

# **PLAYMAKERS: HOW GREAT PRINCIPALS BUILD AND LEAD GREAT TEAMS OF TEACHERS**

**NOVEMBER 2012**

## About New Leaders

---

New Leaders has seen first-hand the impact of strong principals in multiple, diverse communities. Over 12 years, New Leaders has prepared more than 900 school leaders in 12 urban areas across the country. Students in New Leader schools tend to achieve at higher levels than their peers and tend to have higher high school graduation rates; some of our principals have transformed high-poverty, under-performing schools into environments where teachers and kids can be their best. New Leaders are making measurable progress in closing the achievement gap.

We use the data and insights gained from our experience training principals and conducting research in high-gaining schools—combined with independent evaluations of our program—to improve our leadership development model and to inform the policy recommendations we make to the field.

## Contact Us

---

30 West 26th Street, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10010

[www.newleaders.org](http://www.newleaders.org)  
[info@newleaders.org](mailto:info@newleaders.org)  
646-792-1070

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals across New Leaders made significant contributions to the creation this report. Gina Ikemoto led the analysis and writing for the report, with significant writing contributions from Lori Taliaferro and Erica Adams. The report is based on two research projects, including the Urban Excellence Framework research led by Lori Taliaferro and the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) case studies led by the EPIC team. Veronica Woolley and Lori Taliaferro conducted analyses of data for the report, Rebecca Litt and Kay Moffett contributed to framing and organization, and Amy Norskog contributed layout and design. The report could not have been completed without significant support, input and feedback from Ben Fenton, Stephanie Morimoto and Jackie Gran, who offered valuable input at various stages of the study and report writing.

We acknowledge the important input received from our formal reviewers, Susan Moore Johnson (Harvard University) and Joseph Murphy (Vanderbilt University), who provided thoughtful and insightful reviews that led us to re-shape some of our findings and to clarify our methods and recommendations. We are also grateful for the candid feedback that we received from Kerri Briggs (George W. Bush Institute), Josh Edelman (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Ed Fuller (Penn State University), Tabitha Grossman (National Governors Association), Ed Pauly and Jody Spiro (The Wallace Foundation), Dan Weisberg (The New Teacher Project) and Courtney Welsh (New York City Leadership Academy). Their thoughtful comments led to important improvements in the framing and policy recommendations.

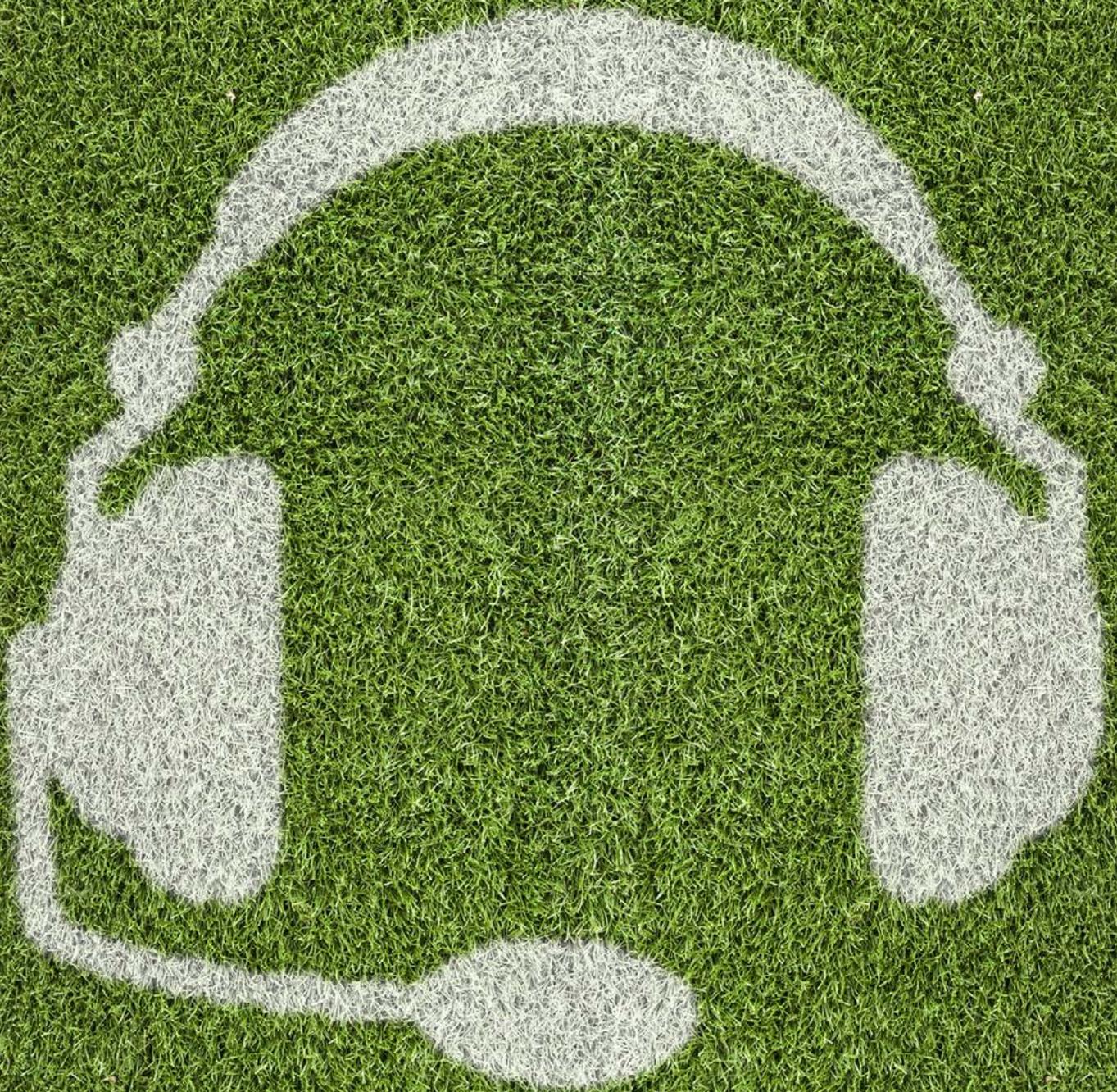
Finally, we deeply appreciate the principals, teachers, school leaders and other staff members who participated in interviews and shared their valuable time and insights with us.

# **PLAYMAKERS:** **HOW GREAT PRINCIPALS BUILD AND LEAD GREAT TEAMS OF TEACHERS**

**BY GINA IKEMOTO, LORI TALIAFERRO, AND ERICA ADAMS**

Leadership on the field: The difference a principal can make .....	4
The playbook: Three types of plays that principals made to amplify great teaching .....	8
Championship coaches: What principals of the most successful schools did differently .....	32
Rules of the game: Policy recommendations that invest resources, time and attention in principals.....	38
Appendix A: Review of research .....	44
Appendix B: Methodology .....	47
Appendix C: Summary table of leadership actions that amplify teacher effectiveness .....	51
Bibliography .....	52

**LEADERSHIP ON THE FIELD:  
THE DIFFERENCE A  
PRINCIPAL CAN MAKE**



**“It’s getting the best out of people.”**

**Tom Landry, legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys**

Iconic coaches are remembered for their ability to take talented individuals and bring them together into a well-oiled team with relentless drive to succeed. Don Shula demanded perfection, Vince Lombardi exemplified determination and Tom Landry stayed flexible. Great coaches invest time and resources in training the talent on the team, make smart choices about where and when to play their skill-players and instill a drive to win. You can’t have a championship team without a gifted coach because teams need leaders.

So do schools.

It is not surprising that a decade of research supports principals’ critical role in shaping the quality of teaching and learning at the school level.<sup>1</sup> On average, a principal accounts for 25 percent of a school’s total impact on student achievement—significant for a single individual. Indeed, the difference between an average and an above-average principal can impact student achievement by as much as 20 percentage points.<sup>2</sup> The influence of an individual principal can be quite substantial,<sup>3</sup> especially in low-performing schools, where improvement does not occur without strong leadership.<sup>4</sup>

Although principals can impact student achievement directly, they typically have a more indirect impact by influencing school practices and culture. Recently, research has suggested that the primary way principals’ impact student achievement is by improving teacher effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> There has been much debate in the research over whether principals improve teacher effectiveness through management decisions, workplace satisfaction or direct efforts to improve instruction. A long tradition of research on instructional leadership argues that schools effective in improving student achievement have principals who focus on curriculum and instruction.<sup>6</sup> More recent research has found that principals have a substantial effect on student achievement by structuring how teachers work together to promote each other’s learning.<sup>7</sup> Another line of research suggests that the primary means through which principals improve student achievement is through hiring, evaluating and removing teachers.<sup>8</sup> Yet another argues that principals have the most impact when they create a climate that improves retention of effective teachers.<sup>9</sup>

---

1 e.g., Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005. See Appendix I for a thorough review of the literature.

2 Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005.

3 Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012.

4 Bryk et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Aladjem, Birman, Orland, Harr-Robins, Heredia, Parrish & Ruffini, 2010.

5 Branch et al., 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010.

6 Fink & Resnick, 2001.

7 Supovitz et al., 2010; Louis et al. 2010.

8 Rice, 2010.

9 Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Ladd, 2009; Louis et al., 2010.

**Great principals dramatically improve student achievement by developing teachers, managing talent, and creating a great place to work.**

---

**While ineffective principals drag down the performance of their schools, effective principals enable effective teaching, at scale, across the whole school.**

No other study has examined the connection between principals and teacher effectiveness across all of these avenues thoroughly and in detail. And few have looked at how the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance varies across school types and contexts, or at the differences between leadership practices that yield incremental gains versus those that yield dramatic change. In order to make effective policy decisions, we need to understand the specific, interlocking ways that principals drive strong teaching. Equally important, we need to examine the practices that differentiated the highest-performing principals.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study addresses gaps in the research by answering the following questions:

1. What specific actions do principals of high-performing schools take to improve teacher effectiveness?
2. What distinguishes principals of high-performing schools from other principals?

To answer these research questions, we conducted an in-depth analysis of data sets from two studies conducted by New Leaders from 2007 to 2011: the Urban Excellence Framework™ (UEF) case studies and the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) case studies. Both data sets were chosen because they identify and analyze principals whose schools made better-than-average gains in student achievement. We refer to these principals across both studies as “highly-effective principals.”

The Urban Excellence Framework data set consisted of case studies made during site visits to New Leader schools. The study was originally conducted to determine what leadership and school practices distinguished schools that were obtaining dramatic gains in student achievement from schools that were obtaining incremental gains in student achievement. Dramatic gains were defined as combined gains in percent proficient in math and English language arts of 20 points or more. Incremental gains were defined as combined gains in percent proficient in math and English language arts of 3 to 10 points.

The EPIC data set consisted of case studies of New Leader and non-New Leader schools that had relatively higher value-added scores than other schools in their district or charter consortium. EPIC is a New Leaders' initiative that identifies schools that made the most impressive gains and rewards those school leaders and teachers for sharing the practices that led to the gains. For both studies, researchers conducted site visits and interviews, then coded the information they collected according to New Leaders' Urban Excellence Framework, which outlines the leadership and school practices that drive dramatic gains in student achievement. This Framework includes the entire range of leadership practices, but for the purposes of this study, we focused only on those actions that related to teacher effectiveness. The framework and additional information on the UEF and EPIC studies can be found in Appendix B.

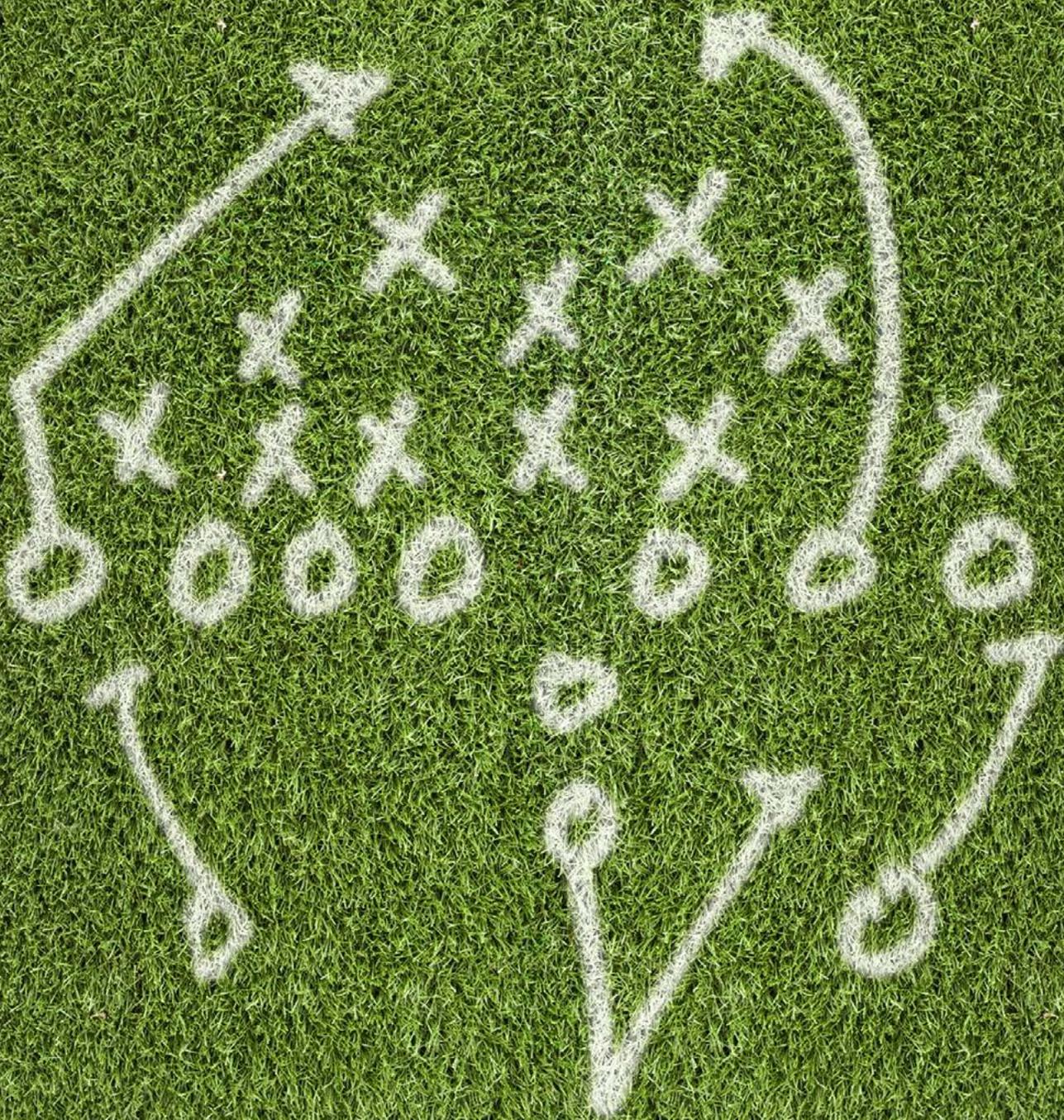
We defined the UEF principals who led dramatic gains and the EPIC principals as “highly-effective” or “great” principals because respondents in these schools attributed their gains at least in part to strong leadership from the principal. In order to form a clearer picture of the specific ways these highly-effective principals influence teaching, we re-examined the case study examples that had been coded as related to teacher effectiveness according to the UEF framework. As we attempted to organize specific actions from the case studies into categories that were based on the literature review (Developing teachers, Managing talent and Creating a great place to work), we realized that many of the examples served multiple purposes. This led us to organize our findings around the interlocking Venn diagram. We also created matrices to examine patterns across different types of schools. The methodology is discussed in further detail in Appendix B.

