



BUILDING PATHWAYS

How to develop the next generation
of transformational school leaders

The authors

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"If I were named superintendent tomorrow, my No. 1 priority would be an outstanding principal in every school. Everything else would be secondary."



IDEA IN BRIEF

Education experts across the ideological spectrum agree that we can and must do a far better job of educating our nation's youth. Too many students leave our public schools unqualified to compete for jobs in an increasingly global workforce. The result is slipping US competitiveness and a perpetuating cycle of poverty.

Less obvious is how to make breakthrough progress at the system level. Reformers and their opponents are engaged in ideological debates across a range of competing policy prescriptions to shape the future of school districts. Despite great progress in many districts across the country, there is a persistent lack of consensus around what works.

What we do know from hundreds of examples nationwide is that dramatically better outcomes are possible at the individual school level even in the most challenging of educational environments. We also know that an essential ingredient behind each of these success stories is extraordinary leadership. Yet we have far too few transformational school leaders today to replicate the results that are possible at a greater scale. The reason: Most school systems fail to methodically develop talented educators into a deep bench of prospective leaders with the experience and ability to build an extraordinary school.

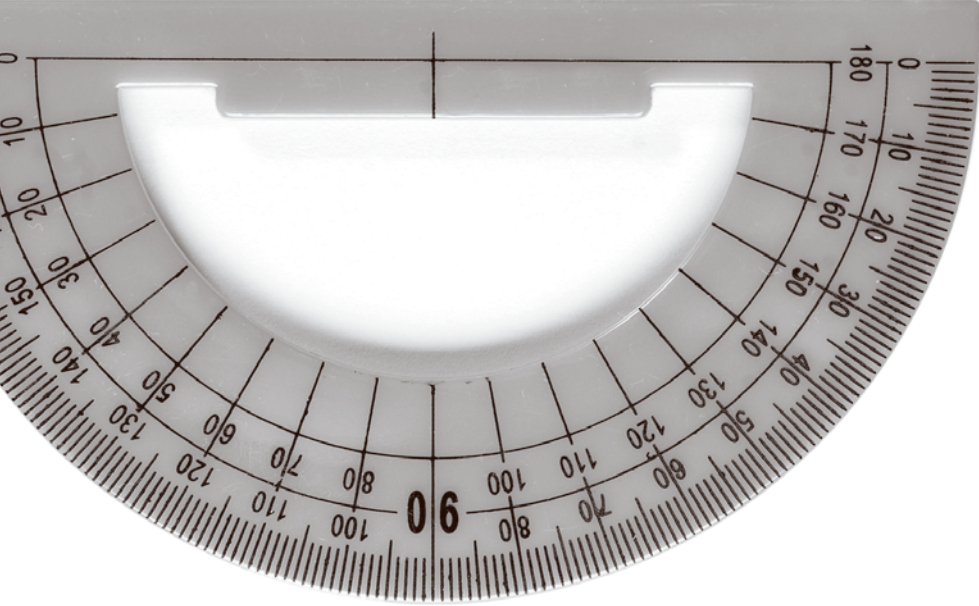
We have the opportunity to develop significantly more transformational school leaders and, through their efforts, create a far greater number of extraordinary schools. Our work with school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs), along with 40 years of experience supporting leading organizations in other sectors, has demonstrated what's possible. We need to stop looking for the best available candidate when openings occur and commit to a model that develops and retains the most promising leaders over time.

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"Most school systems lack an effective end-to-end model for identifying, encouraging and developing the best leaders over time."



*A random walk
to school leadership*



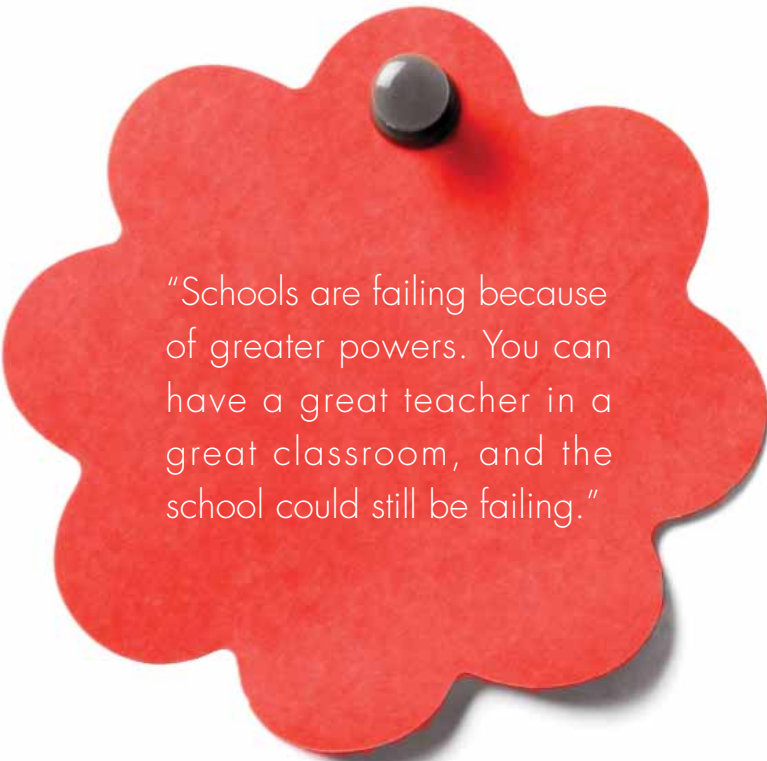
Like most enterprising young teachers in urban school districts around the United States, Michael and Kevin* entered the world of education eager to make a difference. Each stood out as a promising classroom teacher. And both eventually developed an interest in school leadership, hoping to broaden their impact by helping to lead an entire school.

For Michael, the path to principal of a failing, high-poverty elementary school on the East Coast was a fortunate accident. Although he showed early leadership potential as a teacher, his large urban school district had no defined career track for developing management skills or building experience in school administration.

But then Michael's principal took it upon herself to act as his mentor. Amid the intense daily pressures of running a school, she found time to improvise a leadership path for him. She offered Michael the opportunity to run every aspect of the after-school program. She invited him to shadow her, helping him learn what it would take to step into the principal job. With her encouragement, he advanced to assistant principal at another school, and when that school's principal retired, he got the job.

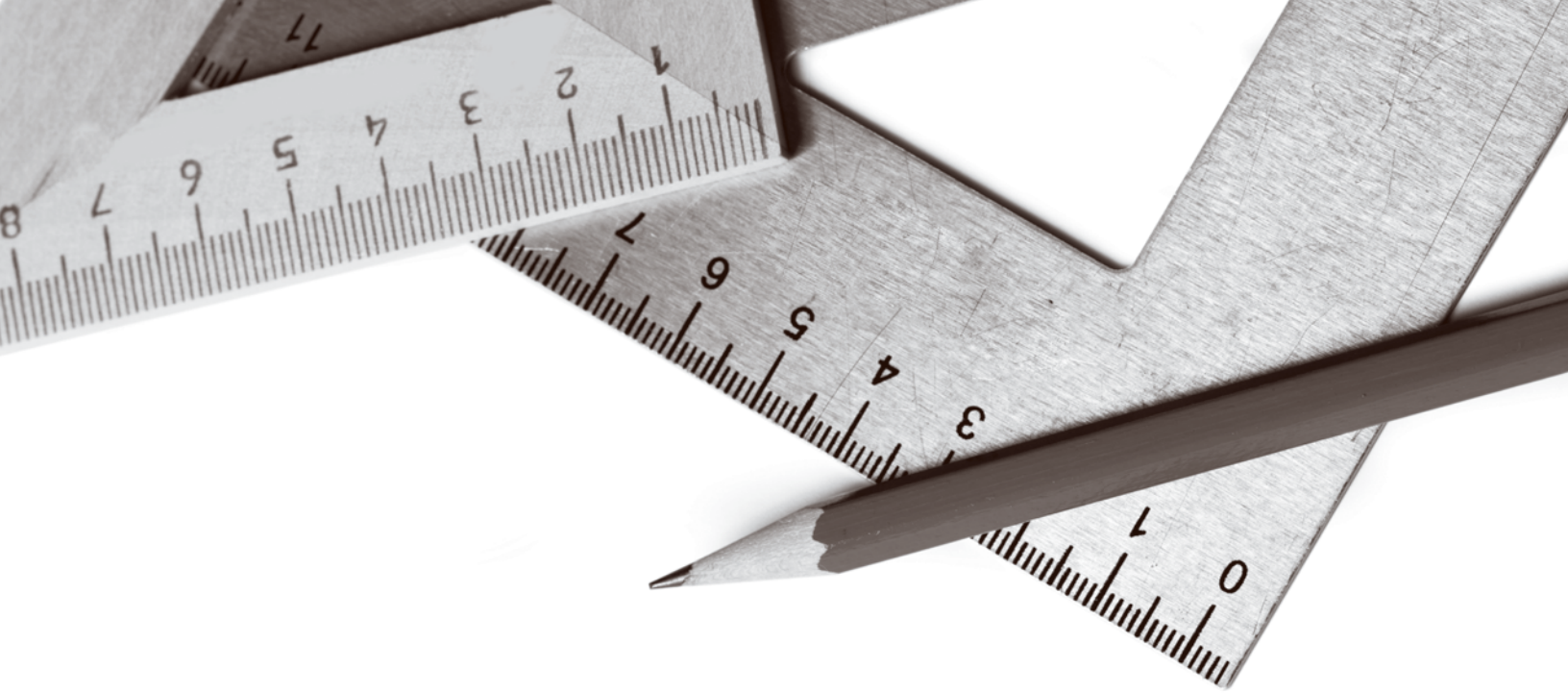
Michael immediately spelled out a clear vision: a high bar for student achievement, more collective accountability for student progress, and an increased sense of urgency around making the difficult changes necessary to improve the school. He recruited a core group of teachers who shared that vision, and the new team quickly changed the culture within the building. By his fourth year, Michael's school had pulled off what many thought was impossible: It had become one of the most sought-after schools in the district. Almost two-thirds of the students tested proficient or advanced in math and reading, up from 30% when he arrived.

For Kevin, a promising start in education ended very differently. He had grown up in an impoverished inner-city neighborhood and experienced firsthand how a strong education can change people's lives: Those from his high school who had managed to graduate and earn a college scholarship were mostly thriving. Many of those who hadn't were mired in a cycle of poverty.



"Schools are failing because of greater powers. You can have a great teacher in a great classroom, and the school could still be failing."

**Not their real names*



After graduating from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Kevin decided to join Teach For America hoping to give something back. In his first two years working in a high-poverty school in a large urban district, he became a standout math teacher. But the more exposure he got to the problems plaguing the schools, the more he felt he could magnify his impact by becoming a school principal or member of the district management team.

“Schools are failing because of greater powers,” he said. “You can have a great teacher in a great classroom, and the school could still be failing.”

Unlike Michael, however, Kevin never found a mentor interested in seeing him advance to the next level. Impressed with his abilities as a math teacher, Kevin’s principal was more intent on keeping him in the classroom. The school district offered no clear management track or even an informal process to discuss future options. When Kevin finally concluded he’d reached a dead end, he left to get his master’s at a top business school. Today, he is a rising star in a senior management role at a major retailer.

Kevin believes he would very likely have stayed in education had anyone encouraged his ambition to pursue a school leadership role. “I would have strongly considered it, but those conversations aren’t happening,” he said. With his newfound skills and experience, Kevin may yet transform an organization. But regrettably for his former school district, it probably won’t be a public school.

Leaving great leadership to chance

Michael got lucky; Kevin did not. But in neither case did the school district that employed them take proactive steps to groom these promising young candidates for leadership roles. Their stories, which emerged from an extensive Bain & Company research study in collaboration with 12 school systems nationwide, highlight what many top educators recognize as a critical missed opportunity: At a time when transformational leadership is vital to solving the nation’s public education crisis, most school systems lack an effective end-to-end model for identifying, encouraging and developing the best leaders over time.

Michael’s example supports what study after study has shown—that a strong leader is essential to transforming a poorly performing school. Yet too often, school systems search for school leaders only when openings occur, rather than cultivating an active pipeline of well-trained candidates with the skills needed to transform schools. Instead of identifying and developing the largest possible pool of talent, they are often left choosing among the best available candidates, frequently at the last minute. In essence, they are leaving this critical school-leadership function to chance.

Most leading public and private organizations do things very differently. They prioritize leadership development and succession planning as two of the most critical human resource functions. Strong and sustainable leadership stems from an understanding by senior management that leadership competencies take time to develop and that retaining top talent requires clear development pathways, ample training and a healthy dose of inspiration. When those things are missing, potential leaders like Kevin see a lack of opportunity and very often elect to go elsewhere. That produces a talent drain that inevitably hinders the organization's performance.

Great teachers, of course, are the lifeblood of any great school and many are perfectly happy (and most effective) staying in the classroom, where they can have the most direct impact on student achievement. School systems need to recognize this and develop pathways that provide opportunities for growth and increased impact while remaining in a teaching role. But developing strong school leaders presents an equally important challenge. Though it is often impossible to predict who will aspire to leadership, it is almost certain the number of candidates will be severely limited without formal systems to encourage talented individuals and create meaningful pathways for their development.

Some systems have sought to broaden their talent pool by importing promising leaders from other fields, which may help in spots. But because the overwhelming majority of school leaders begins their education careers as teachers, building better models for developing talent from within is absolutely essential. What's clear is that transformational school leadership requires an extraordinary combination of skills that can only be developed through on-the-job experience, high-quality training and day-to-day mentorship. It also requires the right mindset. The best principals frequently start as great teachers; their success in the classroom helps foster their conviction that much better results are possible. If school systems are to put the highest-potential leaders in the

most influential roles, they must prioritize building a much more robust approach to developing them.

