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PRINCIPAL SUPERVISION AS A STRATEGY FOR SUPPORTING AND RETAINING SCHOOL LEADERS

*A CASE STUDY OF THE
GRANITE SCHOOL DISTRICT*

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Introduction

The role of school leader is increasingly complex, and the impact of the pandemic made these jobs almost impossible at times. Principal burnout is often high, and morale is often low. Retaining and supporting strong principals, who have a measurable impact on the success of their students, is a priority for the field.

This case study describes how Granite School District used one strategy – transforming the principal supervisor role – to both improve principal skills and deepen these leaders’ commitment to staying in their roles. Granite made a massive shift in the principal supervisor role from one focused on compliance to one focused on coaching. This case study describes the ideological and cultural shifts that were necessary – as well as the positive impact they had on both educators and students.

Increasing numbers of school leaders are planning to leave the profession, in part due to the increased pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Association of Secondary School Principals predicts a “mass exodus of principals from our pre-K-12 schools” based on a nationally representative survey it administered in fall 2021. It found almost four out of 10 principals (38%) expected to leave the profession in the next three years.¹

The George W. Bush Institute found similarly concerning evidence in data collected from our four partner districts in the [School Leadership Initiative](#) Cohort, a five-year study of Principal Talent Management. Based on surveys of all four districts in fall 2021, close to a third (29%) of principals reported being likely to leave their jobs by the end of the school year (2021-22). When we asked this question before the advent of COVID-19, only 7% of principals said they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the school year. In other words, *a fifth of the principals in our partner districts want to leave because of the pandemic.*

School leaders have a job that has become increasingly difficult over time. The average number of reported hours worked per week has steadily increased over the years to now measure 61 hours in 2018 from 56 hours in 2008 and 44 hours in 1928.² In addition, the number and complexity of the responsibilities has increased, mirroring heightened expectations for schools to address more rigorous standards across more subjects, needs of the whole child (including social and emotional learning), and improved equity for historically marginalized students.

¹ National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2021). [NASSP Survey Signals a Looming Mass Exodus of Principals from Schools Press Release](#)

² National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2018). [The PreK-8 School Leader in 2018](#)

The pandemic has made the principal role even more untenable. Principals faced new and increased responsibilities, such as contact tracing and retrofitting facilities to align to COVID-19 policies. They had to lead their schools through the tactical and adaptive challenges of pivoting back and forth between in person and remote learning. Their roles expanded to include crisis management as they learned new skills to communicate through multiple social media channels in a highly politicized environment.

Many school leaders were caught in the middle of contentious debates about masking and other COVID-19 policies, sometimes enduring physical threats to themselves and their families.³ Even while trying to cope with their own stress, principals had to emotionally care for staff and students who were experiencing trauma brought on by the pandemic. Principals have felt underprepared and under supported for their new responsibilities.⁴

Investing in supporting and retaining principals is a smart use of time and money, now more than ever. Principals **play a critical role in school improvement and student success.**⁵ Research shows that principals are second only to teachers in school-level factors that affect student achievement.⁶ Good teachers want to work for good bosses. Strong principals engage with their teachers around instruction and learning, build a productive school climate, facilitate collaboration and professional learning communities, and strategically manage personnel and resources.⁷

Principals are also expensive to replace. A study by the School Leadership Network estimated costs of developing, hiring, and onboarding a new principal at \$75,000.⁸ In addition to the financial burden, schools experiencing principal turnover often find it challenging to initiate or sustain improvement efforts, which can be particularly problematic for low-performing schools.

Granite School District bucks that trend

The situation is different in Granite School District, where many principals report feeling positive about their roles and committed to staying on the job. According to a survey of Granite principals given in the fall of 2020 (in the midst of leading schools through the pandemic):

- 84% of principals report being more likely to remain in their current positions for the near future.
- 66% of principals are less likely to explore other job opportunities.

