Effectively Communicating about Principal Pipelines
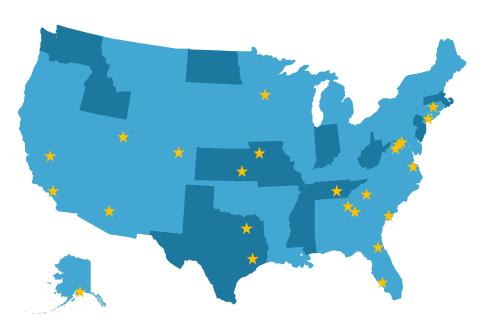
Key findings from qualitative research with superintendents, school board members, and state education officials

December 2019

Methodology

★ *Superintendents and school board members*
◼ *State education officials*

36 In-Depth Interviews

Conducted by telephone from July to November 2019:

12 IDIs with superintendents/senior administrators

12 IDIs with school board members

12 IDIs with state education officials

Superintendents and school board members are in school districts with at least 20,000 students, excluding the six Principal Pipeline Initiative districts and the six Principal Supervisor Districts.

See appendix for more information about respondents.

NOTE: All respondents were told that the research was being conducted on behalf of The Wallace Foundation.

Objectives of the Research

✓ Gauge awareness of principal pipelines generally and based on The Wallace Foundation's definition

✓ Gauge interest in implementing a principal pipeline

✓ Understand barriers to implementing a principal pipeline

✓ Identify the most compelling reasons to implement a principal pipeline, including specific evidence that is most compelling

✓ Test potential names for this systemic approach to cultivating and supporting principals

The Role of Principals and Challenges in Attracting Them

Principals are viewed as absolutely critical to the success of a school, its teachers, and its students.

*"I think people think the biggest difference in a child's life is going to be a teacher, but the reality is, if you don't have a quality principal, you're not going to have quality teachers, so that pipeline is critical … **If you don't have good leadership, you're not going to have the outcomes that you want for kids**. So, you've got to invest in that." – State education official, Midwest*
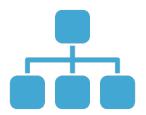
*"We were looking for a solution for recruiting and retaining teachers. Part of that and part of the solution is the principal leadership at the individual school because we know that **teachers will follow a great principal**. One that they like, one that makes them feel valued, one who is a mentor and a good instructional leader." – Board member, very large district, West*

*"I am a firm believer that **the principal sets the tone for that building**. I've said that from day one. You walk into a building, and that building has the flavor of how that principal has set it up. And so, you know I think they're key." – State education official, West*

*"[Principals] play the most critical role in really **shifting student achievement at the school level** … the school leader is obviously setting the academic focus for the school. The school leader is making sure that the culture is conducive for student learning. And then the school leader is managing the ever-changing space and place in public education and bringing the context of the shifts maybe **at the system level, the state level , bringing it into context at their building**. So, they play, in my opinion, the most critical role in setting the trajectory for the school as a whole." – Superintendent, medium district, South*

There is a general recognition of the need to increase capacity within districts in order to be better prepared to fill principal positions with strong candidates.

- For many, this is part of a system-wide effort to develop effective leaders **at every level** and foster a culture of leadership.
- Many highlight the importance of developing principals who are **instructional leaders**.

→ **Diversifying** their district(s) is a priority at every level—principals, teachers, and administrators.

> *"Research indicates that students and staff, in certain occasions, learn better from people who have similar backgrounds and experiences … I have found that the better diverse group you can create, within a setting, the more likely you are to **reach all students or all staff**." – Superintendent, large district, South*

> *"[Increasing the diversity of principals in my district] is very much a goal. **Closing the achievement gap**, a lot of it feeds into each other. But it's important to do this through a racial equity lens, we say that a lot. **Diversity in campus leadership is very important**." – Board member, large district, South*

The challenges of identifying and attracting high-quality, effective principals vary from district to district, but most say it is a major challenge.