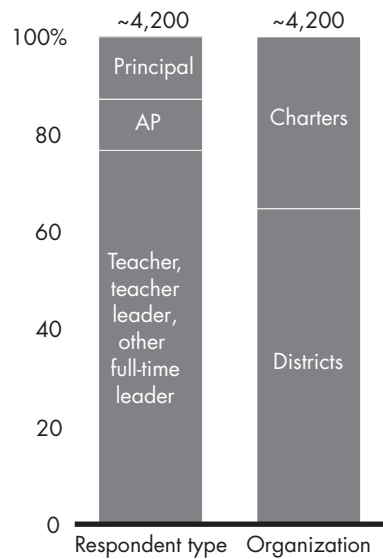
The good news is that many leading districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) are increasingly focused on creating new leadership development models. To better understand the challenges they face, Bain worked in close collaboration with seven urban school districts and five CMOs that share an interest in exploring and benchmarking their practices. We conducted a broad quantitative survey of 4,200 teachers, assistant principals (APs) and principals. We also performed in-depth interviews with school-level, district and charter leadership (*see Figure 1*).

Our work revealed much that was encouraging, including an increasing awareness that the old model is broken and a sharp focus on defining what a new one should look like. It is also apparent, however, that these systems are undertaking an enormous challenge; leadership development has long taken a back seat to other priorities, and the changes required to elevate its importance do not come easily. Much work remains to be done even in places making the most progress. It is notable that just 23% of teachers and 26% of teacher leaders and APs in our research believe that the most talented people in their systems move into school leadership positions. In traditional school districts those percentages are even lower (*see Figure 2*).

Our research identified five persistent roadblocks that typically stand in the way of improvement and a set of concrete actions that together offer a roadmap for how school systems can put in place a robust leadership development model. The changes we recommend present a significant challenge. They require a multiyear commitment to restructure roles and processes and a system-wide focus on leadership development. But the rewards are clear: Developing and putting in place more transformational school leaders is among the clearest and most effective ways to create a higher number of exceptional schools.

Figure 1: Bain conducted extensive research with 12 school districts and charter management organizations

Breakdown of survey respondents



Across seven urban districts and five charter management organizations

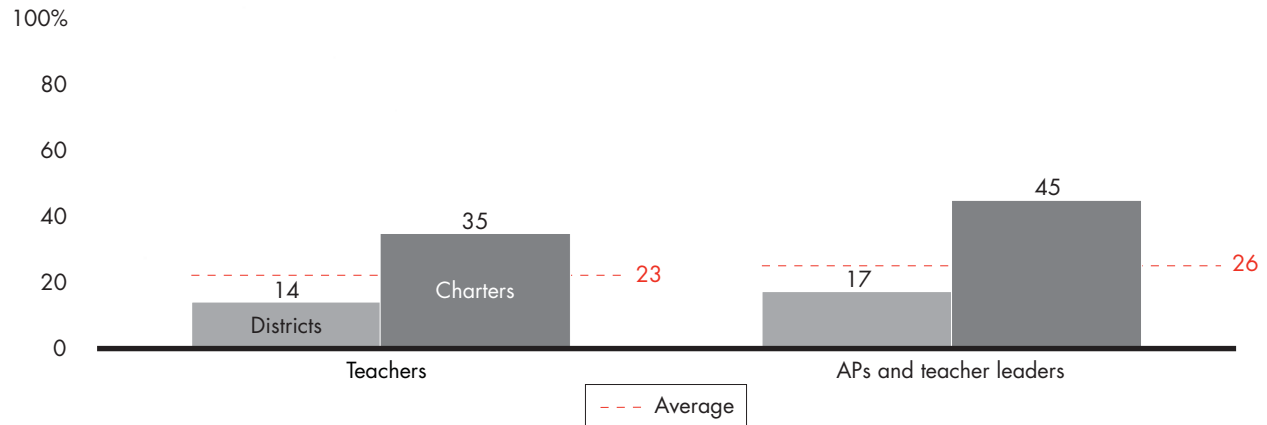
Type	Organization	Number of schools	Percentage of low-income schools (>70% FRPL)	Additional interviews and process sharing
District	District A	< 250	74%	
	District B	< 250	40%	✓
	District C	< 250	72%	✓
	District D	< 250	70%	✓
	District E	> 250	82%	✓
	District F	> 250	64%	
	District G	> 250	76%	
Charter management organization (CMO)	Charter 1	~10	50%	
	Charter 2	~10	100%	✓
	Charter 3	~20	88%	✓
	Charter 4	~20	84%	
	Charter 5	~20	32%	

n=100+

Note: FRPL=free and reduced-price lunches, part of the US Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013

Figure 2: The most talented people are not becoming principals

Percentage who think the most talented people in their district/CMO become principals



Notes: For non-school leader and teacher respondents, n=1,580; for AP and teacher leader respondents, n=1,328
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013

2.

"The critical common denominator for each of these high-performing schools is a transformational school leader."



*Strong leaders
produce strong schools*

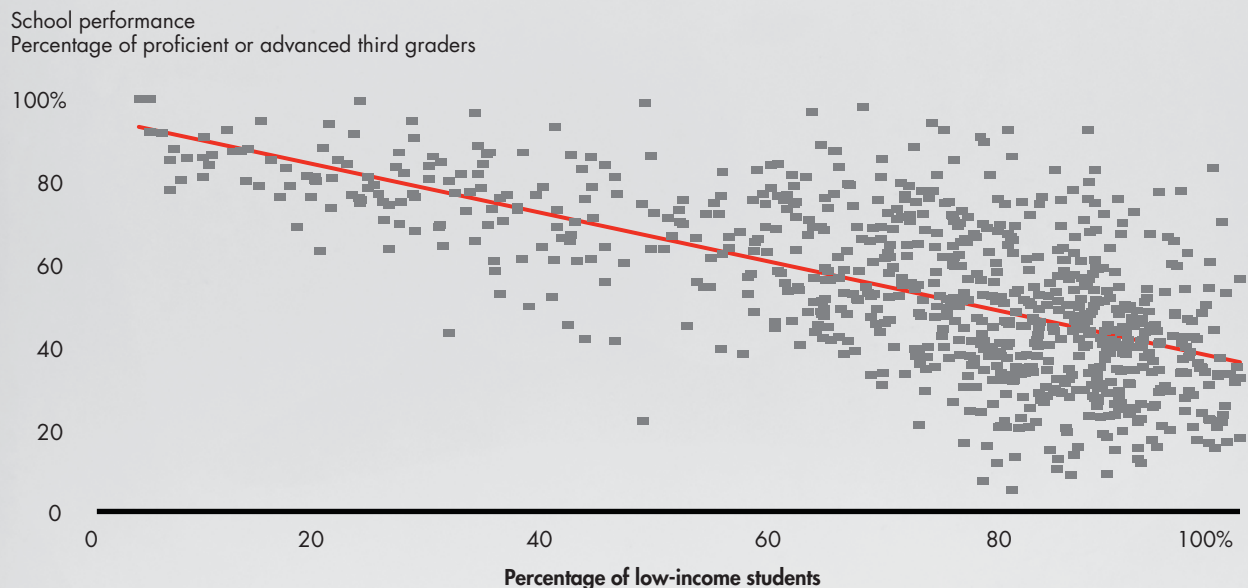
The crisis facing the American school system has defied many decades of policy prescriptions, reform efforts and spending. The US continues to rank well below most other developed nations in reading, math and science. Educational attainment rates have stagnated since the 1970s, and for the more than 16 million children raised in poverty, the outlook is even worse. Students in low-income schools are far less likely to meet basic state proficiency standards than students in higher-income schools (see Figure 3).

But behind these dire statistics, we now know that extraordinary success is possible at the individual school level. Numerous studies have documented the stand-

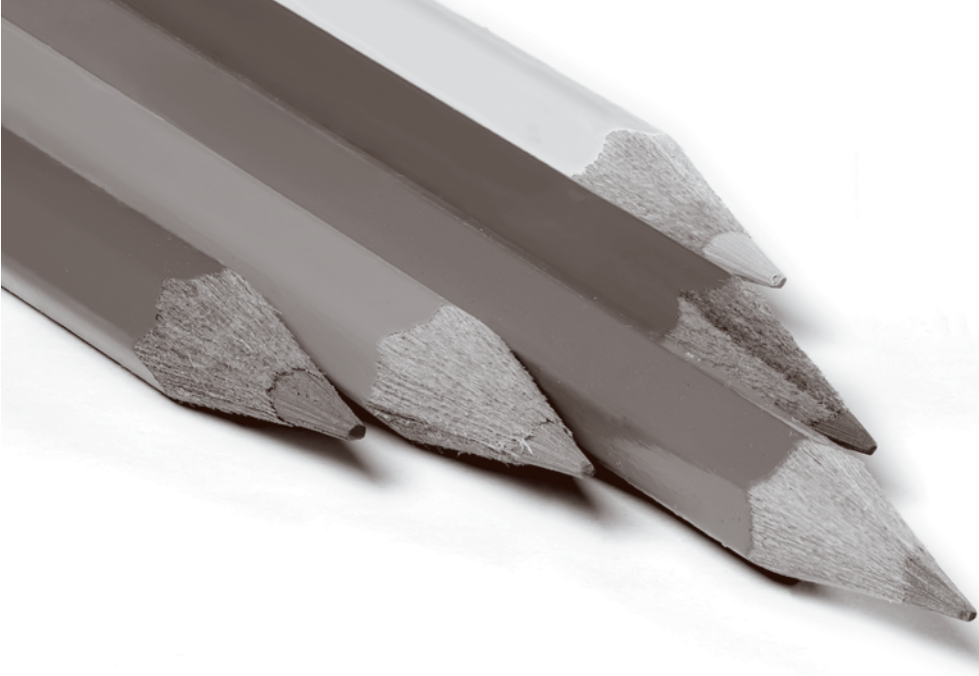
out achievement of more than 250 high-performing schools in traditional urban school districts across the US, where students in poverty are learning more, graduating from high school and increasingly succeeding in college.

Our research turned up many examples of traditional schools that are achieving exceptional results. At Osborne Elementary in the Houston Independent School District, for instance, one longtime teacher-turned-principal helped lead a four-year turnaround that boosted third-grade math and reading scores by 42 and 28 percentage points, respectively, turning a below-average institution into an outstanding one.

Figure 3: Students in lower-income schools are far less likely to meet basic performance standards



Notes: School performance based on 2011–2012 state testing; percentage of low-income students is based on the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches (FRPL) through the US Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program
Source: Publicly available performance and enrollment data



Leading CMOs are also demonstrating what's possible at the individual school level. Houston's YES Prep Southeast boasts an overall student proficiency rate of close to 100% and, despite the challenges posed by a high-poverty student population, every one of the school's graduating seniors in 2012 was accepted to college. At KIPP, a national network of 141 charter schools, students gained 11 months of additional learning in math and eight months in reading relative to their district peers over three years, according to a 2013 study by Mathematica Policy Research. Similarly, Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that students in poverty at both KIPP and Uncommon Schools, a 38-school charter network based in the Northeast, achieved two to three more months of learning each year compared with those at more traditional schools.

The critical common denominator for each of these high-performing urban schools—whether district or charter—is a transformational school leader. While the debate continues around what policies and reforms will best drive student outcomes, the power of great school leaders to make an enormous difference in the buildings they serve is not a controversial one. “Principals shape the environment for teaching and learning,” said National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel in a 2008 union policy brief. “The most-effective principals create vibrant learning communities where faculty and staff collaborate to help every student fulfill his or her potential.”

A full 97% of the survey respondents in our research agreed that “a great principal is an essential ingredient to making a school successful,” and 92% said such leaders “can significantly improve results in high-needs schools.” As the human relations director of one inner-city district put it: “If I were named superintendent tomorrow, my No. 1 priority would be an outstanding principal in every school. Everything else would be secondary.”

Study after study has reinforced this point. “There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader,” concluded a 2004 University of Minnesota study commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, which has provided approximately \$285 million in funding to promote school leadership programs since 2000. The study found that leadership was second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affected learning. A 2012 study of Texas schools, led by Hoover Institution economist Eric Hanushek, documented that the highest-quality principals drove the most lasting improvements.

Transformational leadership is vital to school turnarounds for a simple reason—the job is extraordinarily challenging. Great leadership has always been essential to building great schools, but never has the task required such a broad range of skills and competencies. North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district, which is part of

The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative, recently codified the skills and requirements that it believes all principals must have to be effective in their jobs. Derived from a set of equally stringent state requirements, the district calls them “Super Standards,” and it’s a daunting list. The competencies include vision, innovation, establishing a culture of high performance, data-driven decision making, building diverse relationships, resource allocation, conflict management and several more (see Figure 4).

“Public education’s changed mission dictates the need for a new type of school leader—an executive instead of an administrator,” the Charlotte district concluded. “No longer are school leaders just maintaining the status quo by managing complex operations but ... like their colleagues in business, they must be able to create orga-

nizations that can learn and change quickly if they are to improve performance.”

School districts and CMOs nationwide are increasingly recognizing the need to populate schools with leaders who rise to a higher level of competency. What’s less clear under the current system is where these leaders will come from. Transformational leaders aren’t easily found or recruited, especially on short notice. But they can be developed over time if school systems make a multiyear commitment to building the organizational capabilities required to identify, encourage and nurture the best candidates. Many of the school systems we studied are moving toward a more proactive model (see Figure 5). The challenge now is to more sharply define what works and how systems can best overcome the cultural and organizational impediments that gate faster progress.