---

<sup>10</sup> New Leaders, 2009, 2011. The framework is available at <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/uef/>

<sup>11</sup> Miles & Huberman, 1994.

# **THE PLAYBOOK: THREE TYPES OF PLAYS THAT PRINCIPALS MADE TO AMPLIFY GREAT TEACHING**



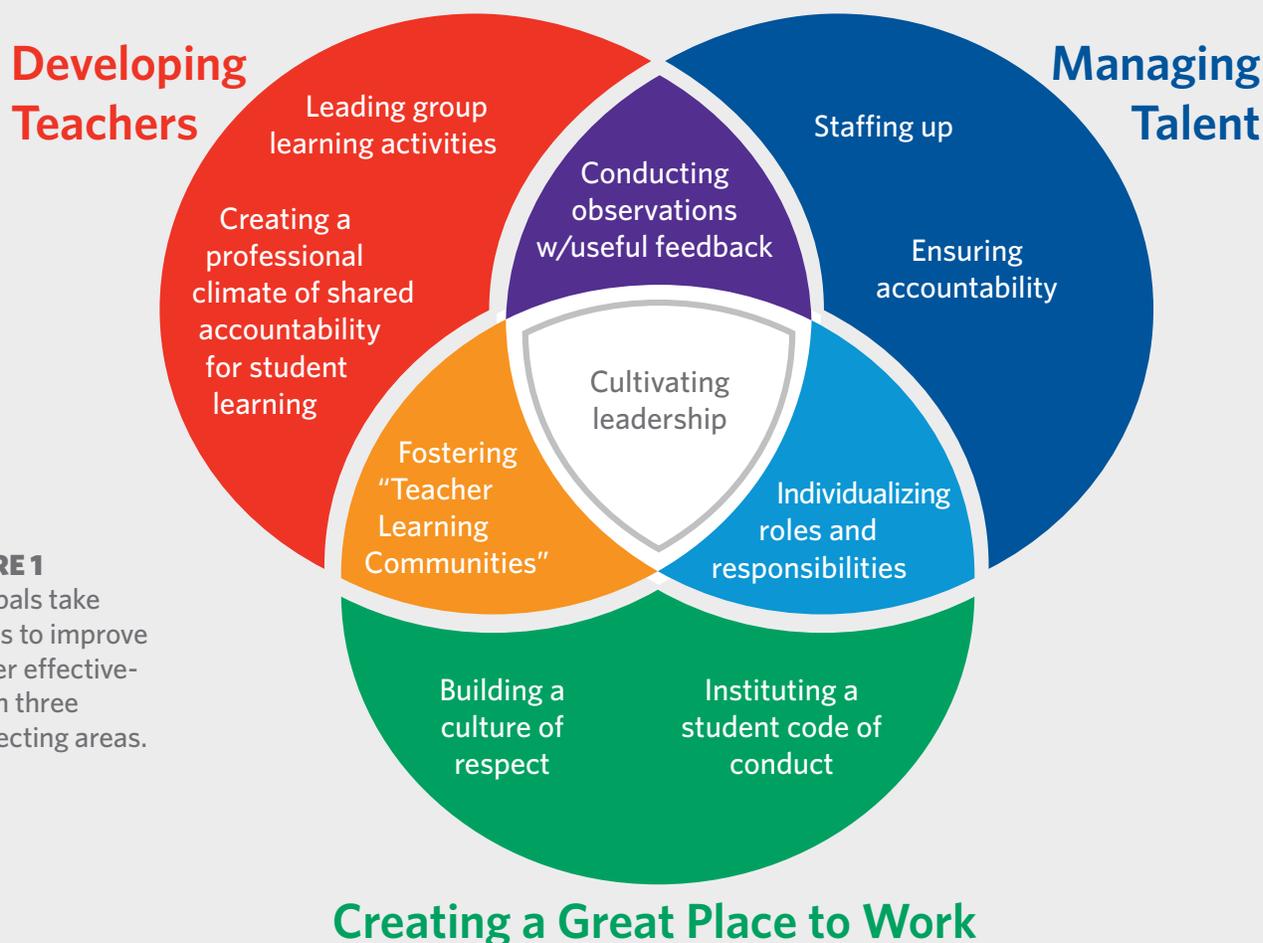
## Great principals amplified great teaching by working in three intersecting areas:

1. **Developing teachers.**
2. **Managing talent.**
3. **Creating a great place to work.**

In the following sections, we discuss in detail the numerous and specific ways the principals in our study pursued each of these goals, including the ways in which some actions served multiple purposes at once (Figure 1). Strong principals seamlessly integrated their work to develop teachers with their work to manage talent and create a great place to work. We found that principals who led the highest gaining schools focused on at least one action in each of the three areas. They didn't merely

go through the motions of developing teachers, managing staff and creating a great place to work. They executed their strategies for improving the quality of teaching in their schools with quality and intensity, while also customizing their approach to fit the context of the school.

This finding—that the highest gaining schools had principals who were explicitly committed to pursuing great teaching in all three areas—has important policy implications. For the sake



**FIGURE 1**  
Principals take actions to improve teacher effectiveness in three intersecting areas.

of narration, we will first describe the actions the principals in our study undertook in each of these three areas, painting a vivid picture of the well-documented claim that principals do indeed have an impact on teaching. We hope the detail contained in this section, “The Playbook: Three Types of Plays that Great Principals Made to Amplify Great Teaching”, will help policymakers understand all the types of actions principals took in the three areas to influence teaching in their schools. Later, in the section called, “Championship Coaches: What Principals of the Most Successful Schools Did Differently,” we go into more specifics regarding how the most successful principals strategically utilized the playbook to maximize results by simultaneously attending to each section of the playbook while also calling the right plays at the right time and executing them flawlessly.

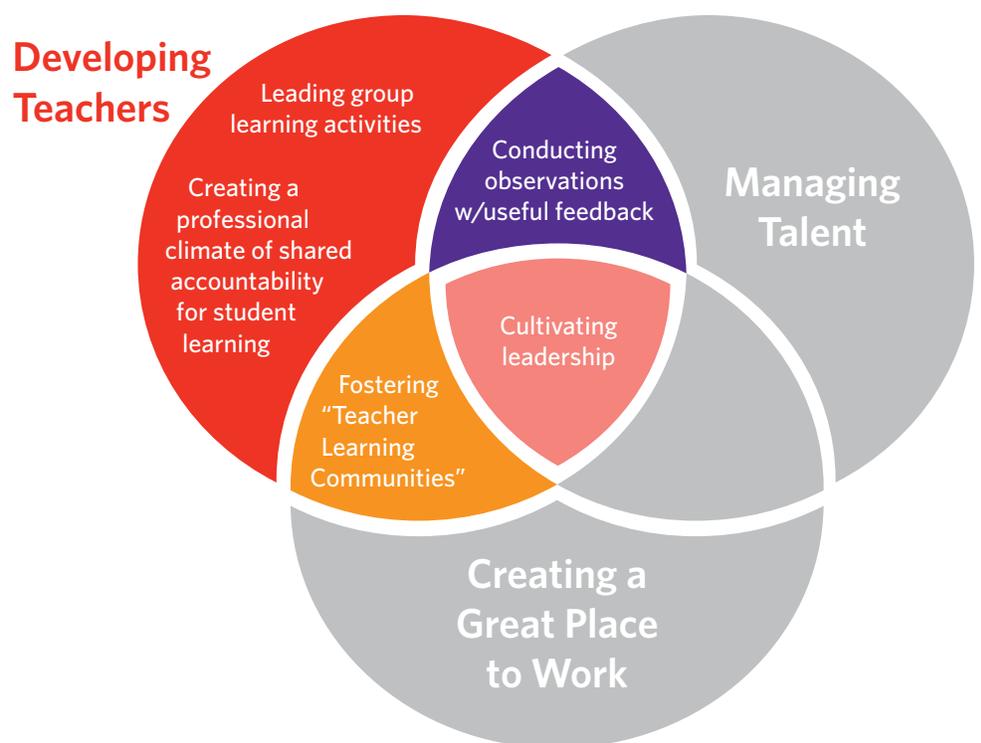
In this section, we begin by defining the leadership actions in each area. Actions in the area of developing staff—such as leading professional development, conducting frequent observations and inspiring teachers to believe that all students can succeed at high levels—were aimed at improving the knowledge, skills and beliefs of teachers. Actions in the area of managing talent—such as recruiting, selecting, hiring and placing staff—were aimed at obtaining the best possible teaching staff as well as defining roles and responsibilities to maximize results. Actions in the area of creating a great place to work—such as building a supportive culture of respect and instituting a student code of conduct—were aimed at fostering a workplace where teachers wanted to stay and grow. Leadership actions (such as observation and useful feedback) that served multiple areas are discussed in each area they serve.

# Developing Teachers

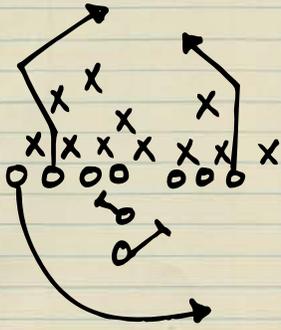
Highly-effective principals worked explicitly to improve instruction in the classroom in the form of conducting observations and giving feedback, leading professional development sessions, leading data-driven instruction teams and insisting on high expectations for all students.

Most principals viewed developing teachers as one of their primary responsibilities. The highly-effective principals in our study understood that developing staff capacity means both hands-on skill building as well as nurturing independence and career growth. Highly-effective principals worked explicitly to improve instruction in the classroom in the form of conducting observations and giving feedback, leading professional development sessions, leading data-driven instruction teams and insisting on high expectations for all students. The principals also provided ways for teachers to continuously grow in their careers: they arranged opportunities for staff to learn from one another and they delegated leadership roles.

When developing teachers, principals consistently performed the following actions:



Each of these activities are important, but several pay dividends beyond just developing teachers; they also help principals manage talent and build a great place to work. In this section, we talk specifically about how these actions served to improve the quality of classroom instruction. It is hard to imagine, for instance, instruction improving in every classroom without a knowledgeable principal willing to engage every teacher in targeted, hands-on instructional support.



### **Providing teachers with precise, actionable feedback on a regular basis**

---

When Principal Michelle Pierre-Farid started at Tyler Elementary School in Washington, D.C., she spent a significant portion of each day observing classrooms to understand the current practices of her teachers and to support their ongoing development and growth. When delivering feedback, Pierre-Farid identified specific aspects of instruction for each teacher to work on, such as the appropriate use of learning centers. She intentionally gave concrete feedback to each teacher so that they were able to improve a specific classroom practice or instructional strategy. For teachers who needed additional supports, she also directed staff to a colleague's classroom to see specific elements of good instruction in action.

### **CONDUCTING OBSERVATIONS WITH USEFUL FEEDBACK**



Highly-effective principals excelled at giving teachers feedback throughout the year—and not only as part of the formal evaluation process. They made it their mission to know how every member of the staff was performing and delivered feedback in a way that gave their staff clear direction and guidance on how to improve. In many schools where the previous principal had not provided feedback on a regular basis, great principals

built a professional culture that established new norms for how principals and teachers interacted that emphasized observation for the purposes of professional growth rather than monitoring and compliance. Great principals also had to find ways to de-prioritize other work to make time for observation and feedback. In secondary schools with large numbers of teachers, strong principals trained and involved their leadership team in carrying out the observation and feedback process.