→ The few who indicate it is less of a challenge explicitly talk about having an intentional strategy in place to develop a **pool of highly-qualified candidates** for principal positions.

*"So, in [my district], it's been very easy to attract principal candidates. It's not unusual when we have a vacancy to have 15 to 30 applicants for our principal positions. In terms of retaining the principals, also not an issue in [my district]. We're fortunate enough to have what I would define as a **robust succession planning program.**" – Superintendent, large district, South*

*"Because of [our district's] growth, we have to have a very strong principal pipeline and that has also become one of the strategies for teachers. We tend to have a pretty **deep bench of prospective principals who most all start out as teachers** … being very purposeful about growing those principal leaders is something that has been effective for us." – Board member, very large district, West*

School board members have **lower levels of awareness** than superintendents and even state education officials about the details of districts' strategies for principal recruitment.

These audiences point to a variety of factors as reasons why it is challenging to attract high-quality, effective principals.

High expectations for principal candidates to be prepared to meet current challenges:

- Evolving role of the principal and greater focus on principal as not just campus administrator but instructional leader
- Challenges of meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of students, especially those in low-performing and high poverty schools
- Impact of high stakes testing

*"As a principal, everything rests with you. If something goes wrong, it's your fault. If something goes right, you should theoretically give credit to the staff that you're working with. **The consequences are tough, and you put in long hours**." – State education official, Midwest*

Lack of highly-qualified candidates:

- The pool of truly high quality applicants is not robust enough (and candidate interest alone is not sufficient)
- The domino effect that teacher shortages have on the principal pipeline
- A candidate pool that does not fulfill the need for greater diversity among principals to reflect student population
- A greater challenge in finding candidates to fill high school principal positions

*"We're hearing a lot about **teacher shortages** right now, but I think we have just as big a problem with principals, especially because really **the pipeline into the principalship is through teaching**." – State education official, South*

Awareness and Understanding of the Principal Pipeline Approach

Virtually all are familiar with the concept of a principal pipeline and the vast majority are familiar with the term itself.

They have heard about principal pipelines from…

- ✓ *Education literature*
- ✓ *Education professional associations (principal, superintendent associations)*
- ✓ *Higher education programs that train educators and administrators*
- ✓ *The Wallace Foundation*
- ✓ *Other districts that are implementing some version of a principal pipeline (including Principal Pipeline Initiative districts)*

Districts do a variety of things to cultivate and support principals that they would characterize as a principal pipeline, though only some explicitly call their approach a "principal pipeline."

Language district leaders use to describe what their districts are doing:

> "
> - Growing their own principals from within
> - Growing their own leaders
> - Growing their own talent
> - Human capital system
> - Aspiring principal program and principal supervision framework
> - Principal learning academies
> - Educational leadership program
> - Robust principal development program/professional growth system that supports the development of principals
> "

Several state education officials indicate they are very involved in principal preparation programs.

- These initiatives are more common in **larger school districts** within their states.
- They sometimes involve **partnership with a state university** to establish a rigorous program to prepare principals and future superintendents.
- Some states are **consolidating** across districts to provide cross-district support and training.

*"In larger districts, they've really broken the schools into networks, and in the networks there is support for the principals within the network. I think in **smaller districts**, there's some effort to do some cross-district support, but that's probably where the **need is sometimes the greatest** just because I think the principal role can be often somewhat isolated … the support sometimes comes from a **professional association**." – State education official, Northeast*

The response to the Principal Pipeline description* is resoundingly positive.

