

Knowledge Utilization Brief:

What Effective, Affordable & Sustainable Principal Pipelines Mean for Preparation Programs



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Scholars, district leaders, teachers, parents and students have long observed that the strategic and systematic preparation of school leaders makes a difference in schools. In 2011, The Wallace Foundation launched the Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI) to support the development of a comprehensive pipeline of school leaders in six districts and analyze the impact of this approach. This brief analyzes findings from studies of PPI [outcomes](#), [cost](#) and [sustainability](#) along with additional reports monitoring the [progress](#) of the initiative in action.

The PPI focused on four components of the principal pipeline: standards, pre-service training, selective hiring, and evaluation and support. The Wallace Foundation provided technical assistance to these six districts in their development of these components: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC; Denver Public Schools, CO; Gwinnett County, GA; Hillsborough County Public Schools, FL; New York City Department of Education, NY; and Prince George's County Public Schools, MD.

Each district had a unique approach to the development of a principal pipeline in 2011 and began the PPI at varying stages of pipeline advancement. By spring of 2015, however, all six districts had at least [partially implemented](#) systems corresponding to the four components and had made demonstrable progress in establishing policies and practices consistent with a comprehensive principal pipeline.

Participation in the PPI has been transformative for these districts' approaches to succession planning. The results substantiate the importance of investing in quality school leader development, concluding that the comprehensive development of a pipeline of school leaders was **effective**, **affordable** and **sustainable** for the six large urban

districts participating in PPI. The experience of the six PPI districts also offers important lessons for leadership preparation programs partnering with districts.

Comprehensive Development of Principal Pipelines is Effective

At the conclusion of the PPI, The Wallace Foundation commissioned The RAND Corporation to research the estimated outcomes on student achievement and principal retention. To conduct their [research](#), RAND compared schools participating in the PPI that received new principals in SY 2012-2013 or later with schools in non-PPI districts that also received new principals during the same time frame.

Schools that were led by principals supported with comprehensive pipeline development through the PPI on average out-performed comparison schools in reading and math. Three years or more after receiving a new principal that was comprehensively developed, schools in PPI districts scored 6.22 percentile points higher in reading and 2.87 percentile points higher in mathematics.

To read in depth on the research approach and findings presented, please visit Wallacefoundation.org and reference:

[Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools](#)

[What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines: Costs and Other Resources](#)

[Sustaining a Principal Pipeline](#)

Additionally, schools led by principals supported by comprehensive development were more likely to remain in their schools. Schools in PPI districts were 7.8 percentage points more likely to have newly placed principals remain in their schools for three years than comparison schools

Comprehensive Development of Principal Pipelines is Affordable

The comprehensive development of principals as demonstrated through the PPI must be affordable for other districts to replicate it. To understand affordability, RAND analyzed district PPI resources expended on comprehensive principal pipeline development in 2017.

The [analysis](#) found that, on average, the six PPI districts spent 0.4 percent of the district budget each year on principal pipeline development activities. This corresponded to \$31,000 per principal in each PPI district or \$42 per pupil. Resources spent to compensate district personnel time was the largest expense for PPI districts.

Researchers also looked at resources expended on pre-service preparation which amounted to \$9,386 per principal or \$13.27 per pupil.

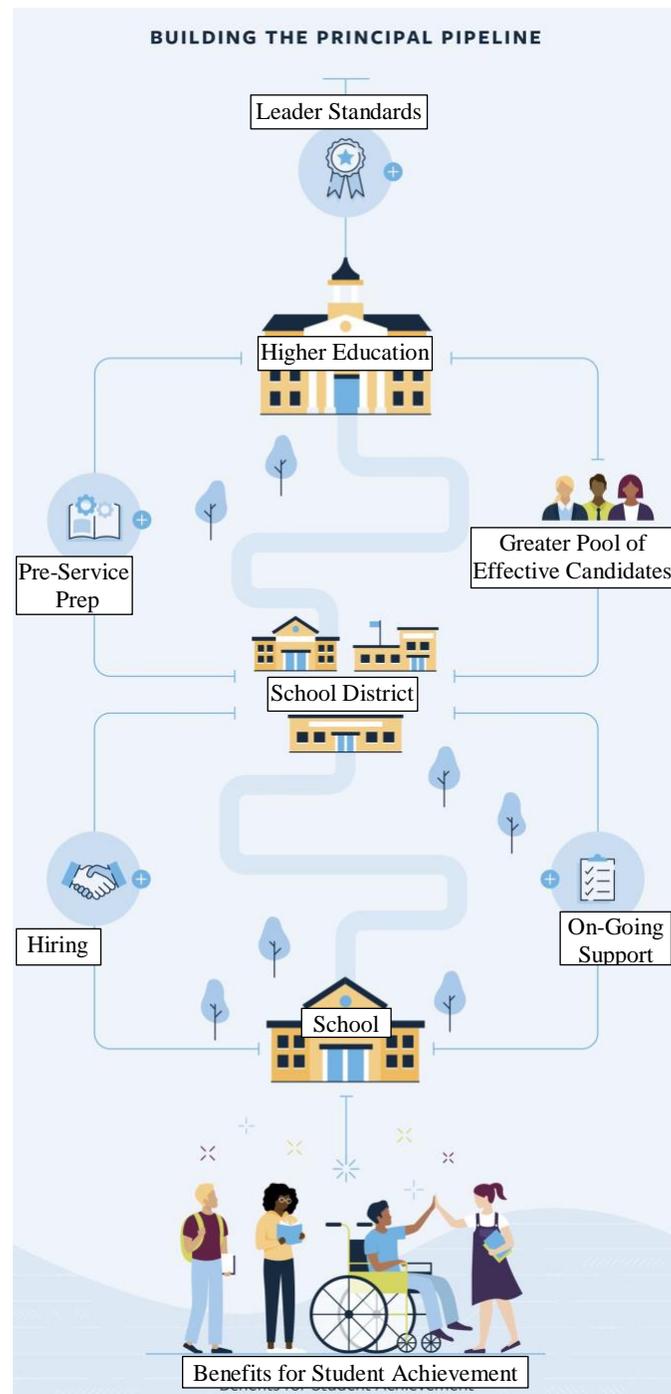
“I think if you were to ask me what's the one thing that will sustain, will be a legacy beyond not only my personal tenure in the district, but any administration that comes in or leaves, it is our work with university partners.” ~ Prince George’s County leader