### **Providing teachers with precise, actionable feedback on a regular basis.**

Highly-effective principals visited teachers' classrooms to observe instruction and provide feedback at least once per month. While the nature of the observations varied from walk-throughs lasting only a few minutes to observations of entire lessons, the key ingredient for successful classroom observations was the follow up. High-performing principals gave specific, timely and actionable feedback that teachers could use immediately to improve their practice. Then, they followed up consistently throughout the year. Great principals returned regularly to observe teachers' efforts to incorporate feedback and they provided additional feedback to continuously respond to evolving skills. They also helped teachers to identify other resources to support growth areas, for example, by recommending that teachers attend particular professional development workshops or observe other teachers who were particularly strong in the growth area.

## LEADING GROUP- LEARNING ACTIVITIES



In addition to individually coaching their staff, effective principals also identified team- and school-wide needs for improvement and ensured that their teachers received training and professional development that would enable them to succeed.

### **Leading professional development.**

Highly-effective principals used professional development days strategically. Even when principals did not directly facilitate the day, strong principals were deeply involved in planning the content and ensuring that it linked to other school-wide initiatives. In many cases, they were also very involved in running the sessions. Their involvement was critical because they organized sessions in response to the needs they had witnessed in their ongoing observations and followed up on the covered concepts in subsequent observations.

### **Leading data-driven instruction teams.**

Extensive research has documented the positive impact of data-driven instruction (DDI), in which teachers carefully analyze students' interim achievement results to diagnose individual, group and classroom level needs and plan instruction accordingly.<sup>12</sup> At the time of these site visits, DDI was a relatively new concept and many principals found that teachers were not comfortable or skilled in the practice. We found that great principals were almost always hands-on in leading DDI, particularly during their first year or two in the school. In several cases, principals later delegated leadership for this process to others, but only after they felt comfortable that teachers understood the process, had expertise in data analysis and felt ownership of it.

## Leading professional development

All new and returning teachers at Higgs, Carter, King Gifted and Talented Charter School in San Antonio, TX participated in approximately 15 days of professional development each August. Principal Claudette Yarbrough set the agenda and led much of the training herself. The focus was on school-wide routines for organizing and planning lessons and on classroom management of students. Throughout the training, Yarbrough employed techniques and activities that she expected teachers to employ in the classroom with their students. Said Yarbrough, "In the school's first several years, I didn't lead the summer training. I just planned it. But I saw that many teachers still didn't know what was expected of them after the training. There had been too much telling and explaining during the training sessions and not enough good teaching. Teachers had been told what to do, but not shown how to do it. My goal now is to model the kind of teaching we expect to see in our classrooms." Yarbrough said that because she was personally involved, she could, "make sure that the teachers know what I expect them to know. I know what gets said in the training and what we train on, so I can hold people accountable. The lesson I've learned is that I've got to be there. I can't delegate this to someone else. It is important for me, as the principal, to know what is going on and to take responsibility for making sure it's done right."

<sup>12</sup> Black & William, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004

## Leading data-driven instruction teams

When Debra Fox-Stanford became principal at Hamilton Elementary School, she discovered that teachers were assessing their students using tests from commercial textbooks that didn't necessarily align with the skills they were teaching week to week. Fox-Stanford realized that this disconnect meant that the teachers did not have an accurate picture of student progress. To give teachers' more useful tools for determining whether students were learning the skills they're taught, she implemented a cycle of assessment. She led grade-level teams in the creation of common, short, multiple-choice tests each week and taught them to use these aligned results to accurately assess student progress and to identify students for small-group instruction. Using this data, grade-level teams at Hamilton assessed specific skills and used the results to plan re-teaching. Said Fox-Stanford, "Hamilton's state test scores improved some in spring 2008, after we'd begun using common weekly assessments. Scores went up even more in 2009. By then, teachers really owned the process. The first year, they started doing it because I asked them to. Then they saw a little increase and started seeing their kids showing some improvements." By the second year, teachers had seen the power of using more accurate assessments and began to lead data analysis within their teams. Through the intensive support in her first year, Fox-Stanford built the capacity and skill of her teacher teams.

### FOSTERING TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITIES



Exceptional principals built and maintained Teacher Learning Communities in which teachers problem-solved together, provided each other with feedback and built a sense of community along the way. Highly-effective principals made consistent time in the day for collaboration, and they developed norms and protocols that focused peer observations, feedback and planning meetings on improving student outcomes. Often, principals were heavily involved in setting up Teacher Learning Communities, but then encouraged teachers to take more leadership of learning community activities to enable more peer-to-peer interaction.

The examples below are components of Teacher Learning Communities. Either executed separately or as part of a more comprehensive Teacher Learning Community, these actions served to develop and support teachers. However, true Teacher Learning Communities also built a sense of shared identity among teachers. We later discuss the other components of Teacher Learning Communities in "Creating a great place to work."

#### Providing time, protocols and an instructional focus to structure team meetings.

Great principals made it possible for grade-level or subject area teachers to meet at a common time during the school day by finding other coverage for students. During team meetings, teachers provided input and feedback on each other's lesson plans, used data to inform planning, worked together to troubleshoot and conducted systematic, transparent examinations of student work. Principals offered guidance for how best to use this time to make a direct impact on instruction. They established protocols to guide group critiques of classroom practices, analyses of student learning across grade levels and across the curriculum and conversations about expectations, teaching and re-teaching. In addition to being a forum for planning instruction and interventions, the meetings were an opportunity for job-embedded, peer-centered professional development.

### Providing time and protocols to structure peer observation and feedback.

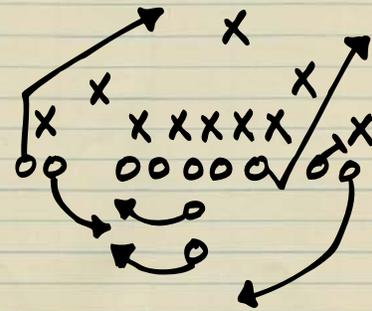
Successful principals encouraged teachers to observe each other's practice and provide each other with feedback. Such peer observation allows veteran teachers to counsel novices, novices to observe good teaching and all teachers to share tips and best practices. Principals made peer observation possible by arranging for substitutes so that teachers could observe a colleague at work and by creatively using video technology. They also frequently provided standard protocols for conducting peer observations and giving feedback, and they made sure teachers felt safe to admit mistakes and receive feedback from their peers.

#### Providing time, protocols and an instructional focus to structure team meetings

Principal Tatiana Epanchin-Troyan of Monarch Academy in Oakland, California established a system for grade-level team meetings that facilitate meaningful collaboration within her teacher teams. She realized that having the teams analyze their data together set a collegial and supportive environment where teachers could look to their peers for ideas on how to teach content. Their grade level meetings, called Data Talks, are structured conversations during which teachers work together to analyze students' formative and interim assessment data to track mastery of content and skills.

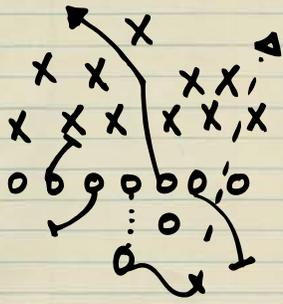
To support high quality conversations that are driven by data, Principal Epanchin-Troyan developed and shared a common set of protocols for analyzing student data and targeting instruction based on the findings. During the Data Talks, teachers are expected to offer each other support in analyzing the data to determine where the weaknesses are and to give advice on developing strategies to address those needs. They also use this time to give feedback from peer observations.

To create time within the school day for regular Data Talks to occur, Principal Epanchin-Troyan hired art, music, P.E. teachers and a librarian to supervise students while classroom teachers met in grade-level teams.



#### Providing time and protocols to structure peer observation and feedback

Eileen Callahan, the Dean of Curriculum at Boston Collegiate Charter School in Boston, MA, wanted to give extra support to new teachers in their first year by giving them opportunities to learn through observation. She established a weekly session where new teachers took turns presenting videos of their teaching. The presenting teacher would complete a written reflection assessing the lesson before the presentation and would debrief the lesson with Callahan during her weekly one-on-one meeting to choose a particular area for peer feedback. In the weekly session, observing teachers would watch a video clip of the lesson and ask clarifying questions, offer areas of strength and specific suggestions for improvement. These questions provided guidance to Callahan in her support of the observing teachers, while also giving first-year teachers many opportunities to see teaching in action and to analyze what works.



### **Raising expectations**

At Clara Barton School, a historically low-performing, 800-pupil PreK-8 school in Chicago, Principal Terry Carter was able to boost confidence and demonstrate that high levels of student achievement were possible and attainable by showing skeptical staff members' videos of schools with similar students that had succeeded. This challenged the teacher's perception of the students and helped to inspire a sense of possibility and hope within Clara Barton.

### **Improving cultural competency**

Principal Jennifer Garcia at Aspire Centennial College Preparatory Academy in Los Angeles, California delivered ongoing professional development based on a book by Angela Valenzuela called *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. She used the case study examined in the book as an entry point to increase self-reflection and cultural competency among staff members. Garcia used the book to expand and explore teacher's perceptions and beliefs while connecting the study to their work in the school.

## **CREATING A PROFESSIONAL CLIMATE OF SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT LEARNING**



Highly-effective principals rallied their staffs around a vision of success for all students and created a professional climate of shared accountability for that vision by setting targets and challenging any beliefs or behaviors that ran counter to this view.

### **Raising expectations.**

Great principals inspired teachers to believe in the ability of all students to achieve at high levels. The highly-effective principals in our study worked explicitly and relentlessly to raise teachers' expectations of all their students. In the face of negative expectations, they offered proof that ambitious goals were indeed within reach. They asked teachers to compare their student achievement data to schools with similar demographics and they arranged opportunities for teachers to visit schools where students with similar backgrounds were achieving at high levels. They were relentless in ensuring that all groups of students were improving and being held to high standards, and they did not settle for proficiency, but pushed to move students to score at advanced levels.

### **Setting targets.**

We found that highly-effective principals created a professional climate of shared accountability by setting specific school-wide student achievement targets. For example, in the previous example, Principal Terry Carter insisted that the school would reach a 70 percent proficiency rate within a few years. These targets established shared expectations for what was possible and expected as well as shared ownership for achieving the targets.

### **Improving cultural competency.**

In some cases, the work of raising expectations involved developing the cultural competency among staff to understand and address issues of culture, race and class to ensure that these are understood as assets, not barriers, to success. This strategy was particularly important in schools where the faculty was largely white and middle-class and the students were largely students of color from lower-income families. Great principals folded cultural competency lessons into professional development sessions, using books, case studies and self-reflection to challenge entrenched beliefs. They also questioned the cultural biases of individual teachers in explicit, one-on-one conversations when they saw evidence of low expectations.

## CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP



Because great principals recognized that they couldn't do it alone, they cultivated staff leadership skills and encouraged professional growth. As described below, principals utilized formal and informal strategies for cultivating leadership. Distributing and cultivating leadership proved to be essential to all three ways

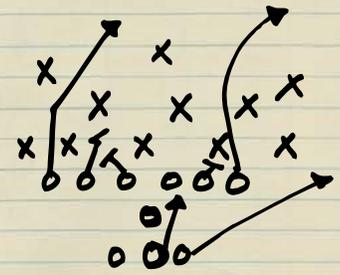
that principals ensured consistently strong teaching across a school. In this section, we focus on how principals gave teachers the tools to nurture new skill sets. In later sections, we discuss how principals used distributive leadership to manage talent and create a great place to work.

### **Cultivating leadership skills early and often.**

Great principals encouraged staff to practice leadership skills, providing many opportunities for teachers to be in charge of school-wide projects, even early in a teacher's career. As early as during hiring conversations, these principals identified future leaders. They encouraged all members of a teaching team to practice small acts of leadership, such as running individual meetings. They distributed larger leadership roles to teachers who had demonstrated success in the classroom and were ready to take on more responsibility. Perhaps most importantly, principals encouraged teachers to mentor other teachers. Peer mentoring improves teacher capacity at two levels: the mentors gain new leadership skills and novices learn how to be better teachers.

### **Mentoring school leaders.**

Just as great principals coach teachers to improve their instructional skills, great principals also coached their instructional leadership team (such as assistant principals, school-based coaches, department chairs and team leads) to improve their leadership skills. For example, highly-effective principals regularly provided team members with feedback on how they ran meetings, led professional development and/or coached teachers. Some principals in our sample served as official mentors for aspiring principals and worked closely with these candidates to provide them with opportunities to practice and receive feedback on leadership skills.