*"Principals I believe are one of the key people, boots-on-the-ground kind of people that are going to be providing the support for the teachers and the programming that are in that building. They need to have **effective management skills**, they need to have **effective mentoring skills**, they need to have **effective evaluation skills**. Those skills just don't come, they need to be trained." – Board member, medium district, Southwest*

*"Maybe you'll get lucky and get a good applicant that for some reason applies and gets hired and in the district does a great job, but you're leaving a lot of things to the roll of the dice without having **systems to ensure that that happens, to ensure that the quality happens**." – Superintendent, large district, West*

*"Leadership matters, whether it's formalized leadership through being in an administrative role, like being a principal, or it's an unformalized leadership where you're just a teacher leader within the building. Anyone involved in the program that builds their leadership capacity, even if it doesn't end in the promotion of that employee, **everybody around that employee benefits**." – Superintendent, large district, South*

*"I'm an attorney by trade, and I have advised a lot of business clients throughout my practice, so I look at things through a business lens, and so this just seems like **good business practice**. You've got a personnel need, an ongoing personnel need, they're not just going to come to you, you've got to be in control of that." – Board member, large district, South*

*See Appendix for Principal Pipeline description.

The Principal Pipeline looks familiar to these district and state leaders because most feel they currently employ some variation of this approach in their district.

The four Principal Pipeline **components** are approaches that medium to large districts are employing in some form or fashion to identify, prepare, and support principals.

- They are not necessarily taking a comprehensive, systemic approach to the principal pipeline, however.

✓ *Leader standards*
✓ *Pre-service preparation (more often happening through university partnerships than in-district programs)*
✓ *Hiring*
✓ *Ongoing support and evaluation*

The two **supports** are of high interest but are more aspirational.

➢ *Principal supervisors*
➢ *Leader tracking systems*

The Importance of Coaching and Mentoring

Ongoing support to help principals hone their skills, particularly in **instructional leadership**, is important, especially for novice principals.
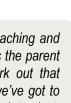
Shifting the role of principal supervisors to focus more on **coaching and mentoring rather than compliance** is a better way to ensure principals can best meet the needs of schools today.

Some superintendents say they have already reshaped the role of principal supervisors to be more focused on support, while **others have work to do**.

District leaders indicate some movement towards this focus in their districts, but there is **room for greater intentionality and a more comprehensive approach**.

*"The ongoing support and evaluation – aligning the job to help them—I love that, especially for the novices. Your first two or three years as a principal, **you learn by fire**. And I think you've got to have that **ongoing support and the evaluation**." – State education official, West*

*"To reshape that role to be something that is coaching and helping leaders get better in the buildings, versus the parent calls and then you're helping the principal work out that problem … And we've got to shift those roles, we've got to **get away from just being compliant**." – Superintendent, large district, Midwest*

The Importance of Using Data To Inform Decision-making

District leaders and state officials note that the needs and requirements for principal positions can vary **depending on the grade level, student population, school culture, and staffing situation**.

They recognize the value of using data to help identify principal candidates:
- With the right **skills and experience** for specific openings
- That are the **right match** for a given position
- That would increase the **diversity** of principals.

*"The element that I think is stronger here is the **tracking system around demographics, qualifications, and then matching that with the right school**. I think that's work that the districts could get better at … as we think about how we might attract and retain more minority candidates especially." – Superintendent, large district, West*

*"Sometimes it's not a good match, and I wonder if there could be another method that we could look at to ensure we make that correct match. If they're 90% Hispanic, it would be critical to have a bilingual principal there, someone who **understands the culture of the population that they serve**." – Board member, very large district, West*

Leader tracking systems are NOT something that districts have in place. They are intriguing, but there are questions about the **time** and **financial cost** of development and implementation.

Messaging Implications of Current Awareness and Attitudes of Principal Pipelines

✓ These audiences do not need to be convinced of the **value** of principal pipelines generally.

✓ A key challenge is **differentiating what districts are doing now** from the deliberate and comprehensive approach to cultivating and supporting principals that is encompassed in The Wallace Foundation's definition of a principal pipeline (four components + two key supports).

✓ This challenge is more pronounced with **superintendents and school board members**. State school officials more readily recognize that, while districts in their states and even the state itself is undertaking efforts to attract, prepare, and support principals, they are often not taking the holistic approach championed by The Wallace Foundation.