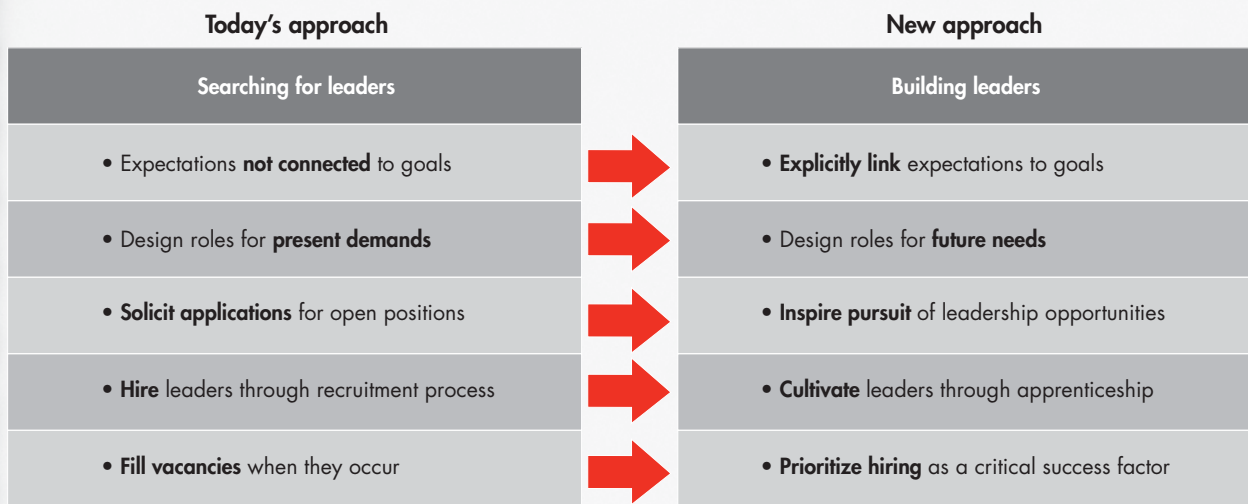
Figure 4: Principals in Charlotte, NC, must rise to an ambitious set of “Super Standards”

Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools’ Super Standards for school leaders

Competencies	Strategic	Instructional	Micro-political	Human resource	Cultural
Building diverse relationships	●		●	●	●
Establishing a culture of high performance		●		●	●
Delegation	●				●
Succession planning	●			●	
Resource allocation				●	
Effective communication			●		
Conflict management			●		
Data-driven decision making	●	●			
Results orientation/ownership of outcomes	●	●			
Visionary	●				
Change leadership	●				
Innovation	●				
Coaching	●				

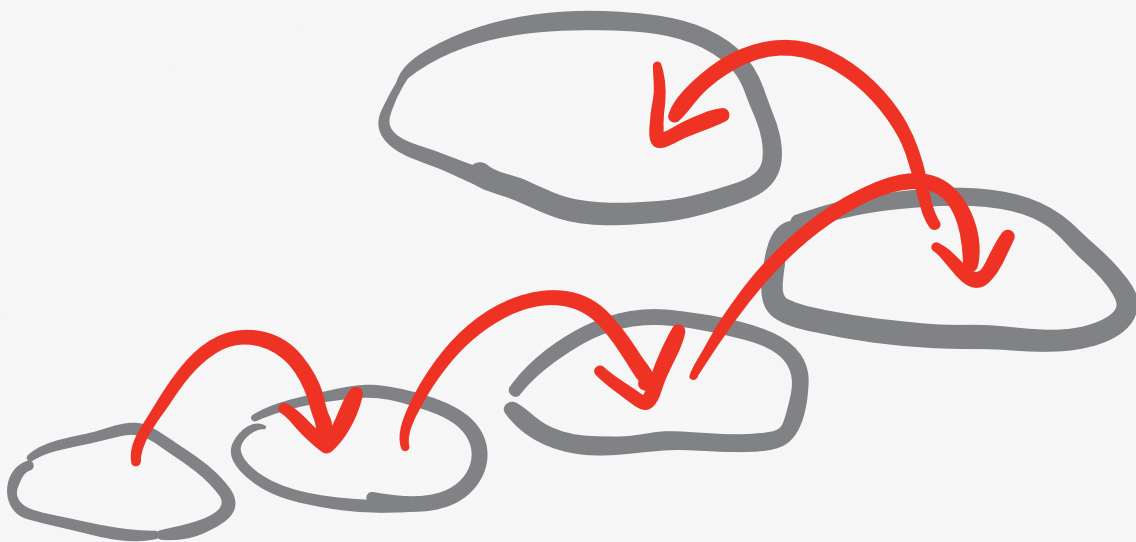
Source: “Recent leader standards,” The Wallace Foundation, 2013

Figure 5: Top systems are moving toward a more proactive model for leadership development



System-wide commitment to leadership development

Source: Bain & Company



3.

"The raw talent is out there. We're just not pulling them through the system."

A black and white photograph of a young child with curly hair, wearing a dark polo shirt, stacking alphabet blocks. The child is looking upwards with a focused expression. The blocks are stacked vertically, with the top block showing the letter 'S'. Other visible blocks include 'E', '4', 'J', 'O', and 'H'. A large red diagonal shape is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

*Identifying the
roadblocks to success*

Roadblock #1:

School systems encourage too few high-performing educators to pursue leadership roles.

A major goal of our research was to collaborate with leading school districts and CMOs to foster a deeper, empirical understanding of the factors that limit the development of a larger number of transformational school leaders. Drawing on our long experience helping organizations in both the public and private sectors build effective leadership development capabilities, we identified five major roadblocks that too often prevent promising candidates from getting the training, guidance and encouragement they need.

Roadblock 1. Given the demands of the principal's job, it is perhaps not surprising that most teachers initially want nothing to do with it: More than 80% of those surveyed said they were unlikely to pursue school leadership in the future. For almost half of this group, the issue is a desire to stay in the classroom. But just as many said they found the principal's role unattractive, meaning that a negative perception is curtailing interest among a large group of potential candidates.

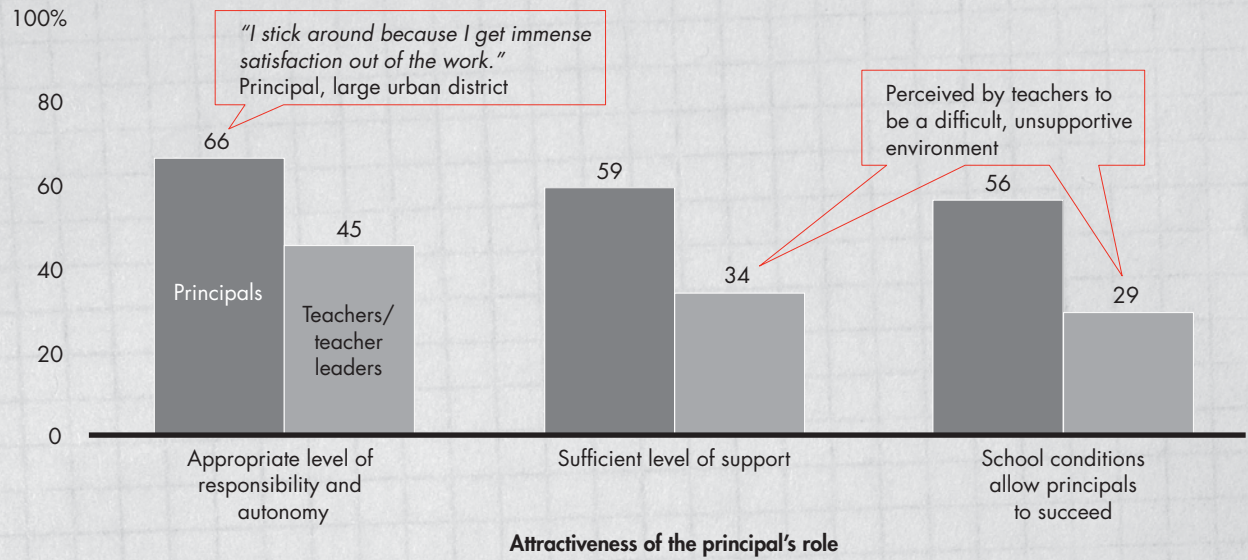
As we see with so many other demanding leadership roles, those who actually have the job find it much more attractive. The majority of principals in the districts

we surveyed relish the challenge and the opportunity to make a broader impact. Unlike teachers, they believe the role offers a good balance of autonomy and support (see Figure 6). "I stick around because I get immense satisfaction out of the work," explained one principal of a Houston school. "Teachers see how hard leaders work, and they already know how hard they work, so they just don't think about it as an option." In his case, however, strong, passionate mentors "helped me understand that it was extremely fulfilling—and possible."

This was a common theme. Almost 80% of the school leaders in our research noted that early encouragement around the attractiveness of leadership roles was formative in making their decision to pursue one. "I was initially resistant to leaving my classroom because I loved teaching," explained the principal of a New York charter middle school. "But it was pitched to me as having a larger impact, and that was a critical turning point." Another principal in Houston noted that he never gave much thought to being a principal until his boss tapped him on the shoulder. "Great leaders can see people down the road as a leader before they can see it in themselves."

Figure 6: Sitting principals view their jobs more favorably than teachers and teacher leaders do

Percentage who agree



Notes: For principals, n=526; for teacher leaders, n=909; for teachers, n=1,801
 Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013



Photo courtesy of Green Dot Public Schools



These findings suggest that while leadership isn't for everybody, promoting the opportunity to the right candidates is an essential first step in developing a more robust supply of strong leaders. Yet few school systems do so methodically or work to identify and encourage high-performing teachers to consider this path. Only 33% of teachers in our research said their system had encouraged them to consider pursuing leadership roles.

For some schools the problem is cultural—a hesitancy to do anything that would encourage great teachers to leave the classroom, even if that might align with those teachers' ambitions and benefit the broader system. For others, it's the challenge of knowing with confidence who to encourage. They lack the ability to sort the highest-performing teachers from average ones, making it difficult to tell who among them has the “right stuff” to be a great school leader. For all, it's a structural problem: How to articulate a clear path forward on a multi-step journey that will provide the right experience and the opportunity to develop the required skills.

That stands in stark contrast to the established best practices we see working in other sectors. Most successful organizations see leadership development as a top priority, and they orient their structures and processes to reflect its importance. They provide high-potential employees with opportunities to lead teams and pursue leadership roles. They encourage mid-level management to strive for greater leadership responsibility. These organizations also struggle to identify those with the greatest leadership potential. But by identifying and promoting clear career pathways, they encourage the broadest possible pool of employees to stay within the organization and rise as far as their talent and inclinations will take them. By contrast, school systems that rely on “accidental” encouragement too often lose talented teachers like Kevin, who seek leadership roles elsewhere.

Roadblock #2:

Stepping-stone roles fail to develop necessary leadership skills.

Roadblock 2. Most schools have a variety of leadership positions that could serve as stepping-stone roles. These include AP roles, teacher leader roles (grade-level chair, department chair) and, depending on the size and grade level of the school, other full-time leadership slots such as instructional coach or curriculum specialist. Most school systems, however, lack guiding standards that define these roles and ensure that they include meaningful leadership responsibilities.

In the systems we studied, stepping-stone roles were often centrally funded but defined across schools haphazardly without a commonly understood set of requirements. Many system leaders said this leads to troublesome inconsistency. Some teacher leader roles, for instance, are structured to provide significant development experience, with ample coaching and training. Others are structured to provide important support for key transformational goals such as implementation of the “common core,” even if they aren’t specifically tailored to be stepping-stone roles. But many are assigned merely to address a narrow set of tasks or to reward long-tenured teachers with a higher-paying role. “If you look at teacher leader models nationally, they are mainly

about giving more money to the most senior teachers,” said one district superintendent. “In most places teacher leaders have no management and supervisory responsibilities.” Many principals agree the teacher leader role is falling short. Only about half of the principals in our research believe the role provides a “purposeful pathway” to leadership in their schools.

“While some principals provide their APs with meaningful roles and responsibilities, others end up focused on the tasks the school leader doesn’t enjoy—buses, books and bathrooms.”

The result is that too many of these roles fail to offer candidates the opportunity or time to begin developing the capabilities required of a principal (see Figure 7). Three-quarters of the teacher leaders in our research said they don't feel accountable for the performance of the teachers they supervise, and 56% said they aren't responsible for providing instructional coaching. More than 80% of teacher leaders had a full teaching schedule with no time allotted for leadership responsibilities.

While APs get a broader range of experience, and the opportunity to focus on the role, the leap to principal is still a significant one. The majority of APs in our research said they aren't involved in hiring/firing decisions, and 35% said they didn't feel responsible for developing future leaders. "While some principals provide their APs with meaningful roles and responsibilities, others end up focused on the tasks the school leader doesn't enjoy—buses, books and bathrooms," said one district recruitment manager for a large urban district.

Without a clear definition of which skills must be developed and a consistent set of roles that are structured to provide those experiences, leadership development becomes catch-as-catch-can. In most cases, that means it gets pushed aside by more immediate priorities. "Teaching is already a hard, full-time job," said one district's director of human resources. "When should our teacher leaders do the things we're asking them to do: observe and coach their other teachers, coordinate curriculum across classrooms, plan the after-school activities, communicate with parents and so on?" The human resources director added: "Technically our principals have the control to allow them to structure in free periods, but we're not really helping them prioritize that in their budgets. We should be. It's a big barrier to the development of our people."