3 Arizona Republic. (2021). [Three Charged After Threatening Tucson Principal with Arrest, Zip Ties Over Covid-19 rules](#)

4 American Institutes for Research. (2021). [Schooling Innovations and New Perspectives From a Year Interrupted](#)

5 Bloom et al. (2014). [Does management matter in schools](#); Branch et al. (2012). [Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals](#); Grissom et al. (2012). [Using student test scores to measure principal performance](#)

6 Leithwood et al. (2004). [How leadership influences student learning](#)

7 Grissom et al. (2021). [How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research](#)

8 New Teacher Center. (2014). [Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover](#)

Granite principals, in interviews, credit their supervisors with providing much needed support that has enhanced their job satisfaction. This is not surprising given that research has found that redesigning the principal-supervisor role can improve principals' perceptions of central office support. For example, principals in districts involved in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Supervisor Initiative reported improvements in the extent to which their central office efficiently provided the services they needed, reached out to help them with their needs, and organized to support them in their roles as principal. They also reported that their skills improved because of the support they received from their supervisors.⁹

This case study describes the describes actions the Granite School District took to successfully shift the supervisor role from compliance to support – and how that shift ultimately makes a difference for students.

⁹ Council of the Great City Schools and The Wallace Foundation. (2013). [Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors](#); Goldring et al. (2018). [A New Role Emerges for Principal Supervisors: Evidence from Six Districts in the Principal Supervisor Initiative](#)

How the principal experience is different in Granite

Supervisors in Granite Public Schools have historically overseen an average of 24 principals¹⁰ and their roles typically focused on accountability and crisis management. Principals could expect a visit from their supervisors less than four times per year unless problems warranted more. In fact, principals often preferred to be left alone because attention from a supervisor might have signified performance challenges.

Granite principals had similar experiences five years ago, when their supervisors were known as “school accountability directors.” One supervisor described his role during this time:

[The purpose of our visits] was all over the place. It was very random. There weren't specific next steps or guidelines. It wasn't really building the principal's capacity. It was more focused on accountability.

“Did you get this report in?”

“You're over budget on this area of spending.”

“This is how many parent complaints you got.” Rarely did we ever get into the classroom to see how teachers were instructing or how students were receiving the instruction.

Granite School District leaders decided to shift the supervisor role, in 2018, to focus explicitly and primarily on building the capacity of principals as instructional leaders. The district hired an additional two supervisors, allowing caseloads to be lowered to 12 to 14 principals per supervisor, and retitled the role “school leadership and improvement directors.”

District leaders decided to make these changes as a result of their participation in the [George W. Bush Institute's School Leadership Initiative](#), which exposed them to emerging research documenting how other districts were able to improve school leadership capacity by refocusing supervisor roles on supporting the professional growth of principals.

How is the principal experience different in Granite?

Principals have ample

- Opportunities for professional growth
- Confidence and ability to follow through
- Support from central office departments

¹⁰ Council of the Great City Schools. (2020). [Trends in Principal Supervisor Leadership and Support](#)

As a result of the role shift, principals in Granite see their supervisors on a biweekly basis. Each visit follows a loosely structured format in which the supervisor 1) follows up on prior meetings, 2) connects to best practices discussed in group professional development (in monthly meetings with other principals with the same supervisor), 3) addresses the principal's individualized professional learning goal, and 4) identifies next steps. Principals are very positive about these shifts:

The model the district has put in over the last five years of having [the School Leadership and Improvement Directors] in our schools more frequently and more as a coach – that has made a huge impact because I do feel like I remember when I first started, everybody was like, “Don’t tell your director if you’re having a hard time. They’re punitive. You don’t want to share that with them.”

And after just a year of working with [the current model], I felt like I could trust [my SLID] to know my real struggles and they were there to be my coach. It never felt like I couldn’t share my struggles. And [I have had multiple SLIDs]. They really are there to help support and that has been a huge shift since they have started working with the Bush Institute.

Principals in Granite say they are positive about the shifts in the supervisor role because they now have additional:

- Opportunities for professional growth
- Confidence and ability to follow through
- Support from central office departments

Each of these improvements is described in more detail in the following sections.

Opportunities for professional growth

New principals and veteran principals alike have found that working with their supervisors has helped them to grow professionally and improve their practice. These opportunities come in two forms: 1) group professional development; and 2) individualized coaching.