✓ Once this distinction is established, there are compelling approaches to communication that the Wallace Foundation and its allies can use in support of taking a **more deliberate and comprehensive approach** to principal pipelines.

Making the Case for Implementing a Principal Pipeline

The most compelling reason to implement Principal Pipelines is the positive impact on student outcomes and learning.

At the end of the day, student success is what it's all about.

*"Student gains—that's why we're in the game. If retention is an important contributor to student gains, then retention becomes important, but certainly **the gains are the most compelling** in my mind." – State education official, Northeast*

*"I like that the measure is student achievement because sometimes when we're talking about developing talent and whatever that means, we forget that **the entire reason that we're here is student achievement**." – Board member, very large district, West*

*"Our number one goal would be students and their achievement, and so when you have something that's proving it's not a fad, it's not a new program, it's people not programs, and leadership, this all **proves that it starts with leadership** … the first three years, these are the types of achievement increases that we see." – Superintendent, very large district, South*

*"Student achievement, that's what it's all about. **Everything is in service to student achievement**." – Board member, medium district, Midwest*

The breadth of the impact that principal pipelines had on student achievement across districts, schools within districts, and subject matters is compelling.

The effects of principal pipelines on student achievement were **widespread**.

- ✓ Across all pipeline districts
- ✓ Across math and reading
- ✓ Across grade levels

> *"In order to add the **validity and reliability** to the process, you want to make sure that certain achievement outcomes are widespread, that they happen in the elementary schools, in the middle schools, and in the high school. That it's **not limited to one particular subgroup or grade level**." – Superintendent, medium district, Northeast*

- ✓ Across all schools in pipeline districts—not just those that received a newly placed principal
- ✓ In schools in the bottom 25% of student achievement
  - ✓ Many agree that this is important because many school improvement interventions do not benefit schools with the lowest achievement scores

> *"School improvement interventions actually don't benefit the schools as much as I would love to hope that they do. I've done some of my own data in my own district, and I know that **the intervention isn't necessarily what makes it better. It is that leadership**." – Board member, medium district, South*

The specific data points on student achievement are viewed as credible and most respondents find them meaningful.

The effects of principal pipelines on student achievement were **positive** and **statistically significant**.

*"Schools in pipeline districts that received a newly placed principal—both novice and transfer—outperformed comparison schools by **6.22** percentile points in reading and **2.87** percentile points in math after three years."*

*"All schools in pipeline districts—not just those that received a newly placed principal—outperformed comparison schools. After three years, schools in pipeline districts outperformed their comparison schools by **5.01** percentile points in reading and **2.29** percentile points in mathematics."*

*"Effects were positive and statistically significant for schools in the lowest quartile of student achievement, which outperformed comparison schools by **3.47** percentile points in math."*

The research provides some helpful guidance on how to most effectively present specific data points on student achievement.

For most participants, **all of the data** points on improvements in student achievement are viewed as demonstrating meaningful gains that are worthy of touting.

- **No single data point** stood out or rose to the top above the others.

But it is important to state that effects are *statistically significant*.

"Holistically, yes, I want to know whether my school is an A compare to another school, or a B compared to another school, and I want to look at its trends of performance and see an upward tick in growth on my performance. What I'm ultimately most interested in as an educator is, **am I seeing meaningful improvements in student performance?**" – State education official, Midwest

"These are **amazing numbers** to see. In particular, when you think about putting a new principal in, and the new principal getting these types of results" – Superintendent, medium district, South

The research provides some helpful guidance on how to most effectively present specific data points on student achievement. *(cont'd)*

Some express interest in seeing more detailed or additional data.

"Hopefully that data's speaking for itself, but over a three-year period, I'd want to know what their growth and performance was prior to that. I would assume it wasn't the type of growth in performance where it wouldn't have been necessary to change the principal." – State education official, Midwest

? Explanation on the **source** of outperformance data—e.g., what tests?

? Data to show outperformance in **context**—e.g., how it compares to changes in achievement before the initiative.

