



Highly-Effective Principals



The Big Idea:



Principals have a big impact on the success of students and teachers in their schools. It is important that they are well-prepared and highly-effective.

Why are Principals So Important?

For years, researchers and school improvement advocates have focused on improving teacher quality as the main lever for increasing school quality. However, recent research from the Wallace Foundation has found that the impact of principals on improving schools has been understated. Principals are responsible for recruiting, developing, and supporting all teachers in a school building, as well as building a supportive school climate. Researchers found that changing a principal's expertise from being ineffective (25th percentile of effectiveness) to being highly effective (75th percentile of effectiveness) increased learning in reading and math by about 3 months for all students in a school. Since principals impact all students in a school, principal development is a great investment because policymakers can pour resources into a smaller number of educators while affecting a larger number of students.

How do Principals Make an Impact?

Most of the impact a principal has on their students' achievement is through their teachers. Principals make an impact on students through teachers in a number of ways, including:

- Hiring and retaining effective teachers
- Providing high-quality professional development to help teachers be more effective
- Building relationships with and supporting new and experienced teachers in the building
- Creating and maintaining an effective school climate conducive to teaching and learning
- Effective management and operation of school buildings

Principals also have an impact on students outside of just their academic achievement. Effective school leadership can influence disciplinary rates, which have ties to later life outcomes for students of color, and can lower absenteeism, a problem needing special attention as chronic absenteeism rates was about 15% during the 2023-2024 school year. This means that about 15% of Alabama students are missing over 18 days of school each year.

Principals are a key part of students' learning, and improving principal effectiveness raises student achievement. The following are some considerations when considering the support that principals need to be effective and continuous improvement:

- 1 **Principal Turnover:** Almost half of new principals leave after 3 years, and 20% of all principals nationwide leave their schools each year. Turnover is more prevalent at high-poverty schools and schools that serve students of color. Student achievement rates tend to dip in the year after a principal leaves, and the longer principals stay at their school the better their students tend to do. Keeping principals on the job and supporting them in place is critical.

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Principal Pipelines: The principal pipeline is the systematic approach a district uses to recruit, prepare, and support school administrators. The goal is to create effective principals who can improve schools and student outcomes. While teachers facilitate student learning, principals facilitate adult learning by helping their staff to become better teachers. Pre-service preparation and selective hiring and placement are vital aspects of the principal pipeline. While teachers support student learning, principals support staff learning and development. Preparation for the role is vital within principal pipelines, and Alabama has been working towards building leadership standards, pre-service preparation, selective hiring and placement, mentorship and support, and tracking systems to improve the state's principal pipelines and improve student outcomes.

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New Principal Supports: Principals in their first few years are less effective than experienced principals, and are at higher risk for leaving their roles. They need additional support from preparation programs and mentors. To support these leaders, high-quality principal mentor programs are needed and principal preparation programs at higher education institutions must ensure that standards for new leaders are high, curricula are aligned to the best research on what schools and students need, and school-based leadership experiences are included.

Alabama's School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act

In 2023, the Alabama Legislature passed the School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act, with the goal of improving the quality of principals in schools around the state. In the first year, the Act was funded at \$30 million. These funds provide annual stipends for principals (\$10,000, with up to an additional \$5,000 for those working in low-performing or high-poverty schools) and assistant principals (\$5,000, with up to an additional \$2,500 for those working in low-performing or high-poverty schools) that complete the following:

- Beginning 2023-2024, develop a comprehensive professional learning plan to be implemented in 2024-2025 school year, and each year after
- Complete five additional days of high-quality professional learning each year
- New Principals: Complete a two year principal mentoring program beginning in 2024-2025
- Participate in the new evaluation system for principals beginning in 2027-2028
- Complete the year-long principal leadership academy by 2029-2030

In addition, the Act requires new, updated school leadership standards and a principal leadership framework to be designed. The creation of the standards, framework, evaluation system, and other parts of the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System are in development by the design team, a group appointed by various state leaders and convened by the State Superintendent of Education. Thus far, the design team has developed new standards and a leadership framework that lay out clear expectations for principals and support their growth. The standards were adopted by the State Board of Education on May 13, 2024. With support from CLAS, the new mentoring program for first and second year principals was launched in 2024. The design team is currently developing the principal evaluation system and leadership institute.