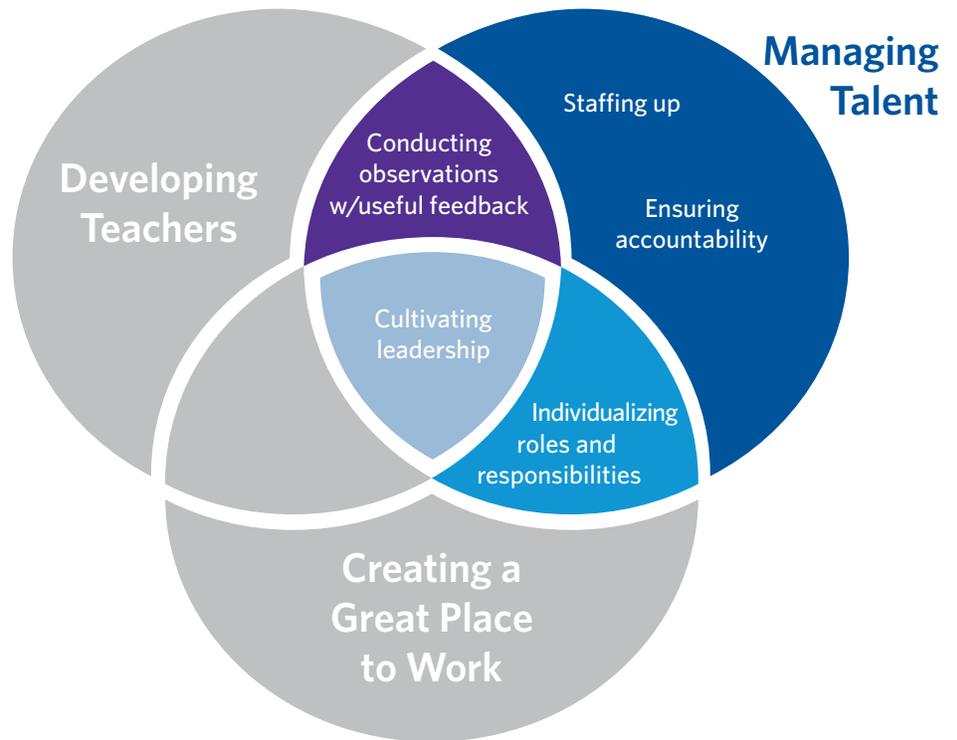
### **Cultivating leadership skills early and often**

At Barnard Elementary School in Washington, D.C., Principal Grace Reid gave teachers leading roles in staff development. She encouraged teacher-led presentations during staff development time. She also asked veteran teachers to mentor new teachers and set goals for their development. Reid said that the mentoring relationship provided new teachers with support as they became acclimated and fostered collaboration among all teachers. It also provided opportunities for veteran teachers to practice and build their instructional and leadership skills.

# Managing Talent

Highly-effective principals worked hard to hire effective teachers, match staff strengths with school needs, and hold teachers accountable.

Principals had the vital responsibility of making human capital decisions that influenced the quality of teaching in their schools. Great principals recognized this as a tremendous opportunity to match skilled teachers with roles and responsibilities that fit the needs of students and the school. For them, managing staff was a chess match with a big pay-off: maximizing the talent within the school to see better results for kids. We identified five actions that high-performing principals took to make sure they had the right people in the right roles:



Highly-effective principals worked hard and deliberately to recruit and hire effective teachers. Once in the door, they thought carefully about how to define the roles and responsibilities of individual teachers to match staff strengths with school needs. Then, they held teachers accountable for meeting high expectations and improving on identified weaknesses. They set clear goals for dramatically increasing student learning, and they focused the majority of their time and effort on monitoring teachers to hold them accountable for reaching those goals.

## STAFFING UP



Successful principals set clear guidelines for what defined a great teacher candidate and they vigorously recruited the best teachers for the job, even outside of hiring season.

### **Defining the selection criteria.**

Great principals set the bar high when defining the characteristics they sought in applicants. Primarily, they sought out candidates who demonstrated content knowledge and core pedagogical skills. They also sought applicants who had the right attitude: a deep commitment to the belief that every student is capable of academic success, dedication to improving student learning and a genuine connection to, and interest in, students. Finally, they sought personal attributes—such as a willingness to constantly learn and improve, a capacity for teamwork and leadership and cultural sensitivity. More specifically, highly-effective principals sought teachers who were a good fit for the school’s particular culture and instructional approach. Where possible, principals wanted a demonstrated track record of measurable growth in student achievement. Even as early as the hiring process, they were looking for teachers who exhibited potential to develop into future leaders.

### **Recruiting the right candidates.**

With such selective criteria, finding teachers who are up to the task required consistent effort on the part of principals to find the right people. Highly-effective principals tapped their own professional networks to search for candidates and extended their recruiting efforts to surrounding districts, local nonprofits and alternative certification programs.

### **Recruiting early.**

Highly-effective principals make a point of recruiting year-round, whether or not they have immediate openings. Even in rapidly improving schools, teacher turnover in urban districts often remains high and district hiring practices can be inefficient and complicated. Therefore, the principals in our study reported that it was imperative for them to develop their own pipeline of quality candidates who had the potential to meet all of the selection criteria.

### **Hiring the best applicants.**

Highly-effective principals rigorously screened candidates and selected the ones who had the most potential to increase student achievement while also meshing well with the culture of the school. They led an intensive process that included perspectives and input from school leaders, teachers and community members. The selection process typically involved an application; interviews with the principal and leadership team members; demonstration lessons with teachers, students and sometimes even families; and opportunities for candidates to receive constructive feedback and reflect on their own learning and professional growth.



### **Recruiting the right candidates**

Terrence Carter, the principal of Clara Barton Elementary School in Chicago, IL, remarked that finding the perfect candidate is, “literally like looking for a needle in a haystack.” Clara Barton is situated in a traditional school district, but Carter said he recruited far beyond the district pool. He maintained close ties with local alternative certification programs that required yearlong residencies and produced candidates who, he said, have been trained to diagnose and address students’ needs.

### **Recruiting early**

One of the highest priorities for the leadership team at E. L. Haynes Public Charter School, a charter school in Washington, D.C., was recruiting and hiring the right faculty. As Eric Westendorf, the school’s chief academic officer, pointed out, “We know that when we get it right, it makes a big difference for kids, and when we get it wrong, it takes up a lot of time trying to address the problem.” The E. L. Haynes leadership team began their recruitment and hiring cycle each January with a meeting to assess their staffing needs and review the effectiveness of the previous year’s recruitment and hiring practices. Based on this assessment, the team set priorities and revised or refined its processes and tools as needed.

### **Hiring the best applicants**

Principal Tina Chekan, of Propel McKeesport Charter School in McKeesport, PA, employed an extensive array of rubrics and activities to assess potential hires for teaching positions. At each stage, multiple staff members assessed candidates using rubrics and scoring sheets to determine if they had the desired combination of pedagogical skills and commitment to student academic success. The principal had the final decision in who would be hired. Chekan explained, “Our goal is to be the highest achieving high-poverty school in the region. That is a goal in our Staff Success Statement, which we discuss at every staff meeting and training. But not every educator truly believes that all kids can achieve no matter their circumstances in life. We need teachers who have a ‘no excuses’ philosophy. They must have a strong work ethic and be willing to put forth extra hours for professional development...to find those teachers, we need more than a standard 15-minute interview. We need to assess the candidates on multiple dimensions.”

## INDIVIDUALIZING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



Outstanding school leaders think carefully about how to define roles and responsibilities of individual staff members in order to maximize success.

### Matching teacher strengths with student needs.

Highly-effective principals made strategic teaching assignments. They often reassigned the strongest teachers to work with the students who were struggling the most. In some cases, this meant placing teachers in different grade-level or subject teaching assignments. This required strategic vision and a soft touch.

### Creating new roles and responsibilities.

In assigning roles and responsibilities, great principals considered ways to provide opportunities for staff to practice new skills as well as responsibilities that leveraged their current strengths. Schools saw double the payout—teachers gained expertise and developed new skills, and the principal built an instructional team to support strong consistent teaching.

### Creating new roles and responsibilities

At Alice Deal Middle School in Washington, D.C., Principal Melissa Kim realized that she needed to create teacher teams that were not hierarchical. To help staff practice new roles and responsibilities, Kim created a structure where each member was assigned a specific role to strengthen and distribute teacher leadership. Members of these horizontal teams at Deal Middle School assumed one of the following roles:

**Team leader:** Facilitated meetings and provided overall team leadership.

**Communication chief:** Communicated with administrators and oversaw all parent contact for members of the team.

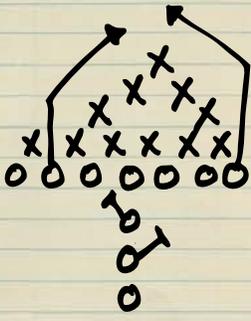
**MYP master:** Focused on curriculum issues, in particular the school's International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program.

**Data dean:** Handled data collection and analysis, as well as facilitated team discussion of "bubble" students on the verge of proficiency.

Kim had teachers rotate through all of the assigned roles over the course of the year to ensure that they were experiencing multiple functions; her goal was to engage staff while also exposing them to new and varied opportunities.

### Matching teacher strengths with student needs

When Vincent Hunter became principal of Whitehaven High School in Memphis, TN, the school was performing poorly on state tests in Algebra I. However, Hunter quickly realized that he had eight highly-effective, veteran math teachers who were teaching higher-level math courses like trigonometry. He approached them and asked them to teach lower-level classes. "When I approached these veteran teachers about teaching lower-level students, they were not completely excited about the idea. Some teachers had been in the same classroom since their first year at Whitehaven. I had to be humble in asking them to make this change for the good of the school. And I had to show support for them, by letting them still teach some upper-level courses and by allowing them to pick their own planning period. Approached this way, I saw the teachers become zealous and enthused about helping their students succeed on the state exam and about helping the school meet its AYP goals." Through approach and compromise, Hunter was able to leverage the talent within his building to support content areas that were not appropriately staffed.



### **Creating and fostering an Instructional Leadership Team**

Tatiana Epanchin-Troyan of Monarch Academy in Oakland, CA thought carefully about whom to include on her leadership team. In her words, “For my leadership team, I look for someone who definitely has the efficacy down – who really, really thinks that there’s no reason that we can’t get to 90-90-90 or that kids—all of our kids—can learn.” Epanchin-Troyan also looked for leadership team members who were reflective, “someone who gets that you’re never a perfect teacher and that there are always [areas where you can] grow and learn.” Finally, she sought out candidates who were trustworthy, both in their relationships with her and with other teachers across the school. She felt that these qualities, along with instructional expertise, were essential for leadership team members to be able to lead other adults. Once she selected highly-effective teachers to be a part of her leadership team, Epanchin-Troyan supported each team member in their new role.

### **CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP**



Managing talent means more than moving staff around like chess pieces on a board. Rather, great principals built career pathways for teachers to grow their expertise and corresponding leadership responsibilities. They created both formal and informal opportunities for teachers to practice leadership. By cultivating leadership, principals are able to extend the reach of great teachers to touch the lives of more than just a single classroom of students.

### **Creating and fostering an Instructional Leadership Team.**

Highly-effective principals almost always had a team of teachers who were jointly responsible for school-wide instructional initiatives. The members of these teams were deputies for the principal, enforcing consistent instructional practices and expectations throughout the school. These teams made important decisions about curriculum and instruction based on frequent analysis of data. Each member typically oversaw a grade-level or subject-area group of teachers, for which they facilitated instructional planning, monitored the consistency of instruction and provided individual coaching.

Principals selected team members carefully. They worked closely with the team to make sure everyone shared the same vision for the school and had the right tools to carry out their leadership responsibilities. They clearly delineated what results they expected from grade levels or content areas. In some cases, they had difficult conversations around changing the membership of the team.

## ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY



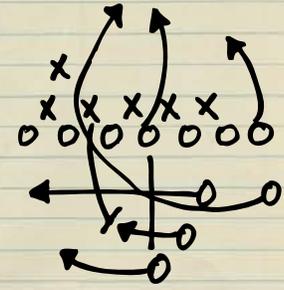
Great principals set clear performance expectations, closely supervised classroom instruction and held teachers accountable for meeting expectations. They made a dedicated effort to support teachers in reaching these goals but took corrective measures when necessary.

### **Rigorously conducting formal evaluations.**

As currently cast, the majority of state- and district- mandated teacher evaluation systems rate nearly all teachers as good or great and produce very little actionable knowledge. Highly-effective principals, by contrast, were more likely to use formal evaluation systems to differentiate strong teachers from weaker ones and to use the information gathered in the process to develop tailored improvement plans for every teacher. These principals took detailed notes during the observation process and provided teachers with specific and concrete evidence to justify their assessment. Such thorough feedback helped teachers to understand what was expected of them and to buy into a common vision of quality teaching.

### **Dismissing or counseling out underperforming teachers.**

When efforts to improve teacher performance failed, great principals were not afraid to give difficult feedback or to remove a teacher through formal processes. They did not make this decision lightly. As frequent classroom observers, they documented what they observed, continued to offer support and noted efforts to develop. Because of the principal's thoroughness, teachers who were unable or unwilling to meet expectations often decided to transition out on their own. When they didn't, highly-effective principals pursued formal dismissal from the school, and where appropriate, the system as well.



### **Rigorously conducting formal evaluations**

At E.L. Haynes Public Charter School, a pre-K-8 charter school in Washington, D.C., Jennie Niles, Michelle Molitor and Eric Westendorf used the formal teacher evaluation process as an opportunity to support teachers' professional growth. At the end of the annual evaluation meetings, teachers and supervisors created a professional growth plan for each teacher that outlined concrete actions and gave specific timelines for improving performance in a limited number of competencies. Principal Molitor said limiting the number of goals on professional growth plans increased the chances that teachers would accomplish them: "If you make a long laundry list, the likelihood is high that you won't complete any of it, because it's paralyzing to think about having that much to think about correcting. Our focus is on what's going to do the most to improve your practice and what can you actually accomplish—and that's what we're going to hold you accountable for."

## **Dismissing or counseling out underperforming teachers**

When Claudia Aguirre became the principal at Dual Language Middle School in New York City, it had been known as a “dumping ground” for low-performing students; more than 90 percent of students were living in poverty, more than 30 percent of students were English language learners and more than 25 percent were designated “special education.” It was not uncommon for some students to arrive at the school not fluent in either English or Spanish. Aguirre knew she had a limited amount of time to prepare her students for high school and quickly identified increasing teacher effectiveness as one of her primary goals. In the fall of her first year, she outlined goals and expectations for every teacher; when teachers bristled at the high expectations, she offered support and specific strategies. When teachers did not improve, she put teachers onto development plans and began to document areas of underperformance. She was transparent that teachers needed to demonstrate progress within the timeframe outlined in the plan or she would begin formal removal processes. When expectations were not met, she was consistent about writing teachers up and counseling teachers out. Following these explicit conversations, most of the identified underperforming teachers left at the end of the year of their own volition.