? Impact on other **outcomes besides student learning**, such as attendance, measures of student well-being, school climate (teacher surveys), parent engagement, retention of families in school.

? Disaggregation of the impact by **race, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status.**

Documenting student success is key, especially when it comes to securing funding.

For all three audiences, being able to **document gains in student learning and achievement** are essential in making the case to state legislators, school boards, and constituents when they are defending their budgets or asking for more funding.

*"Funding is always an issue, but if you received a grant and then our research shows that it benefitted … **Our legislators want results**. They keep telling us they want to see the return on investment." – State education official, West*

*"I've been in professional development for a long time, and I've seen funding come and go, if you will. When you can see a **specific return on investment**, and I think you have that in these specific scenarios, you can then make the case for what is the return on the investment … the return in student achievement. I think that would be **very compelling for school boards and school superintendents**." – Superintendent, very large district, South*

Principal retention is a secondary reason to implement principal pipelines and is important because of the impact it has on teacher turnover, and ultimately on student outcomes.

Principal retention is the means to an end, but not the goal in and of itself:

Recruitment and retention of high quality principals	Lower teacher turnover	Improved teacher outcomes	Better student outcomes

*"If you have a principal who is highly trained in an organization, **teachers stay with him**, he stays in the building, it's going [to] increase student achievement. It's just, it's a no-brainer to me""* – State education official, West

*"In our district, where we've had high turnover with principals, those specific schools are at the lowest because of the high turnover. And so the high turnover with the principals is high turnover with the teachers and high turnover with all the other supporting staff, and **sometimes even high turnover with the students**. Because they're moving around chasing that principal … **A student may build a relationship with that principal**."* – Board member, medium district, South

Superintendents' focus is on **attracting and cultivating** high-quality candidates and supporting principals to maintain and improve quality and effectiveness. While not unimportant, they talk less about principal retention as a concern.

Avoiding principal and teacher replacement costs is a secondary reason to support principal pipelines.

For all audiences, positioning principal pipelines as a way to **conserve precious district funds** is important, but less central than the key benefit of improving student outcomes.

The concept of **avoiding replacement costs** of teachers and principals resonates strongly.

However, reactions to the **$75,000** dollar amount vary—some feel that it sounds about right, and others wonder if it could really be that much.

Providing evidence that principal pipelines are <u>sustainable</u> is critical.

There are a few points about sustainability that resonate strongly and really help make the case:

- ✓ The fact that two years after The Wallace Foundation funding ended, districts continued to fund these efforts and **all components of the pipeline remain in place**
- ✓ That superintendents are **championing the work**
- ✓ The **ripple effects** of change (smaller preparation programs and other meaningful roles for assistant principals and other emerging leaders because of fewer vacancies)
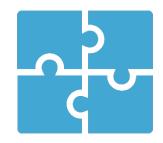
*"It's impressive that the districts that have used it have continued with it and even absorbed the cost of it. That must mean **it's working well for them and they're happy with the results** that they're getting." – Board member, medium district, Midwest*

*"[The superintendents in the study] have remained in the district. So, that's what makes this successful. That **consistency in the leader leading the effort is what makes this outcome possible**." – Superintendent, medium district, Northeast*

*"I'm impressed with the sustainability section … it really stands out to me as a really strong statement, that **even when this grant was gone, the superintendent was still championing that this was something that needs to continue**. I think it is a strong case. And in our district, when the superintendent internalizes a grant, into an operational extent, it tells me that he is 100% bought into that investment as something that he would have made without the grant money. That's a strong statement" – Board member, large district, South*

Adaptability to districts' unique needs and circumstances is important.

These audiences recognize that the profile and characteristics of school districts can vary, and each district may face specific or unique challenges and circumstances. An acknowledgement that principal pipelines are adaptable and can be customized to districts' unique circumstances is key.

*"I appreciate that districts develop their pipelines in different ways to really customize them for their school division. **Every school division is different, has a different culture**."*
– Superintendent, very large district, South

Proactively addressing costs concerns is critical.

