

A CLEAR, POWERFUL INSIGHT: GREAT SCHOOLS ARE LED BY GREAT PRINCIPALS

THE CHALLENGE IS TO TRANSLATE A SIMPLE IDEA INTO

EFFECTIVE POLICY AND PRACTICE AT SCALE

Jon Schnur

Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder

New Leaders for New Schools

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Great schools are typically led by great principals. And faster-improving schools are led by better principals than others. Indeed, nearly 25 % of the in-school factors affecting student achievement can be attributed directly to the quality and effectiveness of the principal. This is second only to the effects of teacher instruction -- which is shaped by the way our most effective principals select, manage, and develop their teachers. And because principals select, train, manage, support, evaluate, and set the culture for teachers, a teaching quality strategy can't be successful without effective principals.

The bottom line: *the quality and effectiveness of school principals matters a lot to the future of our students and to the future of our nation.*

In a world where there are no shortcuts to school success, a serious focus on the principalship provides no silver bullet. But systematic efforts to drive the quality and effectiveness of our nation's principals may be one of our most pragmatic and significant opportunities to offer our neediest students better support to help them reach high standards of excellence.

Translating this simple insight into effective policy and scalable practice is no easy task. It is not easy to balance the urgency of the need for effective principals at scale (especially in our highest-need schools) with the need to ensure that these reforms are implemented in a deliberate, high quality way. Too often, powerful ideas are lost to inadequate knowledge about how to bring ideas to scale, limited capacity, and well-intentioned but poorly planned implementation. As we consider solutions and strive to meet the urgent educational needs of children as quickly as possible, we must both identify how the federal government can be most effective in this work and recognize the current need for more research and development as well as learning on how to gain clearer knowledge, build capacity, and quickly scale effective efforts. While this testimony is focused on the principalship, I do believe there is a similarly difficult balance to strike when designing policies around teacher quality and effectiveness.

In this testimony, I offer a few ideas to inform your policymaking. First, I offer some observations to help define the problem we are trying to solve and provide a clear target for the goal of a principal quality policy. Second, I offer some lessons learned from our six years of work recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting new urban principals across the United States at New Leaders for New Schools. Third, I highlight some of what we in the field know and don't know about scaling highly effective principals. Fourth, I will offer thoughts on implications for immediate federal policy options.

While this testimony is simply a starting point, New Leaders for New Schools and I would be happy to work with you and your teams to explore and develop public policy options aimed at driving principal quality and effectiveness to ensure that all children can reach high levels of academic excellence.

First, we must define the target at which we are aiming; i.e. what problem are we trying to solve with a principal quality policy. While academic standards and principal policy are sometimes considered to be unrelated, defining student and school success is crucial to understand how to define principal success.

Defining Student Success. Our goal is to ensure that all students succeed at high academic levels – starting with academic achievement at least at a proficient level for every student. Senator Kennedy and others are on the right side of this debate to insist on maintaining the No Child Left Behind goal of 100% proficiency by 2014 for every student regardless of race, family income, or native language and culture. I agree that there should be a national standard for what constitutes student proficiency at least in reading, writing, and math. For example, while there are thousands of different teacher techniques, lesson plans, and instructional materials for *how* to teach children to read effectively and independently by the 3rd grade, our society and children can no longer afford to hold a Tennessee school or school system to a different standard than a Massachusetts school or school system for *whether* every child regardless of background learns to read effectively and independently by the 3rd grade.

That's partly because we know from the research that a 3rd grade student unable to read well enough to learn "content" will likely struggle and learn less from most of his or her courses in the 4th grade and beyond. That student will need far more intensive and expensive help to "catch up" to a diploma-ready (much less a college-ready or a global-economy-ready) standard of excellence. In an era where a college diploma can make a \$1 million difference in lifetime income when compared with a high school dropout (and where there are states that determine the number of prison cells to build based on elementary reading scores), I don't believe that the birthright to learn how to read should be a New York or Louisiana birthright – it should be an American birthright available to every child that walks in the door of any school in any of our communities.

