

Hire strong leaders in every school in every district

School leadership matters, because school leaders have the power to substantially influence teaching quality and student learning.¹ Studies show school and district leadership account for about a quarter of total school effects,² second only to teaching among school related factors.³ In schools and districts struggling to increase student achievement, the effects of high quality school and district leadership are even greater. The evidence is clear: it is virtually impossible to “turnaround” a struggling school or district without a powerful and effective leader.⁴

PSEA believes that school improvement across the Commonwealth requires a strong and sustained commitment to recruiting, developing, and maintaining an excellent cadre of school leaders for every school and district.

PSEA Recommendations

Engage in actions to improve the quality and stability of school leaders.

- Conduct a statewide working conditions study as a first-step in addressing the reasons school leaders leave the profession.
- Examine national models of principal evaluation and develop a standards-based evaluation system that examines professional, evidence-based leadership behaviors, rather than simply accountability for student test results. This evaluation system should ensure that principals and other leaders support teachers and respond to circumstances that impede teachers from improving their practice or increasing student learning.
- Develop models of distributed and shared leadership that build collegiality within the school and district, allow instructional leadership to be shared among administrators and content teachers, and engage all educational professionals in the process of culture change and school improvement.

Grow great leaders

National studies, such as the Schools and Staffing Survey from The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, have found that teachers who leave the profession as a result of job dissatisfaction often report a *lack of administrative support* as one reason for their departure. Teachers working in high minority and high poverty schools are even more likely than other teachers to report that the *lack of administrative support* led them to leave teaching.

The quality of school and district leadership directly affects the quality of teaching in schools in many ways.⁵ In fact, it is the work that school and district leaders do that enables teachers to be effective. Teacher effectiveness is not simply a factor of the traits of teachers, but also of their ability to apply their knowledge and skills in a high-functioning organization, designed for student success. The leader builds the organization and recruits, retains, and develops staff to maintain it.⁶

Policies and programs need to pay attention to the particular needs of urban and rural schools. In many urban and rural districts nationwide, the turnover rate among principals is as high as 20 percent annually.⁷ This is troubling because true systemic change rarely takes fewer than five years,⁸ and many major changes can take as many as 10 years to fully implement.⁹ When a principal leaves, research confirms that urban and rural districts face a particularly limited supply of high-quality principal candidates.¹⁰ Urban and rural communities often pay lower salaries and offer fewer benefits than other districts, and as a result they receive significantly fewer applicants for open positions.¹¹ Consequently, urban and rural schools, often with comparatively low levels of student achievement, are more likely to be forced to choose among a small number of inexperienced principal and assistant principal candidates.¹² This is not fundamentally the result of a “shortage” of school leaders, but it is a shortage of school leaders who are willing to accept pay and working conditions that are substantially lower than other, more prosperous, districts.¹³

Policies and programs need to recognize the link between stable school leadership, teacher stability, and student achievement. Principal and superintendent turnover is not only a problem because of challenges in recruiting new candidates. Evidence is growing that rapid turnover among school leaders may have a negative impact on teacher retention and student achievement. One study in Texas found that, after controlling for teacher and school characteristics, teachers were about 20 percent more likely to stay at the same school for at least five years if the same principal remained at the school over the same time. The same researcher found that, after controlling for student, teacher, and school characteristics, schools operated by the same principal over time had greater gains in student achievement than other schools.¹⁴

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Another study found that teachers who say their principals treat them as educational professionals are at least 50 percent more likely to stay at the same school than other teachers.¹⁵



Policies and programs need to measure and improve the working conditions of school leaders. Principals overwhelmingly report that the level of education, energy, and stress inherent in the job are not commensurate with the salary.¹⁶ Several states have begun detailed examinations of principal working conditions and the impact of those conditions on employment decisions as well as on student achievement. For example, one study found that principal retention rates are strongly influenced by student achievement during the principal's first year of employment and the percentage of economic disadvantage in the school; more than 20 percent of secondary school principals in the lowest achieving schools or highest-poverty schools leave the job after one year.¹⁷

Improving the working conditions of school leaders will require the Commonwealth to re-examine those conditions in detail, determine the leading causes of administrator dissatisfaction, and modify the work of administrators in ways that make them more satisfied and effective.

Build a system of effective principal accountability, evaluation, and professional development. Any formal accountability, professional development, or evaluation program needs to be based on standards, including a shared understanding of what it means to build a constructive learning environment, and require the leader to develop a system of professional support that enhances teachers' knowledge and skills. Pennsylvania has started to build a standards-based system of school leadership in the development of the Pennsylvania Inspired

Leadership Initiative and the passage of Act 45 of 2007; however, this system has yet to develop evaluation procedures to examine the work of school leaders in relation to standards and pinpoint leaders' specific professional development needs. Professional development is most effective when it is individualized and based upon comprehensive professional evaluation.

(01/10)

¹ Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (1998) "Exploring the Principal's Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980–1995," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, vol. 9, no. 2: 157–91; and Institute for Educational Leadership, *School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative, Task Force on the Principalship, Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship* (October 2000). Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.

² Leithwood, K. et al. (2004). "Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning," New York: Wallace Foundation.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Schiff, T. (2002). "Principals' Readiness for Reform: A Comprehensive Approach," in *Principal Leadership*, National Association of Secondary School Principals.

⁶ Wallace Foundation. (2007). "Education Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform." New York: Wallace Foundation.

⁷ National Governors Association. (2003). "Improving Teaching and Learning by Improving School Leadership." Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.

⁸ McAdams, Richard P. (1997). "A Systems Approach to School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(2).

⁹ Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 49.

¹⁰ National Governors Association. (2003). "Improving Teaching and Learning by Improving School Leadership." Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.

¹¹ Roza, M. et al. (2003). "A Matter of Definition: Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?" Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

¹² Papa, F., Lankford, H. and Wyckoff, J. (2002). "The Attributes and Career Paths of Principals: Implications for Improving Policy," Albany, N.Y.: University of Albany, SUNY, 8.

¹³ The Wallace Foundation. (2003). "Beyond the Pipeline: Getting the Principals We Need, Where They are Needed Most," p. 5.

¹⁴ www.npbea.org/meetings/NPBEA_12.9.07.ppt.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lortie, D.C. (2009). "School Principal: Managing in Public," Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Quote from: http://www.utexas.edu/news/2009/10/05/principal_retention/.