In addition to showing positive outcomes, being able to demonstrate that principal pipelines are **not as expensive as one may think** is critical for bolstering the perception that they are feasible.

While not clear cut, reactions suggest a more convincing way to convey affordability is to **frame cost as a percentage of the district's budget (e.g., 0.4%).**

➡ *$42 per student is not seen as affordable for all districts.*

"It's impressive that the districts that have used it have continued with it and even absorbed the cost of it ... Well, obviously the affordability of it is good to know up front and so that would answer those questions right off the bat." – Board member, medium district, Midwest

For state-level professionals and school board members, **documenting the ROI** is very important.

Cost (both in dollars and staff capacity) is one of the top questions these audiences have about principal pipelines.

- Based on the initial description this strikes many as something that could be quite expensive, especially for **small and medium sized districts**.
  - These respondents had a lot of questions about what is involved in terms of cost, staffing and time.
- Some raise questions and express concern about the investments needed for **specific elements**:

Pre-service Preparation	Leadership Tracking Systems
Concern it could require districts to **make their own investments** as opposed to being able to mainly rely on universities or alternative certification programs that provide training/education for administrators.	This is an idea that is of great interest, but **developing or purchasing software** that will do this will obviously cost districts money.

*"There's a **quality and expectation gap** from what is needed to serve kids well and what is entering the field. So districts are having to invest in their own service preparation on the job training." – State education officer, South*

*"The **financial investment is always a big barrier**. You know, there's always, the only concern is there's too many things to do and not enough money to cover it. That would be number one." – Superintendent, large district, West*

Spending on administration is closely scrutinized and often viewed as at the expense of spending on teachers and students.

Spending on principals is often seen as **taking away funding that would otherwise go toward teachers and students**, and state and local elected leaders, school boards, and constituents prioritize spending on teachers and students.

There is a general sense, however, that **if these investments are bearing fruit** in terms of student outcomes, district leaders will push for funding. Similarly, if lawmakers and school boards see that an initiative or intervention has promise, they will fund it.

*"It's a hard sell because you have this community perception that **everything needs to be spent just on students or just on teachers**." – Superintendent, very large district, South*

*"People hate when you spend your money on your admin versus spending it on the students, but you could really have a **compelling message that you could send in why you want to spend that money on that particular pipeline**. One thing that stood out for me was that financial piece in selling this to your board or your community." – Superintendent, large district, Midwest*

Thus, it is important to **directly link spending** on principals to student achievement.

Other Concerns About Principal Pipelines

For some, time is anticipated to be a potential barrier to implementing principal pipelines.

All of these new systems and processing take time to implement and to maintain, and the professionals who would be tasked with doing so already have full plates.

It's important to make the point definitively that the **investment in time is worth it**.

> "I would wonder about the amount of time that people could devote to this kind of work outside of school. When I go visit principals and assistant principals, they're not spending a lot of time doing research and studying these things. **They're spending a lot of time directly involved in what's happening in the classroom**. More than I ever expected. So, I would think time would be a barrier." – Board member, large district, South

Changing the mindset around how districts approach principal recruitment and hiring will be a challenge for some districts.

There is a recognition that transitioning to a more purposeful, systematic, and data-informed approach for identifying and fostering talent would be a positive change, but may take some **period of adjustment**.

Some district leaders acknowledge that a key to implementing principal pipelines may be **shifting mindsets away from traditional recruitment procedures**, which have been less focused on data and more focused on relationships.

*"In our district, we are **still very good old boy good old girl**, and most of our administrators are placed in those positions by that method unfortunately." – Board member, large district, South*

*"It's more easy to recruit an administrator because of the pay increase that teachers get when they go into administration, but sometimes … they're just people who simply want to make more money and they **don't really have a passion for the position or the work that's entailed**." – State education official, West*

State education officials also note that, in the traditional track for a career educator, **teachers view advancing to a principal position as the natural progression**. Everyone does not have the passion for the job or leadership skills to be an effective principal, however.

