

# Building Principal Capacity and Engagement for Reforms

## Principal Role

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### Purpose of This Document

Strong principals are fundamentally important to the success of students. States can take strategic action to foster policies that enable and empower—rather than hinder—strong school leaders. This document identifies ways State leaders

can support districts and schools in meeting the new expectations of principals to lead the implementation of new college- and career-ready standards and new educator evaluation and support systems by defining an effective and sustainable principal role.

## RESOURCES FOR BUILDING A CULTURE

### Online Resources

Research by the George W. Bush Institute's Alliance to Reform Education Leadership and New Leaders found that the most effective districts' staffs and school-level leaders see one another as partners in meeting students' needs. With balanced autonomy school leaders are expected to support district-wide priorities, goals and initiatives—but they also have discretion, with guidelines and subject to approval, to implement them in ways that fit the context and needs of their schools. More information can be found in the [Great Principals At Scale](#) materials, including the [report](#), [executive summary](#) and [toolkit](#).

### State or District Examples

The **Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement** (GLISI) works with districts to develop balanced score cards to ensure alignment of goals and strategies. GLISI also provides districts with tools and protocols to continuously measure, monitor and make course corrections to district strategies and initiatives.

In **Massachusetts**, the State and its districts work together as partners. According to the Wallace-funded RAND study [Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems](#), as the state increased its collaboration with districts by listening to, validating and addressing their concerns, the State education agency (SEA) gained credibility, thereby encouraging more districts to collaborate with it.<sup>1</sup> One SEA staff member said, "Our face has grown friendly," and a Springfield, Massachusetts district staff member agreed, saying, "It was like having inside help... the state was becoming a real partner in our work and not an adversary or just a compliance organization."

As part of its Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility plan, **Tennessee** committed to changing how it interacts with school districts by differentiating accountability and support. The new model differentiates the amount of support and oversight provided based on district needs.



<sup>1</sup> Augustine, C. H., Gonzalez, G., Ikemoto, G. S., Russell, J., Zellman, G. L., Constant, L., & Dembosky, J. W. (2009). *Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

## RESOURCES FOR BUILDING A CULTURE (Continued)

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools** adopted data tools for all levels of the school system to understand their performance and the efficacy of their work. The expectation was for a data-driven culture to be instituted system-wide, with teachers, school leaders, and central office staff reviewing diverse data regularly to monitor progress. Though most data tools were first adopted only during School Year 2010–2011, and overall training and adoption varied across the system, by the end of that school year, the district saw gains on multiple measures of student performance.

As part of a broader set of district reforms, **Baltimore City Schools** adopted a new funding model, “Fair Student Funding,” which gave resources directly to schools to control and allocate as they saw fit rather than pushing specific resources out from the central office to schools. Principals had new authority to control the use of resources to meet the needs of their schools and students, but needed support to do so effectively. To this end, the district created budget guidance resources for principals. More significantly, they created a new structure in the district, a system of networks that would support the schools and help principals with operational aspects of their work—such as budget decisions—so that principals could remain focused on instructional responsibilities.

## RESOURCES FOR DISTRIBUTING LEADERSHIP

### Online Resources

The U.S. Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards launched the “**Teach to Lead**” initiative to explore the teacher leader role and other opportunities for teachers to take on additional leadership responsibilities, including within their schools. Additional resources on teacher leadership can be found [here](#).

### State or District Examples

**Massachusetts** developed [model collective bargaining contract language](#) that districts can use when renegotiating collective bargaining agreements in order to implement new evaluation and support frameworks for teachers and principals. The language is intended to serve as a framework for deep and constructive conversations between labor and management.

Recognizing the role teacher and leader contracts play in shaping local education policy, **ConnCan** developed a [Teacher Contract Database](#) and an [Administrator Contract Database](#) that provide free access to collective bargaining agreements for every single school district in the State. Resources like this enable anyone, including State and local officials, to quickly look up contracts and determine whether there is any language that might prevent a district from encouraging teachers to take on additional leadership responsibilities, such as observing their peers. Such a database also opens up possibilities for States to identify and highlight model language for other districts to use when re-negotiating contracts.



