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Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding **research on how talent pipelines strengthen schools and school systems**. Ask REL Southwest is part of a collaborative Ask-A-REL reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories (RELs). By design, this service functions much in the same way as a technical reference library, by providing references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations for research-based education questions.

Please note that REL Southwest has not done an evaluation of the resources themselves but offers this list to you for your information only.

BACKGROUND

“Two things are true about talent pipeline work: first, it is absolutely imperative to the sustained vitality of any organization; second, it is really hard work. Yet, investments in human capital pipelines save work in the long run, and there are immediate results that will keep the organization healthy and thriving. When the organization is a school district, state education agencies (SEAs) can facilitate this work, leading to vital, higher performing districts. Considering that the single most significant resource in education is its people, it is essential to get the right people in the right jobs, doing the right things.

A talent pipeline is an intentional system designed to train, cultivate, attract, support, and retain exemplary employees who are prepared to meet rigorous performance expectations. A strong talent pipeline can pay dividends quickly and serve to position an organization for success long term.”¹

Following an established REL Southwest protocol, we conducted a search for research reports, websites, as well as descriptive briefs on how talent pipelines strengthen schools and school systems. **We searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.** The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, educational databases, and general Internet searches using Google and Bing. See the methods section at the end of this Ask A REL for additional information on how we identified the following sources.

¹ Woodruff, D., & Clark, C. (2014). Building human capital pipelines: Examining the role of the state education agency. In L. M. Rhim & S. Redding (Eds.), *The state role in school turnaround: Emerging best practices* (pp. 81–99). San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Building_Human_Capital_Pipelines2.pdf.

QUESTION

How do “talent pipelines” serve to strengthen schools and school systems? What factors contribute to building a talent pipeline at every level of the school system?

SOURCES

Black, W. R., Martin, G., & Danzig, A. (2014). Pathways for performance: Recruitment and selection, university preparation, licensure, and professional development for school principals. *Education Leadership Review*, v15 n2 p1-13.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1105570>.

From the ERIC abstract: “The need to recruit, prepare, and develop the next generation of educational leaders challenges states and localities everywhere. The complex demands of current educational reform initiatives have been articulated in national and state reports detailing the changing conditions of schools and provide compelling evidence for the necessity of new abilities and sensibilities at all levels of the profession. This article reports on research which examined four locations along the career continuum of school principals in Minnesota: 1) recruitment and selection, 2) university preparation programs, 3) licensing and certification, and 4) continuing professional development. We also include 18 specific policy recommendations.”

Burrows-McCabe, A. (2014). Stepping stones to leadership: Districts forge a clear path for aspiring principals. *Journal of Staff Development*, v35 n4 p40-43, 47.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1040718>.

From the ERIC abstract: “This article describes a comprehensive strategy for developing a larger corps of effective principals, “The Principal Pipeline Initiative,” launched by the Wallace Foundation in 2011. Its purpose is working to strengthen school leadership by documenting and evaluating leadership development in six urban districts (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; New York City Department of Education, New York; and Prince George’s County Public Schools, Maryland.) Now two years into the initiative, decision makers are looking for evidence of what a strong pipeline looks like. An evaluation collected and reviewed qualitative data, including interviews with 113 administrators and surveys of novice principals and assistant principals. The survey also focused on preservice opportunities, support for novice leaders, and the role of partnerships in preparation and support. All six districts were building on strong preparation experiences in instructional leadership. All six districts in the Principal Pipeline Initiative put serious effort into forging university and organizational partnerships for their programs in leader preparation or novice support. Ongoing evaluations continue for the Principal Pipeline Initiative and, as districts head into the next school year, changes that foster success for student outcomes continue.”

Goldhaber, D. & Walch, J. (2014). Gains in teacher quality. *Education Next*, v14 n1 p38-45. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1027865>.