Each supervisor convenes their principals monthly. These meetings used to be informational sessions during which the supervisors and other central office departments would disseminate district initiatives (a common practice in many districts). Information was shared, but learning and discussion was limited. Granite supervisors have repurposed these meetings for group professional development. They focus on a particular topic of leadership practice that is a common need by principals, such as building relationships with parents.

How is the supervisor role in Granite different than five years ago?

	Previously	Now
Title	School Accountability Director (SAD)	School Leadership and Improvement Director (SLID)
Case load	20-24	12-14
Frequency of school visits	1-4 times per year	2 times per month
Focus of school visits	Reactive to issue of the day; accountability	School goals and principal development goals
Focus of group meetings	Information dissemination	Professional development

Supervisors also work with each principal to identify an individual professional growth and evaluation (PG&E) goal, and a portion of each visit is focused on that goal. For example, one supervisor was working with a principal who wanted to improve how he conducts teacher observations and provides feedback. So, during a regularly scheduled visit, the supervisor and principal conducted a classroom observation together. They sat apart and took their own notes. Then the supervisor asked a set of questions of the principal to guide and coach him on providing effective feedback. As the supervisor described it,

We debriefed what we saw. I let him go first and then I stated what I saw and then we role play. If I were the teacher, how would the principal debrief with me? What are two things that he saw that went well? What are two things that the teacher should consider improving and then ways to improve that? I asked him specific questions.

“Tell me when you’re going to follow-up with the teacher for the debriefing and feedback. Tell me when you’re going to follow-up in the classroom again, to ensure the next steps occurred.”

At the end of the visit, the supervisor and principal identify action steps to help the principal keep practicing and improving toward their goal. In this case, the action step was for the principal to conduct observation and feedback sessions with three teachers before the supervisors’ next visit. And at that next visit, the visit protocol requires the supervisor to start by checking in on those action steps, which helps keep the principal accountable for following through. It also provides an opportunity for reflection and additional coaching as needed.

Even veteran principals have welcomed this type of coaching support:

I don’t see it as a bad thing. Tom Brady has a coach. Lots of CEOs have executive coaches. It doesn’t mean you are doing something wrong. Actually, it is the opposite. It means that we have a chance to get better at what we are doing on a daily basis, and that’s good for kids.

In fact, principals say that this individualized coaching represents an investment in them and their growth that makes them feel valued and supported. This investment has helped Granite to not only retain principals but also to recruit new principals from other districts who are interested in professional growth opportunities. One district leader explained:

"I think people intrinsically want to be good at their practice. And if they find out that there are programs that will help them develop their skills and maybe their district's not doing those things, but another district close by might be, they will tend to look to come to a district that is providing those growth opportunities."

Practice, confidence, and the ability to follow through

Anyone who has worked with a personal trainer will likely attest to the dual benefits of improved skill and motivation. A good trainer typically recommends strategies to help meet goals – and then helps the client execute those strategies by explaining, modeling, encouraging, and providing feedback. Simply having a regularly scheduled time to meet creates both accountability for progress and the time to focus on their goal. This type of accountability can be particularly valuable in the face of competing priorities and demands on principals' time.

Granite principals report that the motivational benefits of working with their supervisors are important, especially for principals in schools without other school leaders. One principal explains:

"I probably wouldn't be as excited to [lead change] if I didn't have someone who was right there in my corner, cheering and excited to see and hear how it's going. Especially in my school – I am all alone here. I don't have an instructional coach. I don't have an assistant principal. So it really is kind of a lonely job. It would be tough, really tough [if I didn't have my supervisor]. That would be terrible."

The motivational benefits are particularly important because of the nature of school leadership, in which principals naturally encounter resistance as they work to lead changes in practices and culture. Even though the resistance might be expected, the pushback can leave principals second guessing whether and how hard to push. When supervisors encouraged them to stay the course, it helped them to follow through on leadership actions.