## **CONDUCTING OBSERVATIONS WITH USEFUL FEEDBACK**



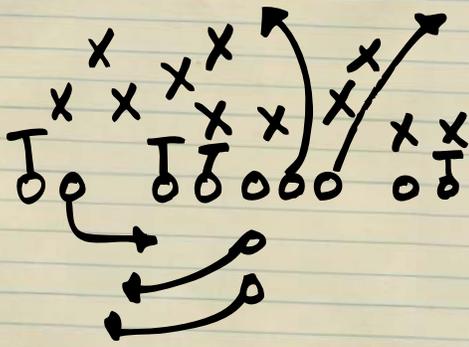
As discussed above, frequent classroom observations were a hallmark of great principals. We are addressing them separately here, instead of as part of “Monitoring performance,” because of the nuanced way highly-effective principals used informal observations to both supervise teachers and develop their capacity.

### **Ongoing monitoring of progress toward performance goals.**

Highly-effective principals set clear expectations for performance and conducted ongoing observations of classroom practice to determine whether expectations were being met. Principals monitored both school-wide and individual performance and took action accordingly. Throughout the year, they held teachers accountable for implementing strategies from professional development sessions and improving in the areas identified during the formal and informal observation processes. Struggling teachers were monitored even more closely, both to provide additional support to the teacher and to supply the principal with up-to-date information on their progress. As one teacher put it, “Since I know [the principal] will be coming to my room, I don’t let things slip the way I might otherwise. [The visits] help me stay accountable and on top of my game.” Strong principals provided difficult feedback even to strong teachers to push all teachers to continuously improve their practice.

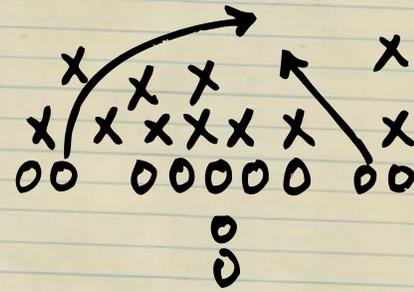
### **Ongoing assessment of individual and collective strengths and growth areas.**

Highly-effective principals used frequent classroom observations and the results of interim student assessments to develop a clear picture of the strengths and needs of every teacher in the building. By closely monitoring staff performance, principals were able to make informed decisions about assigning roles and responsibilities that matched strengths and growth areas, to identify appropriate school-wide professional development topics and to clarify expectations, if needed.



### **Ongoing assessment of individual and collective strengths and growth areas**

At A.B. Hill Elementary in Memphis, TN, led by Principal Tyrone Hobson, the principal, assistant principal and instructional facilitator conducted daily observations, using an instructional checklist to survey and improve upon the consistency of instruction. "This is a tool to help us monitor instruction," said the principal. "It gives us a quick snapshot of what's going on." Using the trends across classrooms, the leadership team was able to address gaps in instruction and areas of growth with individual teachers or in grade-level team meetings as they were observed.



### **Ongoing monitoring of progress toward performance goals**

The teacher-evaluation process at YES Prep North Central in Houston, TX, where Mark DiBella served as school director, included a formal midyear evaluation in addition to an end-of-year summative evaluation. DiBella said, "The purpose of our midyear evaluation is to ensure that we're getting a chance to focus in on student achievement data and make sure that there is a connection [to] the goals that teachers are setting instructionally...It's a way to make sure that we're having focused conversations around those two things." The midyear evaluation cycle included an announced, full-lesson observation conducted by the dean of instruction to measure each teacher's performance on aspects of the school's Instructional Excellence Rubric. Midyear observations data was cross-checked with the data collected during the 15-20 minute observations conducted throughout the first semester and followed by a post-observation conference with each teacher to review their evaluation, identify target areas for growth and brainstorm possible second-semester goals in preparation for the year-end summative evaluation meeting.

## Creating a Great Place to Work

Successful principals made sure teachers knew they were valued and fostered a strong community among colleagues. They delegated leadership and responsibility, and in doing so, gave teachers ownership over school decisions and initiatives.

Great principals shaped their schools into places where effective teachers wanted to work and stay. Successful Fortune 100 companies have long understood the need to create positive and productive environments to keep scarce talent and maximize productivity. Effective principals understood this, too, and recognized that teachers want to work in environments where they are valued, trusted and respected as individuals. They want to work with colleagues who genuinely care about their well-being and success, and they want to work in a place where they have opportunities to develop professionally. High-performing principals attracted and kept the best staff by making sure teachers felt respected and had opportunities to grow.

We found that principals directly influenced five areas of the school environment:



### Creating a Great Place to Work

Successful principals made sure teachers knew they were valued and fostered a strong community among colleagues. They delegated leadership and responsibility, and in doing so, gave teachers ownership over school decisions and initiatives. They instilled a uniform code of conduct so that teachers could focus on instruction rather than on managing behavior. In all these ways, great principals created environments that attracted effective teachers and inspired them to stay committed to the common goal of improving student achievement.

## INSTITUTING A CODE OF CONDUCT



Successful principals understood that effective instruction could not occur in chaotic classrooms. They established uniform, enforceable codes of conduct that were aligned to school values.

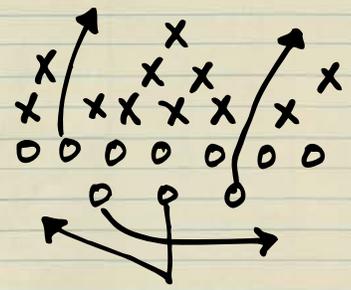
### **Enforcing school-wide consistency.**

Highly-effective principals implemented clear and consistent codes of conduct

that reinforced positive behavior and disciplined infractions. Principals insisted that every adult in the building implement the code of conduct in the same way so that students would know exactly what is expected of them. As a result, individual teachers no longer had to develop their own strategies for classroom management. A school-wide approach meant that no one teacher stood on his or her own, and it provided valuable scaffolding for novices. Teachers of all experience levels reported finding it easier to focus on the core of their work: instruction.

### **Aligning codes to school values.**

Great principals made sure the codes of conduct buttressed their efforts to build a culture of high achievement for all students. The codes of conduct were designed to reinforce positive learning behaviors, such as demonstrating consistent effort and showing respect for oneself and others. They also provided a framework for discipline when students failed to meet expectations. The rewards for positive behaviors and the consequences for infractions were clear and understood throughout the entire school community, and were primarily handled within the classroom, not in visits to the principal's office.



### **Enforcing school-wide consistency**

When Lori Phillips was assigned to be principal of Dunbar Elementary in Memphis, TN, she determined through observations and interviews that to improve academic performance she had to address the lack of order in the building. Phillips reflected, "Without structure and a positive climate, there is no way you can focus on academics. I knew we'd be able to shift our focus to improving instruction once we had order and a positive learning climate." She established consistent expectations for student and staff behavior across the school and modeled the behavior she wanted to see. These consistent expectations made it clear how infractions were to be addressed. According to Phillips, "Chaotic and unruly behavior in the cafeteria and in the hallways improved right away. Children came in the building quietly and were no longer wild and loud. Teachers quickly learned not to discipline children by sending them out of their classrooms. And there was no running in and out of classrooms as there had been before."

## BUILDING A CULTURE OF RESPECT



Highly-effective principals were considerate leaders who made sure teachers knew how much they mattered.

### Establishing routines and rituals that signal teachers are valued.

Great principals found ways to celebrate teacher success. They recognized teachers who made progress in improving student achievement. They also found ways to express appreciation for hard work. Teachers reported that simply saying “thank you” went a long way towards making them feel valued.

### Demanding that teachers respect one another.

Effective communication fosters community and eliminates the corrosive effects of closed-door venting. Great principals were sensitive to workplace tensions and counseled staff on how to respectfully resolve differences.

### Respecting teachers’ time and opinions.

Effective principals respected teachers’ boundaries and incorporated their views into decisions. Principals acknowledged when their requests were impractical or unfair and respected a teacher’s prerogative to set boundaries. When principals approached and treated teachers as professionals, the teachers felt and acted like professionals.

## FOSTERING TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITIES



Exceptional leaders instilled a sense of community among staff members to improve retention and intensify staff commitment to school goals. Teacher Learning Communities, first discussed under “Developing Teachers,” gave teachers a structured

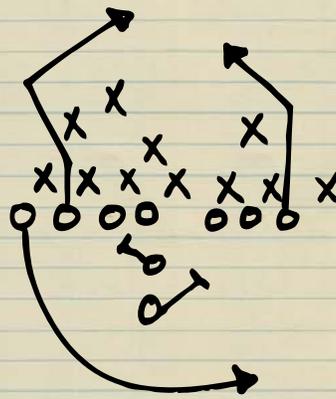
way to learn from each other and push each other to improve as educators. They also contributed to making teachers feel comfortable in and dedicated to their school.

### Building a community.

Great principals encouraged collaboration among teachers. This not only improved instruction through shared practice, it also created relationships between colleagues. Working closely together gave teachers a chance to get to know each other, learn from each other and develop trust in each other’s opinions. Teachers who are part of a learning community share values, develop a common repertoire of techniques and develop an allegiance to the community. This sense of community makes teachers more likely to experience a sense of belonging and commitment, which in turn enables schools to retain effective teachers.

## Aligning codes to school values

Airways Middle School was known by members of the Memphis community as a school afflicted by violence and frequent disruption—a place where limited learning took place. Principal Sharron Griffin and her assistant principal set about changing student behavior as the first step in changing school culture. Griffin said, “One of my first priorities was discipline and order. I knew that without discipline and order, instruction couldn’t take place, not effectively.” For this reason, she and her assistant principal put in place the Progressive Discipline System (PDS), which teachers and students were expected to follow consistently and with fidelity. The PDS protocol is designed to manage student infractions with scaffolded interventions. A student who continued to act out after two initial interventions met with all of his or her teachers, and together they identified any common academic and behavioral challenges the student was facing. After that meeting, the student was asked to sign a “Behavior Contract,” which as Griffin explained, “empowers the student to say, ‘Hey, I do have a problem here... and if I do the right thing, these are all the incentives that I want.’” Teachers felt that the school’s fidelity to the PDS was a critical step in the school’s turnaround. Ultimately, the development of school identity—and respect within the building—set the stage for learning without disruptions.

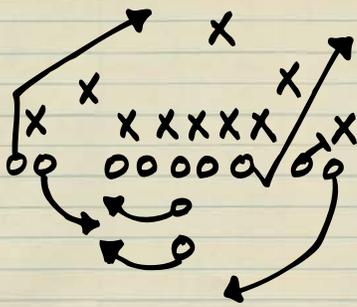


### Demanding that teachers respect one another

According to Principal David Ayala of KIPP DC: KEY Academy in Washington, D.C., a key to building a strong and cohesive staff was to encourage a direct, respectful approach to having difficult conversations. Whenever interpersonal problems or conflicts arose, staff members were expected to confront and resolve their differences in direct one-to-one conversations. The school designed professional development sessions based on the book *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. All staff members received explicit instruction in how to productively conduct difficult conversations. They were given opportunities to practice through role-play activities during summer professional development and throughout the school year. They acted out scenarios typical of school conflict, including upholding administrative norms, talking about students and complaining about other teachers.

### Respecting teachers' time and opinions

Terry Ross at Getwell Elementary School in Memphis, TN explained, "I really learned that you need to treat your teachers like professionals, respect their ability and tap into their ability. I promised teachers that if we managed our time well during the day, they wouldn't have to give the school their time during the weekend and in the evenings. I remember one faculty meeting when we were supposed to meet from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. I realized it was 5:15 P.M. I apologized to everyone and was waiting for people to rush out, but they didn't. There were groups of teachers still working in different pockets of the library. One fifth-grade group was going over a rubric for scoring student writing with a couple of newer teachers."



### Building a community

Dee Weedon became principal of Keystone Elementary in Memphis, TN, as the school was expanding, enrolling a bigger, more diverse, student population and hiring more teachers. Weedon's goal was for new and veteran teachers to build working relationships with each other as they evaluated the needs of the new students. To accomplish that, she gave every teacher a role in drafting the school-improvement plan (SIP). Says Weedon, "I focused on finding ways to encourage new and veteran teachers to work collaboratively and understand the academic strengths and challenges of the changing student population. Just as important, we had to develop a common mission, vision and beliefs around the 'new' Keystone. By involving the entire staff in the process of developing the school-improvement plan, which Tennessee requires every three years, I set out to do all these things." Each teacher sat on a subcommittee in charge of a specific component of the plan. The subcommittees were made up of teachers from different grade-levels and subjects, enabling collaboration between staff members who normally wouldn't interact.

### INDIVIDUALIZING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



Great principals considered individual teacher preferences when making teaching assignments and defining other roles and responsibilities. Accommodating teacher preferences, even in small ways, was a critical strategy for improving teacher's happiness in their role and therefore a critical strategy for retaining effective teachers.

### Taking teacher preferences into account when assigning roles.

Great principals understood their staff's teaching interests and made every effort to accommodate that. Principals were willing to do this even if the assignments didn't necessarily serve greater school effectiveness or staff development—they recognized the importance of staff happiness as a goal in-and-of-itself. Although classroom teachers usually have a standard core set of responsibilities, there are often several roles and responsibilities that principals distribute across the staff. For example, teachers frequently share responsibilities related to planning the grade-level field trip, running an afterschool program or serving on various school committees. Highly-effective principals sought to assign responsibilities in ways that matched individual teachers' interests and desires for professional growth. For example, a principal in our sample allowed and encouraged two teachers in the same grade level to share teaching responsibilities across their two classes because one teacher was particularly interested in teaching math and science while the other preferred to teach reading and social studies. This decision did not support professional growth or staff management—it was solely designed to make the role more desirable for the teachers. Teachers were more likely to want to stay when their principal found ways to accommodate their interests and preferences.

