SUSTAINING A PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

Leslie M. Anderson

Brenda J. Turnbull

POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES

FEBRUARY 2019

SUSTAINING A PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

Leslie M. Anderson
Brenda J. Turnbull

POLICY STUDIES
ASSOCIATES

Commissioned by:

The Wallace Foundation®

CONTENTS

EXHIBITS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six urban school districts set out in 2011 to develop and support a cadre of principals whose leadership would positively affect school outcomes. The districts were Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; New York City Department of Education, New York; and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland. Leaders in these districts believed that they could improve on their recent experiences in hiring novice principals, some of whom had struggled to meet the demands of instructional leadership. Each district pursued a "principal pipeline" strategy with four interrelated components, aimed at cultivating a steady supply of well-prepared and well-supported new principals:

- Adopting standards of practice and performance that would guide principal preparation, hiring, evaluation, and support.
- Delivering high-quality preservice preparation to high-potential candidates, typically through a combination of in-district programs and partnerships with university preparation programs.
- Using selective hiring and placement, informed by data on candidates' demonstrated skills, to match principal candidates to schools.
- Aligning on-the-job evaluation and support for novice principals, with an enlarged role for principal supervisors in instructional leadership.

As evaluator of the work of these districts, Policy Studies Associates found that the districts used the pipeline components as a coordinated strategy that addressed their priorities for school leadership. Every district put effort into designing and implementing its own way of carrying out each component of the pipeline, and each component reinforced the others, according to district leaders. This was a core finding of an implementation evaluation conducted through interviews and principal surveys in the six districts from 2012 through 2015. A forthcoming report from RAND Corporation, which has been a partner in the overall evaluation, will describe the pipeline's impact on school-level achievement and principal retention through 2017. The Wallace Foundation provided grant funds and technical assistance to the districts, which were grantees in the Principal Pipeline Initiative, which Wallace designed as a test of four key components of a pipeline. Wallace also supported the evaluation of implementation and impact.

Early positive results were evident in the perceptions of district leaders and also in survey results. Districts got better in placing candidates in schools, based on novice principals' reports of the fit between their skills and their school's needs, as well as on district leaders' reports of their satisfaction with the new principals they were placing. New principals consistently gave high ratings to support from coaches or mentors and, over time, began to give similarly high ratings to their supervisors.

This report brings the story of implementation and principal perceptions up to date, with data gathered in 2018 through interviews and surveys. Interviews were conducted with district officials who have responsibilities related to principal development and support, including principal supervisors and key central-office staff. Surveys were administered to all principals in five districts and to a sample of principals in New York City.

Key Findings

All six districts are maintaining principal pipelines, continuing to follow the vision of intentionally managing the career progressions of their aspiring principals and principals. They continue to see principal standards as foundational in shaping the development and support of leaders through preparation programs, job descriptions, evaluation criteria, and coaching or mentoring for principals. Superintendents continue to champion the work, and an office dedicated to leadership development is part of every district's budget. While each district has made changes in its pipeline activities and reorganized some responsibilities among district offices, particularly as the role of principal supervisors continues to grow, the overall stability of the pipeline vision and pipeline structures is notable. In interviews, district leaders made it clear that they see benefits from their principal pipelines, particularly in the strengths shown by recently appointed principals and in retention of these principals.

Novice principals' reports on their pipeline experiences remain generally positive, and reports from novice and veteran principals now allow us to discern—in retrospect—changes in the experience of principal preparation during the Principal Pipeline Initiative.

- As of 2018, most principals in their first or second year (63 percent) report an "excellent" fit between their skills and their school's needs, and another 35 percent say the fit is "good." Only 2 percent say the fit is "fair," and zero percent say that it is "poor." While positive, these reports do not represent statistically significant improvement when compared with the reports of novice principals surveyed in 2013. The percentage who report an excellent fit is lower than the 72 percent of first- and second-year principals who did so in 2015, although the difference is not statistically significant.

- Districts' efforts to improve preservice preparation for principals appear to have made a difference in the preservice experiences of incoming principals. The differences are evident in the 2018 survey responses of principals who started their principal preparation in March 2012 or later, compared with those who completed their preparation by March 2012. Responses to questions about the "totality" of their preservice experience revealed that preparation that took place in the latter period— after all districts had begun to make changes in preservice programs—more often emphasized instructional leadership, school improvement, and district context. These differences are statistically significant.

- Novice principals continue to give positive answers to survey questions about on-the-job evaluation systems. Most perceive these systems as accurate, fair, based on clear expectations, and useful to them.
- Support from principal supervisors, coaches, and mentors remains strong, according to survey responses from novice principals, responses that are substantially the same as those gathered from novices in 2015.

Fine-tuning of the pipeline continues. Districts continue to work on strengthening principal supervisors' skills in supporting principals, and on sorting out the respective roles of principal supervisors, coaches or mentors, and central-office departments in supporting principals. Some areas of overlap and confusion remain in systems of support, however. District leaders are also working to strengthen talent spotting and support for aspiring leaders within schools, recognizing that sitting principals play a key role as mentors.

Some districts are also working to adapt their pipelines to a new reality: they have more candidates for principal positions presenting strong qualifications, and fewer vacancies, apparently due to improved principal retention. These districts are adapting by trying to ensure that the aspiring leaders in a hiring pool keep their skills fresh while waiting for a principalship. These districts also find that they may want to shrink their preparation programs. Cutbacks in the size of some in-district preparation programs are apparent, less for reasons of cost than because of the new supply-and-demand reality.

As they consider all their leadership roles and progressions strategically, districts are increasing the leadership density in schools. That is, they are adding positions and responsibilities for deans and assistant principals, giving leadership opportunities to individuals who show promise as leaders. They are making this change partly as a way to maintain the energy and motivation of these individuals if fewer principal positions are available, but also in the belief that students, teachers, and principals will benefit from a stronger, broader leadership team.

When asked about advice for other districts, those who have led principal pipeline work in these districts say that another district can make similar changes, even without substantial funding, if the superintendent supports the work, if standards are used as the starting point and the foundation, and if the district works step-by-step to develop the leaders it needs for its own context.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

School districts can address challenges that arise in hiring and retaining strong school principals. By working to manage the "pipeline" of incoming and novice school principals, the leaders in six large urban districts found that they were solving problems they had had earlier, when too few strong candidates were applying for principalships and too many novice principals were struggling. As evaluators, we documented the progress that they made in this effort from 2011 to 2015. Because the reported successes were notable at that time, we returned in 2018 to study the durability of the approach that the districts used. The districts are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; New York City Department of Education, New York; and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland. With support from The Wallace Foundation in the form of grants and technical assistance, they worked to put in place four interrelated components of a pipeline:

- Adopting standards of practice and performance that would guide principal preparation, hiring, evaluation, and support.
- Delivering high-quality preservice preparation to high-potential candidates.
- Using selective hiring and placement to match principal candidates to schools.
- Aligning on-the-job evaluation and support for novice principals, with an enlarged role for principal supervisors in instructional leadership.

Eight to ten years ago, each of these districts was struggling to find an adequate supply of principal candidates. Each district began to pursue at least some of the pipeline approaches listed above by 2011. At that time, The Wallace Foundation designed and launched its initiative, providing support for the further development and implementation of pipelines. The districts designed and adapted their own ways of carrying out each component of the pipeline.

Results of this work were impressive, as documented by the evaluation that Policy Studies Associates and the RAND Corporation have conducted. Our reports on implementation analyze how, by spring 2015, the districts had established policies and practices consistent with a coherent principal pipeline.[1] The districts were using their defined principal standards and

---

[1] In chronological order: Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley, Erikson R. Arcaira, Leslie M. Anderson and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Building a Stronger Principalship (Vol.1): Six Districts Begin the Principal Pipeline Initiative,* Policy Studies Associates, 2013; Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Building a Stronger Principalship (Vol. 2): Cultivating Talent Through a Principal Pipeline,* Policy Studies Associates, 2013; Brenda J. Turnbull, Derek L. Riley and Jaclyn R. MacFarlane, *Building a Stronger Principalship (Vol. 3): Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline,* Policy Studies Associates, 2015; Leslie M. Anderson and Brenda J. Turnbull, *Building a*

competencies in managing the principal workforce. All had cultivated deeper working relationships with preparation programs, and all were operating or planning in-district preparation programs for their aspiring principals. They were gathering and using more data on principal candidates to inform hiring and placement decisions. Principal supervisors were using standards-based evaluation systems and following up with support aligned with needs, and the districts also had mentors or coaches helping novice principals. Over the same period, RAND researchers found that the cost of these pipelines was relatively modest, amounting to about one-half of 1 percent of annual district budgets.[2] In April 2019 the evaluation team will release a final report from RAND, assessing the impact on school-level achievement and principal retention in schools with newly placed principals.

Early positive results were evident in the principal survey data as of 2015:[3]

- Districts got better in placing candidates in schools, based on novice principals' reports of the fit between their skills and their school's needs.
- New principals consistently gave high ratings to support from coaches or mentors and, over time, began to give similarly high ratings to their supervisors.

This report addresses a question that naturally arises when an initiative takes hold and shows promising early results: Can it last? We bring the story of implementation and principal perceptions up to date with data gathered in 2018, as described next.

Study Questions and Methods

This report assesses continuity and change in district policies and practices and in principal perceptions as of 2018. It asks:

- To what extent and in what ways are districts still carrying out each of the four components of the Principal Pipeline Initiative?
- What changes have they made to their pipelines, and why?
- What do principals say about their preparation, hiring and placement, evaluation, and support, and how is it similar to or different from key findings that we reported earlier?

We visited each district in spring 2018 and interviewed decision makers in the office responsible for leadership development, principal supervisors, other high-level officials, coaches or mentors, and university officials who have liaison roles with a district. Interviews were transcribed and systematically analyzed, ensuring that we captured information about each component and could triangulate across the perceptions of different individuals and offices. We sought generalizations across districts to the extent possible, as well as notable exceptions to an overall pattern.

Stronger Principalship (Vol. 4): Evaluating and Supporting Principals, Policy Studies Associates, 2016; and Brenda J. Turnbull, Leslie M. Anderson, Derek L. Riley, Jaclyn R. MacFarlane and Daniel K. Aladjem, *Building a Stronger Principalship (Vol. 5): The Principal Pipeline Initiative in Action,* Policy Studies Associates, 2016.

[2] Julia H. Kaufman, Susan M. Gates, Melody Harvey, Yan Wang and Mark Barrett, *What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources,* RAND Corp., 2017

[3] Turnbull et al., 2016

Individuals were assured of anonymity in our reporting, and therefore this report masks the identity of districts in which the combination of district name and respondent's role could make the individual source easily identifiable. All quotations in this report come from interviews conducted in spring 2018.

The survey, also administered in 2018, was a shortened version of the one that we administered to novice principals annually in 2013, 2014, and 2015. The survey included questions on the respondent's experiences and perceptions related to preservice training for school leadership, the hiring and placement process, principal evaluation systems, and support from supervisors and coaches or mentors. In 2018, we administered it to veteran principals as well as novices. All principals were surveyed in five of the districts; for New York City we drew a random sample and oversampled principals who started on the job between 2015 and 2018. Response rates, overall and by district, appear in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1:
Principal survey respondents and response rates, by district

District	Number of respondents	Response rate, in percent
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	131	74
Denver	107	73
Gwinnett County	121	88
Hillsborough County	184	78
New York City	271	49
Prince George's County	165	81
Total	**979**	**68**

Exhibit reads: One hundred thirty-one principals completed the survey in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, comprising 74 percent of all principals surveyed in the district.

Survey analyses presented in this report are based on a weighting procedure that gives equal weight to the aggregate responses from each district.[4] This is the same procedure used in previous reports on implementation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative. Exhibits throughout this report show the weighted number of respondents as "N(w)."

Many of the survey analyses here focus on novice principals, specifically those who started on the job during the two or three years (depending on the question) before February 2018. This allows us to compare the responses of current novices with the findings we reported from surveys of novices conducted in 2015 and earlier. Thus, for example, we compare perceptions of the principal's own fit with their school for three different groups of novices: those who started on the job between March 2010 and February 2012; those who started between March 2013 and

---

[4] The post-stratification survey weight for each district is the inverse of the number of respondents from the district out of the total number of respondents, divided by six.

February 2015; and those who started between March 2016 and February 2018. In each case, the perceptions are those that the respondent reported the first time we surveyed them, whether in 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2018. In this report's comparison of preservice preparation across multiple cohorts of incoming principals, we use the responses gathered in 2018 from all principals, novice and veteran.