If those standards and assessments are done well, a student that achieves these standards grade-by-grade should be ready to enter college successfully by the 12th grade. While not every student will choose college, I believe it is our responsibility to

ensure that *every student and their family are empowered to choose* to attend and succeed in college. Our failure to get a student to college-readiness by the 12th grade deprives them of that choice.

Our conception of student success should include two other areas beyond academic achievement. First, in a democracy that depends on citizenship and service and in an economy where many workplaces depend on teams, successful schools will ensure that students learn how to define “success” as success not only as an individual but also as a contributing member of a team, class, school, and society. Students must understand how to succeed as an individual partly through contributing to – not at the expense of – success of those around them including those they see as different from themselves. Second, I believe that successful schools will contribute to students whose academic strength lies not only in their mastery of certain courses or skills but also in their capacity to persistently and confidently act as on-going learners in a world where they will face situations and need skills we haven’t even dreamed of yet.

Defining School Success. Having identified the goal of having schools that educate students at high academic levels and equips them to succeed in the ways described above, our next step is to identify the most important elements in schools making significant progress towards that goal. It is important to note the distinction between this question and one that asks “What are the characteristics of effective schools?”. Framed that way, “characteristics of effective schools” tend to define a happy end-state that doesn’t provide a useful and needed roadmap on how to get there. Our focus in setting policy around the principalship must be on the most vital characteristics of schools making dramatic progress toward success for every student. Here is a one formulation that draws on both research and the experience we have had at New Leaders for New Schools in hundreds of schools across the U.S.

Schools tend to make dramatic, sustained progress when they are successful in the following three areas:

- *Data-driven learning and teaching.* Fast-improving schools drive continual improvements in effective learning and teaching across every classroom. This depends on clear learning goals deeply understood by many, using data and assessment multiple times during the year to help improve teacher and student performance, shared vocabulary and mindsets about instructional practice, and effective intervention for struggling students.
- *Effective organization and management of teams, instruction, and operations.* These schools create conditions for success through effective organization and management that recruits and selects talent well, builds teams, manages learning and instructional performance effectively, creates clarity and trust, organizes staff time effectively, and is strong on implementation, operations and project management.
- *Rigorous school culture focused on achievement and success for every child and other specific beliefs.* These schools build a consistent school culture among adults and students that models and reinforces personal responsibility and aspiration to achieve excellence as individuals and as a school community; a focus on continual improvement, positive and explicit social norms; challenging, rigorous, and direct feedback within a safe environment; personal engagement and positive relationships that enable learning from others; and, a belief that every student can learn at high levels.

While no school or organization of any kind will ever be even close to perfect in each, I haven’t seen any school make dramatic and sustained progress in student achievement and success where that school is failing to make meaningful, continual progress in even one of these three areas. The implications of that insight for the principalship (and for principal policy) are enormous. For example, a school system focused on excellence in these three areas (and that understands that school-based management drives culture and practice) wouldn’t simply ask principals to “make the trains run on time” and keep parents happy. And they wouldn’t just ask principals to be instructional facilitators/leaders.

The implication is that school systems must get vastly better at recruiting, selecting, training, retaining, managing, evaluating, and supporting principals (system-wide and long-term) who can work with their school leadership teams to successfully lead data-driven learning and teaching, effective organization and management, and a consistent school culture that reflects a specific set of core beliefs. Part of that work is getting and training the right pipeline of principals. Another part is redesigning a school system to provide an array of supports and tools to help principals lead these three areas of work effectively.

Second, I am pleased to share background information and some of the lessons learned from six years of work recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting new urban principals across the United States through New Leaders for New Schools.

Background. New Leaders for New Schools is a national non-profit organization working in nine urban school systems on one clear mission: promoting high levels of academic achievement by attracting, developing, and supporting the next generation of outstanding principals for our nation's urban public schools. Our goals by 2012 are to have at least at least 80% of our over 200 high-need schools led by New Leaders principals for at least five years achieve 90-100% proficiency in core academic subjects and 80% of high schools led by New Leaders principals for at least 5 years achieve at least 90% real graduation rates. Our goal is also to provide 25% of the new urban principals needed in the U.S. by 2014. (As noted earlier regarding the definition of student success, we are actively searching for the best one or two additional student performance indicators that will allow us to inform and set additional goals for student success.)