Sometimes, for the good of the school, principals made the tough decision to reassign teachers in ways that might not be popular. By being responsive and respectful, principals built trust among their staff, which made great teachers more likely to accept role changes and more likely to stay.

## CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP



Highly-effective principals did everything in their power to create clear pathways for great teachers to expand their reach both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Giving teachers a voice in decisions.**

Great principals offered teachers many opportunities to take on leadership

responsibilities, and in doing so, gave teachers a voice in how the school was run. They gave teachers a role in leading professional development, conducting classroom observations, designing the curriculum and even hiring new staff. In doing so, they gave teachers a sense of ownership over decisions, leading to increased acceptance of and commitment to school-wide initiatives.

### **Rewarding teachers with increased leadership.**

Great principals rewarded highly-effective teachers with increased leadership responsibilities, such as becoming mentor teachers or members of Instructional Leadership Teams. Successful principals also recommended strong candidates to become assistant principals and principals. Teachers valued these assignments not only because they sought opportunity for professional growth, but also because they signaled recognition and appreciation of their strengths and potential. Such support for career advancement helps principals retain the best teachers (in the district, if not always in their school), as it demonstrates confidence in teacher abilities and a true personal commitment to teachers as individuals with career goals.

## **Giving teachers a voice in decisions**

Dr. Dee Weedon, of Keystone Elementary in Memphis, TN, needed to hire more staff, as the school transitioned from an optional school with selective admission requirements to a neighborhood school with 180 new students and 10 new teachers. She included all grade-level teams in the hiring process. Teachers collaboratively developed interview questions and scoring rubrics, participated in interviews and reached a consensus on which candidates to hire. Says Dr. Weedon, "One of the first things I did to prepare for this transition was to meet with each teacher individually. While everyone told me they were happy with the school and how it was run, about half of the school's 20 teachers told me they wanted a greater voice in how things were done." Dr. Weedon wanted to make sure that by hiring 10 new teachers, "we didn't create an us-versus-them situation. I also wanted to send the message that it was a new day at Keystone and that there would be some decisions we would all make together. So I decided to include the staff in the hiring process for new teachers." Says Dr. Weedon of the impact, "Teachers here are very focused; they tend to work very hard. They support one another, they share and they stick up for one another—not because they have to, but because they see themselves as a team. I think the hiring process contributed to that sense of teamwork...I also think the hiring process helped teachers realize they do have a say, and it strengthened their sense of ownership in the school."

# **CHAMPIONSHIP COACHES: WHAT PRINCIPALS OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS DID DIFFERENTLY**



## **Legendary coaches who lead their teams to championships and sustain success over time rise above other talented head coaches.**

We conducted an analysis to examine whether the practices of highly-effective principals (those that led dramatic gains in the UEF data set and those that led schools with relatively higher value-add scores in the EPIC data set) differed from the practices of less-effective principals (those that led incremental gains in the UEF data set). Just like championship coaches, we found that the most successful principals:

### **1. See the full game.**

Like championship coaches who attend to all aspects of the game—offense, defense, and special teams—great principals have a playbook that covers developing teachers, managing talent and creating a great place to work, often achieving two or more of these goals with just one action.

### **2. Focus on the right plays at the right time.**

Like great head coaches who develop a new game plan each week tailored toward the specific strengths and weaknesses of the next opposing team, great principals diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of their schools and identify particular strategies they want to emphasize from their playbook. They adjust these strategies over time as the needs and context of their schools change. They call the right plays at the right time.

### **3. Emphasize flawless execution.**

Like legendary coaches who are perfectionists, great principals implement their strategies with greater quality and thoroughness, performing actions with frequency and intensity.

First, the most successful principals understood that they could not achieve success by only developing teachers, or only managing talent, or only improving school culture. They understood that they needed to address all three areas to recruit the right people, develop them to their full potential and retain them over time. They did not execute every leadership action in the playbook, but they did focus on at least one in each of the three areas.

Second, with only so much time in the day (and school year), the most successful principals strategically focused their time and energy towards particular strategies across the three areas. This approach often meant focusing on the “high yardage plays” at the intersection of the Venn Diagram, like cultivating leadership, conducting observations with useful feedback, fostering “Teacher Learning Communities”, and individualizing roles and responsibilities.

Most importantly, the most successful principals tailored their focus appropriately to the specific (and changing) needs of their schools. This was especially important in chaotic schools, where principals worked first on establishing order and getting the right staff on board before tackling peer-led instructional support.

Finally, the most successful principals were thorough and relentless in their efforts to improve teaching, performing their leadership duties frequently and with intensity. For example, they observed classrooms often enough to be familiar with every single teacher’s strengths, weaknesses and progress toward improvement.

## SEEING THE FULL GAME

The most successful principals saw all three areas of staff development, management decisions and workplace environment as critical to improving and sustaining teacher effectiveness. Whereas the less successful principals tended to focus in just one or two of these areas, the more successful principals made plays that serviced all three goals. They also saw these three areas as linked, not as discrete and disparate problems to tackle. They understood that the solution to one challenge could also go a long way toward resolving another. The most successful principals were vigilant in identifying “high-yardage plays” that simultaneously addressed teacher development, talent management and school culture, and therefore made large strides in improving instruction. These high-yardage plays included: cultivating leadership, conducting observations with useful feedback, fostering “Teacher Learning Communities”, and individualizing roles and responsibilities.

Highly-effective principals utilized classroom observations to simultaneously improve teachers’ instructional ability and monitor performance. Similarly, when these principals fostered “Teacher Learning Communities”, they not only supported peer-led instructional assistance, they also created a community that made the school a place where teachers wanted to work. When especially strong principals made decisions about teacher roles and responsibilities, they balanced the needs of the school and the interests of the teachers – strategically managing talent while building trust. When these leaders distributed decision-making authority to teachers, it served all three areas by building skill, leveraging talent and providing an opportunity for career growth that made teachers want to stay.

The strongest principals not only understood this overlap, they used it to their advantage.

A previous example described how Michelle Pierre-Farid used observation and feedback to develop teacher capacity. In addition, she communicated clear performance expectations at the beginning of the year (for example, including the use of active word walls, bulletin boards with student work, learning centers and desks arranged to encourage small group instruction) and then tied her feedback to those performance expectations to monitor and hold staff accountable for meeting those goals. Also, by conducting these observations in every classroom on a regular basis, she became well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of each individual teacher, thereby allowing her to assign roles and responsibilities that fit teacher strengths and growth areas.

As this example illustrates, highly-effective principals linked their classroom observations to both staffing decisions and professional development. They designed relevant professional development, targeted at the needs they witnessed firsthand during classroom observations. Then, they followed up with additional observations to hold teachers accountable for implementing the skills addressed in training sessions. Finally, they made staffing decisions (hiring, assigning roles, and when necessary, counseling out) based on the school-wide and individual needs they discovered through ongoing classroom observations.

By contrast, classroom observations that were divorced from professional development and staffing decisions fell short. For example, one principal who distributed leadership to an instructional leadership team, but who did so in ways that were not thoughtful about teachers’ professional interests and growth trajectories, achieved a short-term gain in efficiency but missed an opportunity to maximize the school’s ability to retain its best talent.

The best principals recognized the trifecta of leading great teachers: develop them, manage the talent in the school and make the building a place where great teachers want to work. Addressing

these goals head-on and with a well-rounded approach led to rapid and significant improvement in student achievement.

### FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT PLAYS AT THE RIGHT TIME

Like leaders in any other field, the most successful principals did not attempt to do everything at once; they targeted and adapted their strategies to fit the situation at hand.

Highly-effective principals approached the goal of improving teacher effectiveness in different ways depending on the specific needs of the school. Some principals led dramatic gains in schools that were chaotic and low-performing (i.e., proficiency rates below 30 at the start of their tenure at the school). Other principals led dramatic gains in schools that were moderately-performing when the principal took the helm. Great principals were able to correctly diagnose what needed to be done and hone in on actions appropriate to the particular situation. For example, in chaotic schools, principals dedicated themselves first and foremost to creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. In moderately-performing schools,

principals focused on ways to give teachers more ownership over the school-wide goal of higher achievement. In each case, the strongest leaders recognized the need to tailor improvement strategies to the very individual circumstances that a school presented.

Highly-effective principals not only employed a wide variety of strategies to improve teacher effectiveness but also knew which actions to emphasize when. Like running a two-minute offense at the beginning of the first quarter, mistimed improvements can disrupt school tempo and throw off the leadership team's game. Instead, a carefully queued approach to improving teaching can create a cascade of positive changes. Leadership is not one-size-fits-all. The most capable leaders know their team and know their playbook. They tailor their actions to meet the needs of their students, teachers and school.

**TABLE 1**

Variation in actions to improve teacher effectiveness between principals in low-performing versus moderately-performing schools.

Actions emphasized in chaotic, low-performing schools	Actions emphasized in moderately-performing schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Getting the right people on the bus.”<sup>13</sup></li> <li>• Raising expectations.</li> <li>• Instituting a code of conduct.</li> <li>• Building capacity &amp; monitoring for consistent instructional practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering teacher learning communities.</li> <li>• Cultivating leadership.</li> <li>• Distributing decision making.</li> </ul>

13 Collins (2001).

## EMPHASIZING FLAWLESS EXECUTION

The principals of the highest-gaining schools in our study made effective teaching their top priority and performed their responsibilities with exceptional thoroughness and quality.

The specific types of strategies that all principals used to improve teacher effectiveness were similar across the board. When we compared the actions of principals in schools that made dramatic gains in student achievement with principals of schools that made incremental gains, we found that principals who led dramatic gains employed these strategies with greater frequency and intensity.

For example, the most successful principals conducted teacher observations more frequently and provided teachers with more precise and detailed feedback. They followed up by persistently monitoring the progress of teachers as they implemented feedback from the observations. Similarly, codes of conduct in high-gaining schools were more thorough and more consistently enforced.

Simply going through the motions was not enough to ensure great teaching in every classroom, every year. Rather, the most effective leaders were perfectionists who executed their strategies to improve teacher effectiveness with greater quality and intensity.

**TABLE 2**

Examples of how leadership actions differed in quality and intensity between principals of high-gaining and incrementally-gaining schools.

Leadership action	Principals of high-gaining schools	Principals of incrementally-gaining schools
<b>Conducting observations and giving feedback.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observed each teacher at least 1-2 times a month.</li> <li>Gave immediate, specific and actionable feedback.</li> <li>Identified specific and measurable targets for growth and timelines for meeting those targets, then held teachers accountable for progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were faithful to the formal evaluation process and minimum number of evaluations, but provided feedback that was less concrete.</li> <li>When professional goals were identified, they were less specific and measurable, and often accompanied by inconsistent follow-up.</li> </ul>
<b>Recruiting, selecting and placing staff.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planned ahead to identify vacancies and proactively recruited broadly.</li> <li>Led a rigorous screening process, including interviews and demonstration lessons.</li> <li>Included a wide range of stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did recruit, but not as widely and not as early.</li> <li>Included a range of stakeholders, but did not necessarily use a rigorous interview protocol or require demonstration lessons.</li> </ul>
<b>Instituting a code of student conduct.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established codes of conduct that reinforced positive learning behaviors and provided a framework for discipline.</li> <li>Insisted that every adult implement the codes of conduct in the same way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instituted codes of conduct, but did not enforce consistent implementation by all adults and for every student.</li> </ul>



**RULES OF  
THE GAME:  
POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
THAT INVEST  
RESOURCES,  
TIME AND  
ATTENTION IN  
PRINCIPALS**

**“Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.”**

**Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers**

Principals who prioritized improving teacher effectiveness—and who were skilled at it—saw substantial gains in student achievement. These findings suggest that investing in principal effectiveness could be a powerful strategy for improving effective teaching at scale.

Though federal educator effectiveness programs generally include options for investments in principal quality, states have focused most dollars and time on teacher quality initiatives that are separate from the principal. If included, school leaders are often an afterthought or add-on to teacher initiatives as opposed to an integral element of any effort to transform instruction and schools.

But this is akin to drafting every player in the “top 10” without installing an effective head coach to lead the team.

New teacher-evaluation systems are at the center of many of the educator effectiveness reforms. Yet, if we want these new teacher evaluations to truly improve instruction and ultimately, student learning, they must be conducted by a school leader who can use them as a powerful tool to build high-performing teams—not as a solely punitive process.

Knowing the difference between a poor, average and outstanding teacher, and knowing how to act on that information in a way that motivates and inspires the adults in a school to get it right for the kids, requires a different type of leadership than we have historically cultivated in our principals. It is principals who will make, or break, these reforms. The principal’s indispensable role in teacher evaluation deserves more attention in these reform efforts.

The findings from this report also suggest that improving principal effectiveness itself can be a strategic lever for improving teacher effectiveness. To this end, policy makers should invest more time, attention and resources into improving principal effectiveness. Our recommendations outline how this investment can be made at the local, state and federal levels.

## AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Local school districts define the majority of conditions that support or inhibit principals. Districts have multiple important opportunities to change the status quo. We recommend that school districts tackle:

### **Principal hiring.**

Seek out the best. 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, districts should implement more rigorous hiring processes that screen and assess for necessary mindsets and skills, such as an unwavering belief in all students' ability to succeed, adult management experience and instructional expertise.