Organization of This Report

We begin with an overview of the perceptions of district leaders and principals in 2018. Next, we review the current status of each pipeline component in chapters on standards, preparation, hiring and placement, and evaluation and support. An additional chapter explores system supports for a career continuum, based on these districts' many years of experience in building and using a principal pipeline. A final chapter offers a summary and concluding observations, including advice from district leaders for other districts.

II. PERCEPTIONS OF PIPELINE SUCCESS

This study did not gather or analyze hard data about effects of the pipeline. These are the subject of a different report, forthcoming from RAND as part of the overall initiative evaluation. However, our qualitative methods give us a window into the trends that district leaders see in principal vacancies and their impressions of their incoming cohorts of school leaders. In addition, novice principals responded to a survey question about their perception of the fit between their skills and the needs of their school. Overall, the responses show positive impressions, as this chapter describes.

Administrators in every pipeline district told us that their incoming school leaders are highly skilled. The following observations from individuals involved in hiring and supporting new principals were typical:

- A superintendent stated, "The pool of candidates that I get [for principal selection] is deep and their knowledge is broad."
- In Hillsborough County, principal supervisors said that newly appointed principals are able to lead effectively from the start because they have already developed competencies, such as monitoring student progress, and insights, such as understanding their own impact on school culture. These skill sets are different from those that veteran principals brought when they were new to the job.
- A principal supervisor in Denver said, "I think the pipeline work has been great in growing and developing future principals and aspiring principals [who have] managed a small team of teachers, so things like people management are not brand-new concepts and they've had exposure to things like the budget-setting process and other operational issues."
- Principal supervisors in Denver commented that not only are new principals better prepared, but so are assistant principals, which has had a multiplier effect on the benefits brought to schools. With the powerful combination of newly appointed, pipeline-prepared assistant principals working side-by-side with pipeline-prepared principals, "We have faster traction on change," as one supervisor put it.
- A Prince George's County administrator said, "We think we're doing better at identifying talented people coming in and then we provide the right level of support to everything else, so I would say I feel promise."
- Principal coaches in Hillsborough County said they have to rethink what they do in order to challenge their novice principals. One described the novices as "phenomenal go-

getters" and admitted to musings like, "This person is a really great curriculum person. How can I add value to what she's already doing at her school?"

District leaders in three districts said that they have seen improved retention of principals. This observation came up in our interviews in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Denver, and New York City, where district officials working on leadership development have been keeping an eye on retention rates. They do so as a measure of their own work—and also as a data point that they need to use in determining how many aspiring principals they should be systematically preparing to step into vacancies. All three told us the retention rate was up for new principals, in terms such as the following:[5]

> They're staying in their jobs longer and we believe that they are better prepared for the role, they're better supported for the role. Over the years, our retention rates have increased dramatically.
>
> When I first started [in this] position, we had over 35 new principals [hired each year]. Last year, we had about 10.... [The number of sitting principals' contracts not renewed] has gone down tremendously, and the number of new principals hired has gone down.
>
> We're tracking principal retention, and we're seeing significant increases in principal retention in the first and second year.

The quality of new principals' self-reported fit with their schools has remained high, but it no longer shows a statistically significant increase since the pipeline initiative began. As of 2015, we found a statistically significant increase since 2013 in novice principals' reports of an "excellent" fit with their schools.[6] This analysis was based on a survey question with a four-point scale: excellent, good, fair, or poor. We compared the survey responses of those who had started on the job from March 2010 through February 2012 (the two earliest cohorts of incoming principals who responded to our surveys) versus those who had started on the job from March 2013 through February 2015. We said this change was a likely leading indicator of retention and success on the job, based on prior research.[7]

Adding data gathered with the same survey question in 2018 from the two newest cohorts of principals (those appointed from March 2016 through February 2018), we find that the proportion of novice principals reporting an "excellent" fit in 2018 is at a level between the proportions found among novices reporting in 2013 and in 2015 (Exhibit 2). Significance testing

---

[5] We do not try to quantify the changes here because each of these districts does this tracking for its own purposes and on a somewhat different basis. Another evaluation report will provide that analysis, however: the districts reported individual-level, longitudinal principal data to RAND, whose forthcoming report on the pipeline's impact uses those data to analyze changes in the retention of newly hired principals across all six districts.
[6] Turnbull et al., 2016.
[7] Amy L Kristof-Brown, Ryan D Zimmerman and Erin C Johnson, "Consequences of Individual's Fit at Work: A Meta-Analysis of Person-Job, Person-Organization, Person-Group, and Person-Supervisor Fit," *Personnel Psychology*, 58, no. 2 (2005): 281-342.

shows no difference from the reports of either of these earlier groups of principals. In other words, the extent to which new principals consider the fit to be excellent is not substantially different from the perceptions measured earlier among previous cohorts of new principals: it does not represent an improvement over the 2010-12 baseline, and neither does it represent a drop from the perceptions of the principals hired in 2013-15. Small proportions of principals reported a "fair" fit at each time (5 percent in the earliest cohorts of principals, 2 percent in later cohorts); a "poor" fit was reported by 1 percent in 2013.

Exhibit 2:
Novice principals reporting an "excellent" or "good" fit of their skills, experience, and interests with the needs of their schools, by cohort
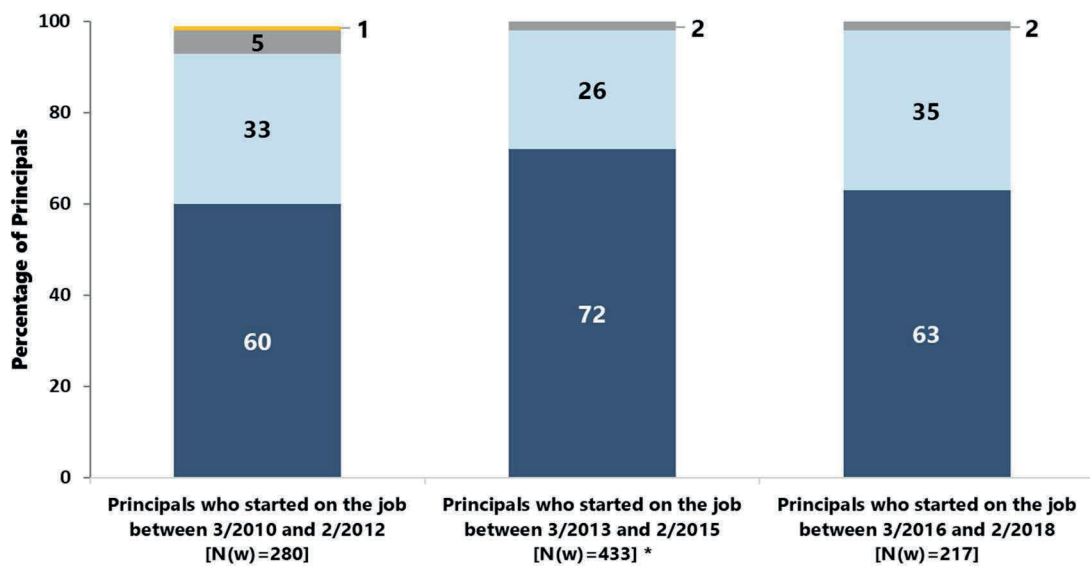
* The difference in reports of "excellent fit" between principals who started on the job between 3/2010 and 2/2012 and principals who started on the job between 3/2013 and 2/2015 is statistically significant

Exhibit reads: The percent of principals who characterized the fit between their skills, experiences, and interests and the needs of the school where they are principals as "excellent" was 60 percent for principals who started on the job from March 2010 through February 2012, 72 percent for principals who started on the job from March 2013 through February 2015, and 63 percent for principals who started on the job between March 2016 and February 2018.
Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2018.

Summary

Overall, district leaders express satisfaction with the state of leadership development. They praise the caliber of their candidates for principal and assistant principal positions. Principal retention has reportedly improved in three districts that are tracking that metric.

Most new principals continue to report an excellent fit between their skills and their school's needs. The percentage giving this response has diminished since we posed the question to novices in 2015 but is higher than it was among the novices in 2013. Neither of these differences over time is statistically significant, however.

III. STANDARDS

Just as they had in past years, district leaders report in interviews that standards have been important in creating and maintaining alignment across the components of the principal pipeline. They continue to work with their standards, not only refining them (as they had in past years) but also extending them to leaders other than principals.

How Standards Remain Important to the Districts

The leadership standards that districts developed and adopted early in the initiative have remained critical by "forcing alignment" of the pipeline components. After initially perceiving standards development as just one more set of tasks, district leaders were surprised to recognize that it had been a pivotal and essential first step in their pipeline work. Looking at their pipeline components in 2018, district officials engaged in the work in multiple districts commented on the depth and value of alignment based on standards:

> Everything [in preservice] is grounded in the competencies that are identified in the standards. If you think about selection, everything is grounded in our foundational standards and framework. I think we, when we started this work, didn't realize the extent to which that would be and how powerful that would be and how that would be forcing that alignment for every other component of the system.

> To have recruitment strategies that are aligned to that … to be able to assess those candidates to see where they meet those standards and then to … have enough good information about them that you could actually communicate to hiring managers what their skills and capacities are … that's what you're shooting for, real coherence and alignment throughout the whole system, the whole pipeline, is a beautiful thing.

> When we say we're going to be doing professional learning around visioning … we can attach that to [one of the standards]…. We can [also] call it out and then be able to evaluate on that, "As a leader, are you seeing the difference? Is [the professional learning] having an impact?" That's a little bit different than what we've done before, because now we have eight or nine [professional learning activities tied] to a standard or competency, whereas before I think we had a general idea that the [professional learning] was around this topic, but not necessarily aligned to a standard or competency.

How the Content of Standards Evolved

As we reported based on previous rounds of visits to the districts, local standards and competencies for principals are living documents. District staff continue to refine their standards for principals based on experience. They are also working to adapt their existing principal standards for use with other leadership roles.

Early revisions to standards, especially in the first year or two of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, often came from committee discussion. One district administrator recalled in 2018 how it had been common for stakeholders to get bogged down in word choices for the standards:

> *People get really hung up on different words, like "Do I like the word 'engaged' versus 'empowered?'" I can't tell you how many times I had to revise [the standards] because one person didn't like this word and then I revised it with their word and then somebody else didn't like that word.*

When districts use the wording of standards in policy instruments such as job descriptions and evaluation systems, their experience prompts further revisions. As they have fleshed out each pipeline component—such as principal hiring or evaluation—district leaders said they can better see and address gaps in the existing standards' scope, clarity, and practical utility. One example was offered by a principal supervisor in Denver, who thought more deeply about the content of the standards in the process of implementing the current process for selecting aspiring leaders into the hiring pool:

> *In order to get into the pool, you had to demonstrate the competencies that were on the [standards]. And so that added value to the [standards]. It also helped me to check … to say, "Are these the right competencies—does this really define what we want principals to be able to do and our leadership skills that we want them to demonstrate?"*

Defining the competencies and skills of an effective leader is an ever-changing task because the contexts within which schools operate continually change and evolve. A district leader in Charlotte-Mecklenburg described the worry that she and her colleagues continue to confront regarding whether they have succeeded in identifying the essential knowledge and skills that define an effective leader. A leader in Prince George's County described a similar worry: "I definitely see a trend of our principals being more prepared for what's in front of them, but I think what's in front of them keeps changing and gets more complex." A principal supervisor in yet another district had narrowed the worry down to a subset of principals, wondering whether the standards were shaping the hiring and selection process to find the right middle school leaders: "I don't think our pool is quite where we need it to be for middle school leaders. I think if we could just identify a couple priorities, like that we want [aspiring middle school leaders] to come into each role with X skills, it would be helpful."

Standards were differentiated for different leadership roles and contexts. For example, Denver developed adaptations of its principal standards to address the responsibilities of assistant principals, teacher leaders, and central-office staff. Interviewees commented that this helped the central office align on-the-job evaluation with standards for each role and could also help individuals by clarifying the pathway through the leadership pipeline and the developmental requirements along the way:

> [There's] the expectation that [leaders] have the same competencies that they're working towards, but it looks different by role. So, I think people appreciate seeing how this competency relates to their work. And to me the biggest difference is the purview. So this [revised set of standards] now differentiates from principal to AP to senior team leaders[8] to leader of others so that you can see also how your work should shift across that trajectory, but also to help support people in career planning so that if they want to know, "What do I need to do to be ready for my next role?" They can look [at the standards and] say, "Okay, these are maybe some areas that I need to prioritize with my growth."