Another major goal is to create groundbreaking, research-based knowledge and learning for the field about what it takes to recruit, select, train, and support highly effective urban principals (and the schools they lead) at scale. The Rand Corporation is doing an independent, long-term longitudinal evaluation of our schools and our work.

Our major funders and partners for New Leaders generally include some of the nation's leading philanthropists, leading local companies and foundations in cities we serve, and superintendents and leadership teams in nine major urban school systems. The nine cities and superintendents we currently serve are Baltimore, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, New York City, Oakland and California's Bay Area, Prince George's County, Washington D.C. – and as of two weeks ago, New Orleans. Our largest national philanthropic funders are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Noyce Foundation, and the Walton Foundation. Local partners include companies like Boeing, FedEx, AOL, Ford, and more. We also have received grants for our principal selection and training work in four of our nine partner cities from the federal school leadership program. While we are focused on transforming urban education within the United States, we are collaborating with a similar London-based private-public partnership that was created based heavily on our model.

Our principal program is divided into several components: intensive recruitment and selection of outstanding educators and leaders (330 New Leaders selected from our first 5,000 applicants), intensive training and development including a yearlong full-time school leadership residency to prepare those individuals to become effective new principals, and on-the-job support to promote the success of those principals and the schools they lead. We also conduct a city competition to select one new city partner each year that meets our criteria for serving high-need schools, coupled with the readiness and commitment to a deep student-focused partnership.

We have seen some dramatic examples of success at schools led by New Leaders principals. For example, 80 percent of the incoming 9th graders at North Star Academy (led by a New Leaders principal) in Newark, NJ have graduated from high school and gone onto 4-year-colleges. Nearly 100 percent of students from North Star are from low-income families. Last year in Chicago, two schools led by New Leaders principals (the Dodge Renaissance Academy and the Clara Barton Elementary School) have made some of the most dramatic gains in the entire city. The Chicago Tribune recently cited the Clara Barton school and the New Leaders principal there as an example of what's working in terms of educator recruitment and training in Chicago.

Selected insights and lessons learned. We have both learned lessons and gained significant insights from each of our programmatic areas with implications for local, state, and federal policy and practice. Then I will close this section with a few overall insights and takeaways from our work over the past six years.

Recruitment and Selection. As we seek outstanding aspiring principals, we have been screening for three characteristics/types of knowledge in highly structured, rigorous ways: the right belief system (that every student can learn at high levels and that adults are responsible for children achieving their potential), instructional expertise, and a strong record and potential to lead and manage adults effectively. While many schools systems and schools of education have not prioritized this, an important insight we've gained is that *an intensive, quality recruitment and selection process is very important in driving school and student success. A second insight is that even the best principal recruitment and selection processes are based on hypotheses about what characteristics are important, and not yet based on rigorous research. That's why we are investing heavily in research and evaluation of our model and correlation over time with school and student achievement.*

Overall, New Leaders for New Schools and our local partners have made substantial progress in improving the recruitment and to some extent the retention of school leaders. We have successfully recruited 330 New Leaders across our cities to make long-term commitments to become school leaders. And we have had fifteen times as many applications as spots. While not a single New Leader has voluntarily left the program in the first training year, we are currently retaining just over 90 percent of our New Leaders each year in their school system's principalship. While that is higher than retention levels overall in many school systems, we do think additional steps will be needed to further maximize retention rates.

Through our work, we have found that:

- *There is serious interest in the urban principalship if defined right with the right support.* While some see dwindling interest in the urban principalship, we see the opposite. With the right clarity of mission and commitment of support, a surprisingly large number of committed and talented educators want to take on this role. 5,000 people applied for our first 330 fellowships.
- *Beliefs matter tremendously in the selection of principals that have the commitment and capacity to be effective. However, most school systems do not rigorously screen for the candidate's beliefs.* All of our highest performing principals demonstrate intense personal commitment to the proposition that every student regardless of background can learn at high levels -- and that it is their responsibility as principal to drive dramatic improvements in instruction and academic achievement. While many of 5,000 candidates seemed to express that belief, the majority actually fail our screening process for this belief system. Training won't quickly shift that belief.
- *All three of our overall criteria (beliefs, instructional knowledge, and adult leadership skill) are critical.* Individuals who are weak in any of these areas fail to deliver impressive results as a principal. One rare exception may involve leaders who can succeed without the instructional knowledge when they are paired with the right

instructional leader. Where additional instructional expertise is not available, a high level of principal instructional expertise is crucial.