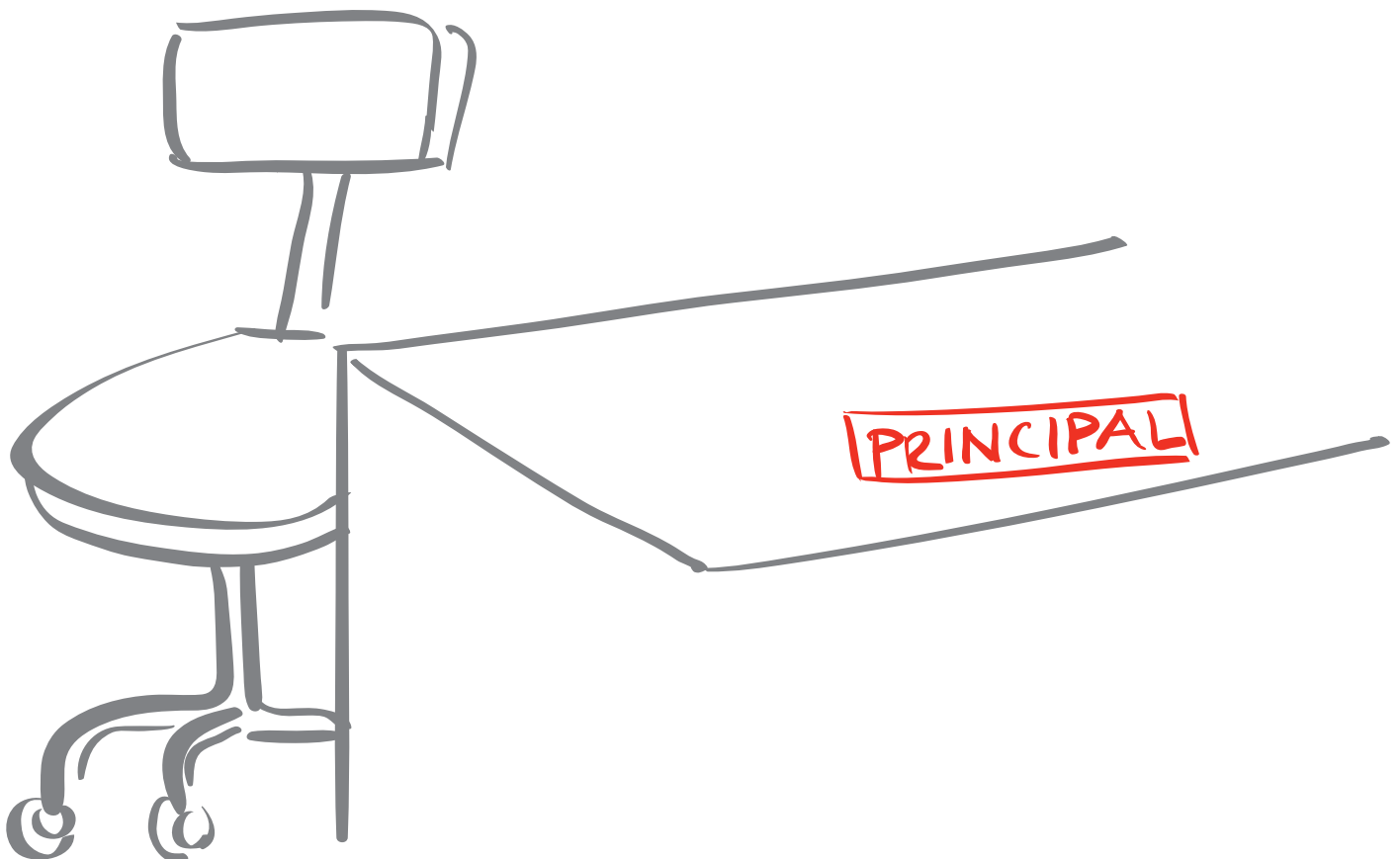
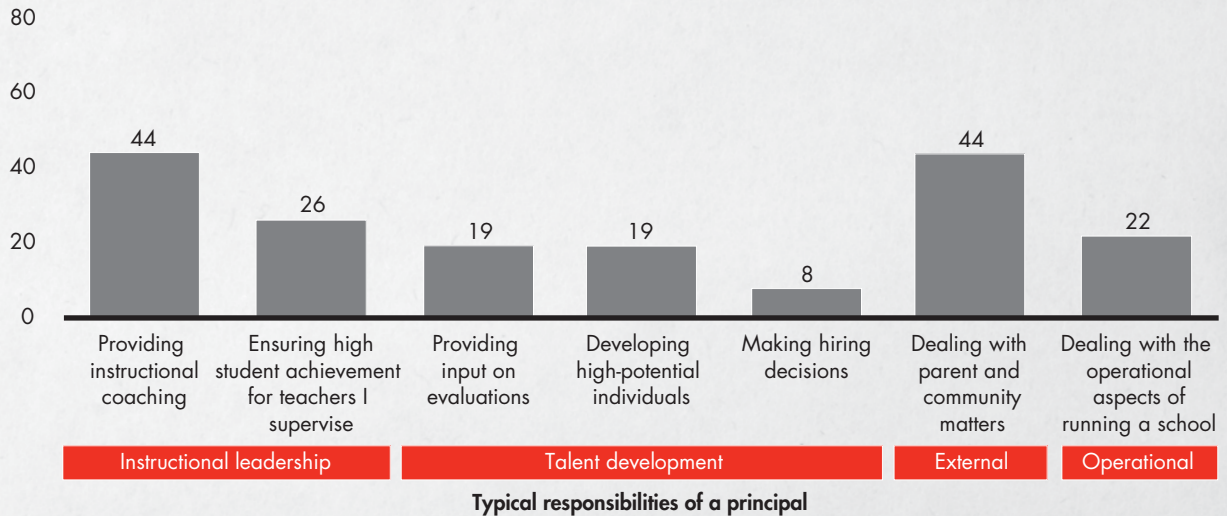




Figure 7: Teacher leaders are often not engaged in leadership development activities

Percentage of teacher leaders
100%



Note: Teacher leaders, n=915
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013



Photo courtesy of Green Dot Public Schools

Roadblock #3:

Aspiring leaders receive inadequate coaching and training on key skills.

Roadblock 3. Despite the fact that principals themselves often cited coaching and encouragement as major factors in their own development, most struggle to find the time to offer similar support to high-potential leaders in their buildings. Less than half of the APs and other full-time leaders in our survey said they receive frequent coaching and feedback on their performance from their principals.

Most school systems have not created a culture in which formal leadership coaching and development are a key part of what school leaders are expected to do and how they are evaluated. And most systems in our research have yet to find a way to bridge that gap. “For our APs, we literally do nothing,” said an HR official at one large district. “We put them in the role, and we just expect them to do things like evaluate teachers. Obviously, this is something we want to address.”

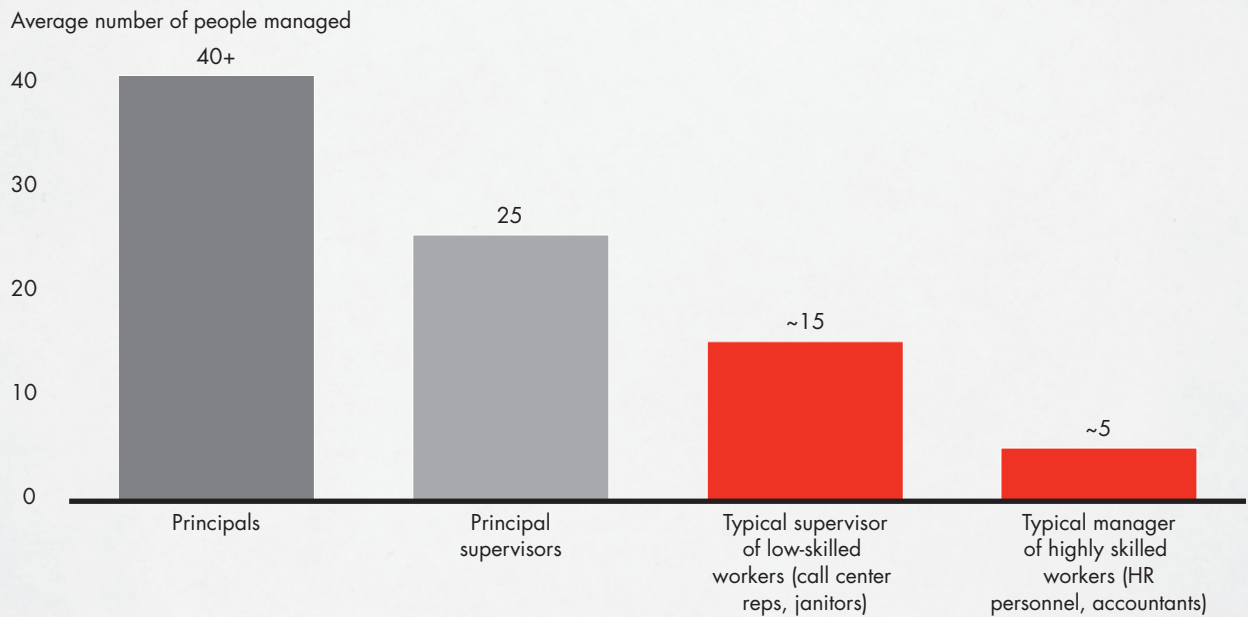
Addressing the problem, however, requires a system-wide commitment to freeing up the time for current leaders to help develop the next generation. One district we studied has made working with APs a priority for

principal supervisors. “The hope is that our new review process will make it clear to principal supervisors that knowing the talent in their network is a key part of their role,” said the district’s director of principal talent. “But it hasn’t been in the past. That means we’re going to have to take things off their plate and help them prioritize—we can’t just keep adding on.”

Much of the problem stems from the fact that both school leaders and system leaders typically have much broader “spans of control” than managers in other organizations (see *Figure 8*). District school principals are, on average, responsible for supervising more than 40 individuals. Principal supervisors are just as swamped, often overseeing 20 to 30 schools and about 200 to 300 staff in some form of leadership role. This breadth of responsibility is far wider than we see in other fields. People in corporate leadership positions typically are responsible for five to 15 subordinates, with lower spans when overseeing more complex and customized activities.



Figure 8: Compared with other fields, school leaders manage far too many people



Notes: Average based on district responses; for principals, n=514; for principal supervisors, data obtained from interviews
 Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013

Roadblock #4:

Leadership roles are not managed systematically as a talent pipeline.

Roadblock 4. Organizations with a focus on talent development design leadership roles with a dual objective: managing today's challenges and developing tomorrow's leaders. They evaluate individuals based on both current performance and future potential. Those who fall short on either dimension are moved off the leadership development track.

"The most disappointing thing is to have a school where the principal leaves and there are three APs in that school, none of whom want the principal role or are prepared for it."

But leadership roles in schools work differently. They are designed and filled with little consistency and without close system oversight. Decisions are based on today's school-level considerations rather than the talent development needs of the broader system. "Until very recently, the principals hired whomever they wanted and they don't always select on the right criteria," said a senior administrator at one large district. "Often, they'll look for the person who can just keep things off the principal's plate... A more formal process is needed with a clear pathway to leadership for those that are interested."

Relying on an informal system based on short-term priorities and a fragmented building-by-building perspective leads to stagnation: Too many stepping-stone roles are filled by educators with little interest in leadership. In our research, 73% of teacher leaders and 36% of APs said they are unlikely to pursue a school leadership position (*see Figure 9*). Leaving APs in their positions indefinitely comes at a high cost. They may be playing a valuable role today, but they are filling a seat that that might otherwise be used to give more ambitious leaders an important development experience. This effectively clogs the arteries of the leadership development pipeline by limiting available stepping-stone opportunities and discouraging others from seeking such roles.

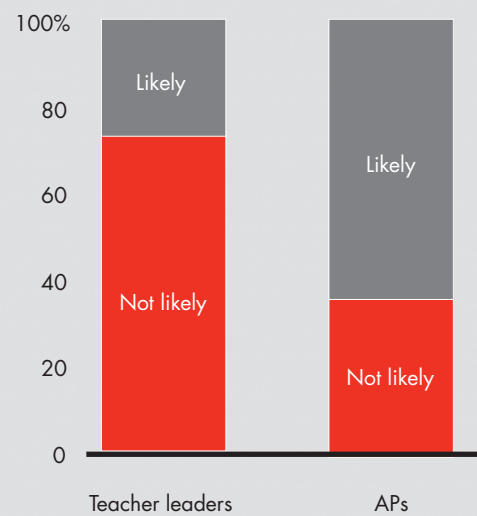
Figure 9: Educators with little interest in school leadership fill too many key stepping-stone roles

73% of teacher leaders

36% of APs

are not likely to pursue the principal role

Percentage of respondents pursuing a principalship



Notes: For teacher leaders, n=913; for APs, n=511
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013

Roadblock #5:

The hiring process is disconnected from performance management.

Many school system leaders recognize that the AP role, in particular, is a wasted development opportunity. But culturally, the status quo is hard to change. Many “career APs” have been in their roles for 5, 10, even 15 years, and many principals value having a safe set of hands into which they can delegate the less desirable parts of their jobs.

While sitting district school leaders spent only 3.2 years as APs on average, current APs in our research have already been in the role an average of 5.4 years, with 40% indicating they have been in the role for more than six years. In one district, almost 60% of the APs have been in their role for longer than six years. Given that approximately 20% of the schools in an average district face principal vacancies each year, the failure to develop more leaders can be a debilitating problem. Superintendents find themselves with a persistent dearth of internal candidates ready to step into the principal role. That leaves them with a difficult choice: Scramble to find candidates from the outside or promote those who aren’t ready from within.