Tailoring the standards to the demands of a struggling school, Hillsborough County added some new specifics as elaboration on its five leadership standards. As a district administrator explained, the five standards are right for all principals, while the new additions focus on competencies specifically related to school turnaround. When principals demonstrate those particular competencies, the administrator said, "Those are the ones we recruit to move to our high-need schools."

District leaders are also making sure that the standards do not become a ceiling on principals' growth. They want the standards to serve as a motivational tool that encourages principals to continuously improve. A Denver leader commented:

> It's so critical to have an iterative process around [the standards]. What I mean by that is we set standards that are aspirational, right? We have school leaders that are performing at this level and we would like them to perform at a higher level. And so that higher level becomes the standard.... So, we never become stagnant. We never become status quo.... Otherwise, I think we will get back to where we started [before the pipeline initiative], where we have standards, but they really don't inform [a principal's] growth and development.

Similarly a member of the Hillsborough leadership team explained that the team's expectations for principal development have changed, in the belief that leaders should be working toward deepening their leadership capacities and skills within each of the standards: "The competency is the same, [but] the expectation is that as they move through the pipeline they're going to be able to go deeper within that competency."

---

[8] A senior team leader, such as a teacher leader, might supervise, support, and coach one team of teachers whereas someone who is another type of leader might supervise a schoolwide project or school culture. APs would have several teams of either teachers or senior team leaders that they are supporting, and then the principal is the hub that focuses on school coherence and building capacity across all those leadership roles to ensure that school leaders are moving in a coherent and aligned way toward achieving the instructional vision for the school.

Summary

Principal standards remain a cornerstone of principal pipelines in the districts. Preparation, hiring, evaluation, and support are aligned with standards, and district leaders continue to value the common language that standards provide for school leadership.

Having fine-tuned their standards in earlier years, some districts are now extending the use of standards to other leadership roles, including assistant principals, team leaders within buildings, and central-office staff. One district is elaborating the standards to add competencies that may be especially relevant in turnaround schools.

Several interviewees commented that standards must remain living documents. The challenges that face principals can change over time, they note. Moreover, as a district's principal corps becomes increasingly proficient in existing standards, the district can raise expectations for performance.

IV. PRESERVICE PREPARATION

In building their principal pipelines, the districts worked to strengthen principal preparation across all types of programs for aspiring principals. They introduced or strengthened their own selective preparation programs for those who appeared close to readiness for a principalship. They also forged or strengthened partnerships with the universities that prepared principal candidates. But they faced an unavoidable delay in seeing results of all this work reflected in their incoming principals. Across districts, the median elapsed time from starting preservice to becoming a principal ranged from three to ten years as of 2015, with an average across districts of six years.[9] Thus, of the most recently appointed principals in 2015, most had started their preparation well before the pipeline initiative began. Our previous reports found few differences in preservice over time, based on the reports of incoming principals. However, by 2018 we are able to gain a more complete picture of changes in new principals' preservice experience because districts have hired more principals who started and finished their preparation after the pipeline initiative began.

Meanwhile, all six districts have continued to work on improving preparation for aspiring principals, and all of them continue to focus both on in-district programs and their partnerships with universities. As of 2018, they are also fine-tuning their approaches to preparation. This includes restructuring the residencies that many of the districts offer, and for some districts it also includes adding special programs to prepare turnaround leaders.

A Greater Focus on School Improvement

Principals whose preservice preparation began after the Principal Pipeline Initiative got under way (i.e., after March 2012) report different experiences than those principals who completed their preparation before that date.[10] Our questions about preservice ask about "the totality" of the respondent's experience, and thus include all stages of preparation. Survey respondents who started their preservice preparation after March 2012 give reports on three features of their preparation that show statistically significant differences

---

[9] The time lag from starting principal preservice to becoming a principal did not change to a statistically significant extent based on 2018 data. For the newest principals, who started on the job between March 2016 and February 2018, the district-level median time lags ranged from four years to nine years, and the average of the district medians was seven years.

[10] Our latest survey (administered to all sitting principals, including veterans as well as the newest cohorts) allows us to compare responses from two fairly sizable groups: those who report having become principals (and, therefore, must have completed their preparation) before March 2012; and those who report having begun their preservice preparation after March 2012. The latter group's experiences all took place during the time of the initiative and could have been influenced by changes that the districts made, whereas the former group completed their principal preparation before those changes began.
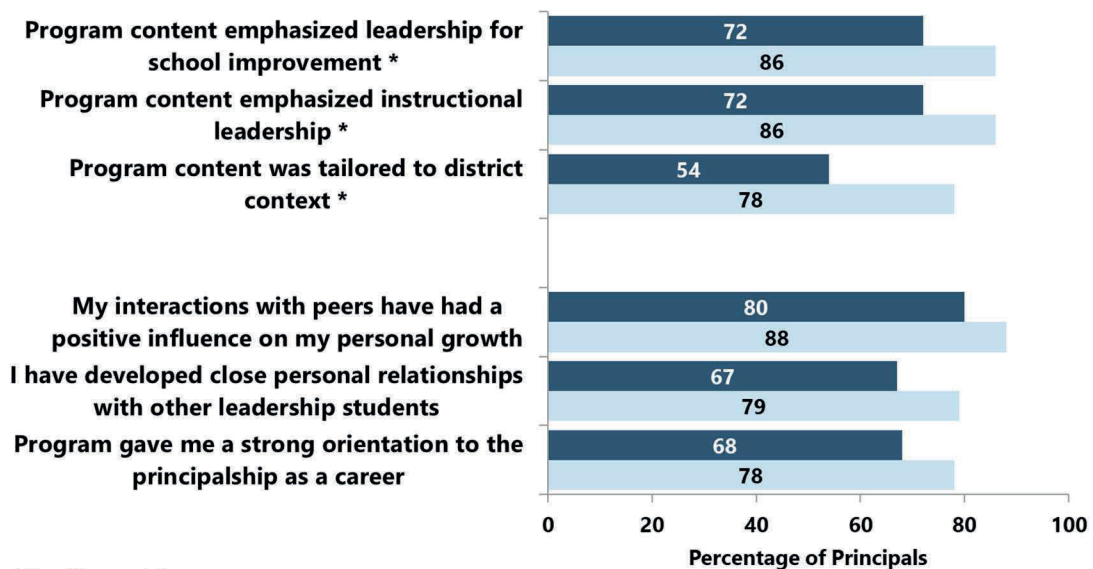
when compared with respondents who completed their preparation by that time (Exhibit 3). They report that, to a considerable or great extent, their preservice program content:

- Emphasized leadership for school improvement (86 percent vs. 72 percent for the earlier group).
- Emphasized instructional leadership training (86 percent vs. 72 percent).
- Was tailored to the district context (78 percent vs. 54 percent).

Other differences, related to a cohort model of instruction and an orientation to the principalship as a career, are also apparent but are not statistically significant.

Exhibit 3:

Principal reports of the extent to which their preservice programs emphasized various qualities or practices to a considerable or great extent, by pre-2012 preservice starters versus post-2012 preservice starters

Program content emphasized leadership for school improvement * : 72 / 86
Program content emphasized instructional leadership * : 72 / 86
Program content was tailored to district context * : 54 / 78

My interactions with peers have had a positive influence on my personal growth : 80 / 88
I have developed close personal relationships with other leadership students : 67 / 79
Program gave me a strong orientation to the principalship as a career : 68 / 78

Percentage of Principals

* The difference between pre-2012 and post-2012 preservice starters is statistically significant

■ Started preservice preparation before 3/2012 [N(w)=366]
■ Started preservice preparation after 3/2012 [N(w)=129]

Exhibit reads: Seventy-two percent of principals who started their preservice preparation before March 2012 reported that the qualities and practices of their leadership preparation training program(s) included content that emphasized leadership for school improvement "to a considerable or to a great extent" compared with 86 percent of principals who started their preservice preparation after March 2012 and reported that the content of their leadership preparation training program(s) emphasized this quality/practice, which was a difference of 14 percentage points.
Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2018.

The more recently prepared principals also report having started on the job with higher levels of preparedness for a number of leadership practices.

Again comparing those who started their preservice after March 2012 against those who completed their preservice before that date, we see one statistically significant difference and several apparent differences in their self-reported judgment of the extent to which the experience left them ready for particular aspects of school leadership (Exhibit 4). The more recently prepared principals are significantly more likely to say that they started out ready to use data for school improvement. Other differences are apparent but not statistically significant.

Exhibit 4:

Principal perceptions of the extent to which their preservice training prepared them well or very well to engage in various leadership practices, by pre-2012 preservice starters versus post-2012 preservice starters

Leadership practice	Started preservice preparation before 3/2012 [N(w)=366]	Started preservice preparation after 3/2012 [N(w)=129]
Understand and build school culture	71	82
Create a collaborative learning organization	69	81
Use data to monitor school progress, identify problems, and propose solutions *	63	80
Evaluate teachers/provide instructional feedback to support their improvement	70	80
Engage in comprehensive planning for school improvement	63	76
Lead a well-informed, planned change process for a school	61	73
Have difficult conversations with teachers, staff, parents, or other stakeholder	55	67
Set performance standards for students	55	66
Redesign school organizations to enhance productive teaching and learning	52	64
Design professional development that builds teachers' knowledge and skills	53	64

Percentage of Principals

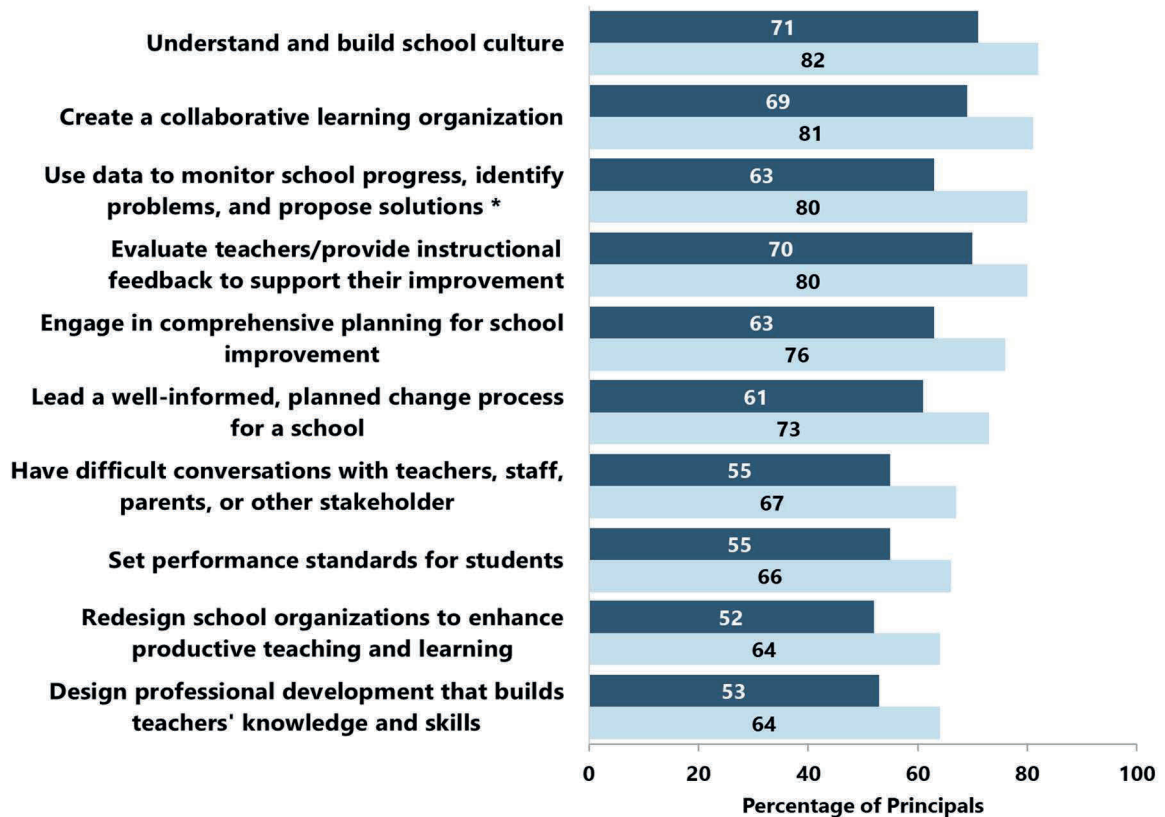* The difference between pre-2012 and post-2012 preservice starters is statistically significant

Exhibit reads: Seventy-one percent of principals who started their preservice preparation before March 2012 reported that their preservice training prepared them well or very well to understand and build school culture compared with 82 percent of principals who started their preservice preparation after March 2012 and reported that their preservice training prepared them well or very well in this way, which was a difference of 11 percentage points.

Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2018.

Adjustments in Residency Programs

Cost considerations are present in decisions about residency programs, but they are not the whole story. A residency program, which we define as a placement of at least a month in a school other than the candidate's regular placement, was a part of district-run preparation programs in Denver, Gwinnett County, and Prince George's County in 2015. Each of these programs has undergone changes, and district staff explain that these changes are driven by the aim of setting up the best possible learning experience for residents, shepherded by leaders who will meet their learning needs. We know from the study of districts' pipeline expenditures by Kaufman and colleagues that residencies are a big-ticket item in principal preparation.[11] No interviewee said that cost alone had been the main reason for adjusting a residency program, however. Instead, they mentioned other reasons—ones that Kaufman and colleagues had suggested could be behind the reductions in spending on preservice preparation that districts made as the grant period wound down. Kaufman and colleagues speculated that districts might have found they no longer needed such a large pool of candidates for principalships, or that the districts might have developed more cost-efficient approaches to preparation. We found that both of these factors were at work in adjustments to residencies that districts made after 2015.

Denver and Prince George's County emphasize their careful process of matching residents with the principals with whom they will work. In Denver, the number of residents has been cut, both because there are fewer principal vacancies for which to prepare new principals and because the district is raising its expectations for the quality of placements. An administrator explained: "In order to guarantee that these folks have an absolute good match and that they're with a principal that is going to be a good mentor to them and actually get them ready for the position, we had to kind of control their numbers." Care in making the matches is also a priority in Prince George's County, where the residency cohort has not been reduced but was always a small one. In assigning residents to schools, an administrator said, "We really tried to figure out [which principals] have particular strengths and then match them up with the deficits that we see in the folks who are residents."

Gwinnett County has stopped moving aspiring leaders to different schools for residencies. In the new arrangement, individuals stay in their current school and principal supervisors take the lead in building their skills (see box for a more complete description of Gwinnett County's residency program). This is expected to improve the process both at the beginning of the residency period and down the road As one district administrator explained, the principal supervisors already know the candidate's knowledge and skills better than a principal in another school: "They know [the resident's prior] work, so wouldn't they be the most informed person to [identify] gaps [and say], 'Here is what we need to work on in a residency,' rather than a person who may be introduced to [the resident] for the very first time." Then, at the end of the

---

[11] Kaufman et al., 2017.

residency, the principal supervisor will know even better whether the candidate is truly ready to lead a school.

Gwinnett County district leaders reported that early results suggest that this modification to the residency program has been worthwhile. Unlike sitting principals, the principal supervisors have a major role in hiring and placement, and therefore, one administrator said, "They really are paying more attention to the strengths, the needs of those aspiring principals." Another administrator observed that now the residents are able to work from a basis of existing relationships within the building rather than walking into a new school as a stranger: "It takes months to build any type of relationship with people in this kind of working environment. So we were sticking them in [to another school], and by the time we pulled them back out, they were just then getting to the relationship level where you could get some real meaningful work accomplished." It is possible that cost-efficiency was a factor in Gwinnett County's decision to modify the residency, but these administrator comments suggest that substantive reasons have been very important in the decision.

Components of Gwinnett County's Residency Program

- Develop an individualized professional development plan for each resident that they co-create with their home school principal who provides feedback based on their knowledge of the school, based on the resident's abilities, and based on what the principal has determined in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
- Craft experiences at the school, overseen by the principal supervisor as well as the principal, that will help to strengthen what residents already do well, and give them exposure to new responsibilities as well.
- Provide resources such as PowerPoint presentations, case studies, and other materials for residents to use.
- Provide residents with written feedback on their individualized residency plan after each principal supervisor visit to the school.
- Provide feedback to district staff regarding the progress of the individual residents so that district administrators can make adjustments in classes or experiences, or in other decisions about the progress and maybe even the continuation of the individual in the program.

New Efforts to Keep Skills Fresh in the Hiring Pool

As their rate of principal hiring slows, districts have arranged programs that will continue developing the leadership capacities of the assistant principals in the principal hiring pool. This was a step that Prince George's County took several years ago, a time when few principal openings were available and graduates of its in-house principal preparation program were not moving up from their assistant principal jobs. More recently, Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Denver have faced the same situation and are taking similar steps. Charlotte-Mecklenburg is trying to define a set of leadership pathway requirements and a highly coherent curriculum that will further develop the capabilities of aspiring principals while they wait in the pool. The district is also requiring training for those who provide training to these assistant principals "so that everyone is exposed to the same concepts, same ideas." Denver has reworked its residency program to include a second year that offers aspiring leaders different content intended to help them continue "growing and learning even though there's no opportunity for a principal job for them."

Continuing Work with University Partners

District and university staff are continuing to invest time in transforming university preparation programs into ones that yield effective leaders. Interviewees in most districts specifically spoke of both the time invested in partnership and the payoff that they saw or anticipated. Denver, for example, has asked its partners to align their preservice preparation programs to the district's school leadership standards. The district assigns a staff person to remain in contact with these partners and meet with them regularly, often monthly or more, to co-plan the programming. One administrator said: "We co-plan. We sit in on their selection of participants. So ... if it's a partnership, you're co-doing, and that's time-intensive." The result, according to another administrator, has been that "they're producing candidates that are highly qualified [to lead our] schools."

Similarly, principal supervisors in Charlotte-Mecklenburg described the years they spent on a university partner's board. Meeting with their partners every other month, they worked together closely to identify gaps between the district's leadership standards and the university's preparation program coursework:

> *And then we would suggest ways that that course could be enhanced to basically kind of fill those gaps, or we'd talk about emerging trends ... in administrative preparation programs, and things like that.*

As a result, they say, one of the university-based preservice preparation programs is seeing more and more of its graduates attaining principal jobs.

In Gwinnett County, district leaders described sitting at the table, reviewing applicants for the preservice program alongside their university partners. As their partnerships have deepened and matured, district administrators have been asked to participate in other activities, including co-presenting at faculty conferences throughout the state. Ultimately, as one district leader explained, if done right, the benefits of the partnership are shared: "There is that mutual beneficial relationship that enables the university to have outstanding graduates and for us to have outstanding leaders."

A district leader in Prince George's County said the strength of the university partnership is rooted in a strong infrastructure and points of contact: "So we actually work on relationships. We actually work on team building. We actually talk about data that's mutually beneficial. We talk about the graduates, and the candidates, and all these different things."

Some comments emphasized the long view of university partnerships. As a Prince George's County leader described, "I think if you were to ask me what's the one thing that will sustain, will be a legacy beyond not only my personal tenure in the district, but any administration that comes in or leaves, it is our work with university partners." He explained:

> ... one of the things [the Principal Pipeline Initiative] taught us is that we could be really good consumers. And so we advocate for people in our district to be adjunct professors in all of our partnerships. So it helps provide that context that we think might be necessary. And some universities are really good at doing that, and others are learning that they have to get better at that. So that's part of our process. [With respect to the remaining] areas of improvement, it's really just kind of continuing to build influence around curricula at the university level.

Leaders in another district described continuing to build their university partnerships, recognizing the importance of hiring principals who have been trained in ways that are aligned with the district's leadership standards: "They would have received the training that would really prepare them well for success as a [district] principal and I think that in order to [find principals who were prepared to succeed in the district], we have to have some kind of impact or some imprint on the training that people are getting in the universities." The challenge, however, is in determining what motivates universities to invest and engage in the district's work to develop high-quality school leaders.

Preparation of Turnaround Leaders

Two districts are looking at adaptation of their pipeline for a specialized purpose: identifying and preparing leaders to turn around low-performing schools. A Charlotte-Mecklenburg administrator described it as part of the natural progression: "Well, we have talked about turnaround school leaders being a unique type of leader. And we've talked about a need for a spinoff of the pipeline to better groom and prepare potential" turnaround leaders. The effort in Charlotte-Mecklenburg now includes work with a university partner to study the feasibility of adding turnaround components to the preservice preparation program.

Hillsborough County has worked with a university partner to develop two courses focused specifically on preparing turnaround leaders. An aspiring leader who wants to be part of a turnaround leadership pathway (TLP) and who demonstrates the core competencies needed to successfully lead school turnaround can be added to the TLP pool and receive priority for future jobs. Notably, district leaders select candidates for TLP based on their ability to demonstrate turnaround competencies through observations, interviews, performance tasks, and performance evaluation scores over a two-year period "because we're looking for experienced and effective leaders," as one district leader put it. The district also made a new policy that bars the placement in a high-need school of any principal with less than two years of experience.

In addition, Hillsborough County district leaders described the importance of developing and assessing potential candidates' readiness for leading in a turnaround environment by giving them opportunities earlier in their career to work in a turnaround school:

> *If you're a teacher and you want to be considered [for an assistant principal position in a turnaround school], then we encourage you to go to a high-need school as a teacher so you are better prepared to lead in this type of environment. Plus, the other thing is we don't want you to be at a low-need school and then become an assistant principal at a high-need school and not understand the sense of urgency, level of commitment, and "whatever-it-takes mindset" needed to improve the instructional experience for students.*

Summary

Preservice preparation has changed, according to principals' survey responses, comparing those who had completed all stages of principal preparation by March 2012 versus those who started their preservice in March 2012 or later (i.e., after introduction of the Principal Pipeline Initiative). The latter group is significantly more likely to report that their preservice emphasized school improvement and instructional leadership and that it was tailored to the district context—priorities that the districts had pursued in their efforts to improve preservice. The participants in this later era of preservice are also more apt to report that it left them well prepared to use data for school improvement. Other responses, while not statistically significant, are consistently favorable to more recent preservice as well.

Districts are continuing to offer their own preparation programs and to work with partner universities. Within districts, residencies for aspiring principals are now crafted around the aim of making a strong match between the resident and the sitting principal, and one district has stopped moving the aspiring principals out of their home schools for residencies. Partnerships with universities have become routinized and are reportedly productive.

V. HIRING AND PLACEMENT

Districts continue to strive for an excellent match between the principal and the school. All districts continue to use a two-stage process for principal hiring: first, acceptance into a hiring pool, then placement in a principalship. They also continue to require that credentialed principal candidates demonstrate their skills as part of the process of admission to the pool.

Districts have kept the requirement that candidates demonstrate their skills by participating in simulations and other practical exercises. Districts began to require such demonstrations during the Principal Pipeline Initiative, as a way of generating more and better information about aspiring principals' readiness for the job. Rather than just submitting resumes and participating in interviews, candidates engaged in simulations, such as observing a video lesson and describing the feedback they would provide, and senior district staff observed and rated their skills. Exceptions have been made for experienced principals applying from outside the district, and candidates already in a hiring pool have kept their eligibility without undergoing the new procedures. Over time, greater numbers of new principals reported on our surveys that a structured, practical demonstration of their skills had been part of their hiring process. The frequency rose from 28 percent of novice principals who started on the job between March 2010 and March 2012 to 60 percent among those who started between March 2013 and March 2015. As of this year's surveys, the percentage was similar though slightly lower, 58 percent, among the principal cohorts that started on the job between March 2016 and February 2018.

Districts have some concerns about the amount of staff time devoted to selection into principal hiring pools, which includes reviewing applications, conducting observations, and interviewing and providing feedback to candidates. A district administrator described the challenge of maintaining a rigorous, intensive, and high-quality selection system, which external consultants had designed early in the pipeline initiative. The issue was the system's unsustainable demands on staff time:

> That's something we've struggled a bit with, is ... wanting these in-person interviews and just having the people capacity and time capacity to make all of those happen. Inviting ten candidates a week to come and interview and then having enough people to interview.... But the quality of what [the external consultants] developed was really strong, and I think that people saw that quality in what was coming through that process.

Districts are weighing the amount of time they devote to the interview process. For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg plans to make the delivery of feedback to applicants more efficient. "With over 400 applicants [for the pool], the district has struggled to find ways to deliver feedback that will allow candidates to continue to develop and grow—and reapply for the pool," a district leader said. But this administrator also said that it will be important to strike a balance between efficiency and rigor: "Everybody agrees the process needs to be as rigorous as it is because the job is that rigorous."

One district is launching a systematic test of the criteria that it uses in hiring. Reflecting some of the uncertainty in the selection of effective school leaders, one district is planning to test whether the talent pool selection scores correlate with principal evaluation scores.

> So, what we plan to do, we haven't done it yet, is to look to see if there are any trends or commonalities among the more effective principals and how well they scored on the selection tool.... Maybe there are certain competencies that are correlated with success more than others. Maybe there are certain [hiring] activities that we've done ... and so we know we can put greater value or emphasis on those competencies or those specific activities and make adjustments to our talent pool process as a result of that.