- *Even the best selection processes for the principalship or in any sector yield only 80% successful candidates, yet many school systems and schools of education act as if that's not the case.* Top human resources experts in the business world confirm that an 80% success rate is about as high as successful selection processes for a particular job work at scale. Many school systems and schools of education act as if they can assume that they are achieving 100% success rates. That doesn't mean the other 20% percent should be removed – but it does mean that employers should at least be ready to consider moving someone into a different role where they have a better prospect at success (e.g. assistant principalship or a district staff role instead of a principalship).
- *Effective recruitment and selection requires discipline, investment and time. Many school districts and most schools of education invest little or no effort toward this.* Nearly 20% of our overall costs at New Leaders go to recruitment and selection. But the general bias is against spending time and money in school systems and schools of education on this critical activity.

Principal training and development. New Leaders residents participate in a year of intensive training and development before becoming a principal. This includes an intensive five weeks at a summer institute acquiring the foundations and framework for the principalship, weekly local sessions, and a yearlong full-time leadership residency and intensive yearlong coaching and feedback. This model is aligned to a set of principal leadership competencies that we gleaned from research and experience. *One insight is that the field of principal training is very weak – only a few institutions are doing intensive work training principals. A second insight is that the training for principals going into high-need urban schools should differ substantially from training for principals more generally. Any institution trying to generically train principals for all contexts or districts will likely be severely hampered by the lack of focus and context-specific work.* Also:

- *There is substantial emerging knowledge about school improvement that is not codified and not readily available to most principals and teachers in the U.S.* Our most effective training (e.g., data-driven instruction) comes from a few high-capacity principals and/or other experts in early stages of developing their expertise and training and who are providing it at a small scale. It will take huge work to codify, institutionalize, and scale the availability of this knowledge. Most institutions working on principal training don't have the capacity to deliver this.
- *Most principal training is delivered in the university classroom or the district central office. But the most effective learning seems to be a mix of high-quality training and applying it in real contexts in real leadership roles.* Our year-long residency is one way to address that. But the training and development of aspiring and current

principals needs to be embedded far more in context of a school leader's work throughout their careers.

- *If the key areas for school success are indeed data-driven teaching and learning, management and organizational effectiveness, and building rigorous cultures, then most principal training is not aligned to build knowledge and skills in the right areas. Current capacity to teach these effectively at institutions that train principals is quite limited.*
- *Focused, practical, research-driven training can substantially impact principal practice.* For example, our training on data-driven instruction and observation and supervision of teaching lead to demonstrable changes in principal practice that may correlate to faster improvements in schools. Absent intensity and quality, other training may not affect the impact that principal practice can have on student achievement.

On-the-job coaching and support. New Leaders provides on-the-job principals with on-going coaching, an online community, and high-quality formative assessment tools aligned to each state's standards, and coaching on how educators can make effective use of these assessments to drive instructional improvement. With support from the Teacher Incentive Fund, we will soon offer access to effective practices from the highest performing and fastest improving urban schools and classrooms and financial incentives for high-performing educators in exchange for their sharing of effective practice with others. *But even with initiatives like Title I increases and the Teacher Incentive Fund, the significant insight is that in order to be successful at this work at-scale across the country, substantial new systems of data-driven differentiated capacity building will be needed to take these and other promising practices and customize them to individual schools through serious on-the-job support. And that may be constrained by lack of financial resources, human capacity, and an absence of the right, shared data-driven mindset in many institutions.*

Third, now that we have identified our overall goal and considered one organization's experience in attracting, preparing, and supporting principals in high need schools, we can ask ourselves: do we know enough about the successful principal of a high-need school (and how to scale that) to drive specific kinds of consistent principal quality policy across the U.S.?

