

# PRINCIPAL PIPELINES

An Affordable & Effective Strategy to Improve Student Achievement

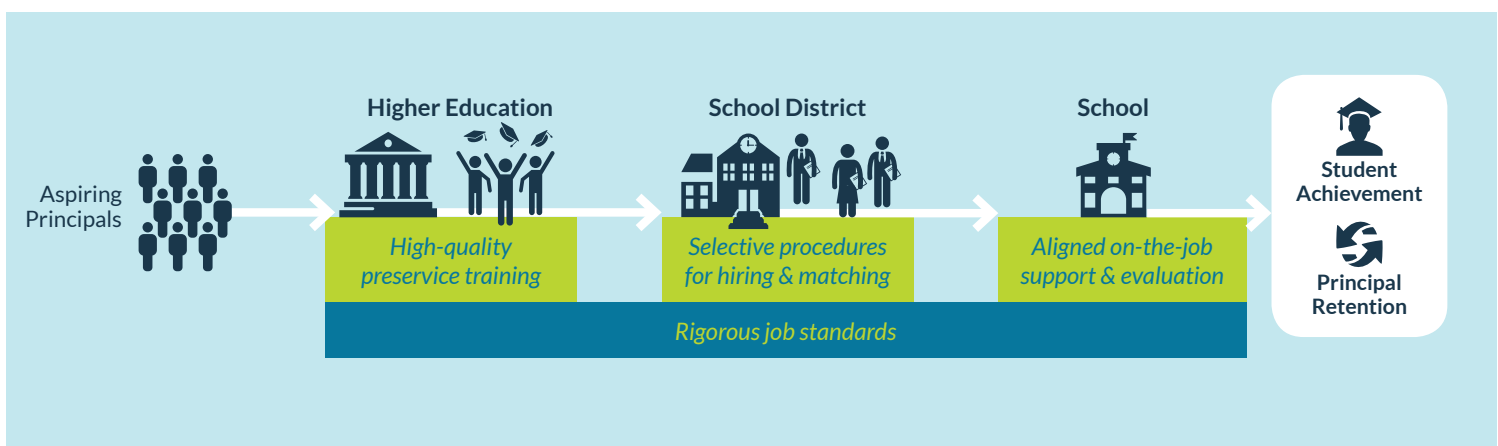
OCTOBER 2019

Principals matter in school improvement. They are second only to classroom instruction in school-related influences on student learning—and central to turning around low-performing schools.<sup>1</sup> Now, wide-ranging, independent research has shown that a more deliberate approach to cultivating and supporting new school leaders—a principal pipeline made up of four aligned parts—offers a strategy to improve schools districtwide and boost principal retention.

## What Are Principal Pipelines?

A principal pipeline refers to four interlocking components that districts use to manage the preparation, placement, and support of new principals:

1. **Rigorous job standards** that specify what a principal needs to know and do—and are reflected in how principals are trained, placed, and managed;
2. **High-quality preservice training**, including district and university training programs;
3. **Selective procedures for hiring principals and matching** them to schools; and
4. **Aligned on-the-job support and evaluation**, especially for those new to the job.



<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2004.

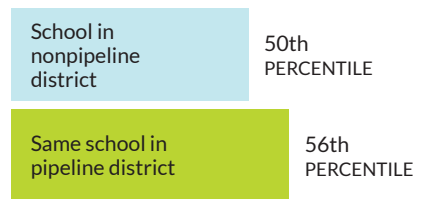
# Principal Pipeline Benefits: Student Achievement and Principal Retention

What happened when six large school districts developed principal pipelines? The results of a study by RAND Corp. and Policy Study Associates Inc. were eye-opening: 1,100 pipeline district schools outperformed 6,300 nonpipeline schools in the same state by a statistically significant degree, almost three percentile points in math and more than six in reading after three years.

**High-needs schools** (those in the lowest quartile of student achievement) experienced positive, statistically meaningful effects. Pipeline benefits kicked in quickly, appearing with the earliest cohorts of new principals.

**Benefits appeared throughout K to 12:** Elementary and middle schools with new principals saw positive, statistically significant results in reading and math; high schools saw significant results in math.

## READING ACHIEVEMENT

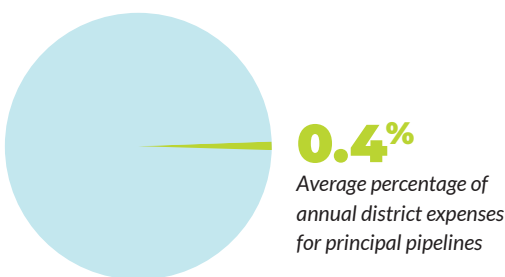


**\$75,000**  
Estimated turnover cost per principal

**Principal retention also increased:** For every 100 newly placed principals, pipeline districts as a whole had eight fewer losses after three years than comparison districts. This result is notable because turnover is disruptive to schools and negatively impacts student achievement. Also, the average estimated cost of principal turnover for a district is \$75,000 per principal.

## Affordable Cost

The pipelines examined in this study were affordable. Districts spent about \$42 per pupil per year to operate and enhance their pipelines,<sup>2</sup> accounting for less than one-half of 1 percent (0.4 percent) of annual expenditures.<sup>3</sup> **Principal pipelines, thus, require a small investment but can yield a huge payoff in terms of student achievement and retaining high-quality school leaders in the profession.**



- 2 The Wallace Foundation, *Principal Pipelines: A Major Strategy to Improve Student Achievement Districtwide*, April 2019.
- 3 Julia H. Kaufman, Susan M. Gates, Melody Harvey, Yan Wang, and Mark Barrett, *What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources*, RAND Corp., 2017.

## Funding Opportunities

States and districts can use Title I and Title II, Part A funding to build and sustain principal pipelines.

### TITLE I

States are required to set aside 7 percent of their Title I, Part A funds to improve low-performing schools by using evidence-based strategies that increase student learning. The RAND study's rigor makes principal pipelines eligible for Title I and other federal Every Student Succeeds Act funding.<sup>4</sup>

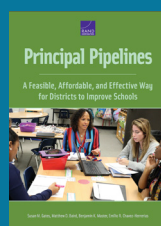
### TITLE II

States may allocate up to 5 percent of their Title II, Part A allocation to teacher and leader development and an additional 3 percent exclusively for school leadership investments. These investments can be used to prepare aspiring school leaders, to develop current principals, or even to fund coaches or mentors who directly support principal learning.<sup>5</sup>

- 4 Cristofer Price and Barbara Goodson, *Memorandum: ESSA Evidence Review of Principal Pipeline Initiative*, Abt Associates, 2019.
- 5 Danny Espinoza and Jessica Cardichon, *Investing in Effective School Leadership: How States Are Taking Advantage of Opportunities Under ESSA*, Learning Policy Institute, 2017.

## Find Out More

To learn more about principal pipelines, see:



Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools  
<https://bit.ly/2OU7OX0>



Investing in Effective School Leadership: How States Are Taking Advantage of Opportunities Under ESSA  
<https://bit.ly/2sa8J89>