I have had some really hard teachers and some really hard parents, and so it was so emotionally draining sometimes. It was really valuable for [my supervisor] to provide suggestions on how to handle situations. He oftentimes would come sit with me at difficult conversations with a parent or with a teacher just to help provide guidance if I felt I needed it. And then he would provide feedback to me as well to let me know if maybe there was something I could have improved on. Or if I handled the situation appropriately but was second guessing myself, he was there to help reassure me.

Support from supervisors can also alleviate stress when principals worry if they should handle situations differently:

I think oftentimes in education we are so isolated, and we get to thinking that what we're doing is not – you don't know if it's the right thing, you don't know if it's good enough... [My supervisor] has been very good to help build that confidence in myself as well as provide me with like, "Here's some resources. Here's an idea of something you might try. Here's other principals that are doing similar work."

"If I didn't have [my principal supervisor], I would probably not feel as confident and supported. So it would probably be something that would be harder for me to keep going and keep doing, because it is hard work to change the culture of a school."

Principals were clear that their supervisors do not blindly provide unfounded encouragement. The supervisors strategically use coaching skills and tactics to guide principals through a reflective process that helps them to identify strategies and opportunities for improvement. For example, one principal knew that she needed to push some of her teachers to use small groups to better differentiate instruction, and she was worried that they might resist it. Her supervisor helped her identify strategies to approach the situation. In the end, teachers were very positive about the practice and their shifts in instruction helped to improve student outcomes. She described the role of her supervisor's support:

She supported me by hearing me out, listening to my ideas. She would give me suggestions of things that she did at her school because we have very similar styles... If I ever have a question, I'll ask it to her, but most of the time, it really is that coaching model of just, hey, let's look at what you're doing. Tell me about that. What's your next step with that? Is there something I can do for you to help you with that? So, it really is still my work, but she's there really as that coach for me.

Support from central office departments

In addition to feeling more support from their supervisors directly, principals in Granite also feel more supported by departments in the central office. The disposition of these staff members has shifted to a supportive orientation in which they try to better understand the needs of the principal and work to support those needs from an accountability orientation in which they try to "get principals to do what they are supposed to do":

There are nuances to becoming a principal that you don't know as an assistant. There's little things like passwords to certain programs, and programs you have to sign onto now. My first two weeks, I spend a lot of time on the phone with a lot of different people, and that was one thing that was so heartening to me was that every person I called said, "Yep, we'll help you figure that out," or, "You know what, I'm not the one who knows that, but this person will." Everyone was patient with me, and everyone was kind with me, and I don't know any other district but Granite...with people who just went above and beyond to make sure I knew what I was doing.

The importance of feeling supported by central office departments cannot be understated, particularly during the pandemic when so many principals felt lost, confused, and left to fend for themselves.

Principals credit their supervisors with helping to make the culture shift. First, supervisors lead by example in being responsive to their principals' needs. When asked to find a resource or follow up with additional information, supervisors make sure to respond within a day or two.

Supervisors also helped to make the culture shift by advocating for principals:

They really advocate for us. There were a lot of stressful things that happened with Covid ... things that made our jobs harder and sometimes impossible. [The supervisors] do a good job of saying, hold on, wait a minute, we cannot have our administrators do one more thing. We need to find a better way to solve this for them. So I think the role of advocating for us is just as important as any of the support they give us. They really do a great job of watching our backs.

Supervisors often play an important role in helping central office staff understand how districtwide initiatives are playing out on the ground. For example, when contact tracing was first mandated, principals were heavily involved because other staff in the buildings were directly providing services to students. But it soon detracted from the other important work of the principals – leaving them burnt out and unable to accomplish all of their responsibilities. The supervisors advocated for the district to put a nursing team in place that could handle the contract tracing.

How Granite shifted the supervisor role

In order for principal supervisor role to change, Granite:

- Decreased principal supervisor caseloads.
- Protected supervisor time to be in schools.
- Convinced stakeholders that the same person could be a coach and a supervisor.
- Developed supervisors' knowledge and skills.
- Obtained and conveyed supervisor support.