# RESOURCES FOR DEFINING THE PRINCIPAL ROLE AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER AND TALENT MANAGER



## Online Resources

New Leaders' **Urban Excellence Framework™** outlines the key elements of schools achieving breakthrough gains in student achievement. Based on more than 100 visits and case studies of schools that achieved dramatic gains, an extensive review of the available research on the practices of effective schools and leadership and the resources available through New Leaders' Effective Practice Incentive Community Program, the Urban Excellence Framework™ identifies the categories and leadership actions that lead to school improvement. Among these are establishing rigorous, goal and data-driven learning and teaching and building and managing a high-quality staff aligned to the school's vision.

Research from New Leaders has found that principals improve student achievement by amplifying great teaching. In particular, great principals (1) develop teachers; (2) manage talent; and (3) create a great place to work. More information can be found in the *Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers* materials, including the [report](#), [executive summary](#) and [policy guide](#).

A 2009 Wallace [study](#) of 17 districts found that authority over decision making was positively related to time spent on almost all of the instructional leadership practices and was most correlated with principals' time spent on promoting staff professional development and motivating staff. It also had a positive relationship with appropriateness of time spent building a common vision, monitoring classroom instruction and developing leadership staff.<sup>2</sup>

## State or District Examples

Over the past three years, **Houston Independent School District** has implemented significant reforms in human capital management. Its focus has been to create policies that support principals in their work to improve teacher effectiveness. The district implemented a new teacher evaluation system to raise expectations for teacher quality and give principals new tools for assessing teacher quality. In addition, the district created new data systems and reports around human capital for every school, allowing principals to review the current status of every staff member in terms of tenure, evaluation results, areas for growth, certifications and other information necessary to support effective staff planning. Principal managers review these reports with their principals a few times a year to identify strategies and next steps for specific staff members and to plan ahead for human capital and staffing supports needed from the central office for the school.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, C. H., Gonzalez, G., Ikemoto, G. S., Russell, J., Zellman, G. L., Constant, L., & Dembosky, J. W. (2009). *Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

# RESOURCES FOR PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & MANAGEMENT

## Online Resources

Research by McKinsey and Company found that the world's best school systems build leadership capacity by focusing on the middle-tier system leaders who oversee groups of schools but not entire systems. The report, entitled *Capturing the Leadership Premium: How the World's Top School Systems Are Building Leadership Capacity for the Future*, can be downloaded [here](#).

The Gates Foundation recommends the following formula to determine the appropriate caseload for principal managers: work hours per month x percentage of schedule outside of central office for school visits/(average hours per school visit + average travel time between schools) x goal for average number of visits per school per month.<sup>3</sup>

A toolkit for assessing principal supports entitled *Principal Support Framework: Supporting Principals as Instructional Leaders* is available from the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership.<sup>4</sup>

The Wallace Foundation reported on the challenges in the current principal supervisor role and made recommendations for improvement in *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*.

## State or District Examples

In **Delaware**, all principal supervisors must become "Credentialed Evaluators" in order to evaluate principals. This strategy could be further refined over time to include audits of principal managers' practice as evaluators of principals.

In **Gwinnett County Public Schools**, principal managers are organized as "brokers" of other central resources. They work closely with principals to identify specific supports needed from other central offices and then they help make the request for that support, whether from curriculum and instruction or from human resources. In turn, the central office teams are accountable for timely and effective response to the needs identified by schools and principal managers. When a principal or school is brought to the superintendent as underperforming, the superintendent first asks the cabinet what supports have been provided to this leader and school, reinforcing the sense of accountability for providing school-level support.

In **Denver, Colorado**, one principal reflected, "My manager helps me define what the real work is and then helps me improve at doing the work."<sup>5</sup> Principal managers redefine the role of principals to make it more feasible and to retain principals in their role. This approach necessitates staffing principal manager positions with individuals who have the knowledge, skills and caseloads that enable them to effectively hire, develop and evaluate principals. A report with additional information on how Denver has invested in and prioritized principal managers can be found [here](#).



<sup>3</sup> Jerald, C. (2012). *Leading for Effective Teaching: How School Systems Can Support Principal Success*. Washington, DC: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Educational Leadership. (2012). *Principal Support Framework*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington College of Education.

<sup>5</sup> New Leaders. (2012). *Playmakers: How great principals build and lead great teams of teachers*. New York, NY: Author.

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