Evolution in the Process of Matching Principals to Schools

Key elements in the matching process at this time are use of Leader Tracking Systems (LTSes), which provide dashboards summarizing individual and aggregate data on all of a district's aspiring and sitting principals, and the growing role of principal supervisors.

Leaders in several districts commented that the rich content of their Leader Tracking System is useful in bringing together information about principal candidates so that they can be matched with schools. These observations echoed those that we documented in an earlier report.[12] District leaders continue to be pleased with the practical tools that they have built through their LTSes, including their vacancy matching tools that decision makers continue using to review information-rich candidate profiles and school profiles to quickly identify potential matches to school needs. In addition, district leaders report continuing to use their LTSes to forecast principal vacancies and assess the alignment between school needs and the potentially available talent.

---

[12] On the development and uses of these systems, see Leslie M. Anderson, Brenda J. Turnbull and Erikson R. Arcaira, *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data Into Information for School Leadership,* Policy Studies Associates, 2017.

Principal supervisors occupy an increasingly prominent role in principal placement decisions in several districts. Gwinnett County illustrates this trend well. If a principal retires or moves to another school, the district now expects the principal supervisor to articulate what the school needs in its next leader so that the district can identify and assemble a pool of qualified candidates to consider. Principal supervisors are now part of the discussion that determines which candidates will be recommended to the superintendent to fill a vacancy. A principal supervisor explained:

> When we're looking at the potential candidates, it really is a district-wide view of who is this individual, what can they bring, where would be the best fit for them, is this the right role for them or is the seat that they're in really where they need to be to make the most impact. It really has increased, like I said, the rigor in the candidate itself, but also the participation across the board in our own programs.

Principal supervisors stated in an interview that they have become the most knowledgeable in the district about the qualifications and readiness of the candidates in the hiring pool because they have followed the candidates from "teachers all the way to principals and in other cases assistant principals to principals, and we're more confident about those names that we say we would like to be the principal of that school."

In some districts, principal supervisors collaborate with central-office staff in looking at vacancies. In Denver, for example, district leaders continue to meet with principal supervisors every fall to discuss possible future vacancies and available leader talent to fill them. A central-office administrator described the process:

> We first meet with all the principal supervisors. Are you aware of any retirements? Are you aware of anybody who has asked for a change? And—sometimes … they're ready for a new challenge. We look at how long the principals have been in their building. Are they going to be ready for a change? And then, are you aware of anything else that we're not aware of, so we can help you plan for this? Have you talked to your people, do you think they might want to retire next year, so we can plan the succession plan? We've been trying to do that a lot more intentionally. And then the succession principal is hired.

Among the benefits of this meeting is that it allows principal supervisors to learn about available talent throughout the district of whom they might not otherwise be aware. As the administrator explained, these meetings offer an opportunity to strengthen the match between leader skills and school needs:

> So, there's six elementary school networks. If I'm [a principal supervisor] of network two, I don't necessarily know about [aspiring leaders] in network four who might be a really good fit for my network. Network four doesn't have any openings, so that vacancy meeting is an opportunity to hear those names as well from other [principal supervisors] in kind of a formal way.

In another of these large districts, however, interviewees reported that only some of the principal supervisors work with the staff office that coordinates aspiring principal development and maintains data on candidates. In that district, principals often want to simply designate their assistant principal as their successor, and principal supervisors may simply approve that designation. We heard some criticism of this "next in line" approach, but it persists as the preferred approach of some principals and principal supervisors.

Summary

Districts continue to use practices that they introduced during the Principal Pipeline Initiative: they maintain hiring pools; and candidates must demonstrate their skills in a series of practical exercises. Although districts are making some efforts to reduce the time demands of scoring these exercises, they do not want to make major changes.

The role of principal supervisors in hiring decisions has grown in several districts. Systems for compiling and drawing on information about candidates and schools are said to be working generally well. Although interviewees in some districts said there is room for improvement in succession planning, those in other districts described a collegial process in which decision makers pool their knowledge of candidates and arrive at a good match of candidates to schools.

VI. SUPPORT AND EVALUATION

Evaluation and support are still closely linked in the districts. The district's principal standards undergird both evaluation and support systems, and principal supervisors are charged with blending evaluation and support roles as they work with principals. Most districts have made few changes in on-the-job evaluation. They continue to work with principal supervisors, mentors, and coaches to strengthen support for principals, and the survey responses of novice principals continue to show high ratings for that support.

Principal Evaluation

Most districts conduct annual, high-stakes evaluations of leader performance that are tied to leader standards, and principals continue to view the evaluation systems favorably. In comparison with the principals who were evaluated in 2013-14, those evaluated in 2016-17[13] continued to give positive responses on the system, with slightly larger percentages agreeing that the system was accurate and fair, set clear and consistent expectations for their professional practice, and was generally useful for informing their practice (Exhibit 5). These differences are not statistically significant.

District leaders in five districts continue to believe that principal evaluation is on track. In New York City, a new evaluation tool for principals has sparked discussion about the alignment of evaluation with standards, according to some. In other districts, however, leaders said they see principal evaluation as a valuable way of identifying principals' learning needs so that targeted, aligned support can benefit the principal and the school. They also commented on the growing focus on instructional leadership in principal evaluation. A Gwinnett County principal supervisor commented in a group interview that the evaluation criteria reflect "high-yield" principal practices:

> *The things that we're talking about around the table are universally agreed upon as things that make a difference for teachers and they make a difference for students and so how refreshing is it to be held accountable for things that do right by teachers and students, and the things that you're being held accountable for are actually high-yield practices.*

Gwinnett County's evaluation system now includes measuring the correlation between teacher evaluation scores in the building and school performance. If a principal gives teachers high ratings but school performance is low, that indicates that the principal is falling short on delivering difficult feedback for improvement in teachers' practice.

---

[13] Our principal survey, which was administered in spring each year, asked about the evaluation carried out in the previous school year in order to gather data on evaluation activities over a full school year.

Exhibit 5:

Novice principals evaluated in 2013-14 and 2016-17 who agreed that their district's evaluation system was accurate and fair, provided clear expectations for performance, and was useful and worthwhile
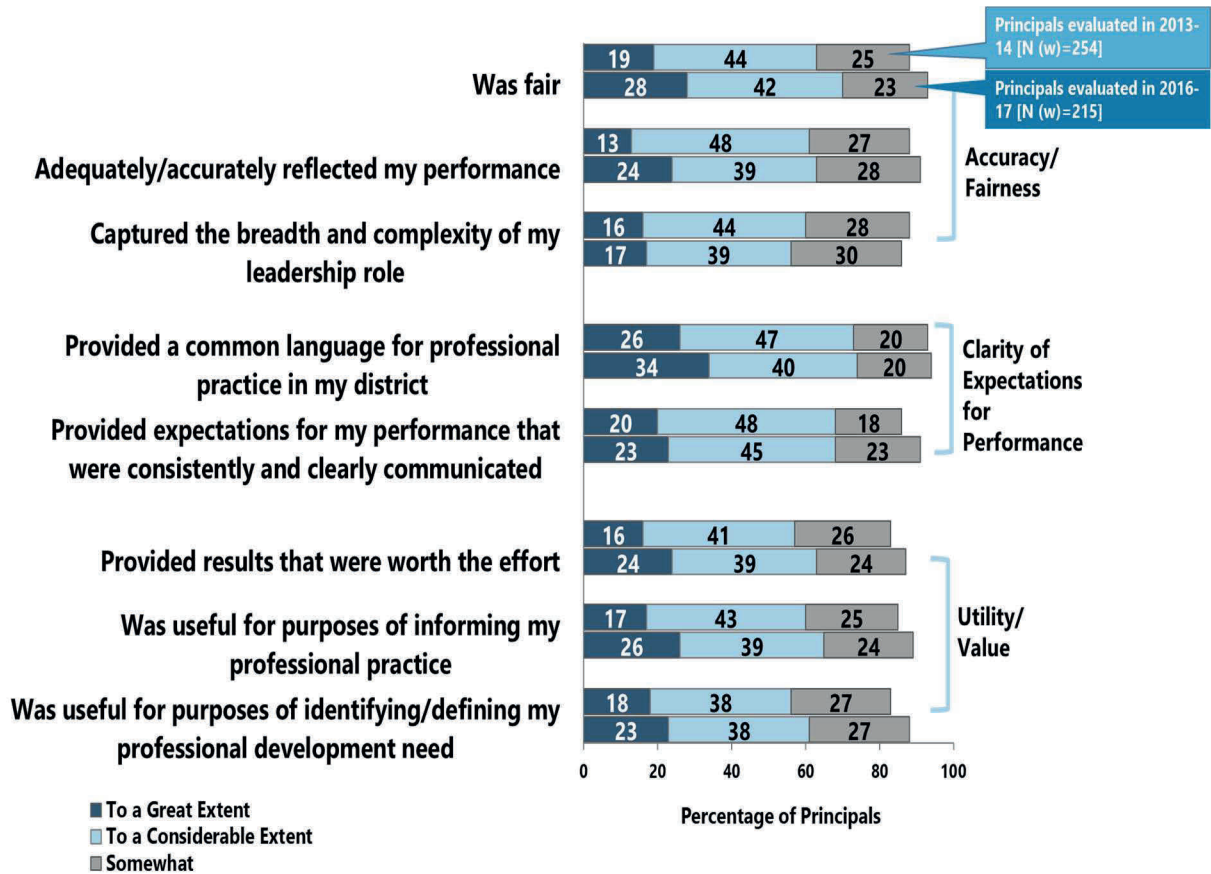

Exhibit reads: Eighty-eight percent of novice principals who were evaluated in 2013-14 agreed that their district's evaluation system was fair, saying they agreed at least "somewhat" with the statement compared with 93 percent of novice principals who were evaluated in 2016-17 who agreed with this statement at least somewhat. The other responses, no shown in the exhibit, were "not at all" and "minimally."

Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2015 and 2018.

Leaders in other districts also commented on their effort to focus principal evaluation on instructional leadership. Principal supervisors are making progress in this regard, they said. "The way they're looking at instructional expertise now is different than … three years ago," one said, adding that the efforts to deepen principal supervisors' knowledge and skill with the evaluation instrument was resulting in lower scores for some principals as their supervisors observed their work with a more informed critical eye.

Continuity in the Role of Principal Supervisors as Defined in 2015

District leaders described having largely succeeded in redefining the role of principal supervisor as facilitators of principal success as instructional leaders. An administrator in Gwinnett County described having to help new principal supervisors reframe their own impressions of their role: "... [They] immediately jump into the role of super principal for the school, and we've learned that that does not work. You've got to actually work directly with the principal on their behaviors to affect instruction."

Across districts, a number of principal supervisors described their work in terms aligned with a district vision focused on guiding principals' growth in instructional leadership (see box for a detailed account of the role of the principal supervisor in one district):

- One Denver principal supervisor described her role as "empowering school leaders to implement their instructional and school culture visions." Another spoke of discussing the standards during every principal meeting and encouraging principals to think about where they are in their practice in relation to those standards: "So at every meeting I just took out a new competency, and I led them through a practice of unpacking it and asking themselves, 'Where am I with this competency right now? What's the feedback I need to give myself?'"
- A Gwinnett County principal supervisor explained that the work has shifted from the principal's office to the classroom. "[I'm] working alongside that principal each day ... and that's the majority of where we spend our time."
- A Hillsborough County principal supervisor said, "We're in schools now as instructional leaders."

In their role of offering support where needed, principal supervisors in all districts explained that they use a tiered approach. Schools and principals with the greatest needs get the most frequent and longest visits, while a school with a strong leadership team is not likely to see its supervisor every week.

Principal supervisors are still encouraged to blend evaluation and support.
Principal supervisors in Hillsborough County described rooting all of their work and feedback in an evaluation rubric that is closely aligned with the leadership standards:

Principals pretty much think everything they do is part of the evaluation, but it's because what we do is we really try hard to align our comments to the principal rubric so that as we are travelling through the year on our journey we make deliberate ... comments and things, then we pull [our notes] together for evaluation.

Several administrators in Denver spoke about the effort to "blur the lines" between coaching feedback and formal evaluation. One said, "We want it to all blend together and all feel like the exact same thing." Accordingly, district administrators are working to help principal supervisors learn how to compile and use evidence as an ongoing record that they use every time they enter the school and meet with the principal. One Denver administrator describes how it can work:

> So they say, "When I was in your building in October, I saw this, and it was great and that relates to the community and equity competency, and so I'm going to take note of that and remember when I write your evaluation at the end of the year that I saw such a positive thing happen in your building in the fall."