### **Principal evaluation and development.**

Districts should provide clear and consistent expectations of success for principals. They should focus evaluation, professional development and accountability for the student outcomes that principals need to achieve, and on the important roles principals play, including the development and retention of high-quality teachers. In particular, districts should provide sufficient training for principals on the new expectations for teacher evaluation and development and hold principals accountable for successfully demonstrating these skills.

### **Principal management and support.**

School districts should dedicate sufficient time and training for district leaders to conduct principal evaluation and performance management activities, including clear goal setting, school-site visits, formative feedback and support for individual principal development. They should hold principal managers accountable for results of the schools and principals they manage.

### **Decision making.**

District leadership should empower principals with flexibility to make managerial decisions that impact teaching, such as discretion to:

- Make strategic staffing decisions, including hiring, promotion, and when necessary, the efficient and fair removal of ineffective teachers.
- Manage budgets and staffing allocations to meet specific school needs.
- Restructure school schedules to enable common planning time for teachers to foster communities of practice led by the principal and teacher leaders.

## AT THE STATE LEVEL

State legislatures and departments of education face a changing world in education where they are outgrowing a largely compliance-focused role. Instead, many states are building policy systems for school district improvement across an entire state. They can embrace this new role by:

### **Emphasizing skills for improving teaching at every stage of the principal pipeline.**

From standards to evaluation, states should clarify that principals are expected to focus on strengthening teacher practice and make sure all related systems are aligned, including:

- **Principal standards.** States should include standards for selecting, developing and retaining effective teachers.
- **Preparation.** There should be a requirement for preparation programs that build aspiring principals' skills in developing teachers, managing talent and creating a great place to work, and an assessment of candidates on their demonstrated abilities in these areas. Preparation programs should invest in more selective admissions processes, integrate field practice, and ensure that candidates demonstrate the required skills before program completion.
- **Certification.** For renewal, states should require principals to demonstrate success in improving teacher effectiveness and improving student outcomes.
- **Evaluation.** States should set guidelines for districts to hold principals accountable for improved student outcomes and for demonstrating the key practices of improving teaching practice, performance management and building a strong school culture.

### **Investing funding in principal effectiveness.**

States should make an investment in the tools, training and support needed to build a strong principals corps. Also, they should use flexibility in state and federal funding to focus on principal effectiveness; for example, they should encourage Title II formula funding to be used for investments in principal effectiveness.

## AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Federal policymakers help set the tone and importance of education policy for the country. From new initiatives that foster innovation to continued funding for bedrock programs, these policymakers can integrate principals into education reforms in several ways:

### **Leverage existing formula funds.**

Federal policymakers should set aside Title II formula dollars specifically for principal effectiveness and promote the use of Title II funds for school leadership strategies that support teacher effectiveness. Additionally, they should continue to require rigorous teacher and principal evaluations as part of the requirements for flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

### **Champion the cause.**

Policymakers should bring the importance of school leadership to national prominence. For example, they could expand the Champions of Change program to leverage highly-effective principals nationwide, or use the strong blueprint provided by the Administration's proposal for a Master Teacher Corps. They should talk publicly, consistently and at the highest levels about the importance of principals in amplifying great teaching.

### **Break down barriers to entry.**

Federal policymakers should encourage states to cultivate talent from all sectors. While all great teachers require a strong background in teaching and instruction, professionals returning to the field may have gained valuable adult leadership skills from other experiences such as time in the public or private sector or service in the military. By removing arbitrary barriers to entry for returning talent, states and districts can fortify the pipeline of emerging principals and leaders.

### **Invest in tools and consortia focused on leadership.**

Policymakers should help states find wheels, not recreate them. Federal policymakers are in the unique position to invest in tools and convene states together to bring ideas, discuss challenges and share best practices in all areas of education, especially in school leadership.

### **Competitive grants.**

Federal policymakers should continue to expand efforts to promote principal effectiveness in competitive grant programs and underscore the need for teacher effectiveness efforts to include principals.

# APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF RESEARCH

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPAL PRACTICE AND TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Teachers matter, beyond a doubt. Teacher effectiveness accounts for nearly 33 percent of variance in impact on student achievement. Principals, however, also play a critical role in improving student achievement. In a meta-analysis of 69 studies, Marzano and colleagues found that school leadership accounts for approximately 25 percent of the school's impact on student achievement, a finding that was recently confirmed by the largest in-depth study of school leadership to date.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of an individual principal can be quite substantial.<sup>15</sup> For example, in a comprehensive study of school reform in Chicago, Bryk and colleagues found that schools with strong leaders were seven times more likely to substantially improve achievement in mathematics and four times more likely to substantially improve achievement in reading than schools with weak leadership.<sup>16</sup> Quality of leadership is particularly important in low-performing schools where school improvement does not occur without strong leadership.<sup>17</sup> Principal skill can have the strongest impact in these types of schools,<sup>18</sup> yet high-poverty and low-performing schools tend to have lower-quality principals.<sup>19</sup>

Why is principal leadership so important, particularly in low-performing schools? How do principals, who are not in classrooms, have such a large impact on student achievement? There is an extensive body of research that has examined principal effectiveness and identified principal actions and practices that are associated with improvements in student achievement.<sup>20</sup> Most studies are focused broadly at the relationship between principals and student achievement as opposed to specifically examining the relationship between principals and teacher effectiveness. Emerging research suggests that principals' impact on student achievement is largely indirect, through their impact on teacher effectiveness.<sup>21</sup>

There is debate in the literature regarding how principals influence teachers, with some studies arguing that principals build teacher knowledge and skills, some studies arguing the impact occurs through personnel decision making (such as hiring and removing teachers) and still other studies arguing that the impact occurs through influencing teacher working conditions and retention.

---

14 Marzano, 2005; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010

15 Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012

16 Bryk 2010(2010)

17 Bryk et al., 2010, Louis et al., 2010; Aladjem, Birman, Orland, Harr-Robins, Heredia, Parrish & Ruffini, 2010

18 Branch et al., 2012

19 Rice, 2010; Branch et al., 2009; Horng et al., 2009

20 e.g., Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005

21 Branch et al., 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010

A long tradition of research on instructional leadership established the critical role that principals play in improving teaching and instruction. This research generally concludes that schools effective in improving student achievement have principals that focus on curriculum and instruction.<sup>22</sup> They use their knowledge of teaching and learning to provide valuable feedback in ways that enable and motivate teachers to improve their practice.<sup>23</sup> They build teacher capacity by making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry and giving praise.<sup>24</sup> They lead teachers in aligning curriculum with standards, analyzing student work and using data to differentiate instruction.<sup>25</sup>

More recent research has found that principals can have a substantial effect on student achievement by structuring how teachers work together to promote each other's learning. For example, Louis and colleagues found that school leadership impacts student achievement in large part by strengthening a school's "professional community"—an environment where teachers work together to improve classroom instruction.<sup>26</sup> Sup Ovitz and colleagues had similar findings when they examined the effects of principal leadership and "peer teacher influence" on teachers' instructional practice and student learning.<sup>27</sup> The authors defined "peer teacher influence" as influencing colleagues via instructional conversation,

interaction around teaching and learning and advice networks. They found that,

Although peer influence has a greater direct effect on teacher instruction, principal leadership has a greater total effect on ELA [English Language Arts] student learning because of the indirect effect through teacher peer influence. This implies that principals are the most important actor in student learning in ELA, in part because of their indirect influence on teacher instruction through collaboration and communication around instruction between peer teachers. Through fostering a climate of instructional collaboration, principals have the greatest impact on learning.<sup>28</sup>

Another line of research suggests that the primary means through which principals improve student achievement is through hiring, evaluating and removing teachers.<sup>29</sup> Two studies found that principals with strong academic credentials tend to hire teachers with strong academic backgrounds, who, in turn, tend to be more effective at improving student learning.<sup>30</sup> Other studies found that more effective principals are able to attract and hire teachers with higher tests scores, more teaching experience and better track records of improving student achievement.<sup>31</sup> Beteille and colleagues found that more effective principals were able to attract and

---

22 e.g., Blasé and Blasé, 1999; Heck, 1992; Leithwood, 1994; Southworth, 2002

23 Fink & Resnick, 2001

24 Blasé & Blasé, 1999

25 Copland, 2003

26 Louis et al., 2010

27 Supovitz et al., 2010

28 Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; 46

29 Rice, 2010

30 Baker and Cooper, 2005; Wheeler 2006

31 Clotfelter et al., 2007; Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2010

hire higher-quality teachers to fill vacancies, were able to retain higher-quality teachers and remove less-effective teachers, and had teachers that improved at a greater pace than teachers in schools with less-effective leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Research also suggests that principals have a clear and important impact on retention of effective teachers. In a national survey of more than 40,000 teachers, Scholastic Inc. and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation found that 96 percent of teachers rated supportive leadership as absolutely essential or very important to retaining good teachers, more than any other factor.<sup>33</sup> Additional research suggests that principals contribute to retention by creating a climate where teachers want to work.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Louis and colleagues found that principals' impact occurs primarily through their influence on teachers' motivation and working conditions as opposed to their influence on teachers' knowledge and skills.<sup>35</sup>

These and other studies of effective leadership practices usually seek to identify relationships between principals and outcomes that hold across all types of schools. The vast majority of the research has not examined how relationships between principal leadership and teacher effectiveness vary across school types and situations. A limitation of this approach is that it does not examine the ways in which effective leadership might look different in low- versus moderately-achieving schools. It also does not reveal important differences between

leadership practices that yield incremental gains versus practices that yield dramatic gains. Such analyses are important given emerging evidence regarding the situated nature of leadership.<sup>36</sup>

One exception is that Louis and colleagues found that high school principals were more likely to emphasize the importance of supporting teacher collaboration whereas elementary school principals were more likely to emphasize ensuring consistent approaches to discipline and providing teachers with instructional resources and materials.<sup>37</sup> Studies examining this variability are important because the practices that define effective leadership depend on the situation.<sup>38</sup> Effective principals diagnose their school and employ leadership strategies that match the needs of their particular school.<sup>39</sup>

This report contributes to the research by providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of all the ways in which principals influence teachers. It also examines whether and how effective leadership practices vary across elementary versus high schools, charter versus traditional schools, low-performing versus moderately performing schools and schools with dramatic versus incremental gains.

---

32 Beteille and colleagues, 2010

33 Scholastic, 2010

34 Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Ladd, 2009; Louis et al., 2010

35 Louis et al., 2010

36 Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 1999

37 Louis et al., 2010

38 Spillane et al., 1999

39 New Leaders, 2010

# APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

## DATA SETS

### URBAN EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK CASE STUDIES

Between 2007 and 2010, New Leaders conducted a series of case studies of New Leader principals to determine what leadership practices distinguished schools that saw dramatic gains in student achievement from schools that saw incremental gains. Dramatic gains were defined as combined gains in percent proficient across math and English language arts of 20 points or more. Incremental gains were defined as combined gains in percent proficient across math and English language arts of 3 to 10 points.

The data set included 116 schools located in six metropolitan areas: Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Memphis, TN; New York, NY; Oakland, CA; and Washington, DC. Table B1 shows the distribution of the sample. Researchers first identified all New Leader schools that met the criteria for dramatic gains in each of the six sites. Then, researchers paired the dramatic gains schools with a set of incrementally-gaining schools by matching the schools on several variables including: district vs. charter, K-8 vs. secondary, student demographics and starting student achievement. In the data sets, most schools were part of a matched pair. They were matched on school type (district versus charter); school level (K-8 versus secondary); student demographics (FRL, percent minority and percent English learners); and starting student achievement (percent proficient on math and English language arts state tests).

Data collection included a day-long visit to each school and follow-up interviews with the principal. During the site visit, researchers conducted a walk-through of the building, including short classroom observations and conducted interviews with school leaders and approximately five to

six teachers per school. Teachers were chosen to represent a range of grade levels, performance levels and leadership levels. Protocols probed for interviewee’s perspectives on the school and leadership practices that had influenced teacher effectiveness and the school’s student achievement results. Due to the nature of our protocol questions, we solicited a lot of detail and examples regarding the leadership practices but not a lot of detailed examples of how the leadership practices influenced teacher practice. Researchers wrote case summaries for each school they visited.

New Leaders then conducted an analysis of the case summaries and interview transcripts and combined the findings from this research with findings from a literature review of effective leadership practices to create its Urban Excellence Framework—which outlines the leadership and school practices that drive dramatic gains in student achievement (New Leaders, 2009, 2011).

**TABLE B1**  
UEF Case Study Sample.

Type of School	Sample Size
Dramatic Gains	64
Incremental Gains	52
District	87
Charter	29
K-8	61
Secondary	55
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116 schools</b>

**EFFECTIVE PRACTICE INCENTIVE COMMUNITY (EPIC) CASE STUDIES**

EPIC is a New Leaders project that identifies the highest-gaining high-need schools in grant partner districts and a consortium of charter schools, and then gives financial awards to those school leaders and teachers for sharing the practices that lead to the gains in student achievement. The project is funded over five years by the U.S. Department of Education’s Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), school district and charter school partners and private philanthropic funders. Between 2007 and 2011, EPIC has awarded \$15.5 million to more than 5,100 principals, assistant principals, teachers and teaching assistants in more than 200 schools, to reward them for making significant gains in student achievement and for participating in a rigorous process to identify and document the effective practices that led to their students’ success.

district or consortium. The value-added measures were calculated by Mathematica Policy Research, based on its analysis of individual student-level data (Potamites, Chaplin, Isenberg & Booker, 2009a, 2009b; Isenberg & Hock, 2010).