State education officials and some superintendents note that staffing capacity will be a key barrier to smaller and rural districts implementing principal pipelines.

Ongoing support and evaluation and principal supervisors are the two elements that are expected to depend most on staff that most small districts do not have. There just **aren't a lot of people to play these different roles**. For instance, who is going to mentor new principals?

It can also come down to just not having enough **qualified people** to fill the pipeline.

*We just **don't have an unending supply of people that are qualified** in the state. It's a struggle. In the rural districts, they're always trying to encourage, and even in the large districts they do that too, they're looking for teachers that rise to the top that have potential to be quality leaders and encouraging them to go back and get their ed leader degree. I just don't think we have the numbers for this to work really well." – State education official, Midwest*

*"That barrier is lessened when the organization is **larger and has more capacity versus a smaller organization** that is, by definition, leaner, and you have somebody that is running this, is pulled in 15 other directions." – Superintendent, Large district, West*

Capacity is not a central concern for **medium to larger districts** that have large central support systems. For these superintendents and board members it is more about having the **funding and the commitment** to the approach. But they see how this is a major obstacle for smaller districts, and that this is a place where The Wallace Foundation could play a facilitating role.

The fact that the initiative was conducted with six large districts does impact how some state education officials view the evidence we presented.

It will be important to be able to demonstrate success and gains in **smaller and medium sized** school districts as well.

*"If you're going to say that this is **credible and can be replicated anywhere**, then I think you would need to show that you have some districts that you would find in North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, you know places like that." – State education official, Midwest*

*"My question that I would like to get at as I read this is the size of the districts that were in this pilot program or in this study. What were the sizes of those school districts? Because my visceral reaction is that you're going to be looking at larger, suburban or urban school districts that **some of the affordability and the sustainability may not be quite as extrapolative—to smaller school systems** that don't have the existing resources and staff." – State education official, South*

Message Framework

Primary Benefit: A District-Wide Strategy to Improve Student Achievement

Core Message:

The effects of principal pipelines on student achievement **were positive**, **statistically significant**, and **widespread**—across math and reading, across grade levels, across all districts, in schools in bottom 25% of student achievement.

Message Pillars:

Schools in pipeline districts that received a newly placed principal—both novice and transfer—outperformed comparison schools by 6.22 percentile points in reading and 2.87 percentile points in math after three years.

All schools in pipeline districts—not just those that received a newly placed principal—outperformed comparison schools.

After three years, schools in pipeline districts outperformed their comparison schools by 5.01 percentile points in reading and 2.29 percentile points in mathematics.

Effects in math achievement were positive and statistically significant for schools in the bottom 25% of student achievement—schools which have not benefitted from many other school improvement interventions.

Schools in the lowest quartile of student achievement outperformed comparison schools by 3.47 percentile points in math.

Primary Benefit: A District-Wide Strategy to Improve Student Achievement *(cont'd)*

Supporting Messages: Principal Pipelines are…

Sustainable   Superintendents are championing the work

Two years after the Wallace Foundation funding ended, districts continued to fund these efforts and all components of the pipeline remain in place

There are ripple effects of change (smaller preparation programs and other meaningful roles for assistant principals and other emerging leaders because of fewer vacancies)

Affordable   Frame the average cost of principal pipelines as 0.4% of district expenses

Adaptable   Districts adapted their pipelines to their unique needs and circumstances
→ Adding examples would help strengthen this claim

Secondary benefit: a district-wide strategy to recruit and retain high-quality principals will lead to lower teacher turnover and improved student outcomes.

Minimizing teacher turnover is more salient than minimizing principal turnover

Recruitment and retention of high quality principals → *Lower teacher turnover* → *Improved teacher outcomes* → *Better student outcomes*

Highlight that it is cost-effective:

Increased retention of principals minimizes the system costs of replacing **principals and teachers**.