Another district administrator in Denver described helping principal supervisors deliver feedback that feels the same whether it's delivered as part of a regular school visit or as part of their evaluation, but added that there is still room for improvement in this process: "That convergence is a real work in progress … the convergence between support and evaluation has not totally happened yet."

Some districts have recently supported their principal supervisors by providing external professional development or tools that they can use. Charlotte-Mecklenburg has partnered with an outside provider to help supervisors with their principal

---

The Role as a Principal Supervisor Describes It

Some of my schools have an instructional priority around the teachers giving feedback to all students during class and so they might set a benchmark that by our October walkthrough, 70 percent of teachers are implementing this instructional priority. We start there and see what a principal's goals are for the year, what is evidence that they're going to hit them, and by when? And so, then we facilitate school visits where we progress monitor the implementation of those benchmarks.

In between those school visits is where we have weekly or biweekly coachings with the principals where I'm helping them to implement their plans to put them on the path toward hitting the benchmarks they've set for themselves. They also set student interim assessment data that we also monitor, so I might try to align my coaching to that, toward them implementing their action plan, but then also my coaching focus is on some leadership development that is usually aligned to our [leadership standards].

[The standards] help us to determine some leadership goals…. So, I know based on my observations or school data that teachers are not feeling safe at the school to express divergent opinions or to give feedback to the leader. I could say to the leader, "Okay, you have to create a safer environment for your teachers,' right?" But why is that happening in the first place? I have to know my leader and know how to coach around that to help him unpack what needs to happen to create that type of an environment. Is it that they're in their office all the time and people just don't see them? Is it that when they get stressed out, they sort of blow up? Is it because they're defensive when they give feedback? What is it that's happening that's creating that breakdown?

Then besides my support, we also have partners, like academic partners, a math partner, an English learning partner, a [special education] partner, and we create partner service agreements that are helping the schools, again, get to those benchmarks that they're setting around their major improvement strategies.

coaching and feedback techniques. "We've been doing that now for two years," explained one district leader. She also described a year-long coaching program that the district implemented to help principal supervisors learn how to coach their high-performing principals and how to tier their support to address varying principal needs.

Tools for principal supervisors can range from simple to elaborate. Gwinnett County administrators believe that new principal supervisors have benefited from using standardized questions for observation and feedback to principals, developed locally. Denver has partnered with an outside organization to develop an online progress monitoring tool that allows principal supervisors—or anyone conducting leader observations and delivering feedback—to enter the feedback into a data system that can then be uploaded to a shared data storage system that those staff members and the principal can access and read. The system also has video capability. Its purpose is to encourage more ongoing and aligned progress monitoring of individual principals by those district staff members who work with them.

In the Denver system, principal supervisors will be able to review all the observations and the feedback delivered to all the principals within their network. The district has decided not to tie the system directly to the evaluations in an effort to focus attention on progress monitoring rather than evaluation results. "One of our goals ... is to improve the quality of feedback that people receive so they can develop as better leaders," explained a district administrator. "It allows for quick feedback, almost like an instant message, that they can just send within the tool, or they can fill out a full observation form." In this system, principals are able to record and upload videos of themselves at work, tag each video to indicate the specific standard(s) they were trying to meet in that leadership episode, and monitor their own work by viewing the video. "And hopefully even, before they submit it to their manager, [a principal might say], 'Oh, I can do this better.' And so they improve their practice, and video themselves again, and then they can tag to the [standards], or say to the supervisor, 'I need help on this area.'"

Districts continue adjusting the division of labor around principal supervisors in an effort to ensure a focus on instruction. One district, for example, decided to divide the work of the eight principal supervisors so that five would be instructionally focused and three would be operationally focused. Another district removed any responsibility for operations management from principal supervisors' span of control by creating a department of academic support and another department for school operations.

Hillsborough County added a deputy director position to support principal supervisors, a position that a district leader described as "critical, critical, critical." The deputy helps with coaching, support, and evaluation of principals, and also manages non-instructional issues. One principal supervisor described her deputy as "taking every single management phone call that comes into my office, every one of them," which frees up the supervisor's time to provide more instructional leadership to principals.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaches or mentors continue to be an essential part of every district's principal support system. District leaders described the purpose of coaches as "getting to the right conversations about helping people improve their practice," as a leader in Prince George's County put it. Several districts, in fact, are considering extending the work of coaches and mentors to serve more principals, not just novices.

Districts have sorted through job responsibilities and more clearly delineated the role of coach or mentor versus principal supervisor, although the distinctions between roles are still not completely settled. Moreover, we heard that communication between these two arms of district support has also improved. A Gwinnett County administrator described the current status:

> *[Principal supervisors] are very clearly defined in their role and then there's an expectation of communication happening and a transfer of information between the two groups, which is in a better place now than I've really ever seen it.*

The administrator went on to explain that principal supervisors have responsibilities related to classroom observations, evaluations, and walk-throughs, whereas mentors are available for "longer conversations. Because they do have a little more time. It's not as much of a pressure of a role. They can get down into some of the specifics with the person and ask questions .... and to lead them in a direction to find a right answer, or what they believe to be the right answer."

New York City and Gwinnett County have made changes in their coaching or mentoring models. Three years ago, New York City began piloting a model that recruited veteran principals to coach novice principals, trying to attract "our best principals right now" into the coaching position. The district offered a menu of coaching options: to become a master principal and coach just three new principals while still serving as a principal as well as a coach; to receive a coaching fellowship and leave the principalship for a year, with the option to return; or to commit to a three-year appointment as a principal coach. One principal supervisor, once a coach herself, shared her impressions of the revised coaching model, which she said "provides a deeper level of support and coaching to a new principal" than the district had previously provided. She said the coaches in place now are trying "to push the principal to be more strategic about what they're doing and why, as opposed to just providing a technical solution to a problem or a Band Aid moment." She also commented that the new model offers veteran principals an opportunity to grow professionally by trying a coaching position:

> *I think it gives a principal who is good and experienced an opportunity to kind of step out a second and do something different without having to give up their principalship if they're not ready to ... I also think [it] creat[es] opportunities for principals to learn about system leaders [in the central office].*

Gwinnett administrators described two kinds of changes in coaching and mentoring: adding coaching designed to develop the leadership of the school team rather than just the principal; and working to ensure that mentors stay in touch with principals. A principal supervisor explained:

> *Especially if it's a new principal, or if it's a school that has been academically struggling, we may look at working with the whole team for periods of time. Somebody might come with me to some of my schools and do team development. That's something that we're moving into, because we see the value of it.*

Mentors said that they no longer wait for principals to request support, because "that doesn't necessarily work really well, especially with a new principal that has a lot on their plate." In addition, an online tracking system allows mentors to follow up with principals regarding a specific need, providing them with articles or school data they might want principals to think about.

Coaches and mentors spoke of struggling to make the case for their positions when budgets are tight. In a district that is facing budget cuts, two coaches in a group interview commented that they have had no effective way to justify their role:

> *How many crazy phone calls have come into [the principal supervisor's] office, or how many principals have done something really stupid in the first or second year? Has that ever been measured? I don't know. My point is that those are things [where we make a difference by what] we're doing. But yet, when we're asked how do we measure our worth, I'm perplexed.... What would we define as success for coaches in this district?*

> *And I think that that's probably one of our downfalls, because it's not our priority. Our priority is our schools and doing a good job for them and our principals, but we're not out touting our statistics to people, and perhaps we should be ... and I feel very strongly that [principals] are peaking earlier as a result of our work.*

Principal Perceptions of Support from Their Supervisors and Coaches or Mentors

Survey responses continue to show that principals serving in their first three years value the individual support they receive in these districts, with upward trends from school year 2013-14 to school year 2017-18 in novice principals' ratings of their support (Exhibit 6). Principal supervisors had become roughly equal to mentors or coaches as a source of support as of 2015, according to principals' survey responses gathered at that time, and their standing with principals remains high in 2018. At the same time, principals' ratings of the support they received from their coaches and mentors rose even higher between 2015 and 2018, with a statistically significant increase in the percentage agreeing that coaches used feedback to improve the coaching or mentoring support (81 percent to 92 percent).

Exhibit 6:

Trends in principal perceptions of the support they received from their mentor/coach and supervisor/evaluator in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2017-18
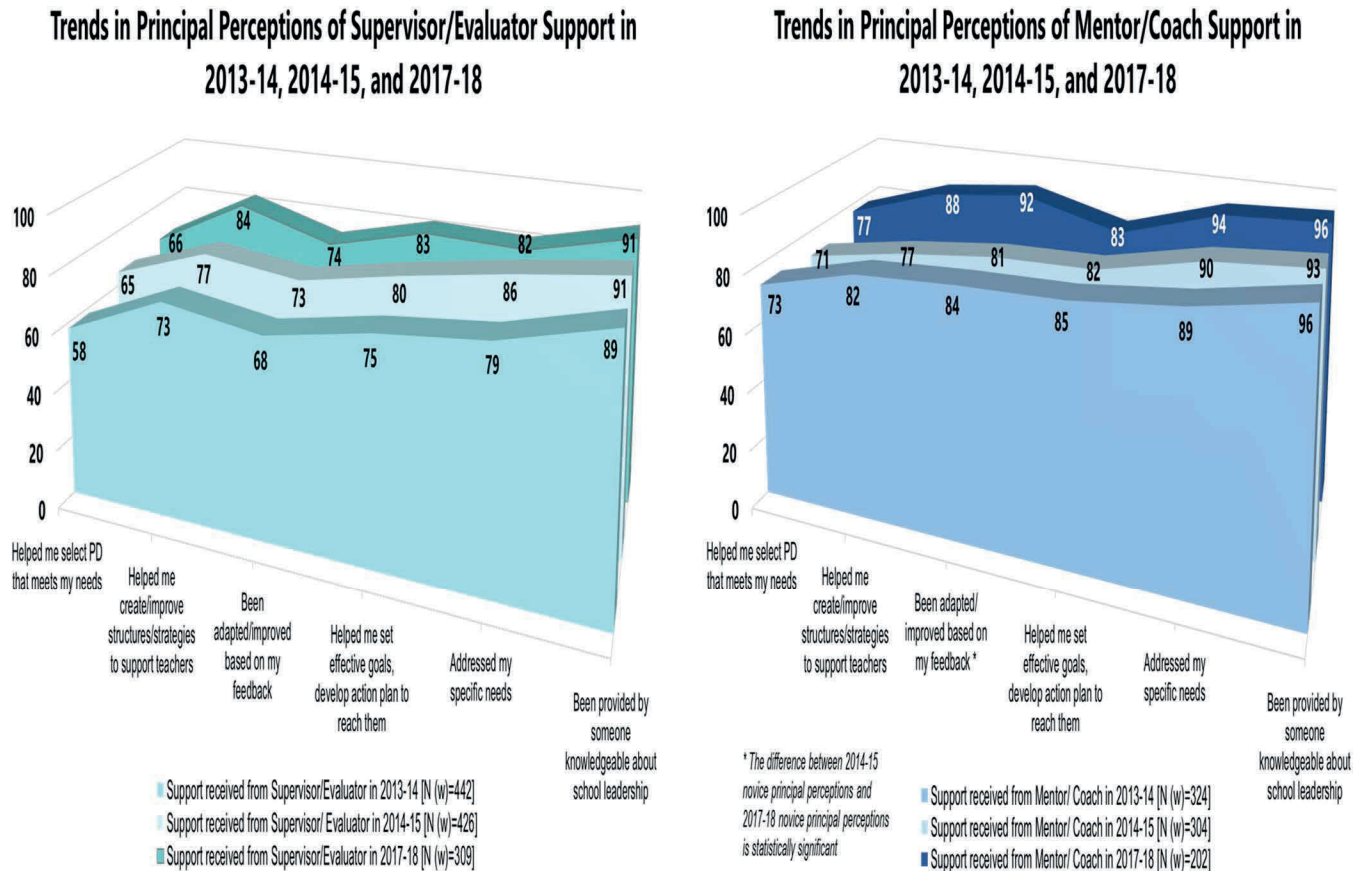

Trends in Principal Perceptions of Supervisor/Evaluator Support in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2017-18