Defining Principal Success. Given the definition of student and school success described above, we must ask the following questions: 1) *What actions must the principal actually take in order to ensure that all students can succeed? Can we identify the knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics that principals need to take those actions effectively?* Only then can we fully address the vital questions of what are the policies, systems and

practices that can a) help create a pipeline of principals who can succeed in this role and b) provide on-the-job supports, tools and management to help them succeed.

Here's my troubling answer. While I will share with you hypotheses that we are testing out at New Leaders, we don't really know the definitive answers to these questions. While we know there are a small number of exceptional principals driving dramatic gains in high-need schools, we don't know nearly enough about how or why in different contexts to scale that nationally.

It is crucial that we figure this out in the next five to seven years.

In some ways, the most important role the federal government can play related to the principalship is to mandate, drive, and fund an intense period of rigorous experimentation and learning in every state grounded in certain core beliefs that I will describe below about creating a new principalship in this country defined by its responsibility for school success and student achievement.

We do know enough for the federal government to set some very broad direction – including encouraging states and school systems to invest in the principalship and focus their efforts on leveraging the principalship to drive dramatic improvement in student success and academic achievement. We know high-quality principals are crucial to school success and there are some common-sense steps we can encourage – such as providing ways to recognize, reward, and retain our highest performing principals or encouraging more rigorous processes to select, evaluate, and when necessary, remove principals. But we don't know enough about how this works to legislate the specifics.

We do know that an effective principal is critical to the success of schools and that the federal government should support a crucial R & D phase of trying, rigorously evaluating, and learning from an array of approaches to driving principal effectiveness. This is especially urgent in low-performing schools. Among other benefits, we will then learn much more that can inform national policy in a much more robust way by the time of the next NCLB reauthorization.

But we do not know enough to set consistent national policy on such areas as principal certification. We do not know enough to require states to address certification in particular ways. We do not know enough to mandate prescriptive approaches to principal recruitment, selection, base compensation, evaluation, and accountability.

We are in a phase of our work together in education where we are creating early hypotheses and need to rigorously evaluate and learn from them. *If handled right, we could make this a golden age of learning about how to ensure highly effective principals at scale.*

For now, while there is some research about what effective principals do, there is very little meaningful research about the actions that principals must take to drive change in the high-need, low-achieving schools that are rightly such a strong focus of federal policy

under NCLB. And there is similarly very little meaningful research about the corresponding knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics that principals need in order to take those actions effectively in particular contexts.

Moreover, there is real evidence that suggests that the actions, knowledge, skills and personal characteristics of an effective principal who is the steward of a school that is doing well or “just fine” are actually quite different from what’s needed from a principal who is to lead dramatic change in high-need schools where most of the students are achieving at low academic levels.

While New Leaders for New Schools is the largest national provider of urban principals in the U.S., even we are still only in the phase of testing out hypotheses that will be tested out by our experience and an independent Rand Corporation evaluation over the next several years.

I will share some of the specific highlights of this limited research in my comments before the committee.

Fourth, what are the implications for policies that the federal government could undertake to move this work forward?

There are several high-level policy options that I would like to propose for your consideration. Most of these are research & development efforts designed to spur a “golden era” of learning about the principalship and ensure that we have far more knowledge to inform the next reauthorization of NCLB and the next wave of school and leadership reforms. Specifically, these R & D options are in the areas of principal recruitment, selection and training, principal-led turnarounds of low-performing schools, district wide strategies to ensure successful principals at scale, and state efforts to overhaul state licensure and certification.

To increase the impact of the efforts, Congress should fund a world-class research and evaluation firm and team to oversee and coordinate the evaluation of all of these options in order to systematically create knowledge for the field. They would identify, drive and coordinate learning around questions such as “What are the most important characteristics that selection processes should screen for to pick principals who are likely to lead dramatic turnarounds of schools?” and “How can a district effectively create a system-wide results-based strategy to ensure effective leadership in every school?” In addition, every grantee under any of these options would need to create, pilot, and evaluate systems for providing useful data to educators through value-add academic achievement gains at least at the school level. Funding would be included under any of these options to help create, refine, and evaluate these systems. A portion of the research and evaluation would examine the usefulness of the data provided by these systems.