As the chief of human resources in one district put it: “The most disappointing thing is to have a school where the principal leaves and there are three APs in

that school, none of whom want the principal role or are prepared for it.”

Roadblock 5. The persistent difficulty school systems encounter when openings occur can be captured in one telling data point: Fully half of the principals in our research were hired within one month of the start of the next school year. The fire-drill nature of the hiring process is partly a result of insufficient investment in the systems needed to evaluate and cultivate the highest-profile candidates coming through the pipeline. But schools also lack insight at the final step of the process: vetting the best candidates among those in the applicant pool for a particular leadership role.

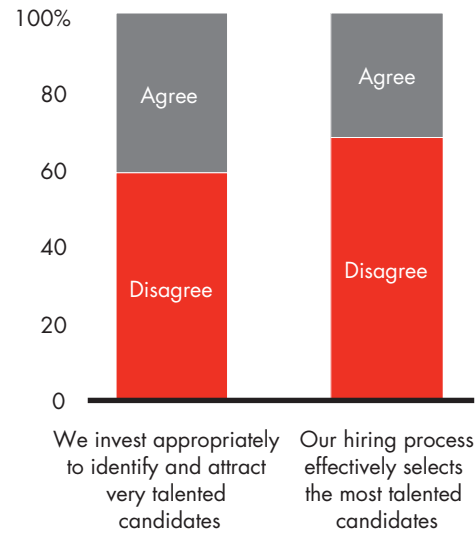
Only 41% of the school leaders in our research believe their systems have invested appropriately to identify and attract “very talented” candidates to apply for principal slots. And when it comes time to hire, only 32% feel the process effectively selects the most talented candidate from those who do apply (*see Figure 10*). “Every year, the superintendent has to renew poorly performing principals because the applicant pool isn’t strong enough to replace them,” said the manager of school leader recruiting for one large district.

Figure 10: School systems aren't investing enough to attract the most talented candidates

More than half of principals and two-thirds of APs say

school systems are not
attracting and hiring
the most-talented candidates

Percentage of respondents (principals and APs)



Note: For principals, n=529; for APs, n=502
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013



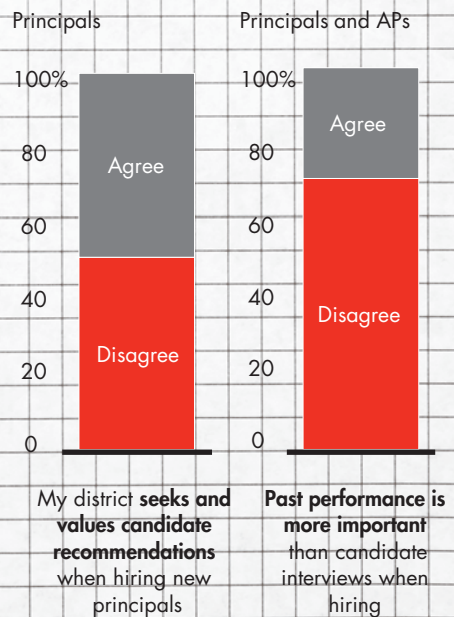
At most school systems we studied, data on past performance either doesn't exist or is hard to come by, making it difficult to evaluate candidates for current jobs or spot those with the most potential moving through the system. "Applications are often taken blindly," said the director of principal talent in one district. "Applying to be principal requires the same form and data as if you were applying to be a bus driver. We just aren't capturing the level of data we need to make a good decision."

School officials lament that despite the fact many candidate have been in the system for years, their historical performance relative to others is rarely a major factor in the application process. The institutional knowledge is available, it just isn't getting captured. Only 49% of principals say their system asks for and values their hiring recommendations when evaluating candidates. More than two-thirds of school leaders believe their system places more importance on candidate interviews than past performance data (see Figure 11).


Figure 11: Most school systems fail to capture important institutional knowledge about candidates

51% of principals don't think their district values candidate recommendations

71% of principals and APs think candidate interviews are more important than past performance in hiring



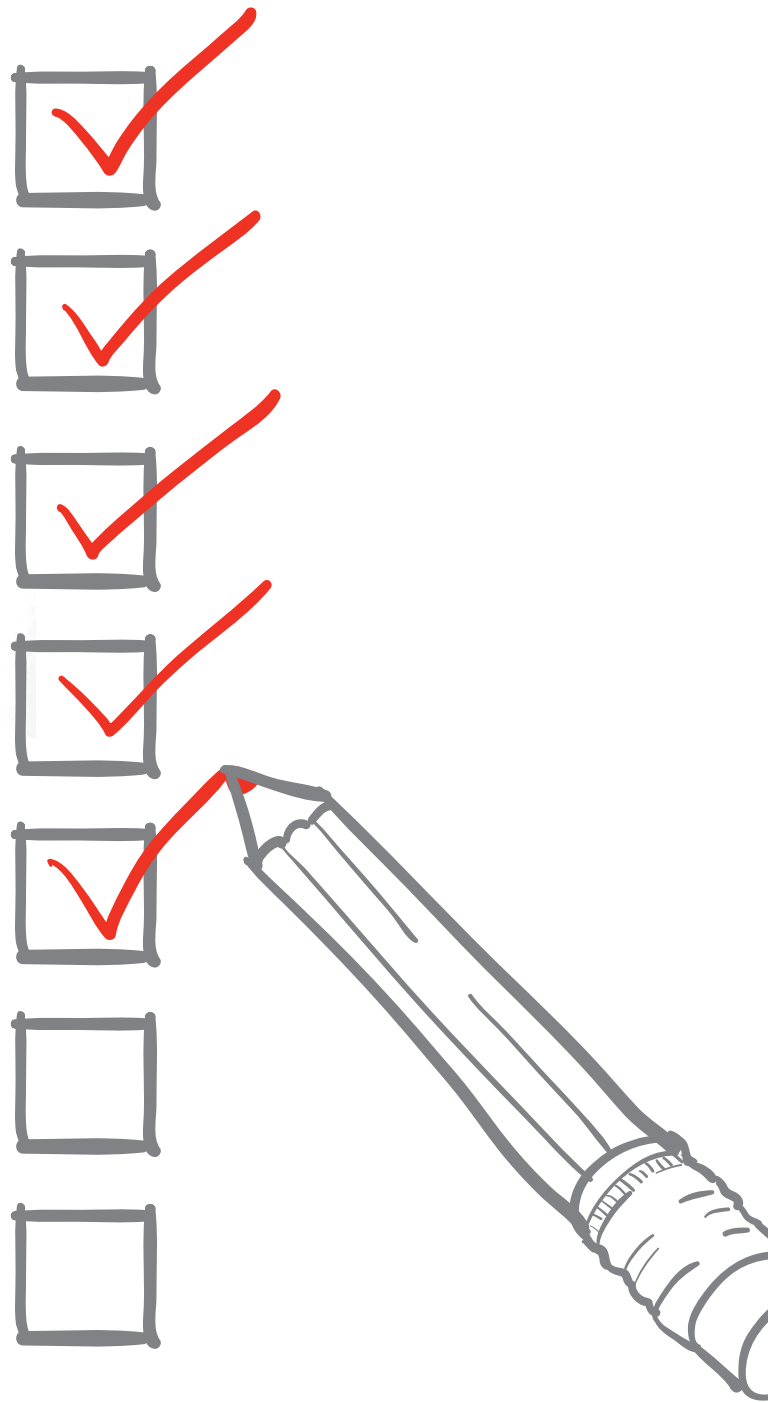
Notes: For principals, n=530; for APs, n=415
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013



“Applying to be principal requires the same form and data as if you were applying to be a bus driver. We just aren't capturing the level of data we need to make a good decision.”

One root cause of the problem is that schools have historically failed to invest in the tools and processes most leading organizations use to collect and analyze the performance data that underlies sophisticated pipeline planning. “We haven’t had effective evaluation and performance-management systems,” said the human relations director at one district. “Under our prior system, 97% of our teachers were ‘satisfactory,’ providing no differentiation... so it was hard to rely on any of that kind of data.”

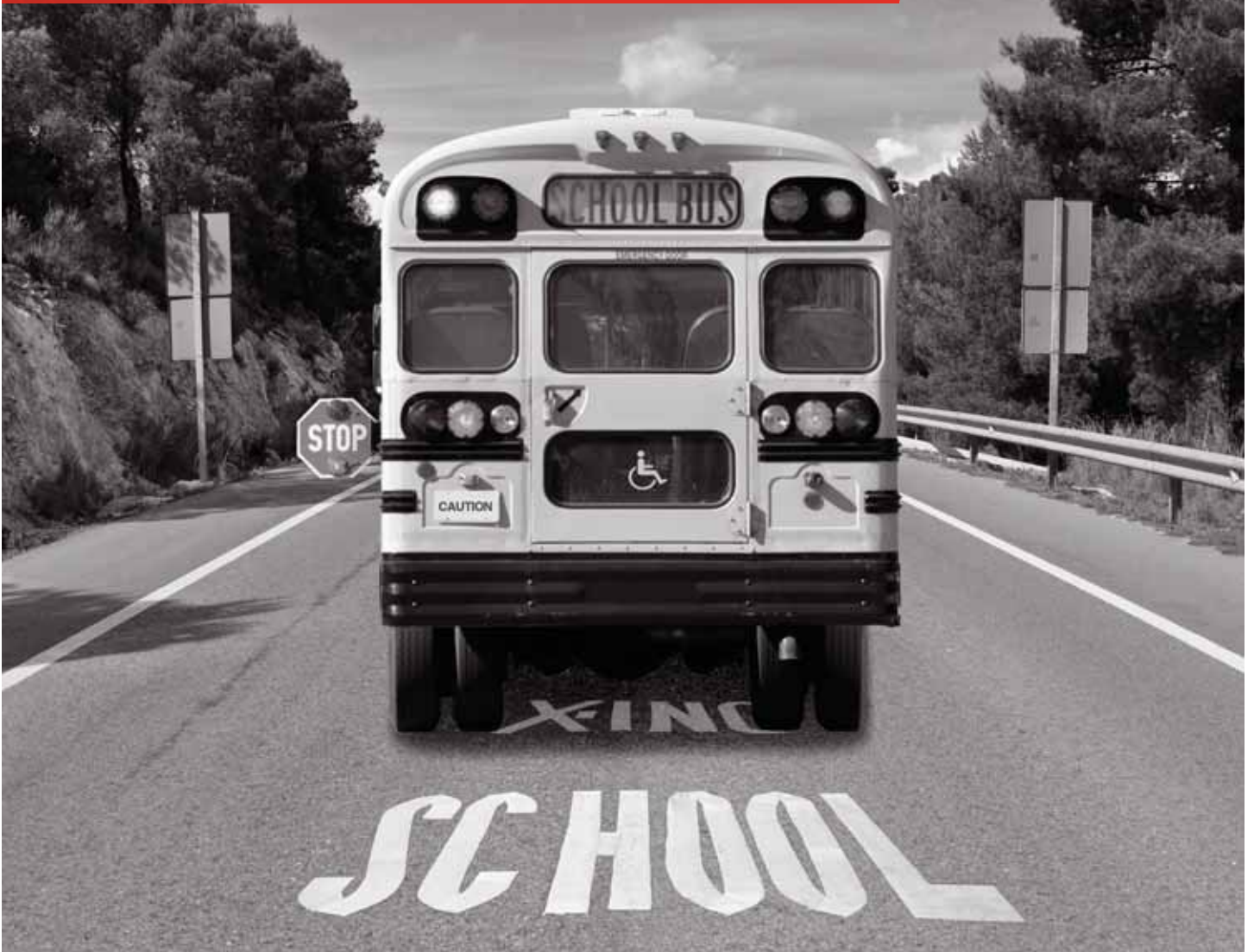
Another HR official agreed that a lack of meaningful ways to evaluate talent leaves officials guessing when it comes to both nurturing strong candidates and promoting the best ones. “We’re not taking advantage of the fact these people have been in our system,” he said. “We should know these candidates and their strengths and weaknesses. The raw talent is out there. We’re just not pulling them through the system.”



4.

"Creating a better leadership development model will require extraordinary leadership."

