



OUR TAKE

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The Wallace Foundation lights the way to better principal learning

Iwonder how many of you remember your elementary, middle, or high school building principal. I really don't remember much about mine. A principal, I remember thinking, was someone you only saw when you were in trouble. The principal's job was to keep order, fix problems before they got out of hand, do paperwork, and speak at events like Spirit Day and graduation. I had no idea what else principals could be doing.

Twelve years after shaking my principal's hand at my high school graduation, I stepped into my own principalship. After sitting in a principal's seat and studying leadership further, I have a much deeper understanding of the importance of the building principal. I now understand that, although individual teachers play the primary role in supporting learning at the classroom level, it's the building principal who can create the conditions that enable every child in a school to experience great teaching and learning every day. As Manna (2015) states, principals are "multipliers" of effective teaching.

This link between leader effectiveness and outcomes for students has been well documented in the research. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) concluded that principals are second only to classroom teachers among all school-related factors that contribute to results for students. This effect, according to Leithwood, is even more pronounced in schools that are considered high needs. Clearly, effective principals can make a huge difference in

children's lives.

This fact underscores the important work being done within The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline and Principal Supervisor Initiatives, which together support 14 districts seeking to ensure every school has a quality building principal.

In the Principal Pipeline Initiative, each of the six districts is reaching clarity on the kinds of leadership behaviors it considers highly effective. Each district is also developing structures to identify potential leaders. These districts are developing relationships with preservice institutions to ensure their programs are aligned to district needs.

Additionally, how principals are selected for positions, inducted into those positions, and supported the first few years on the job is being meticulously structured. Evaluation structures in these districts are tied to the agreed-upon leadership standards and linked to professional learning systems that are based on a cycle of continuous improvement.

The Principal Supervisor Initiative pushes districts even further to consider the work of those who support building principals. Often called a principal supervisor, these individuals have titles that range from area or associate superintendent to director or superintendent. The work they do to help principals grow into

effective instructional leaders is critically important.

The theme of The Wallace Foundation's initiatives and this issue of *The Learning Professional* is that leadership practice, development, and support cannot be left to chance. We must work together to support leaders

who demonstrate an absolute focus on creating the conditions that enable excellent teaching and learning every day for every single

child in their schools. These principals will model what Learning Forward calls "learning leaders for learning schools." As you read their stories and see their examples, I encourage you to reflect on what it takes to find, develop, and support these types of principals.

Effective principals can make a huge difference in children's lives.

REFERENCES

Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

Manna, P. (2015). *Developing excellent school principals to advance teaching and learning: Considerations for state policy*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

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