

Policy Recommendations

Building a Culture For Success

Making Data Useful

We need principals who can create learning environments that foster success for kids and who can use data to reinforce a “growth mindset” for staff and students, helping everyone focus on improvement and believe that achievement is possible. While these are by no means the only responsibilities principals have, they are essential to delivering on the promise of a quality education for every student. The policy recommendations below focus on supporting principals in their work to create and maintain a culture of high expectations and to harness the power of data to improve student performance. For broader recommendations see <http://www.newleaders.org/impact/policy-recommendations/>.

Ensure principals are “job ready”

Make sure principals enter school prepared to set a culture of learning and high expectations for kids. Hold tight to the idea that preparation matters and take steps to assess candidate competencies before they become school leaders.

Districts need to

- **Require deep clinical practice as part of principal training:** Effective school leadership around culture and data requires authentic adult leadership practice, but many educators rise to the principal level with little practice leading other adults. Work with principal preparation programs (university-based or non-traditional) to develop meaningful clinical experiences for and assessments of aspiring principals. Ensure that these experiences provide candidates with real responsibility to move the practice of a subset of teachers, ensure common planning time to engage in instructional leadership activities (such as team unit planning and vertical alignment), allow candidates to engage in data analysis and support teachers in data-driven instruction, and provide opportunities to lead coaching activities, including observing and providing informal feedback to peers.
- **Be selective and expect the best when hiring:** When hiring principals, districts often stress graduate degrees or number of years in the system rather than the competencies and skills necessary to excel on the job. Instead, implement hiring processes that screen and assess for necessary mindsets and skills. An effective principal will use diverse student-level data to drive instructional improvement and insist on and support students in having and realizing high aspirations for themselves. Competency-based selection may include participation in simulations of realistic leadership situations that require candidates to use data, responses to instructional and leadership videos, and responses to questions designed to elicit specific experience and actions around building a culture of high expectations.

States need to

- **Focus preparation on key skills:** Require, as a part of program approval, principal preparation programs to demonstrate how they will build aspiring principals’ skills. Among these skills should be the ability to develop a culture of high achievement, track student level data to drive continuous improvement, support data driven instruction, and use disaggregated data to inform interventions. Also require programs to assess candidates’ mastery of these skills in an authentic setting before program completion.
 - **Hold prep programs to a high quality bar:** Hold all preparation programs accountable to the practices and assessments above as well as program outcomes. After a number of years running a program, require institutions to demonstrate the program’s outcomes, implementation of research-based best practices, and continuous reflection and use of data for improvement. Outcome measures, including placement rates, retention rates, district satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and impact on student outcomes can be used to differentiate the intensity and frequency of program review. How student outcome data is used may depend in part on your methodology: consider a number of factors such as outcome measures for high schools, longitudinal data, and the ability to control for prior student achievement. (For additional information see: <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/change-agents/>)
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Set high expectations for college readiness and instructional rigor

Ensure all schools start with a clear message of high-achievement for students by instituting rigorous, career- and college-ready standards of learning. Match these expectations by requiring similarly high standards for instruction.

Districts need to

- **Set rigorous goals for all schools:** Create a high quality district strategic plan that identifies clear and ambitious goals as well as aligned strategies and resources. Begin the strategic planning process by setting clear and rigorous goals for improving overall student achievement and for ensuring that every subgroup is achieving at high levels. Without a clear mandate from the district for improved performance that closes achievement gaps and prepares all students for college and career success, it becomes more difficult for principals to establish a culture of high expectations at the school-level.
- **Train Principals on Common Core:** Many states and districts have focused nearly exclusively on introducing teachers to the new standards and assessments but principals need new skills too. Principals need to be able to help teachers design assessments aligned to the new standards, engage in planning sessions around curriculum, match resources to the work at hand, and observe teachers on their instructional practice. Provide professional development to principals to develop them as leaders for Common Core – not just sharing the same content that is provided to teachers around the new Common Core standards.
- **Let principals build their teams:** Trust prepared and supported principals to use their skills to assess and select teachers on their beliefs, alignment to a culture of high expectations, and comfort using data, and who budget time and resources in a flexible way that is responsive to the needs of the students.
- **Know how to support principals (and who needs it):** Use a high-quality evaluation system to identify the strong skill sets of principals and the areas where they may benefit from additional support. Assess their abilities to use data and to set a culture of high expectation. (For an open-source example see: <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/principal-evaluation-handbook/>)

States need to

- **Expect great things from students:** Adopt rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments for students. Expect that every student can achieve great things and establish standards accordingly. Communicate these standards and assessments in clear and consistent ways and provide sustained and quality professional development for principals to help their school transition to the new standards.
- **Be clear about what effective leadership looks like:** Require a robust vision of school leadership by adopting standards for effective principals. Include a standard that captures the actions a principal takes to create a vision of high achievement supported by a culture of high expectations and family engagement. Too many states currently do not raise up culture as a standard and therefore lose the strong message that setting a culture of high expectations is a crucial skill for an effective principal.

Provide principals the tools to succeed

Finally, equip principals with the tools and resources they need to be successful. This means providing quality data in a timely and easy to use way.

Districts need to

- **Be quick with quality data:** Provide high-quality interim assessments of students that align to college- and career-ready standards that occur four to five times a year. Ensure that the results of these interim assessments are quickly communicated to principals for timely use in schools.
- **Invent the wheel once:** Build easy to use reports for all principals that give them the tools they need to effectively use data. This includes on-track to graduation and persistence data reports for high school principals and data systems that support data driven instruction and tracking progress toward school goals.

States need to

- **Capture economies of scale:** Recognize that not all districts can invest similar levels of resources in developing evaluation systems, data systems, assessments, and other tools. Build models and open-source tools for every district and principal to use.
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