Trends in Principal Perceptions of Mentor/Coach Support in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2017-18
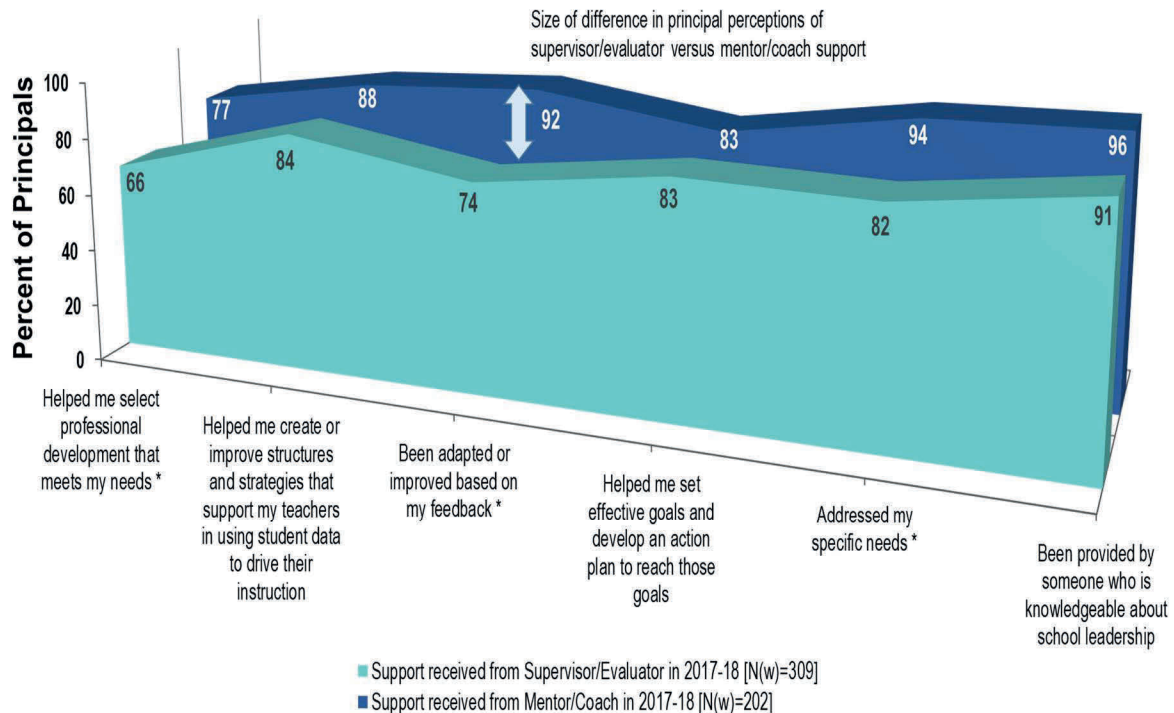
Exhibit reads: In 2013-14, 73 percent of novice principals agreed that their mentor/coach had helped them select professional development that meets their needs compared with 58 percent of novice principals who agreed that their supervisors supported them in this way. By 2017-18, 77 percent of novice principals agreed that their mentor/coach had helped them select professional development that meets their needs compared with 66 percent of novice principals who agreed that their supervisors supported them in this way.
Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2014, 2015, and 2018

Comparing the novice principals' ratings of principal supervisors versus coaches or mentors in 2018, there are three significant differences in favor of coaches or mentors (Exhibit 7). These differences appear to reflect a coaching or mentoring role that is expected to be more flexible and responsive than the role of a supervisor: compared with the ratings of principal supervisors, more principals perceived that coaches or mentors helped them select professional development that met their needs, adapted the support based on feedback, and addressed their specific needs. However, there are no statistically significant differences between principal supervisors and mentors or coaches in the principals' ratings of their knowledge of school leadership, their help in setting goals and developing an action plan, and their help to the principal in supporting teachers' data-informed instruction.

Exhibit 7:

Difference in principal perceptions of the support they received from their supervisor/evaluator and mentor/coach in 2017-18

Exhibit reads: In 2017-18, 66 percent of novice principals agreed that their supervisor/evaluator had helped them select professional development that meets their needs compared with 77 percent of novice principals who agreed that their mentor/coach supported them in this way.

Source: Principal Survey for "Evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative," 2018

Investment in New Leader Induction

Districts continue to invest in induction support and training for their novice principals. Administrators consistently point to the difference between actually serving as a principal and preparing for the job, no matter how strong the preparation. One commented on the importance of induction support to move the needle on principal quality and retention:

> *One thing for me has been just the power and the importance of new principal support; that you can learn a lot about how to be a principal before you take on the job, but where you really learn how to do the job is when you're doing the job. And that the support that you receive in your first couple years doing the job is critical. That was such a missed opportunity [in the past]. There was new principal support, but I don't think it was all that effective, to be honest with you. I think that now ... we're much*

more deliberate and thoughtful and intentional about how we're providing new principal support. I think that that's been a huge improvement for us.

Districts are still fine-tuning their induction programs. They are working to target programs more accurately to the specific needs of the novice principal and to ensure that training is relevant, timely, and meaningful. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, for example, dropped the program previously offered as the fourth year of its multi-year induction sequence. That fourth-year program had been designed to support development of a creative mindset, and its activities focused on art and innovation. Although the program had been of high quality, a different approach more tailored to principals' needs made sense to district leaders. Participation had dropped, and district administrators determined that principals were often moving on to new schools by their fourth year. They were facing a new school and new challenges rather than needing to bring a creative mindset to change in a school where they had been serving. The district thus arranged to provide consulting coaches to principals who were making that kind of move "for one to two years to help them through that transition."

Summary

Principal evaluation systems remain in place, and principals who have been evaluated during their first or second year on the job continue to express generally favorable views of these systems with respect to accuracy and fairness, the clarity of expectations, and the value of the process, based on the 2018 surveys. Districts continue to support principal supervisors as instructional leaders and to encourage them to blend evaluation and support as they work with principals.

Principals continue to value their coaches or mentors; indeed, there has been an upward trend since 2015 in the ratings that they give to the support they receive from coaches or mentors. They also rate supervisors highly as sources of support.

Districts have fine-tuned their coaching, mentoring, and induction support in various ways, based on their experience. What all six districts have in common is a continued commitment to supporting novice principals.

VII. SYSTEM SUPPORTS FOR A CAREER CONTINUUM

The underlying idea of a principal pipeline is that a district can build a standards-aligned system that supports high-potential aspiring school leaders in their progress through preparation, placement, and the first few years of a principalship. With some years of pipeline building and maintenance under their belts, decision makers in these districts are applying system-level visions more widely. They are taking steps designed to help schools benefit from incubating future leaders and to help the district benefit from the talents of individuals who want to rise to new challenges. Taking a long view of the career continuum for leaders, they have introduced more roles and better mentoring for aspiring leaders within schools, and succession planning and support for roles such as central-office positions and principalships in turnaround schools. And, as the districts assimilate major innovations like new roles for principal supervisors, they are recognizing and trying to iron out system-level issues around lines of communication and authority.

This next-generation work on a principal pipeline is no less challenging than the early stages, and districts are approaching it with energy and considerable creativity. This chapter describes the trends.

The School as an Incubator for Leadership

Districts are creating more leadership density in schools—more leadership positions with more responsibilities—for the sake of both school improvement and individual leadership development. With multiple roles that allow scope for leadership, the burden of leadership that falls on principals can be somewhat lightened while aspiring leaders gain valuable experience. In Denver, for example, the district is building its leadership capacity—and supporting the work of the principals—by creating more deans, senior leads, and teacher leader positions in the schools: "… we have more dean positions than we ever had before and we have this senior lead role, those are perfect positions to be in a role where you can gain experience in leadership, but not necessarily have the buck stop here."

Similarly, Charlotte-Mecklenburg principal supervisors explained that the district has begun to develop instructional leadership teams (ILTs) as a way to develop instructional leadership capacity in a school. "… the idea was to build teacher leadership and ILT facilitator leadership to help drive the instructional work. Your instructional leadership team is driving the professional learning within your school, to ultimately impact student achievement." Another interviewee commented about this model: "It's like leadership development instead of leadership placement."

Progressing through different positions and gaining experience, this person said, "keeps you from burning out when you get to the top position."

Districts recognize that they must prevail upon principals to better mentor the leaders and potential leaders in the school. A district leader in Gwinnett County explained that it is the district's expectation that everyone create leaders:

> *[The superintendent] is very explicit about that work … and he will ask that question, you know, "How is the principal developing the assistant principals into instructional leaders?" If this assistant principal aspires to be a principal, then that journey starts now in the school because we need to know that they have the capacity to lead.*

When Gwinnett County principal supervisors are in schools, they encourage principals to have their assistant principals lead classroom observations and debriefings regarding instructional strengths and weaknesses and plans for improvement. According to a district leader, the principal supervisor is expected to communicate to the principal that "it's okay to just monitor, to watch and to ask questions," knowing that many principals may not let the assistant principal learn from minor mistakes. This district leader explained that otherwise, "the moment something went wrong, [the principal] would run to go and try to fix it." Similarly, a Denver administrator described "principals who really help prepare their APs" as those who "give them authentic leadership opportunities where they're leading data teams or leading professional development."

Opportunities for learning are lost when principals lack the skills to develop talent or fail to take that responsibility seriously. Leaders in two other districts described how they are seeking to build principals' skills and dispositions for developing leadership:

> *Some [assistant principals] get tired because their principals are micromanaging…. We are trying to shift that. We meet with our principals that have people in the [preservice preparation program]; we meet with them quarterly to try to help them help their person have leadership opportunities.*

> *[There's] a gap in the alignment between what principals are providing in terms of professional development versus what … the selectors [of new principals] identify as effective skills…. Are [principals] developing a manager of the work or are [they] developing a leader of the work? [The district plans to work on this challenge with principals] so that their APs will be better prepared, not only for the principal pool, but just for the principalship in general.*

Effective talent spotting and development is not automatic. Administrators in four districts brought up the issue of improving identification and development of leader talent systemwide. They see principals or principal supervisors who think a protégé is ready to move into a competitive preparation program or into a principalship when in fact that aspiring leader is not ready for the challenge and needs more opportunities to learn about leadership. A principal supervisor commented, for example, on seeing:

> *… principals who would say, "Yeah, my AP is ready to be a principal," [whereas] my assessment of that was, "No." That's a gap there … and we've been trying to talk about how we really develop our principals to be the coaches of their assistant principals.*

In another of these districts, some principals have been able to establish their own succession plans in which an assistant principal is the heir apparent. A central-office administrator explained that this practice leaves the assistant principal with little incentive for the hard work of high-quality principal preparation: "I can only speculate that, [if] I'm an AP, I'm in the succession plan and I don't have to do anything more, I don't need this additional work to become a principal, so why would I do this?"

Districts also support new assistant principals directly. For example, Prince George's County has developed an induction program to help with the transition out of the classroom and into a school leadership role. "What we found was that we were not doing enough for new assistant principals," one district leader explained. Accordingly, the district developed induction programs for first- and second-year assistant principals that provide a very targeted curriculum. In addition, assistant principals have a leadership development team that supports them, including their immediate supervisor, someone from the Office of Talent Development, an associate superintendent, and a principal supervisor. The district leader explained the benefits he sees in the new program:

> So, I think it's just that we created a space where you're not on your own ... you have a team that surrounds you for your first few years as assistant principal. We've never done that before and so that makes a big difference, I think, in how people move into the position and how they transition into leadership.

Lengthening the View of the Career Continuum

Succession planning in these districts is not limited to filling principal vacancies. District leaders in three districts have enlarged their thinking about career paths to encompass veteran principals and central office staff. New York recognizes that in order to retain effective leaders in the district, succession planning must attend to veteran principals who are past their mid-career stage and are ready for a new challenge in the district:

> ... as principals move along in their career path, past sort of a novice principal stage and mid-career stage, we do need to be deliberate and strategic about then identifying those strongest principals and preparing them for success as principal supervisors or for central leadership roles.

Preparation for the transitions is part of the succession plan. As a central-office leader says:

> ... principals really struggle when they come to the central office because of kind of the way that you have to work as a central-office leader ... so providing thoughtful preparation for those central leadership roles I think is an important component of what we think of as sort of our extended pipeline, sort of advanced leadership work.

District leaders in Prince George's County also recognize that sitting principals could be good leaders in other parts of the district as well. Accordingly, the district has made residency-like experiences available to veteran principals who are interested in moving into other leadership positions in the district:

I had one in my office, there was one in curriculum and instruction, one in HR, one in budget, and all are working on very important projects in each of those respective offices ... we found success in understanding that we have a model that we can replicate for pretty much every office in the district.