→ Including teachers would help strengthen this point

Name Testing

Five names were tested for this comprehensive approach to cultivating and supporting principals.

➢ *A principal pipeline*

➢ *A systemic, aligned principal pipeline*

➢ *An enhanced principal pipeline*

➢ *A school leadership pathway*

➢ *A systematic process for identifying and developing principals*

"School Leadership Pathway" is the name that garners the most favorable reaction, followed by "Principal Pipeline." *(cont'd)*

→ A key strength of both names: they are simple and concise

School Leadership Pathway

Benefits:

- **Differentiates** this from the good and important work districts are doing on principal pipelines.
- Leans into the role of principals as school leaders and, importantly, **instructional leaders.**
- Signals that this is a **journey**—more comprehensive and inclusive of both **aspiring and current** principals.

*"Some people may still have the idea of the principal from 10 years ago, who was probably more of a manager and a supervisor, **versus the principal of today, which is so much more**. You are an instructional leader. You are a supervisor leader. You are a manager leader, shared leadership and things like that. I think school leadership pathway, school leadership, it's so much more of being a principal." –* Superintendent, large district, South

Cautions:

- Some state education officials comment that the term "pathways" is **associated with graduation pathways** (e.g., efforts pertaining to K-12 graduation requirements).

"School Leadership Pathway" is the name that garners the most favorable reaction, followed by "Principal Pipeline."

→ A key strength of both names: they are simple and concise

Principal Pipeline

Benefits:
- This is something that is **familiar.**
- It is already recognized as **important.**

Cautions:
- Many think their districts have some sort of "principal pipeline," so this **does not signal that this is something different** from what they are doing today.
- Name suggests it is for **aspiring principals but not current ones.**
- Some raise concern about the term "pipeline" due to potential **negative association** with the phrase "school to prison pipeline."

*"Pipeline actually has a negative connotation for me because we're concerned about the **prison pipeline, which is a negative pipeline**. So for me, pathway is just a different visual and has a more positive connotation. You're going somewhere on a pathway." – Board member, medium district, Midwest*

Appendix

Principal Pipeline Definition

A principal pipeline is a districtwide strategy to develop a large, ongoing supply of effective school leaders. It involves four aligned components:

1) **Leader Standards:** Adopting rigorous standards for what principals need to know and do—standards that guide principal preparation, hiring, and job support and evaluation.

2) **Pre-service Preparation:** Delivering high-quality, pre-service preparation to promising principal candidates, typically through a combination of in-district programs and partnerships with university preparation programs.

3) **Hiring:** Using selective hiring procedures, informed by data on candidates and their demonstrated skills, to make good matches between principal and school.

4) **Ongoing Support and Evaluation:** Aligning on-the-job support and evaluation to help principals, especially novices, hone their skills, particularly in bolstering instructional leadership.

In addition, districts implement pipeline system supports, such as:

1) **Leader tracking systems:** Electronic record systems that collect and organize key information—demographics, educational qualifications, professional training and prior performance—about aspiring, novice and veteran principals. The data can help decisionmakers locate principal candidates with the right set of skills for job openings and to make a good "match" between principals and the schools they will lead.

2) **Principal supervisors:** Reshaping the roles of central office administrators who oversee principals—to shift their roles from compliance to support, increasing their focus on coaching, mentoring and evaluating principals.

Overview of IDI Respondents

12 Superintendents and 12 School Board Members:

- Superintendents include both superintendents and high-level administrators focusing on talent and leadership development.
- Superintendents and board members were recruited from districts with at least 20,000 students:
    - 10 from *medium* districts (20,000-49,999 students)
    - 8 from *large* districts (50,000-99,999 students)
    - 6 from *very large* districts(100,000+ students)
- Districts from across the U.S. are represented, excluding the 6 Principal Pipeline Initiative districts and the 6 Principal Supervisor Districts.

12 State education officials:

- State education officials were recruited with the assistance of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Effectively Communicating About Principal Pipelines – December 2019