*A roadmap
for change*

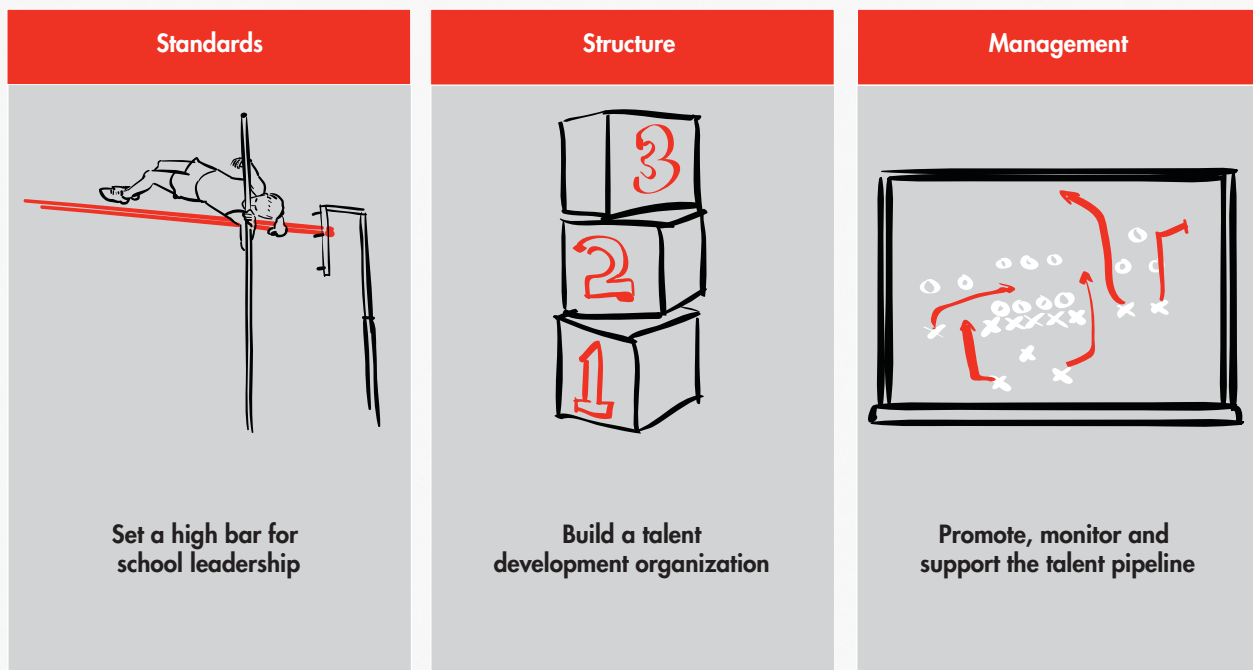


A new model for developing transformational school leaders

The five roadblocks we've identified are both deeply rooted and widespread across the US public school system. Eliminating them will require an extensive makeover in the way most school systems structure and manage their stepping-stone roles, and it will require a much stronger commitment to inspire, develop and select truly transformational leaders. Creating a better leadership development model, in other words, will require extraordinary leadership.

Many of the school systems in our research recognize this challenge and are working hard to address it. A number of them have begun to devise and implement creative approaches to solving some of the thorniest issues. New leadership development models are starting to take shape. The emerging best practices we saw in our research, coupled with our extensive experience in leadership development in other sectors, led us to three broad recommendations that can collectively help school systems take a major step forward on the journey to develop more transformational school leaders.

Best practices: Three steps for creating a better leadership development model



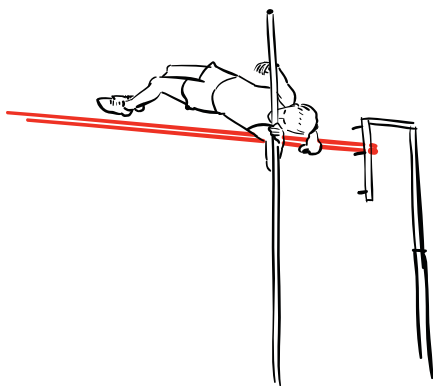


1. Standards: Set a high bar for school leadership

The necessary first step in finding leaders capable of transforming schools is to create a clear vision of who those leaders should be. What are they being asked to do? What qualities and skills must they possess to succeed? Matching a school system's high ambitions for student achievement to an equally ambitious set of standards for the capabilities expected of school leadership inevitably raises the bar from the old fallback standards of "capable administrator" or a "safe pair of hands." It creates an elevated expectation to put in place "transformational leaders" with a realistic chance of turning a struggling school into an exceptional one.

"It is very important to clarify what we expect our school leaders to do so we can make better decisions when bringing people in and also be more sophisticated about how we develop, or when necessary, exit, current principals," said a top HR official in a major East Coast school district.

Best practices (Standards)



Define

- Link school system goals to the leadership capabilities required to achieve them
- Articulate specific behaviors and competencies that leaders must exhibit to succeed
- Involve multiple stakeholders to create buy-in and build desire for change

Apply

Use competencies as a tool to:

- Design stepping-stone roles
- Evaluate and develop current principals and emerging high-potential leaders
- Hire new school leaders

Today, school systems' aspirations for excellence are too often separated from the process of identifying, grooming and evaluating effective leaders. Successful organizations we've worked with across many other sectors have long understood that this creates a disconnect. Bringing about significant change requires creating strong linkages between overall goals and the capabilities of those charged with achieving them. Many of the school systems in our research have embraced this approach and are developing new leadership standards and the systems to support them. The Denver Public Schools (DPS), for instance, launched a multi-phased initiative in 2010 to develop a framework that both defines principal effectiveness and creates the evaluation and feedback mechanisms necessary to help principals meet those expectations.

"We now have a common language," said John Youngquist, the DPS director of principal talent (itself a new role). "Our principal managers now have a guide for what they should be looking for in the schools to know that the right things are happening."

While the Denver framework includes a number of criteria common to other systems, it is not a cookie-cutter solution imposed from the top down. "We looked at external examples, and there are great ones out there," said DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg. "But ultimately, we decided to build our own solution given the importance of involving school leaders, teachers and others in the design."

This is crucial. The act of defining great leadership must include the participation of sitting school leaders, teachers and other important stakeholders. That creates buy-in—a collective aspiration that lays the groundwork for the difficult changes ahead. "We created our teacher leader roles in a highly collaborative way; 30% of our teachers participated in a series of focus groups and helped directly in designing these roles," said Marco Petruzzi, chief executive of the Green Dot Public Schools charter network in Los Angeles.

It is equally important to make sure the new vision becomes “real” by translating those standards into a commonly understood “competency framework,” or set of actual behaviors. That becomes a pragmatic tool for assessing whether a current or prospective school principal truly has the right skills. It also adds precision when placing specific candidates in specific jobs. “It’s imperative to make the right match between the skills of a school leader and the specific needs of the school,” said Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent John Deasy. “All of the competencies in our framework are important, but what’s most important will vary somewhat in different types of schools.”

With a well-defined set of system-wide standards in hand, high-level conversations about leadership qualities give way to hard-nosed assessments of whether candidates actually possess the required capabilities. The conversation shifts from “Who’s available?” to “Who do we need?” That helps principals gauge their own performance throughout the year relative to a clear set

of criteria so they have a better sense of where they need to improve. And for the system as a whole, it drives a deeper understanding of critical gaps in the existing talent pool and helps build a necessary consensus around the importance of taking bold actions to address those shortfalls.

“Raising the bar on school leadership will often require significant change,” said Deasy. “We changed 60% of our school leaders over the past three years.”

“High-level conversations... give way to hard-nosed assessments. The conversation shifts from ‘Who’s available?’ to ‘Who do we need?’”



2. Structure: Build a talent development organization

Transformational school leadership requires both a fundamental belief that better outcomes are possible and an extraordinary combination of skills. Those skills can only be developed through a mix of on-the-job experience, high-quality training and strong mentorship. School systems need to move toward a model that provides all three.

Nothing is more important to leadership development than a rich set of real-world management experiences. In our work across education and numerous other sectors, we consistently see the majority of leadership development coming through opportunities to actively lead other adults in a day-to-day role. The Center for Creative Leadership developed the 70-20-10 model—70% of development should consist of on-the-job experience, 20% from coaching and feedback, and 10% from classroom training. This is as true in schools as it is in other sectors. Developing candidates with the management talent to lead complex organizations requires giving them a broad range of leadership experiences along the way.

Best practices (Structure)



Stepping-stone roles

- Elevate stepping-stone roles by defining a clear set of competencies for each one
- Create consistent expectations for similar roles to enable better evaluation and guidance
- Enable teacher leaders to focus more on leadership roles

Supervisory support

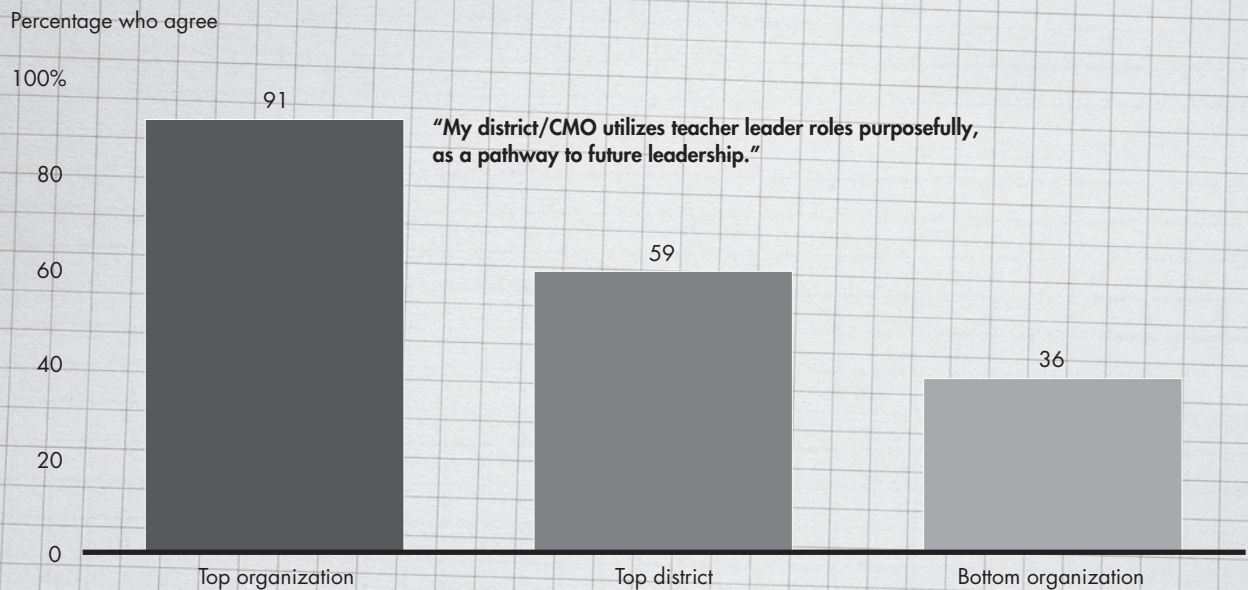
- Enhance the principal-supervisor's role so it includes managing the pipeline for school leaders
- Reduce spans of control to increase emphasis on leadership development
- Focus the supervisory role to assess and manage the development of leadership talent across the school system



That begins with a system-wide effort to create meaningful and consistent stepping-stone roles that have a strong leadership component. Designing teacher leader and AP roles in this way attracts and encourages talented leaders while giving them opportunities to develop the skills they will need in both their current and prospective roles. Several of the school systems in our research have made this a central focus of their leadership development efforts and the results are encouraging (see Figure 12).

For many school systems, setting a more consistent set of expectations can be a difficult structural and cultural shift—and understandably so. AP and teacher leader roles are usually centrally budgeted but locally structured. They have traditionally been defined on a building-by-building basis with today’s issues and personnel squarely in mind. There are many good reasons for that—each school situation is unique, and empowering school leaders to deploy talent in their buildings as they see fit is generally a good thing.

Figure 12: Top school systems are turning the role of teacher leaders into truly effective development opportunities



Note: School leader respondents
Source: Bain School Leadership Study, 2013



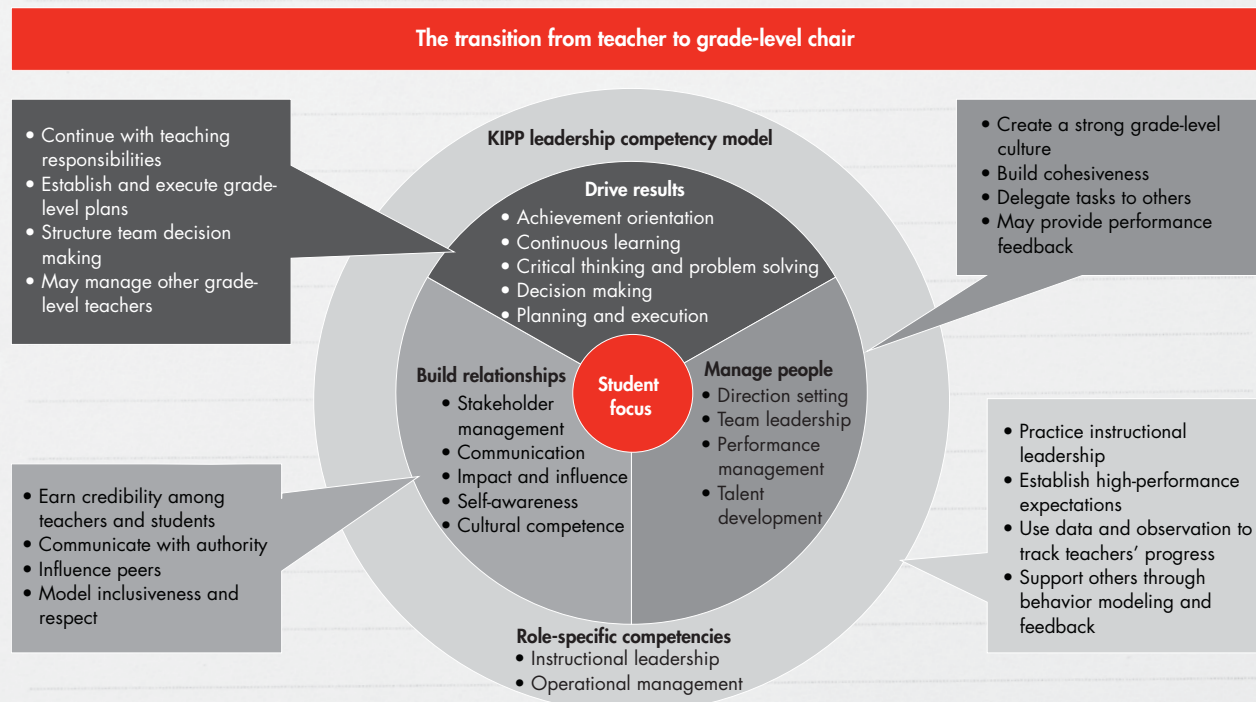
But this model also makes it very hard to ensure that individual schools structure and fill enough of these roles with an eye toward leadership development. Absent a longer-term perspective on how they can contribute to retaining and developing potential leaders, there is a natural tendency to define these positions too narrowly. Our research shows that principals tend to structure teacher leader roles to incorporate a narrow set of tasks that can get done despite a full teaching load rather than structuring them as if developing the next generation of school leaders was among their highest priorities. They often take a similar short-term view of AP roles, designing them around those tasks they least prefer to do.