To develop and retain highly effective central-office leaders, Charlotte-Mecklenburg has begun providing central-office staff with leadership training. A district leader explained:

They need to take care of themselves and sustain their own leadership so that they can be the best leader possible. It's costly when they turn over, and turnover can be caused by people not being prepared to lead. It's also a retention strategy for those leaders to feel like they're valued.

The interviewee added that improving professional practice in the central office has benefits at the school level: "It will eventually hit the students. If their principals can focus on instructional leadership and not chasing around a central-office issue, it's better for everybody, especially the students."

Districts are planning for succession into turnaround schools. Developing or bolstering a cadre of turnaround leaders may require different selection criteria, different training, and different incentives to encourage effective principals to take on the unique challenges of a low-performing school. One district administrator explained that districts need to create incentives to get the "best talent" to work in the highest-need schools through approaches such as paying them more and creating prestige around the job of turnaround leader: "... like, it is an honor to be invited to be considered for this opportunity, because not anyone can do it." Districts can recognize that principals are often looking for the next challenge after four or five years in a school. Getting principals to move to a high-need school might simply require that a district leader invite them to consider the opportunity. An interviewee describes a former principal, saying, "He was a fifth- or sixth-year principal and he's like, 'No one ever asked me, but I would have considered it as the next step in my career.'"

Integrating Principal Support Roles into a Coordinated System

Districts strive to coordinate principal support in a way that addresses principal needs but mitigates the risk of delivering conflicting messages. While principal supervisors, mentors, and coaches are all necessary principal support, they need to be managed appropriately to avoid contradictory or confusing advice. A Denver principal supervisor described the issue that may arise when a principal has a principal supervisor, an executive coach (a term used in that district), and a mentor:

I think all three of those roles play a really important part in, like, the ecosystem of a new principal, but my newer principal, who's in her second year, feels like ... she's getting four different sets of guidance from four different people on a daily basis....
If I'm a new principal and I call my [principal supervisor] on a Monday and then I have a coaching session with my executive coach on Tuesday and then two days later, on Thursday, I reach out to my mentor for help with something, are all three of us generally on the same page? Or, on Friday, when my new principal is reflecting on the week, is it like, "Gosh, I'm more confused than ever before, because I've just gotten three different sets of guidance."

Leaders in Denver and Gwinnett County commented that creating more lines of communication between support streams is a good first step toward mitigating conflicting messaging. One Denver administrator explained that because people are busy, it's often hard to know which support provider is helping principals develop which capacity or competency: "... we've got to do a better job of ... mapping things out and sharing ideas and communicating ideas well because ... our programming has to be all the same." A leader in Gwinnett County who suggested a similar approach maintained that it was incumbent upon district leaders and support providers to work together to provide a coherent support structure that ultimately helps principals succeed. She suggested that districts should start by calibrating support providers in defining or diagnosing the needs of the school. And she cautioned that coordination does not mean standardization, and that the support delivered to principals should vary in response to school contexts and needs:

It is about reducing variability and I don't know if that's something that's just going to be ongoing for us. I think about other organizations that are large, reducing variability is always on their mind. How to make sure that there is consistency in practices, consistency in the support. At the same time there are so many contextual needs, you're talking about human beings and each school having been a microcosm of things that are going in their communities.

The principal supervisor's role in relation to that of the central office is critical in coordinating and aligning principal support districtwide. One principal supervisor worried, however, that districts have begun to conceive of principal supervisors as the best—and only—source of principal support. She explained that principal supervisors need support, too. They need support from central-office staff as data partners or school improvement partners, and those staff could do a better job of tailoring supports to the needs of the school and the school principal.

The office charged with leader development has experienced some disconnection from the work of principal supervisors in at least four districts, according to our interviewees. In one district, this was a previous problem that has been largely solved with a change in leadership for the office that oversees principal supervisors. In another district, it is said to be an ongoing challenge, according to a manager in the leadership office:

The [office directing principal supervisors] does not collaborate on a consistent basis with the [leadership office], and that to me is a misstep. I think it is not the best way to really bring the system to a different level.

There is a danger of overwhelming principals with support. First-year principals often feel as if they are "drinking from a firehose," as an administrator put it, and they simply cannot absorb all of the support they are given. An administrator in another district worried that all the support that is regularly delivered to principals can amount to "pressure disguised as support":

> *There are so many things that are coming at them and [our department is] trying to provide a level of support, but other departments are as well.... A barrier or a challenge is how to make sure that there is kind of this comprehensive level of support.... I think that's going to be an ongoing challenge to be able to streamline the type of support and to truly work across, because we're trying to be responsive to the needs in the moment, too, and some of it is not predictable.*

Prince George's County has tried to address this problem by creating what it calls "a central office school support network." A leader explained, "The point was to coordinate all of the offices that impact the building so that the principal didn't have to have 13 different meetings with 13 different offices at the beginning of the school year."

Summary

With principal pipelines in place, districts continue to see opportunities and challenges. For example, some are heightening their attention to the learning opportunities that future leaders may have on the job in schools: they emphasize the value of leadership positions such as dean or team leader; they are working to build principals' incentives and capacity for developing talent.

Districts are extending their succession planning to encompass movement into and out of various leadership positions. Veteran principals may join the central office or move into turnaround schools, with structured encouragement and support from the district's leadership office.

Finally, districts are attending to the challenge of coordinating among the many sources of support for principals that exist within a large district. They recognize the need to filter out conflicting messages and excessive time demands for principals.

VIII. SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Principal pipelines remain a reality in the six districts. Each district continues to find value in carrying out the policies and practices it has crafted for principal preparation, placement, evaluation, and support, all aligned with standards for principals. This does not mean that pipeline practices are frozen in place; the districts continue to adjust their work as circumstances change and as they learn from experience. Seven years after making a commitment to the Principal Pipeline Initiative, district leaders are pleased with the results. They no longer report struggling to find highly qualified candidates for vacancies. And two years after the foundation grants ended, they are continuing to use and refine the components of the pipeline in a way that is true to the original design.

Districts Still Have Their Principal Pipelines

- Districts manage their aspiring and novice principals strategically.
- Standards shape principal preparation, hiring, evaluation, and support.
- Efforts in principal preparation include selective district-operated programs and partnerships with university programs.
- Hiring managers have hiring pools of vetted principal candidates and individual-level information for use in succession planning.
- Support from supervisors, mentors, and coaches continues to build principals' skills on the job.
- Offices of leadership development continue to oversee many pipeline activities, and superintendents continue to support the pipeline.

As circumstances change in districts, the pipelines have evolved in some ways. Current challenges are different from those that initially motivated the districts to build principal pipelines. Indeed, a major change is the dwindling number of principal vacancies that some district leaders have seen. They report that more qualified principal candidates have filled the bench, and fewer novice principals fail on the job. These are obviously desirable changes, but they have ripple effects that districts must manage. Some have cut enrollment in their in-district preparation programs, anticipating that the shortage of new positions may continue. Districts are also looking for ways to keep the strong aspiring leaders who have not yet been placed as principals.

Some cutbacks are evident, but cost-cutting does not appear to drive adaptations of the pipeline over time. For example, when a district reduced the number of participants in its costly program of residency-based principal preparation, the reason was that the district had fewer principal vacancies and no longer needed so many candidates. Another district made residencies more cost-efficient by keeping candidates in their own schools, and district leaders pointed to many substantive benefits from this change. Assessment procedures for selection into a hiring pool may be streamlined, because districts wonder whether judging the performance of so many aspiring leaders in a series of simulations takes up time that senior district staff might better spend on other work.

A major change over time is the burgeoning importance of principal supervisors in most districts. The emphasis on this role started growing within the first two years of the Principal Pipeline Initiative. As of 2018, principal supervisors in all six districts have a major role that goes beyond principal evaluation and basic support. It includes a prominent place at the table in principal hiring and placement decisions, frequent school visits to observe and support principals (particularly for principals or schools that are facing challenges), and in some districts also a key role in spotting and developing talent for future leadership. In a few districts the growing scope of principal supervisors' authority has given rise to tensions that some interviewees described, as staff who specialize in leadership development sometimes wish that supervisors worked more closely with them. From the standpoint of principals, however, principal supervisors remain the strong and valued support that they had become in 2015.

Many of the other changes made are extensions of the policies, practices, and tools associated with the pipeline initiative. These include more attention to assistant principals, such as by adapting principal standards for assistant principals or offering additional learning opportunities for assistant principals who are in the principal hiring pool. In some districts mentors or coaches, whose support principals rate at least as highly as they did in 2015, have somewhat more delineated roles and different options for entry into the role (e.g., as a temporary change from a full-time principal position). Several districts have extended the logic of a pipeline: they now offer more professional learning to central-office staff, coaches, or mentors; or they have developed pathways for successful, experienced principals to move into leadership positions in the central office or in turnaround schools.

Administrators in all districts want to see an ecosystem for talent development in which principals and principal supervisors are always observing and developing future school leaders. Recognizing that the reality falls short of this ideal, they continue the effort to encourage and support sitting principals as talent developers, while continuing to offer more formal learning opportunities at the district level for aspiring leaders.

District leaders and principals continue to perceive positive results in several important respects. District leaders are impressed with the skills of the principals they are hiring, just as they were in 2015, and principal retention is said to have improved, according to districts that are tracking it.

Principals' perceptions of the preparation that they experienced reveal statistically significant changes over time. Comparing the 2018 responses of principals who completed all of their preservice preparation by March 2012 with the responses of principals who began preparation in March 2012 or later, the shifts are consistent with the changes that districts intended. Principals' reports show increases in the emphasis on leadership for school improvement and on instructional leadership, and in tailoring to the district context.

Principals' ratings of the support that they receive in their first three years from principal supervisors, coaches, and mentors remain high, with no drop-off when compared with the ratings gathered from novices in 2014 and 2015.

The self-reported fit between new principals' skills and their school placements is no longer trending upward the way it was in 2015. Although our earlier report on implementation of principal pipelines highlighted a statistically significant improvement over time in novice principals' perception of an "excellent" fit with their school, more recent evidence on this point is ambiguous. The 2018 survey shows an apparent (though not statistically significant) decline in this response when compared with responses gathered from novices in 2015. Sixty-three percent of principals who started on the job between March 2016 and February 2018 report an "excellent" fit between their skills and the needs of their schools, a result that falls between the low point observed in 2013 among principals appointed in 2010-12 (60 percent) and the high point observed in 2015 (72 percent among those appointed in 2013-

15), with no significant difference from either. We saw no evidence of changes in district procedures for principal placement that would have driven a change in the quality of placement, but this finding suggests that the quality may bear watching in case our survey results are pointing to a trend.

Advice for a Sustainable Pipeline

In interviewing those responsible for the principal pipelines in these districts, we asked how they would advise their peers in other districts. They reiterated the value of building a principal pipeline. They also urged that districts see pipeline development as a process—more a journey than a destination that can be reached through shortcuts. They offered encouragement in several ways.

Most of them commented that pipelines do not have to be expensive. Although they had and appreciated foundation grants for their work, in retrospect they see that there are low-cost ways to launch the work and to lay a foundation for doing existing tasks in new—and not necessarily more costly—ways. As one said:

> *The one thing I would tell districts is that they could do this work without [grant] money. I think people are scared to get started because they think you have to have money to do it. But that's why I always start with leader standards. That doesn't cost money. Having the right people think about what this work should look like is a way to start.*

The same leader also pointed to the low cost of mentoring for novice leaders by experienced principals, saying that after initial investments in mentor training, "It's not a heavy financial lift. It's more affordable to sustain."

Another district official offered the advice that the superintendent's engagement is crucial in making a principal pipeline part of the district's regular way of working, saying that those interested in establishing a pipeline should:

> *... make sure that they have support, encouragement, and advocacy at the highest level of leadership in their district. For example, if it's an associate, an assistant, or a deputy [superintendent] who is pushing for a focus on leadership, absent the superintendent, you're never going to have that become a part of the water supply.*

Reflecting on the organic development of a principal pipeline in the district, another district official cautioned that trying to replicate the existing pipeline of that district somewhere else would not be a good approach. No one, this official said, should think that any other district is "*the* district to watch." Instead, building a pipeline is a local, developmental process that leaders adjust over time, based on their own circumstances and priorities. "Grow into it, always be thinking about ... what's going to get your leaders to where the district needs them to go next."

In this report, we have pointed to the payoff that districts have seen from steady investment of time and thought in developing and refining several key ingredients for leader development: standards; preparation; succession planning; and mentoring and coaching. Steady work on these pipeline components has served the districts well, according to the leaders interviewed. Moreover, principals' survey responses indicate that newly placed principals see strengths in the preparation and support they have received. As of 2018, the principal pipeline shows staying power.