Decrease principal supervisor case loads

First and foremost, Granite had to lower caseloads so that supervisors had sufficient time to spend with principals:

The very first thing you can do, the number one thing you can do that's expensive but doesn't take a lot of brain power, is just lower the ratio of principals to principal supervisor. Just lower it.

If the ratio is higher than 15:1, then supervisors do not have much time to spend with each individual principal on top of other meetings they need to attend. Their knowledge of the principal and the school becomes more superficial, and it is difficult to have meaningful conversations that lead to second order change. In the words of one district leader, "If my ratio is too high, then it's going to be mostly management reacting."

What enabled Granite to shift the supervisor role?

- It decreased principal supervisor caseloads.
- It protected supervisor time to be in schools.
- It convinced stakeholders that the same person could be a coach and a supervisor.
- It developed supervisors' knowledge and skills.
- It obtained and conveyed supervisor support.

Protect supervisor time to be in schools

For Granite, and many districts similarly trying to shift the supervisor role, lowering the supervisor to principal ratio was only half of the battle. Supervisors are frequently required to attend central office meetings which can overwhelm their calendars and leave little time to spend in schools with principals. Supervisors struggled to protect their time until district leaders blocked Tuesdays and Fridays for school visits. This policy was a game changer that

protected supervisors' time in schools, which allowed them to stick to their scheduled time with principals and be accountable to action steps from those visits. To get support for the policy, supervisors documented the meetings they were being required to attend:

They didn't believe us that we were going to too many meetings, so we literally created a giant list. We plugged it in on the monthly calendar – here are all the meetings we go to. It was just overwhelmingly powerful data to show everyone in every division that we are in too many meetings. That was a huge shift to be able to say, "We agree the principal supervisors need to be at your meeting, but they're not available on Tuesdays and Fridays." That was frustrating for them because we weren't available on those two days. They had to figure out schedules, etcetera.

I would challenge any district to have their principal supervisors list every meeting they're required to go to, in a given month, and then fill it in, and say, "Look at this example. This is how we're spending our time. Is this really what you want us to do, as principal supervisors? We are spending a bulk of our time sitting in a meeting. Is that going to build knowledge and skills of our principals if I'm stuck at our district central office in a meeting?"

That was really powerful. Once we [protected Tuesdays and Fridays], we opened the door to do everything we need to do in terms of being with our principals.

Convince stakeholders that the same person could be a coach and a supervisor

When Granite first considered shifting the supervisor role to be less focused on accountability and more focused on supporting professional growth, several stakeholders resisted the idea arguing that the same person cannot be a coach and a supervisor. It was particularly challenging because many people were still not on board with the idea that a principal should both coach and evaluate teachers:

If we believe that the principal supervisor can evaluate and coach the principal, then we also have to believe that the principal can coach and evaluate their teachers and build their capacity. It trickles down, right? That was a huge shift at Granite. We always separated the evaluator and the coach. They were in silos, and never the twain shall meet.

In the end, modeling how the two roles could be carried out by the same person via the supervisor-principal relationship helped the district to model how principals could also balance the two roles in their relationship with teachers:

I would go to a faculty meeting, and the principal would introduce me, and I would say, "I'm your principal's coach now. I coach them and I evaluate them, and you're going to see a lot more of me in your school, and you're going to see me in classrooms with your principal. I'm not going to evaluate you as a teacher. I'm there to evaluate your principal evaluating you or coaching your principal on what kind of feedback they might give you." That whole conversation is really powerful because it helps the teacher see that my supervisor is being coached and evaluated by the same person.

Approximately 18 months later, Granite School District started pushing the idea that principals can both coach and evaluate teachers.

Develop supervisors' knowledge and skills

Granite recognized that the new focus meant that principals' supervisors needed opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills, especially related to leadership coaching. The district hired Gary Bloom, author of *Blended Coaching*, to provide professional development. The training included a book study, shadowing supervisors using *Blended Coaching* in Long Beach, California. Each supervisor was also observed by the consultants and received feedback. The training was very well received:

We had a meta-coach to help coach us on our coaching. They spent a half day with us going to do school visits and then the feedback was just so helpful. To work with another person who is coaching principals, and to have their perspective and their expertise was priceless... In my opinion, whatever the district spent on the training was worth it because it helped me so much in my ability to be an evaluator and a coach.