The lack of consistent expectations and a common language around what great performance looks like make it difficult to assess talent and match the highest-potential leaders to the best opportunities across the system. In a district with 100 schools and 150 APs, for example, it's almost impossible to identify the 20 APs most ready to step into the school leader role. Spotting potential stars in the less-visible teacher leader stage of the talent pipeline poses an even greater challenge.

School systems need to embrace more common definitions and push for a consistent set of expectations across like roles in comparable buildings. That doesn't mean that elementary school AP and high school AP jobs should be the same or that there might not be multiple, distinct AP roles in a high school. It does mean that systems should move toward clearly defining what skills and competencies should be incorporated into distinct stepping-stone roles, even if they vary somewhat from building to building.

The KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) network of charter management organizations has been an early innovator in setting a high bar for its school leaders, including its teacher leader and AP roles. KIPP has augmented its school leadership competency model with what it calls a Leadership Progression Roadmap, which describes in detail the specific skills that candidates develop as they move from one role to the next. (*see Figure 13*). By clearly defining key teacher leader and AP competencies, it has raised the collective aspiration for these roles without being overly prescriptive around exact job designs across a diverse portfolio of member schools.

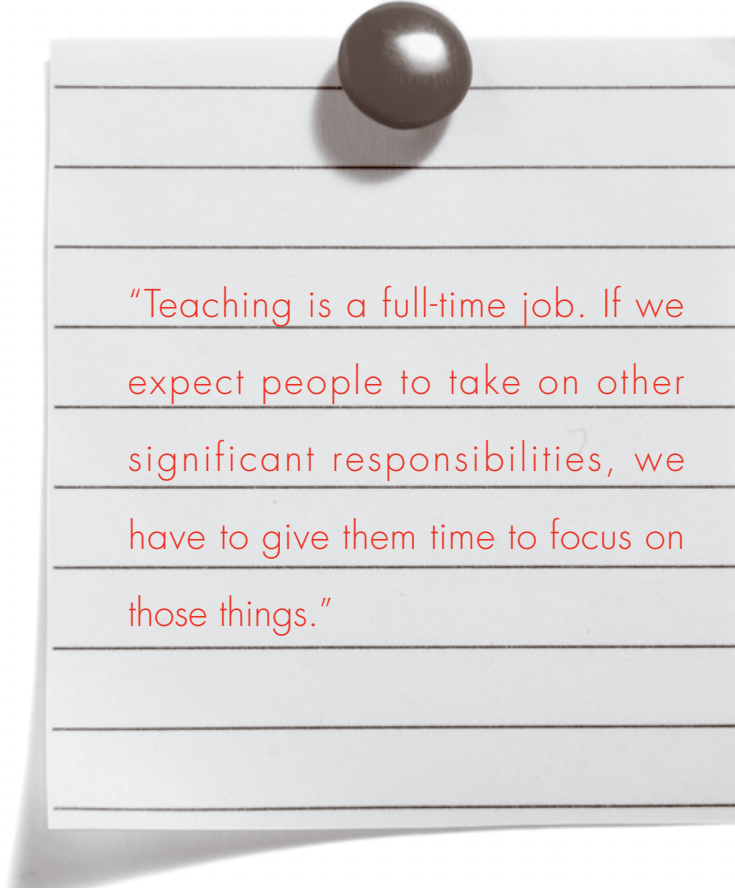
Figure 13: KIPP customizes its leadership competency model for each stepping-stone role



Source: KIPP (to view the full leadership progression, see www.kipp.org/careers/leading-at-kipp)



Photo courtesy of Green Dot Public Schools



“Teaching is a full-time job. If we expect people to take on other significant responsibilities, we have to give them time to focus on those things.”

KIPP recognizes that keeping strong teachers in the classroom is a key priority. But creating clear pathways gives those who aspire to leadership a better idea of what to expect when they transition into the next role, while also giving principals a clearer picture of the skills they should be cultivating.

One example of a clearly defined role is what KIPP calls its Grade Level Chair (GLC). This “first-level leadership and management opportunity” gives high-performing teachers the chance to coordinate and support other teachers at a given grade level. KIPP expects GLCs to “earn leadership credibility” by, among other things, effectively guiding decision making; encouraging a strong, cohesive culture; using hard data and observation to track progress; and, in some cases, providing performance feedback. The idea—explicitly stated—is to begin building the skills needed to advance along the leadership progression toward an AP job.

Available time is a crucial consideration in designing meaningful stepping-stone opportunities. Schools have to find ways to structure teacher leader roles so they include both significant responsibilities and

sufficient hours during the day to focus on them. That will often require creativity in freeing up time for added responsibilities without compromising teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

“Teaching is a full-time job,” said the head of human resources for one major urban district. “If we expect people to take on other significant responsibilities—overseeing other teachers, curriculum alignment, program management—we need to give them time to focus on those things. Our staffing and budget model would easily allow principals to create free periods for teacher leaders, but it’s a matter of prioritization.”

Several of the systems in our research have devised innovative solutions. A good example is Houston’s YES Prep charter organization, which buys time for teachers to get involved in leadership activities by trimming staff at the central office so it can put more teachers and on-campus personnel in its schools. This budget scheme allows YES to give teachers significant leadership development opportunities without taking top performers out of the classroom.

Rather than develop all of the curriculum at the central office, for instance, YES has devised a Course Leader position that hands a significant portion of that job over to teachers. YES gives them a reduced course load but expects them to prepare learning content and planning materials, write assessments and support other teachers. YES also offers teachers several instructional leadership positions such as Dean of Instruction. Not all of these roles involve classroom time, but those that do allow teacher leaders to spend roughly 80% of their time coaching and developing others and 20% teaching.

School systems also need to build time for leadership development into the principal and principal supervisor roles. Principals need an organizational structure that enables them to spend more time mentoring potential leaders within their buildings. Principal supervisors need to support and monitor them, while keeping track of available talent across the system. Leaders don’t develop uniformly across schools, and often

the best candidate for an opening in one building might be found in another. To be effective, principals and principal supervisors need to have spans of control that are manageable.

As we noted earlier in this report, principal supervisors in many systems oversee as many as 25 schools. But several of the systems in our research, including the Houston and District of Columbia public schools, have moved aggressively to ease the burden by giving them a more reasonable portfolio of 10 to 12 schools and focusing their role more formally on leadership development. In Houston, principal supervisors are now called School Support Officers and are expected to be a key resource for the principals they manage. The District of Columbia Public Schools has dubbed the role Instructional Superintendent and has shifted the responsibilities to include instructional leadership.

Reducing these spans is not always simple, of course, particularly in budget-constrained environments.

While some systems may be able to add supervisory resources without too many barriers, others will need to dig more deeply to find some, or all, of the budget needed to do so. We have seen several districts and CMOs take a close look at costs—particularly general and administrative costs—and think critically about the relative value of various expenditures. With an objective eye and sometimes difficult discussions on trade-offs, they have found opportunities to shift budget allocations associated with lower-value activities to those deemed to be higher priority, such as adding additional supervisors.

While never easy, what's clear is that reducing spans of control for supervisors has an immediate effect. In our research, only 3% of the principals in districts with traditional, larger spans said their principal supervisor visits their building at least once a week, while 58% said visits come monthly. In districts with smaller spans, the frequency rose sharply: 19% reported weekly visits and a full 88% said their principal supervisor visits monthly.



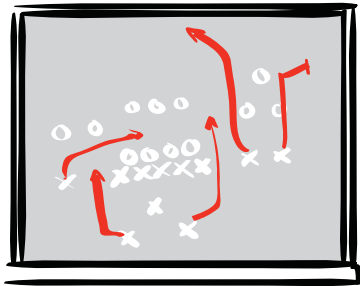


3. Management: Actively promote, monitor and support the talent pipeline

As we've demonstrated, school leadership vacancies in public schools often occur late in the year and spark a mad scramble to fill the empty spots. Open positions tend to be filled in a rushed process, and everyone crosses their fingers, hoping for the best. School systems can change that dynamic by putting in place processes to actively promote, monitor and support their talent pipelines.

The most successful leadership development organizations we see in other sectors focus aggressively on selling the benefits of both staying with the organization and rising to leadership. They realize that leadership roles aren't for everyone and recognize that it is always difficult to predict who will develop into an exceptional leader. But they also know that key roles must be broadly coveted and viewed as prestigious. This is especially true of highly demanding roles with significant stress. These jobs often look far less attractive to those on the outside looking up than to those who already hold them. Absent an active effort to change perception, many talented candidates may never put their hat in the ring.

Best practices (Management)



Promote

- Promote the importance and attractiveness of the school leader's role
- Enhance communication about leadership pathways and opportunities
- Systematically encourage high-potential talent to pursue leadership roles

Monitor

- Regularly review and assess talent in the pipeline against standardized competency criteria
- Make sure a high percentage of stepping-stone roles are filled by high-potential leaders

Support

- Create robust leadership training programs across all key stepping-stone roles
- Provide residency programs for school leaders and APs to connect high-potential talent with the best leaders

While school systems have historically expended little effort in actively promoting leadership roles, our research suggests that this is changing in many districts and CMOs. Increasingly, they are seeking to broaden their talent pools by both promoting the attractiveness of the principal's role and improving their efforts to communicate opportunities and pathways. This is a crucial first step in actively managing a talent pipeline.

Systems are using a number of levers to raise the profile of the principal's role. They are formally recognizing outstanding performers, ensuring compensation is competitive and creating broader leadership opportunities for principals themselves by including them in important district-wide initiatives. The District of Columbia Public Schools, for instance, honors outstanding principals at its high-profile Standing Ovation awards ceremony at the Kennedy Center. It has adjusted compensation upward to be competitive with the region and made principals and APs eligible for significant performance bonuses (up to \$30,000 for principals and \$15,000 for APs).

Top performers can also apply for a subsidized, part-time executive master's program at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, and a select group is chosen for the Chancellor's Principal Cabinet, which meets monthly to tackle district-wide issues. The message: Principals are executive-level talent and the district will invest in their development.

Several districts have also significantly improved their efforts to communicate leadership opportunities by providing better information on their websites about emerging pathways and the recruiting/hiring process. The Denver Public Schools, for instance, is hosting a series of seminars on school leadership roles and deploying HR officials to communicate informally with people interested in follow-up. The Houston Independent School District has built out a section on

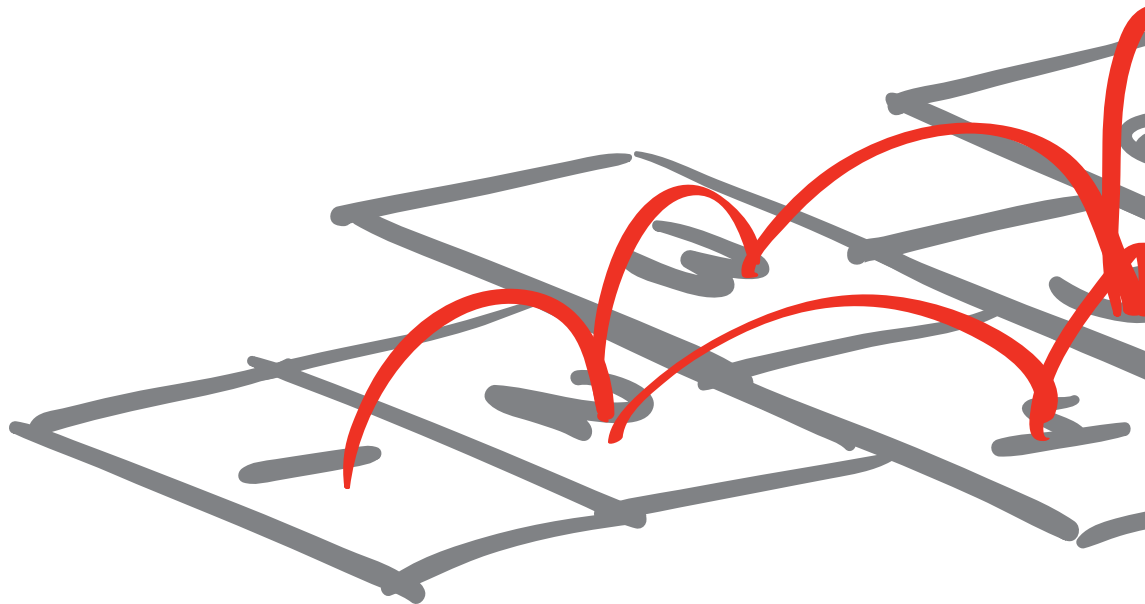


"Leadership roles have to serve a dual purpose: addressing the challenges of today while giving an opportunity for high-potential leadership talent to further develop."

its website specifically for information on leadership development opportunities. Several other districts have formed school-leadership recruiting teams.

The objective of these pipeline-building efforts is to broaden the potential pool of interested talent progressing down leadership development pathways. But to know who's in the system and what they're capable of, school systems must also improve their ability to assess and monitor sitting talent. Producing an active short list of those who are ready to move into larger leadership roles is essential to ensuring those individuals get the additional mentorship and leadership development training they will need to be prepared to successfully step into those impending vacancies.

