

# EPIC Spotlight: The Principal Role in Developing Teachers

It's no surprise that the most talented teachers want to work for the best leaders. A decade of research has shown that, on average, a principal accounts for 25 percent of a school's total impact on student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Effective principals improve student learning and achievement by ensuring that high-quality, consistent teaching occurs in each and every classroom within their schools. These policy recommendations outline ways that states and districts can support principals in their work to drive student achievement through a focus on improving teacher effectiveness. For additional policy recommendations, please see <http://www.newleaders.org/impact/policy-recommendations/>.

## Define, Invest In & Support Principals As Critical To Teacher Evaluation and Development

Teacher development begins with high-quality evaluation and support systems which, when designed and implemented well, identify teachers' strengths and areas for improvement and guide ongoing professional development and support.

*States need to:*

- **Emphasize skills for improving teaching at every stage of the principal pipeline.** Principals must focus on strengthening teacher practice. All related systems should reinforce this expectation – including principal effectiveness standards, pre-service preparation, licensure, in-service support, and evaluation. For example, in-school preparation programs could be structured for principals-in-training to lead teams of teachers. Candidates should be evaluated on their leadership skills – not just textbook knowledge.
- **Invest funding in principal effectiveness.** Investing in teachers alone is not enough. Invest in the tools, training, and support needed to build a strong principal corps, particularly activities that strengthen principals' knowledge and skills around new teacher evaluation and support systems. Use flexibility in state and federal funding to focus on principal effectiveness; for example, encourage districts to spend Title II formula funds on principals.

*Districts need to:*

- **Define the principal as instructional leader and talent manager.** Rather than prioritizing degrees or years of experience, implement hiring processes that screen and assess for necessary mindsets and skills – particularly (1) instructional expertise and (2) adult management experience. Hold principals accountable for the effectiveness of their teachers (*e.g.*, through their performance evaluations) to reinforce the importance of their role as instructional leaders and talent managers.
- **Train principals to implement new teacher evaluation and support systems.** Provide training opportunities that are specific to the principal's unique role. Dropping principals into teacher-focused training or other teacher initiatives does not meet their specific needs as school leaders. Instead, differentiate training to develop and support the critical role principals play in carrying out evaluations and providing ongoing support to their staff.
- **Ensure principals have staffing authority.** Provide principals the ability to hire the right teachers for their school and promote the best teachers to leadership positions. Ensure that principals can effectively support struggling teachers, and, when needed, efficiently and fairly remove ineffective teachers. This authority enables principals to build a staff fully invested in their vision for school improvement and ensures they can create a highly effective instructional leadership teams to support teacher evaluation (*e.g.*, high-quality peer evaluations).
- **Foster communities of practice for principals.** Create opportunities for principals to learn with and from one another. For example, a principal manager can coordinate regular meetings for her network principals to problem-solve, share best practices, and visit their peers' schools to see their teacher evaluation and support strategies in action.
- **Invest funding in principal effectiveness.** Leverage Title II formula funding for investments in principal effectiveness to reinforce investments in teacher quality.

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<sup>1</sup> Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. New York, NY: Wallace Foundation; Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## Support The Creation of School-level Systems & Structures That Help Teachers Grow

More than half of teachers who leave the profession said they left due to lack of advancement opportunities.<sup>2</sup> States and districts can do more to retain these great educators by providing career pathways that expand the reach of great teachers and make the role of the principal more effective, sustainable, and attractive.

*States need to:*

- **Foster the role of teacher leader.** Remove any regulatory barriers that prevent teachers from taking on additional leadership responsibilities within their schools. For example, in some states teachers cannot observe their peers without additional credentials. This is unacceptable.
- **Convene districts to develop model career pathways and share best practices.** In partnership with districts and educators, develop model career paths that keep great teachers in the classroom while simultaneously expanding their reach as master teachers, coaches, or other types of teacher leaders. Convene districts and their practitioners so they can learn what's working in other school systems.
- **Invest funding in principal effectiveness.** Once again, encourage the use of appropriate funds to support principal effectiveness, including developing robust leadership pipelines that keep the best teachers in classrooms while providing them opportunities for genuine leadership practice and experience.

*Districts need to:*

- **Ensure the principal role is sustainable and attractive.** Help principals focus on their roles as instructional leaders and talent managers by finding ways for them to share the administrative and operational duties that are also part of the job. Encourage principals to delegate certain aspects of their job to a leadership team; for example, encourage principals to support teacher leaders in running team meetings or carrying out peer observations. This will help decrease principal burnout and will make the principalship more attractive to great teachers.
- **Create clear and easy to navigate career paths for effective teachers.** Reward effective teachers for their impact and offer opportunities to take on more responsibility within their schools. Principals can use these model paths to inform staff promotion decisions and create strategic instructional leadership teams, while strengthening school culture and increasing retention of effective employees. Career paths also ensure a strong pipeline of future school leaders who have adult management experience and instructional expertise.
- **Ensure principals have balanced autonomy, particularly around professional development.** Provide school leaders as much school level decision-making authority as possible, while also ensuring consistent practice across schools where needed. In particular, let principals use resources to implement a professional development program that reflects the unique needs of school staff, versus a cookie-cutter program that is not relevant. Ensure principals have flexibility around scheduling and budgets to support the vision and goals for the school, including implementing the PD program of their choice.
- **Foster communities of practice for principals.** Once again, create opportunities for principals to learn with and from one another. For example, a district can coordinate walk-throughs of a school that could include observing a data-driven instruction team meeting led by a teacher leader – learning how the principal designed the system and having the opportunity to see it implemented by her staff.

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<sup>2</sup> Marvel, J., Lyter, D., Peltola, P., Strizek, G., & Morton, B. (2006). Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2004–05 teacher follow-up survey. (NCES 2007–307). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.