The district continued to follow up on the training from the external coach by arranging regularly scheduled opportunities for supervisors to observe and provide feedback to each other. The Chief of Schools, who oversees the supervisors, also observes, and provides feedback to the supervisors:

Tomorrow, my boss is going to come out to shadow me during a coaching visit. Next week, I'm going to go shadow one of my colleagues who is an elementary school supervisor. We have a form that we're going to discuss before the visit. It talks about what we hope to see, what we will try to observe, and what we hope to accomplish. We'll have a debriefing. That can be powerful seeing another expert, another professional doing your job in real time. It doesn't cost anything, so there's really no excuses about that. It's just time.

Obtain and convey superintendent support

Granite district leaders report that the supervisor strategy's success was dependent on superintendent support. Supervisors and other stakeholders weren't ready to make meaningful shifts in their practice until the superintendent voiced his support:

I remember when we started, I kept thinking, "does our superintendent support this decision?" It took a few months before we heard him say, "This is what we're doing," Once that happened, other people started to get on board. Really, in Granite, it came from [the superintendent] and him buying into it.

Superintendent support also enabled Granite to gain the school board approvals it needed for resources to hire additional supervisors to lower the supervisor-principal ratio:

Without [the superintendent's] support, we would have never got board approval to do some of the things that we did. For example, we added two [supervisor] positions that made it so that the principal supervisors could do coaching on a more regular basis. And the coaching is what provides the ability to build [principal] capacity.

The superintendent was able to convince his board in part because he had a long tenure and had built relationships and established trust. He was also successful because he was a skilled communicator who was able to explain the strategy and how it would help the district achieve its student outcome goals.

How strong principal supervisors can make a difference for students

Principals in Granite say that one of the main reasons they feel positive and committed to staying in their role is that they feel their leadership is making a difference for their students. And, they think their leadership actions have been more impactful as a direct result of the support they have received from their supervisors.

For example, Becki Monson is a principal of Bacchus Elementary School, which is in a lower socio-economic area of the Salt Lake Valley that serves about 52% English language learners. Principal Monson had been a successful principal at another school and was asked to transfer to Bacchus Elementary as the school entered its final year to exit turnaround status. Principal Monson attributed her prior successes to her ability to cultivate strong relationships, but worried about her ability to lead change – especially the significant change needed to turn around a school – when she was entering a new school and had not yet had an opportunity to create strong relationships.

Principal Monson knew it would be problematic to enter the school and dictate to teachers on how to change their practices, despite her demonstrated success in other schools.

I knew I had to create something that others felt a responsibility or an ownership of versus coming in and saying, "This is a good practice, and this is what you need to do."

Instead, it needed to be something more along the lines of, "Where are the struggles? What are some of the barriers that you as a teacher may feel to be able to implement some of these changes?" And I needed to work with the leadership team on figuring out how we could address those barriers.

Principal Monson worked with her supervisor, Jon Adams, to think through some next steps:

- Frame the need for change.
- Start small to get buy-in from the union.
- Provide development opportunities that teachers valued enough that they were willing to stay after school.
- Use coach questioning techniques when providing observation feedback to teachers to help them reflect on their lessons and buy-in to the things that needed to improve.
- Leverage the leadership team to pilot and spread the good work.

Principal Monson successfully implemented these strategies and found that teachers bought in and responded positively to the training and feedback. Their instruction improved. They prioritized standards and got better at targeting their instruction towards the standards.

Teachers are more focused on what it is the students need to learn. There's research that shows how powerful learning targets and success criteria are. But you've got to implement them, and you've got to implement them well, not just say, "I wrote my learning target on the board."

We have to start having discussions with our kids so they know what it is they're learning, what they're going to do to show how it's going to help them, where they will need this later. Improving how we do this has helped them to find meaning in their learning. So as a result of that, I feel like our kids get more meaningful instruction.