The EPIC team developed a case study of each school’s practice using video, school artifacts and interviews. The primary purpose of the project is to promote dissemination and learning about best practices by making hundreds of case studies, videos and artifacts available on a web-based EPIC Knowledge System (more details available at <http://www.newleaders.org/what-we-do/epic/>). EPIC also partners with training and professional development programs to integrate EPIC resources into these programs.

The analysis presented in this paper includes 95 school cases conducted as part of the EPIC partnership with Memphis City Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools and a consortium of more than 175 charter schools across the country. Table B2 shows the distribution of the sample. The schools used in this analysis include both New Leader and non-New Leader schools. They were selected because they had relatively higher value-added scores than other schools in their

**TABLE B2**  
EPIC case study sample.

Type of school	Sample size
District	47
Charter	48
K-8	50
Secondary	45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95 schools</b>

# OUR FRAMEWORK

Both data sets had been previously coded according to New Leaders' Urban Excellence Framework™ (available at <http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/uef/>). As

shown in Figure B3, the framework has five categories, each with four to five levers representing a collection of school practices evident in our highest-gaining schools.

## FIGURE B3

Urban Excellence Framework™

### Categories and Key Levers to Drive Dramatic Student Achievement Gains

#### Personal Leadership

- Belief-based, Goal-driven Leadership: Leader consistently demonstrates belief in the potential of every student to achieve at high levels
- Culturally Competent Leadership: Leader continuously dismantles inequitable and exclusionary practices and creates a fully inclusive environment where all children and adults thrive and learn at high levels
- Interpersonal Leadership: Leader builds trusting relationships and facilitates active communities of adults and students dedicated to reaching school goals
- Adaptive Leadership: Leader mobilizes others to resolve challenges requiring changes in values, beliefs, assumptions, and/or habits of behavior
- Resilient Leadership: Leader demonstrates self-awareness, ongoing learning, and resiliency in the service of continuous improvement

#### Learning and Teaching

- Curriculum aligned to both state and college-readiness standards
- Consistent and quality classroom practices, routines, and teaching strategies
- Utilization of diverse student-level data to drive instructional improvement
- Individual and common planning for effective instruction
- Pyramid of academic interventions

#### Culture

- Adults and students champion school vision and mission
- Adults demonstrate personal responsibility for the success of every student
- Adults and students live a school code of conduct aligned to the school's vision, mission, and values
- Adults insist on and support students in having and realizing high aspirations for themselves
- Families are engaged in supporting their child's/youth's learning, conduct, and college/career planning

#### Aligned Staff

- Recruitment, selection, and placement of aligned staff
- Consistent feedback and professional learning to drive instructional improvement
- Monitoring and management of staff performance
- High-performing instructional Leadership Team

#### Operations and Systems

- Tracking of clear and focused school goals and strategy adjustment based on progress
- Time use aligned to school-wide goals
- Budget, external partnerships, and facilities aligned to strategic plan
- Stakeholder communication and school system relationship managed to ensure a focus on learning

## OUR ANALYSIS METHODS

We combined the data from the UEF schools with dramatic gains with the EPIC schools that had relatively higher value-add scores and refer to these schools as “high-performing schools” and the principals that led them as “highly-effective” or “great principals” because respondents attributed the student achievement gains at least in part to strong principal leadership. Naturally, principals are responsible for actions unrelated to teacher quality, but for the purposes of this analysis, we pulled only the data from both data sets that had been coded as related to “aligned staff,” “teaching and learning,” and “culture.” We expected to keep these broad categories and find specific types of actions within them. However, after narrowing the list of effective leadership practices to those focused specifically on improving teacher effectiveness, we found similar examples across

the broad categories in the Urban Excellence Framework. For example, we found examples of principals working to support professional growth of teachers in both the “aligned staff” data and the “teaching and learning” data. We drew on our literature review, where we noticed that previous studies tended to focus on teacher growth and development, staff management or working conditions for teachers, in order to re-organize our data into these categories. However, we quickly found that many of the examples served multiple purposes, which led us to develop the interlocking Venn diagram framework to fit our data. We then validated our framework by recoding the data and checking for any disconfirming evidence of the findings. We also created matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to examine patterns across different types of schools.

# APPENDIX C: SUMMARY TABLE OF LEADERSHIP ACTIONS THAT AMPLIFY TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Developing Teachers	Managing Talent	Creating a Great Place to Work
<p><b>Leading group learning activities.</b> Leading professional development. Leading data-driven instruction teams.</p>	<p><b>Staffing up.</b> Defining the selection criteria. Recruiting the right candidates. Recruiting early. Hiring the best applicants.</p>	<p><b>Instituting a code of conduct.</b> Enforcing school-wide consistency. Aligning codes to school values.</p>
<p><b>Creating a Professional Climate of Shared Accountability for Student Learning.</b> Raising expectations. Setting targets. Improving cultural competency.</p>	<p><b>Ensuring accountability.</b> Rigorously conducting formal evaluations. Dismissing or counseling out underperforming teachers.</p>	<p><b>Building a culture of respect.</b> Establishing routines and rituals that signal teachers are valued. Demanding that teachers respect one another. Respecting teachers' time and opinions.</p>
<p><b>Fostering “Teacher Learning Communities.”</b> Providing time, protocols and an instructional focus to structure team meetings. Providing time and protocols to structure peer observation and feedback.</p>	<p><b>Individualizing roles and responsibilities.</b> Matching teacher strengths with student needs. Creating new roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p><b>Individualizing roles and responsibilities.</b> Taking teacher preferences into account when assigning roles.</p>
<p><b>Conducting observations with useful feedback.</b> Providing teachers with precise, actionable feedback on a regular basis.</p>	<p><b>Conducting observations with useful feedback.</b> Ongoing monitoring of progress toward performance goals. Ongoing assessment of individual and collective strengths and growth areas.</p>	<p><b>Fostering “Teacher Learning Communities.”</b> Building a community.</p>
<p><b>Cultivating leadership.</b> Cultivating leadership skills early and often. Mentoring school leaders.</p>	<p><b>Cultivating leadership.</b> Creating and fostering an Instructional Leadership Team.</p>	<p><b>Cultivating leadership.</b> Giving teachers a voice in decisions. Rewarding teachers with increased leadership.</p>

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aladjem, D. K., Birman, B. F., Orland, M., Harr-Robins, J., Heredia, A., Parrish, T. B., & Ruffini, S. J. (2010). *Achieving dramatic school improvement: An exploratory study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Allensworth, E., Ponisciak, S., & Mazzeo, C. (2009). *The schools teachers leave: Teacher mobility in Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Baker, B. D., & Cooper, B. C. (2005). Do principals with stronger academic backgrounds hire better teachers?: Policy implications for improving high-poverty schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(3), 449-479.
- Barber, M., Whelan, F., & Clark, M. (2010). *Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future*. New York: McKinsey and Co.
- Becker, B. E., Huselid, M. E., & Ulrich, D. (2001). *The HR scorecard: Linking people, strategy, and performance*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Beteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2009). *Effective schools: Managing the recruitment, development, and retention of high-quality teachers*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Blase, J., & Blase, J. (1999). Principals' instructional leadership and teacher development: Teachers' perspectives. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(3), 349-378.
- Boyd, D. J., Grossman, P. L., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. H. (2009). *The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Branch, G., Hanushek, E., & Rivkin, S. (2009). Estimating principal effectiveness. *CALDER Working Papers*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Branch, G., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2012). *Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education.
- Bryk, A., Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Cheney, G. R., Davis, J., Garrett, K., & Holleran, J. (2010). *A new approach to principal preparation: Innovative programs share their practices and lessons learned*. Fort Worth, TX: Rainwater Leadership Alliance.
- Chenoweth, K., & Theokas, C. (2011). *Getting it done: Leading academic success in unexpected schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Clotfelter, C., Glennie, E., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2008). Teacher bonuses and teacher retention in low performing schools: Evidence from the North Carolina \$1,800 teacher bonus program. *Public Finance Quarterly*, 36(1), 63-87.
- Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H. F., Vigdor, J., & Wheeler, J. (2007). *High-poverty schools and the distribution of teachers and principals* (Working Paper 1). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Copland, M. A. (2003). Leadership of inquiry: Building and sustaining capacity for school improvement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(4), 375-395.
- Cuban, L. (1988). *The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Curtis, R., & Wurtzel, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Teaching talent: A visionary framework for human capital in education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Donaldson, M. L. (2011). *Principals' approaches to developing teacher quality: Constraints and opportunities in hiring, assigning, evaluating, and developing teachers*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Fink, E., & Resnick, L. B. (2001). *Developing principals as instructional leaders*. Pittsburgh, PA: High Performance Learning Communities Project, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh.
- Finnigan, K. S. (2012). Principal leadership in low-performing schools: A closer look through the eyes of teachers. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(2), 182-202.

- Gates, S. M. (2010). *Advancing strategic human capital management in public education: Policy insights from the private sector and federal government experience*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Gordon, R., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2006). *Identifying effective teachers using performance on the job*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Grissom, J., & Loeb, S. (2009). *Triangulating principal effectiveness: How perspectives of parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial skills*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Grissom, J. A. (2008). But do they stay? Addressing issues of teacher retention through alternative certification. In P. Grossman & S. Loeb (Eds.), *Alternative routes to teaching: Mapping the new landscape of teacher education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Hallinger, P. (1992). The evolving role of American principals: From managerial to instructional to transformational leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 30(3), 35-49.
- Halverson, R. R., Kelley, C., & Kimball, S. (2004). Implementing teacher evaluation systems: How principals make sense of complex artifacts to shape local instructional practice. In W. K. Hoy & C. G. Miskel (Eds.), *Educational Administration Policy, and Reform* (pp. 153-188). Greenwich, CN: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Harris, D. N., & Sass, T. R. (2009). What Makes for a Good Teacher and Who Can Tell? Working Paper 30. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Retrieved from <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~tsass/Papers/IES%20Principal%20Eval%2017B.pdf>.
- Heck, R. (1992). Principals' instructional leadership and school performance: Implications for policy development. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 14(1), 21-34.
- Hewitt, P. M. (2010). Retaining new teachers: Supportive principals needed (n.d.). *ASCD Express*, 6(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/602-hewitt.aspx>.
- Honig, M. I. (Ed.). (2006). *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.
- Horng, E., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2009). *Principal time-use and school effectiveness*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Horng, E. L., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2010). Principal's time use and school effectiveness. *American Journal of Education*, 116, 491-523.
- Huselid, M. A. (2005). *The workforce scorecard: Managing human capital to execute strategy*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

- Isenberg, E., & Hock, H. (2010). *Measuring school and teacher value added for IMPACT and TEAM in DC Public Schools*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
- Jacob, B., & Lefgren L. (2008). Can Principals Identify Effective Teachers? Evidence on Subjective Performance Evaluation in Education. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 25(1): 101-136. Retrieved from <http://econ.byu.edu/faculty/Lefgren/Assets/papers/principals.pdf>.
- Kafka, J. (2009). The principalship in historical perspective. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84(3), 318-330.
- Kane, T.J., Staiger, D.O. (2008). *Estimating teacher impacts on student achievement: An experimental evaluation*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Kimball, S. M., Milanowski, A., & Heneman, H. G. I. (2010 March). *Principal as human capital manager: Evidence from two large districts*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Finance Association, Richmond, VA.
- Ladd, H. F. (2009). *Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions: How predictive of policy-relevant outcomes?* Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Lawler, E. E. I. (2008). *Strategic talent management: Lessons from the corporate world*. Madison, WI: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Leithwood, K. (1994). Leadership for school recruiting. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 30(4), 498-518.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York, NY: Wallace Foundation.
- Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- New Leaders. (2011). *Urban Excellence Framework*. New York: Author.
- Odden, A. (Ed.). (2011). *Strategic management of human capital in education: Improving instructional practice and student learning in schools*. New York: Routledge.

- Paine, S. L., & Schleicher, A. (2011). *What the U.S. can learn from the world's most successful education reform efforts*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Research Foundation.
- Potamites, L., Booker, K., Chaplin, D., & Isenberg, E. (2009). *Measuring school effectiveness in the EPIC Charter School Consortium—Year 2*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
- Potamites, L., Chaplin, D., Isenberg, E., & Booker, K. (2009). *Measuring school effectiveness in Memphis—year 2*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.
- Reeves, D. B. (2009). *Assessing educational leaders: Evaluating performance for improved individual and organization results* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Rice, J. K. (2010). *Principal effectiveness and leadership in an era of accountability: What research says*. Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).
- Rubin, J. P., & Economist Intelligence Unit. (2006 May). The CEO's role in talent management: How top executives from ten countries are nurturing the leaders of tomorrow. *The Economist*, 1-34.
- Scholastic Inc. (2010). *Primary sources: America's teachers on America's schools*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Scholastic Inc. (2012). *Primary sources: America's teachers on the teaching profession*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Southworth, G. (2002). Instructional leadership in schools: Reflections and empirical evidence. *School Leadership & Management*, 22(1), 73-91.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R. R., & Diamond, J. B. (1999). *Distributed leadership: Toward a theory of school leadership practices*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.
- Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 31-56.
- Tennessee Department of Education. (2012). *Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee: A Report on Year 1 Implementation* [http://www.tn.gov/education/doc/yr\\_1\\_tchr\\_eval\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/education/doc/yr_1_tchr_eval_rpt.pdf).
- Tucker, M. S., & Coddling, J. B. (2002). *The principal challenge: Leading and managing schools in an era of accountability*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. (2009). *The widget effect: Our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness*. Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project.
- Wheeler, J. (2006). *An analysis of principal turnover, distribution, and effectiveness in the state of North Carolina*. Master's Thesis prepared for Dr. Helen Ladd, Duke University.