A number of school systems in our research have taken some important steps in this direction. In Denver, sitting principals and instructional superintendents must rate their junior leaders against clear succession criteria and nominate promising candidates for inclusion in selective leadership development programs. District leadership has also started semi-annual talent



review processes to talk through the readiness of each AP and the effectiveness of sitting principals.

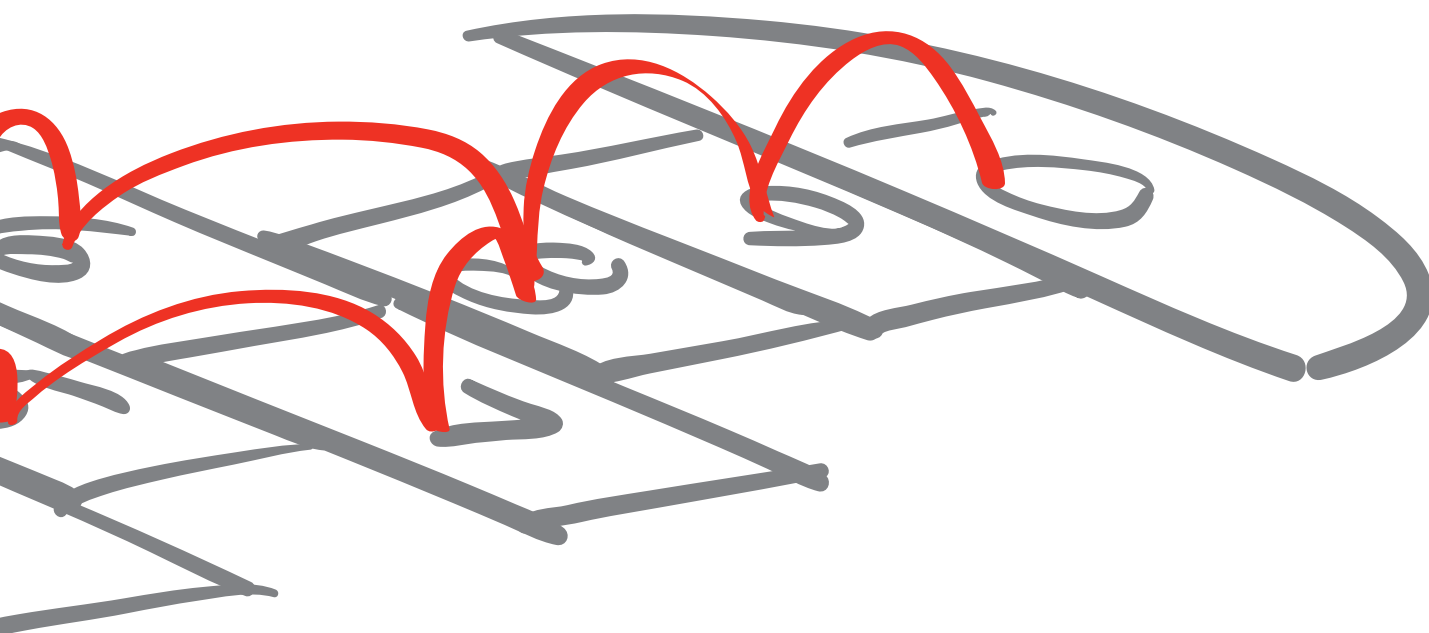
The public nature of these moments is an ongoing prompt for principals and principal supervisors to take accountability for leadership development. It also creates a common language for assessing talent in the pipeline. “Having a name up on the wall and talking through where that person is and the specific leadership behaviors they’re exhibiting helps us all understand what we’re seeing and looking for,” said John Youngquist, the DPS director of principal talent. “Why someone is a 4 and why someone else is a 5? We’ve never been able to have that conversation before.”

This type of structured effort can make a profound difference. Denver, with funding from The Wallace Foundation, has made significant progress in filling its school leadership pipeline with high-potential leaders. After only one year of focused effort, 60% of Denver principals and 43% of all staff believe that teacher leader and AP roles are being filled by the most-talented teachers in the district. That perception among all staff is nearly twice as high as in the lowest-performing district and 40% higher than in the average district in our research. Some of the charter organizations

we studied have made even greater progress: At YES Prep almost 70% of the staff believe that teacher leader and AP roles are being filled by the most-talented teachers in their district.

These rigorous efforts to fill the pipeline and assess the talent moving through it have another benefit. They make it easier for school systems to see where the arteries are clogged. Leadership roles have to serve a dual purpose: addressing the challenges of today while giving an opportunity for high-potential leadership talent to further develop. Schools should have an abundance of quality teacher leader roles. Some will naturally go to veteran teachers with a desire to stay in the classroom, and others will go to skilled teachers rotating for a period of time through an expanded role in which they have an opportunity to make their mark. But a significant percentage of these roles need to be opened up to teachers with a real interest in advancing further down the path toward school leadership.

The District of Columbia Public Schools has addressed this issue by building it into the leadership competency model for all principals. School leaders will be evaluated in part on their ability to identify and strategically place outstanding talent in key roles. Similarly, the New York



City Department of Education has developed a leadership pipeline designed to move strong teachers into leadership positions and proactively move them along a pathway to AP and principal.

In many ways, however, the AP role poses a more difficult challenge. Not only are there far fewer of these key positions in schools, but, as we demonstrated earlier, they often are filled with career APs who have neither

“We now have a clear understanding of what skills APs need to be developing so we can make sure they are getting that and progressing toward principal.”

the ambition nor prospects of advancing to school leadership. The result is that districts are constantly struggling to fill principal vacancies from within.

The keys to building a strong AP bench are to set a high bar for these roles, create a clear and standardized set of job expectations, and put in place robust systems to assess and monitor talent. As with teacher leaders, several districts in our research have established clear AP competency criteria and charged principals with ensuring their successful development. This assures that the school’s top leader is evaluated on his or her ability to move talent through the system. In one district that has taken this approach, only 10% of APs have been in the role longer than six years, vs. an average of 38% in our research (and almost 60% in one district). “We now have a clear understanding of what skills APs need to be developing, so we can make sure they are getting that and progressing toward principal,” said an HR official in the district.

Making sure that the highest-potential teacher leaders and APs are getting what they need to develop is essential to keeping the pipeline fresh. While most leadership skills will be developed on the job, the pace of that development can be significantly enhanced through quality “fellowship programs” that give the most promising

leaders opportunities to reflect on their practice, interact with high-potential peers, and be formally taught and mentored by some of the most talented leaders in the system. These programs can also provide a terrific opportunity to further assess and evaluate who among these standouts is most ready to move into a larger role.

A number of districts in our research have moved aggressively in this direction. Denver has created a series of development programs at each stage of the path to principal, designed to provide training, peer interaction and exposure to strong mentors (*see Figure 14*). Principals nominate up to five teachers each year for the Teacher Leadership Academies, a group that meets monthly to discuss and hone leadership skills. A program in partnership with the University of Denver gives “pre-AP interns” training in school leadership, including mentorship with a DPS principal. Twenty-five promising APs can then take advantage of a pair of one-year residencies designed to prepare them to take over as principal. Said Denver Superintendent Boasberg: “So much of leadership is about developing your pipeline proactively. Until you go way back in your pipeline, you’re never going to have the candidates with the skills that you need.”

“So much of leadership is about developing your pipeline proactively. Until you go way back in your pipeline, you're never going to have the candidates with the skills that you need.”

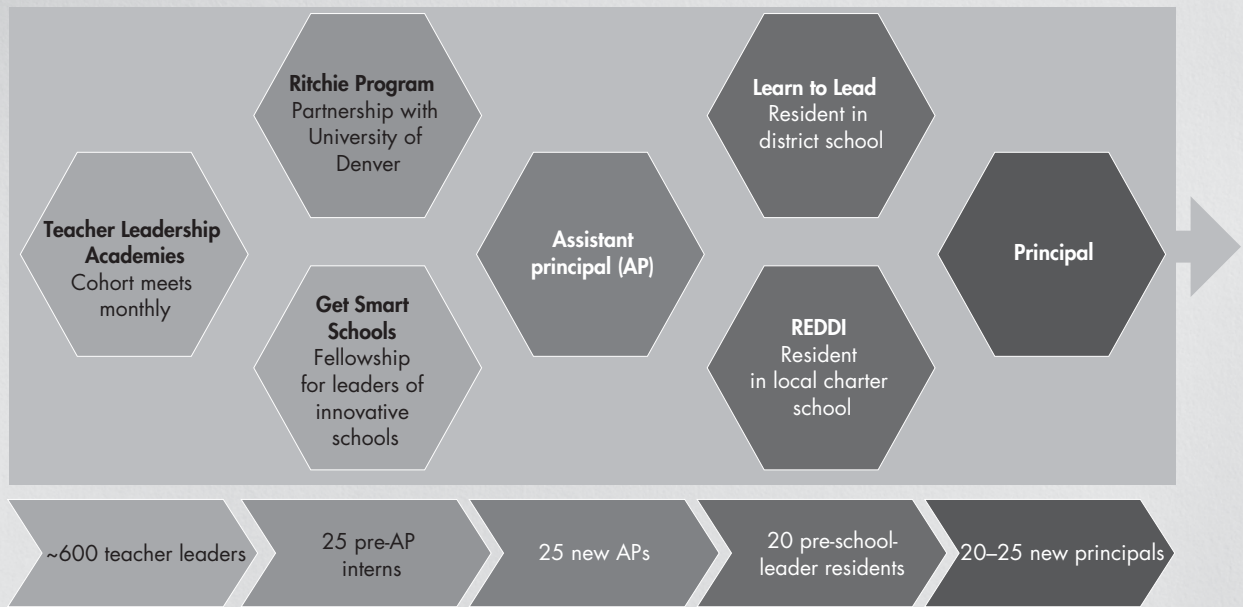
Conclusion: A shared commitment to excellence

We know from hundreds of examples nationwide that dramatically better outcomes are possible at the individual school level, even in the most challenging of educational environments. We also know that an essential ingredient behind each of these success stories is extraordinary leadership. We have the opportunity to replicate these results at greater scale by more systematically developing talented educators into a deep bench of prospective leaders with the experience and ability to build an extraordinary school.

School systems can do that by taking the steps necessary to identify, encourage and develop these leaders from within their own buildings (*see “Launching a New Leadership Development Strategy,” page 47*). Our research with districts and CMOs working on this issue highlights both the challenge and the opportunity. Many of these school systems are making important progress on the long journey to fundamentally rethink leadership development. They are dramatically raising standards, encouraging more-talented educators to consider the path to leadership, creating more meaningful stepping-stone roles, and devising systems to both evaluate and manage those moving through the pipeline.

Our recommendations are not easy to implement. They require a system-wide focus on overcoming the often contentious challenges of restructuring roles, raising standards and creating consensus around top-to-bottom changes in how our schools are managed and run. The payoff is an organic, home-grown solution to the leadership deficit that lies at the heart of our struggle to educate our children and prepare them for a better future. That is a goal all can rally around, but success will require a shared commitment to increase the number of exceptional schools by putting in place the transformational school leaders who can create them.

Figure 14: Denver's leadership pathway includes a series of robust training and mentorship opportunities



Sources: Denver Public Schools; Bain analysis; interviews





LAUNCHING A NEW LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Implementing a new leadership development strategy is a daunting prospect. But a number of school systems in our research are making significant progress and their approaches share some important characteristics. They start with a multiyear, system-wide commitment to develop leaders over time instead of searching for them as vacancies arise. They include the active participation of all constituencies within the system. They tie an ambitious vision for transforming school performance to a concrete set of leadership standards and criteria. They create a robust set of stepping-stone roles and a clear set of pathways that connect them.

Here is what a successful, phased effort might look like:

Phase 1: Define leadership criteria

- Perform an audit of current leadership roles and programs to assess effectiveness, coherence and gaps
- Convene a cross section of system leaders to define a core set of desired leadership skills for principals, APs and teacher leaders
- Engage other stakeholders throughout the system to review this draft and offer input. Build consensus around a final set of standards and competencies
- Redefine principal, AP and teacher leader job descriptions to reflect a high and consistent set of expectations

Phase 2: Develop leadership pathways

- Design and pilot principal, AP and teacher leader evaluation systems aligned to these standards and competencies
- Assess current and prospective leadership talent across the system. Systematically identify and cultivate the highest-potential emerging leaders
- Create pilot teacher leader and AP pathway programs with formal training and enhanced mentorship around specific leadership roles and responsibilities
- Promote the importance and attractiveness of leadership roles and the available pathways to move into them

Phase 3: Organize around leadership development

- Reduce principal-supervisor spans of control and expand their role in managing the development of leadership talent across the system
- Ensure all schools have a core set of robust teacher leader stepping-stone roles with sufficient time available to focus on them
- Fully implement new principal and AP evaluations. Replace principals and APs who don't meet the new standards
- Apply new leadership standards to filling open principal, AP and stepping-stone teacher leader positions. Fully leverage past-performance data in filling key roles
- Rigorously assess the strength of the pipeline and the processes that support it. Make continuous improvement a core tenet of the transformation

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Bain is committed to supporting high-impact organizations looking to transform education around the world. We work with institutions of all types—including school districts and charter schools, organizations focused on supporting students with in-school and after-school services, and education-reform organizations focused on human capital and advocacy.

Bain partners with these organizations to develop strategies and business plans, structure the organization for success, nurture donor relationships, and attract and retain talent, working alongside our clients toward the shared goal of accelerating student achievement.

Our work has highlighted what we believe is one of the most critical issues facing education in the US today: school leadership. Our expertise in human capital and organizational effectiveness, as well as our partnerships with districts and CMOs across the country, helped highlight key challenges and potential solutions for school systems seeking to transform their approach to leadership development.

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