Policy Advocacy for the School Principals our Students Deserve

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Plenary presentation for The Education Trust virtual bootcamp.
1. Principals appear low on education policy and advocacy agendas, especially compared to teachers.

N=198 total publications available as of October 2021

Search “teacher”  N = 52
Search “principal” N = 9

https://edtrust.org/our-resources/publications/
2. Principals merit attention from policymakers and advocates interested in student success and equity.
The work of principals increasingly touches *all* core school activities, including those that have big implications for equity.

% of U.S. principals reporting “a great deal” or “major” influence in their schools over...

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Budget / school spending</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>61.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting discipline policy</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>78.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring teachers</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>86.6</td>
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<td>In-service teacher training</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>34.4</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
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<td><strong>Reform-oriented tasks</strong></td>
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<td>Setting student performance standards</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>72.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating teachers</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>80.7</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>95.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing curriculum</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
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Principals have powerful effects on student achievement.

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<th>Average increase in student achievement associated with:</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moving from a teacher at the 25th percentile of teacher effectiveness to one at the 75th percentile</td>
<td>0.23 SD ≈ 3.7 months of learning</td>
<td>0.17 SD ≈ 3.8 months of learning</td>
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<td>Moving from a principal at the 25th percentile of principal effectiveness to one at the 75th percentile</td>
<td>0.18 SD ≈ 2.9 months of learning</td>
<td>0.12 SD ≈ 2.7 months of learning</td>
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*Notes: SD = standard deviation. Teacher effects estimates based on Hanushek and Rivkin (2010). The months-of-learning conversions are based on gains for the typical fifth-grader reported in Bloom et al. (2008), using assumptions explained on page 41 and in endnote 10.*

Principal turnover disproportionately affects students of color...

Principal turnover is more frequent in schools with more students of color, more low-income students, and low or declining student performance. Given the negative impacts of principal turnover, high principal churn in schools with larger populations of historically marginalized students and greater performance challenges is an important, largely unrecognized issue for educational equity. (p. 53)

...but hiring and retaining principals of color can improve the chances of those same students succeeding.

The presence of a principal of color appears to lead to more frequent hiring and retention of teachers of color and better outcomes for students of color, including higher math scores and higher likelihood of placement into gifted programs. (p. 47)

Strategic development of principals can have broad, positive impacts on students and schools at relatively low cost compared to other educational interventions.

Evidence from Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative districts

Feasible: Districts operated pipelines at scale.

Effective: Districts saw gains in: student achievement, especially in the lowest performing schools; principal retention; principal ratings of hiring, evaluation, and support.

Affordable: Less than ½ percent of district budgets were required to operate and enhance pipelines.

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2666.html
3. Numerous state policy levers exist that can advance principals’ development, can work in concert with federal policy like ESSA, and can promote equity.

- Setting principal standards
- Recruiting aspiring principals
- Overseeing principal preparation programs
- Licensing principals
- Principal professional development
- Evaluating principals

Don’t hesitate to contact me to continue the conversation.

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