

# Effective School Principals: A Lever for School Improvement

## LEADERSHIP MATTERS – A LOT

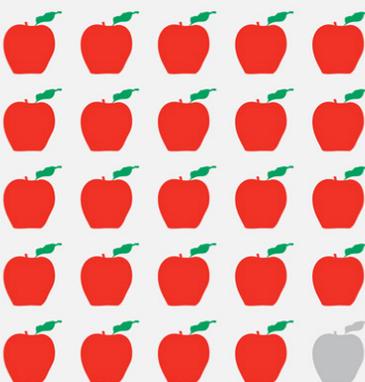
Effective school principals are key to improving schools and raising student achievement. In fact, principals are second only to teachers among school-related influences on student learning. Nearly 60 percent of a student's performance is attributable to teacher and principal effectiveness, with principals accounting for about a quarter of a school's total impact on a student's academic success. There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by an outstanding principal.

## A GOOD INVESTMENT

While teachers have a direct impact on students in their classroom, principals affect all students in the school. A good principal is the single most important determinant of whether a school can attract and keep the high-quality teachers necessary to provide students consecutive years of excellent teaching. The combination of effective teachers and strong principals—not one or the other—will improve student academic performance. Targeted investments in good principals can be a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning because principals ensure that excellent teaching and learning spread beyond single classrooms. They also play a critical role in implementing school-wide reform efforts.

### GREAT LEADERS ATTRACT AND RETAIN GREAT TEACHERS

A high-quality principal will hire, develop and support talented teachers...



...and 24 out of 25 teachers say that the number one factor in whether or not they stay at a school is their principal.

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## STATE POLICY APPROACHES: TAKE ACTION

State legislators can play a significant role in building a pipeline of effective school principals. States can develop a policy framework that supports principals throughout their career, including 1) setting standards, 2) preparation program design and approval, 3) licensure, 4) professional development and 5) evaluation and ongoing support. These also can be linked to compensation, promotion and dismissal.

### Strengthen a Principal's Career Continuum Through Key Policy Levers

**PRINCIPAL STANDARDS.** Revise or adopt statewide standards that reflect what school principals should know and be able to do. Standards provide a framework to guide recruitment and selection, principal preparation program design and approval, licensure, mentoring, professional development and evaluation and ongoing support.

**DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PREPARATION PROGRAMS.** Urge preparation programs to design their programs based on rigorous standards, current research and best practices in the field to ensure principals are graduating ready for the job. Collect and monitor data on the effectiveness of preparation programs, including data on the people who become principals and whether they are effective once on the job. Consider allowing non-

## PRINCIPALS HAVE A MULTIPLIER EFFECT



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Approximate numbers based on national averages

## WHAT DO EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS DO?

- Shape a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards.
- Create a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- Cultivate leadership in others so that teachers and other staff assume their part in realizing the school vision.
- Improve instruction so teachers can teach at their best and students can learn at their utmost.
- Manage people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

Source: *The Wallace Foundation, The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning, 2012.*

university-based programs that meet rigorous standards to prepare principals.

**LICENSURE.** Redesign licensure systems into cohesive, performance-based, tiered systems that are aligned with principal standards, professional development and evaluation and ongoing support, and urge principals to demonstrate effectiveness in developing and supporting teachers and improving student achievement. Consider alternative licensure.

**MENTORING AND INDUCTION PROGRAMS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** Ensure that new principals receive meaningful mentoring and induction. Provide targeted, ongoing professional development to principals throughout their careers. Mentoring and professional development should be aligned with standards, licensure and evaluation and ongoing support.

**EVALUATION AND ONGOING SUPPORT.** Develop and support school principal evaluation systems that are fair and equitable and based on rigorous standards. These systems should promote continuous improvement, steer preparation program

design and approval, guide professional development and licensure renewal, improve working conditions and direct personnel management decisions.

**Create a State Commission or Task Force** to develop recommendations to strategically improve school principal recruitment and selection, preparation, licensure, mentoring, professional development and/or evaluation and ongoing support that includes legislators, practitioners and such key stakeholders as the chief state school officer, state board of education and governor's office.

**Develop and Support Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems** to track principal vacancies, mobility and retention rates; completion of preparation programs; principal performance on the job; number of licenses granted annually; and the types of support principals need on the job. This information can help state and district leaders make strategic decisions and targeted investments to improve the principalship.

**Improve working conditions** by giving principals more autonomy over bud-

gets, staffing and curriculum, and access to timely and useful data in exchange for greater accountability.

**Align all components** of a principal's career continuum, including recruitment and selection, preparation, licensure, mentoring, professional development and evaluation and ongoing support, as well as state and district policies to improve and support principals.

**Direct resources** to programs and policies that are proven to be effective in recruiting, preparing, supporting and evaluating effective principals.

## RESOURCES

NCSL School Principals Webpage: [www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-principals](http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-principals)

The Wallace Foundation: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org)

New Leaders: [www.newleaders.org](http://www.newleaders.org)

The George W. Bush Institute's Alliance to Reform Educational Leadership: [www.bush-center.org/education-reform/alliance-reform-education-leadership](http://www.bush-center.org/education-reform/alliance-reform-education-leadership)