Comprehensive Development of Principal Pipelines is Sustainable

In addition to being effective and affordable, efforts to develop a comprehensive principal pipeline must be sustainable to achieve lasting impact. To understand how actions taken during the PPI endured past the expiration of funding from The Wallace Foundation, an [implementation study](#) was conducted by Policy Studies Associates (PSA). PSA visited the six districts and surveyed district-level decision makers to learn the extent that the districts were still implementing pipeline development activities.

Implementation data show that all six districts maintain a commitment to comprehensive principal pipeline development. Leadership standards developed and adopted by PPI districts remain foundational in aligning pipeline activities and work to improve pre-service preparation (both in-district and through university partnerships) continues in all six districts. Incoming school leaders are rated as highly skilled in each district.

Based on the quality and retention of new principal candidates, leadership in PPI districts continue to advocate and fund principal pipeline activities.



Comprehensive Principal Pipeline Development Leads to Changes in Preparation Programs

While the development of comprehensive principal pipelines involved improvement activities in four areas (Standards, Pre-service Training, Selective Hiring, and Evaluation and Support), the brief will focus on lessons for pre-service training.

Districts' efforts to improve preservice preparation for principals appear to have [made a difference](#) in the preservice experiences of incoming principals. The results of survey responses from a 2018 PSA survey of principals who started their principal preparation in March 2012 or later, compared with earlier cohorts, revealed changes. Principals completing their pre-service training in the later time period indicate their training more often emphasized instructional leadership, school improvement, and district context.

There are a number of design aspects of the PPI that educational leadership preparation programs (EELP) can draw district partners' and partner prospects' attention to in order to strengthen their work together. (See also Turnbull et al., 2016.)

1. Make ELPP's Philosophy and Goals Explicit

PPI districts initiated some new partnerships with ELPPs and ended others. District leaders were drawn to partner with ELPPs that had philosophies consistent with their district's own, and that were willing to discuss the variety of approaches needed to help the districts accomplish their goals. ELPPs that can crisply articulate their own philosophy and goals for graduates will be in a better position to initiate and lead the conversations necessary to collaborate with districts on principal preparation.

2. Assess, Track and Communicate the ELPP's Quality

The PPI partners identified the value of the data they produced about the effectiveness of their work together for sustaining the partnership. The indicators and rubrics in the *Quality Measures for Education Leadership Systems and Programs* can support ELPPs in demonstrating the quality of the ELPP, as well as track it over time. PPI participants created [Leader Tracking Systems](#) within the districts, but ELPPs could build off of these examples to develop a system capturing their contributions to candidates' quality and success.

3. Tune Candidate Selection Processes to Districts' Goals and Needs

Districts in the PPI understood the number of candidates they needed in their pipeline, as well as distinct characteristics needed in the developing leaders', knowledge, and skill. They considered the admission into their [district's pipeline](#) to be "a pretty straight line to a hiring process and thus were highly selective about the number and nature of people selected for participation. Where ELPPs are willing to adjust or even co-develop their selection processes, it adds significant value to districts' abilities to customize their leaders preparation pipeline.

4. Strategize With Districts to Strengthen Clinical Experiences

The PPI underscored the importance of the clinical experiences in preparing leaders for schools, but identified new levers for strengthening this component of ELPPs. Whereas often the characteristic of time in leader role is emphasized, the PPI districts initiated additional training and incentives for the [principal mentors](#) of leader candidates. This emphasis on the quality and depth of experiences when learning to lead, and the opportunities for formative feedback on them, allows ELPPs to draw upon their expertise to consider training or other means for preparing mentors to help candidates make the most of their field-based experiences.

5. Incorporate District Leaders into Courses

In the PPI districts where senior administrators were able to teach or present in courses, they not only were able to gain impressions of the rising class of principal candidates, they were in better positions to offer insights into how course content could be tailored or related to specific district processes or language in improvement planning, and so on.

The Wallace Foundation's PPI provides these and other actionable findings that ELPPs could draw upon to consider how they might add value to districts' succession planning efforts. The series of reports are a wealth of data on why and how partnerships improve outcomes for students.



This brief is part of a Knowledge Utilization Brief series supported by a grant from The Wallace Foundation. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development, particularly research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, with faculty, staff, and leaders at the program, institutional, and state levels, as these individuals are in positions to use this research to make positive changes. Available for downloading at <http://ucea.org/research-utilization-briefs/>

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