This improved instruction translated into improved student outcomes, and the school has exited turnaround status.

Other principals in Granite have similar examples about how their supervisors have helped them take leadership actions that introduce meaningful changes in school practices and/or culture that can make a difference in student outcomes.

Recommendations

District Leaders: Some strategies that Granite used to transform the supervisor role mirror general strategies that enable effective implementation of any change effort, as outlined in the George W. Bush Institute's [Effective Implementation Framework](#). Some strategies that we recommend other district leaders use when working to transform the supervisor role include the following:

- 1) **Initiate change by articulating a vision for the new role and why it was needed.**
In the case of Granite, the vision was “supervisor as coach,” and it was needed because Granite was seeing a sudden influx of new principals as many veteran principals were retired.
- 2) **Engage stakeholders by garnering the superintendent’s support and having them communicate and build buy-in with other stakeholders.** In Granite, the superintendent was critical in building buy-in of school board members.
- 3) **Invest in change by procuring resources to reduce the supervisor-principal ratio.** Since school board members were bought in, Granite was able to obtain budget approval for two new supervisor positions and decrease ratios so that supervisors could spend more meaningful time with each principal.
- 4) **Building capacity by investing in professional development for supervisors.** Granite dedicated resources to professional development so its supervisors could learn coaching skills to effectively fulfill their new roles.

Supervisors: We recommend that supervisors pursue a similar set of Effective Implementation strategies:

- 1) **Initiate change by articulating a vision for the new role and why it was needed.**
Granite supervisors found it useful to explicitly introduce the new role to principals and explain that it was meant to support their professional growth.
- 2) **Engage stakeholders by making central office leaders aware that the supervisor role has changed – and, subsequently, the way that central office will work with principals and their supervisors going forward has changed.** In the case of Granite, it meant that supervisors were less available to attend central office meetings and were no longer spending time on holding principals accountable to responding to central office requests. They had to collaborate to determine how to adjust accordingly.
- 3) **Invest in change by creating new tools and processes to carry out the new role.** In Granite, they created a new tool for conducting and capturing notes from school visits.
- 4) **Build capacity by engaging in their own professional learning.** Granite supervisors attended district-organized professional development and some also did their own reading to learn how to be better leadership coaches.

Conclusions

At the end of the day, principals are not going to stay in their role if they do not feel they can be successful. They need to feel valued and supported, and they need to be able to see that they are making a difference for the students and school community they serve.

The pandemic has decreased principal morale as their roles have become tougher to execute well. But the Granite case teaches us that supervisors can help to counteract those negatives by being champions who can offer guidance, support, and encouragement. They can also work with others in the central office – on behalf of principals – to enable those departments to better understand and support the needs of principals and schools.

Districts which are facing increased turnover should seriously consider lowering their supervisor-principal ratios and providing their supervisors with the training to recraft their roles into ones that are focused more on the support that principals need and deserve and less on accountability. Districts should also consider coupling the supervisor strategy with other efforts for addressing turnover, such as compensation and working environment, depending on their specific context. All districts should take stock of their principals' intentions to leave or stay – and then take action to retain talent in this critical role.

Appendix

About the George W. Bush Institute School Leadership Initiative

The School Leadership Initiative Cohort (2017-2021) was designed to implement and test the Principal Talent Management Framework and Effective Implementation Framework with four school districts: Austin Independent School District (Austin, TX), Fort Worth Independent School District (Fort Worth, TX), Chesterfield County Public Schools (Chesterfield, VA), and Granite School District (Salt Lake City, UT). The five-year project timeline included baseline data collection (2017), nine cohort convenings with ongoing coaching and support of the districts (2018-2020), and a step-down year of coaching support (2021).

Other Resources

- [Principal Talent Management Framework](#)
- [Effective Implementation Framework](#)
- [Conditions for Change](#)
- [Principal Performance Evaluation Guidebook](#)
- [Principal Recruitment and Selection Guidebook](#)
- [Principal Learning and Supervision Guidebook](#)
- [Principal Preparation Guidebook](#)
- [Prioritizing Principals Guidebook](#)



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