- *Create a principal/assistant principal recruitment and training R & D fund.* To do this, we must triple the size of the federal school leadership program to \$50 million in exchange for requiring every grant be used as R & D with a rigorous external research and evaluation effort designed to create significant research for the field on principal selection and training. No project would be funded without a serious

theory of change, a high-quality research plan, and specific plans for producing useful research related to the recruitment, selection, training and support of principals. Give a preference for those initiatives that can show diversity of types of institutions offering training and types of high-quality candidates from different backgrounds.

- *Create a national R & D pilot of 200 school turnarounds (school restarts or “fresh starts”) of the lowest performing schools in the nation led by outstanding principals with track records of success.* Only fund efforts that show how they will select outstanding principals, will ensure rigorous external research and evaluation, require dramatic change/restarting in a historically low-performing school and provide intensive additional support for the principal, teachers, and staff.
- *Create a \$500 million 5-year effort to back 5 high-need districts to pilot systemic approaches to ensuring educator quality – especially teachers, school leaders, and associate superintendents who manage principals, and make New Orleans one of these five cities.* This could include dramatic increases in educator pay coupled with differential compensation systems that are effectively and fairly designed and implemented, and tied partly to student achievement. This could include system wide efforts to adopt smart human capital strategies to cultivate and develop top talent throughout a school system. And it could include robust, data-driven systems of differentiated capacity building for principals and teachers across that school system. This would require serious external research and evaluation and proposals – and would be judged partly by the quality of that research and evaluation plan and the likelihood that it will produce useful knowledge for the field.

I also would strongly encourage you to consider making a down payment on this kind of initiative this year by enacting a version of the Landrieu-Kennedy-Melancon-Miller RENEWAAL Act of 2007 (Revitalizing New Orleans by Attracting America’s Leaders) introduced yesterday. This important legislation was introduced this week by Senator Landrieu, Senator Kennedy, Congressman Melancon, and House Education Committee Chairman George Miller. This bill would make it possible to drive teacher and principal quality in New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. If enacted and funded swiftly, the legislation could help revitalize New Orleans and other devastated communities by addressing teacher and principal shortages there by helping to attract and retain effective teachers and principals for the coming school year. The bill would help boost teacher and principal pay in New Orleans and these communities while providing additional incentives to attract teachers and principals back to New Orleans as well as special incentives for math and science teachers and for the most effective principals and teachers in exchange for sharing their practices with others.

The need for swift enactment and funding of this bill is dire. New Orleans may need to hire as many as 1000 educators in the New Orleans area this year to accommodate rapidly growing student population. Moreover, New Orleans has massive hiring needs at a time when housing costs have increased \$450 monthly compared to pre-Katrina because of scarce housing in the hard-hit city and

region. And the current starting salary for many teachers in New Orleans is \$35,400 compared to an average teacher salary nationally of \$46,000.

Senator Kennedy, we are grateful for your leadership on this initiative.

- *Provide funding to a small number of states who have already done serious work on the principalship an opportunity to overhaul (or pilot an overhaul of) their certification and licensure system for school leaders and/or teachers. The state policy changes must be rooted in data and research. The U.S. Department of Education should fund a variety of models and approaches to evaluate different kinds of approaches to principal certification and licensure, and evaluate results based on impact on student and school success.*
- *Create a national blue-ribbon program to give substantial fellowships and honors to the principals and school leadership teams that have demonstrated the most dramatic and sustained gains in their high-need schools over time. This could be used to convey honor and respect to the very best turnaround principals in the nation – and then be used to leverage their expertise to guide other efforts to dramatically improve schools and school leadership.*

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our insights and recommendations. New Leaders for New Schools looks forward to cooperating with you in whatever way might be helpful to build urgently needed policy options for ensuring effective principals who can drive high levels of academic achievement for all children.