my program about how we structure the schedule." In exchange for that autonomy, the deal we've made with principals is, "You're going to be accountable for how your kids do."

Because of this exchange of autonomy and accountability, everyone in the system knows that the way that you succeed is if your kids are learning. Measuring that is complex. Creating real meaningful autonomy for principals is also complex. But it's something we're refining continually and getting better at. I think if you're a principal today in New York City, you really do have the levers in your hands to shape your school in a way that's unique.

That sense of responsibility breeds a different kind of leader. So, when we see hundreds of schools that have turned around in New York City over this period, I attribute a lot of that to the fact that we found good people and have given them the flexibility to design something that works in their specific environment and then asked them to be accountable for what happens as a result.

Q. Can you talk about the hiring of principals and how it's changed?

"Our goal is to be able to hire folks who've come up through our teacher leadership programs, people we've spent years working with and trying to cultivate."

A. When we hire principals in New York City, we're looking at how to evaluate the training that they've gone through, what have they done as a teacher or as an assistant principal, and who trained them – not just the training program but the mentor. Are they a right match for the school that they're going into?

Moving forward, our goal is to be able to hire folks who've come up through our teacher leadership programs, people we've spent years working with and trying to cultivate. In cases where we know the candidates well, it's not a guessing game; we have a deep sense of what their strengths and weaknesses are. Part of our principal preparation training is beefing up the areas where people are struggling and making sure that they've mastered those, so we take great pains to really look carefully at what the folks in our leadership training programs are saying about the strengths and weaknesses of the people that they're recommending to go into the principalship.

Q. How do you encourage principals to delegate leadership roles to teachers and staff?

A. In 2008, we started something we call "inquiry teams" in all of our schools. These are teacher teams that are spending time looking at student work, looking at student data and asking the question: For the kids who aren't succeeding, what could we do differently? Do we need to change how we're teaching, what we're teaching? Do we need to design interventions for our struggling students? Then, what are the implications for the broader school: Are changes to the schedule needed? Is professional development needed?

The teacher-leaders are taking on the challenge of developing adults. When you're leading a team, part of what you're doing is getting that group organized around a common idea and working through a curriculum with them that will help support their development and the development of their students.

The only way that a system of 80,000, 75,000 teachers can get ready for big change is to leverage the talent of the teachers in our schools who are leaders. We're building further on that by building specific teacher-leader programs that take some of those instructional leaders and team leaders out of schools and do additional leadership work with them and their principals to help prepare them to possibly take on the role of principal down the road.

Q. What do you see the landscape of leadership in New York City being in five, ten years?

A. I'm hopeful that future city officials will continue to invest in leadership and the idea that you don't get great principals unless you give principals meaningful decisions to make. That's controversial because a lot of places in the country – and a lot of folks here in the city – would much prefer that principals go back to being middle managers who don't make real decisions.

You need real meaningful oversight and accountability of principals, but you also need entrepreneurs who have the flexibility and opportunity to create something great that's specific to their communities.

Learn More

You can find out more about school leadership and related topics by visiting The Wallace Foundation's

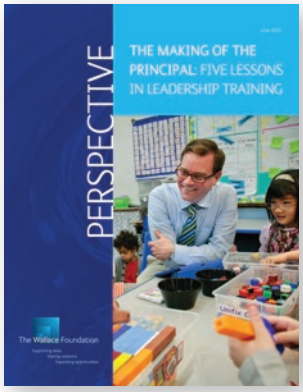
Districts Developing Leaders: Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches From Eight Urban Districts, Education Development Center, Inc., 2010.

How Leadership Influences Student Learning, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2004.

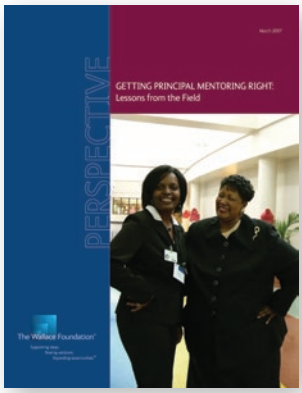
Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs (Final Report and Executive Summary), Stanford University and The Finance Project, 2007.

The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning (Expanded Edition), The Wallace Foundation, 2013.

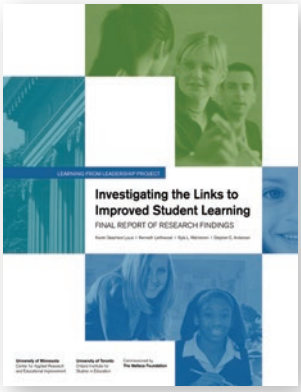
Web site at www.wallacefoundation.org. Here's a partial listing of free Wallace publications and multimedia resources:



The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training, The Wallace Foundation, 2012.



Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons From the Field, A Wallace Perspective, 2007.



Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2010.

Research Findings to Support Effective Educational Policymaking: Evidence and Action Steps for State, District and Local Policymakers, The Wallace Foundation, 2011.

Good Principals Aren't Born — They're Mentored: Are We Investing Enough to Get the School Leaders We Need?, SREB, 2007.

Knowledge in Brief: Connecting Leadership to Learning, The Wallace Foundation, 2010.

Learning-Focused Leadership and Leadership Support: Meaning and Practice in Urban Systems, University of Washington, 2010.

NASBE Discussion Guide: School Leadership: Improving State Systems for Leader Development, National Association of State Boards of Education, 2011.

The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A School-Level Evaluation, New York University, 2009.

The Principal Story Project: Guides, Film Clips and Other Materials Based on the PBS Documentary, 2009.

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