From the ERIC abstract: “The quality of the teacher workforce in the United States is of considerable concern to education stakeholders and policymakers. Numerous studies show that student academic success depends in no small part on access to high-quality teachers. Many pundits point to the fact that in the United States, teachers tend not to be drawn from the top of the academic performance distribution, as is the case in countries with higher student achievement, such as Finland, Korea, and Singapore. The evidence on the importance of teacher academic proficiency generally suggests that effectiveness in raising student test scores is associated with strong cognitive skills as measured by SAT or licensure test scores, or the competitiveness of the college from which teachers graduate. Over the past 20 years, there has been a strong policy push toward getting smarter people into the teacher workforce. Enacted in 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for instance, emphasized academic competence by requiring that prospective teachers either graduate with a major in the subject they are teaching, have credits equivalent to a major, or pass a qualifying test showing competence in the subject. Newly created alternative pathways to certification have sought to bring more academically accomplished individuals into the profession. Absent persuasive evidence on the impact of efforts to raise the bar, some people have speculated that the rise of test-based accountability associated with NCLB and the ongoing push to establish more-rigorous teacher evaluation systems have made teaching less attractive and thereby contributed to further decline in the quality of the teaching corps. So how has the academic caliber of new teachers changed over the last two decades? Has the policy emphasis on teacher quality led more academically talented people into the teacher workforce, or have accountability reforms driven talent away? In this article the authors use a variety of datasets to analyze trends in the academic proficiency of individuals at various points in the teacher pipeline over the last two decades. The findings are generally encouraging, although they come with caveats and an acknowledgment that there is room for improvement when it comes to drawing more talent into teaching. Focusing on the start of the teacher pipeline, i.e., on those who report applying for a teaching job or teachers who begin classroom positions in the year immediately after receiving an undergraduate degree, the authors find that teacher applicants and new teachers in recent years have significantly higher SAT scores than their counterparts in the mid-1990s. Contrary to earlier cohorts of college graduates from the mid-1990s and early 2000s, graduates entering the teaching profession in the 2008-09 school year had average SAT scores that slightly exceeded average scores of their peers entering other occupations. What is less clear is whether this improvement reflects a temporary response to the economic downturn or a more permanent shift.”

Mendels, P. (2012). Principals in the pipeline: Districts construct a framework to develop school leadership. *Journal of Staff Development*, v33 n3 p48-52. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1001517>.

From the ERIC abstract: “A diverse school district hugging the eastern border of Washington, D.C., Prince George's County, has introduced rigorous hiring methods and other practices to boost the quality of leadership in its 198 schools. In so doing, the

district has also earned a spot among the pioneers in efforts nationally to ensure that public schools are led by the best principals possible. "We think the most critical interaction in schools is between the teacher and the student, but second to that is leadership in the building," says Douglas Anthony, director of human capital management for the county. Prince George's County is one of six school districts taking part in a six-year, \$75 million initiative to establish strong principal "pipelines." The key idea behind the initiative is that obtaining effective principals requires four essential elements: principal standards, high-quality training, selective hiring, and a combination of solid on-the-job support and performance evaluation, especially for new hires. These may seem like common sense, but until recently, leadership was an afterthought for most districts and, as a consequence, important pipeline elements were either insufficient or missing altogether. Now, several factors are changing the old scenario. One is government policy. Another factor is research. These factors combined have educators and policymakers looking intently at what they can do to promote school leadership."

Mendels, Pamela; Mitgang, Lee D. (2013). Creating strong principals. *Educational Leadership*, v70 n7 p22-29. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1015496>.

From the ERIC abstract: "Principals have a substantial effect on the quality of learning in their schools. Likewise, districts have a substantial effect on the quality of their leaders. A growing number of large school districts are focusing on two objectives to strengthen school leadership: (1) building a pipeline of new principals who are ready to tackle the most underperforming schools, and (2) fully supporting those leaders, especially during their novice years. Building a strong pipeline of new principals entails adopting high-quality leadership standards, applying district pressure on training providers to improve the relevance of their programs, hiring the right people, and attracting strong leaders to struggling schools. Once they hire new principals, districts have a continuing responsibility to promote their growth and success. To this end, districts need to develop better ways to assess principals, invest in mentoring and continuing professional development, provide good data and the training on their use, help principals and their teams focus more time on instruction, and plan for orderly leadership succession. The big lesson is that principals matter to the academic success of students and that district should therefore take a strong hand in selecting and training their leaders and cultivating their continuous success."

Myung, Jeannie; Loeb, Susanna; Horng, Eileen (2011). Tapping the principal pipeline: Identifying talent for future school leadership in the absence of formal succession management programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, v47 n5 p695-727. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ945628>.

From the ERIC abstract: "Purpose: In light of the difficulty many districts face finding quality principal candidates, this article explores an informal recruitment mechanism of teachers to become principals, which the authors call tapping. The authors assess the extent to which current teachers are being approached by school leaders to consider leadership and whether this tapping prompts these teachers to consider pursuing leadership positions. Research Design: This study uses survey and administrative data on teachers and principals from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools from the 2007-

2008 school year. The authors describe the extent to which principals tap teachers to become school leaders. They use multiple regression with and without school fixed effects to model which teachers are most likely to be tapped and which principals are most likely to tap teachers. They also estimate the extent to which tapping is effective at motivating teachers to become school leaders. Findings: A vast majority of principals report having been tapped by their own principal when they were teachers. The authors find that principals tend to tap teachers who feel better equipped to take on the principalship and who have more school-level leadership experience, but they also disproportionately tap teachers who are male and share their ethnicity. Conclusions: The findings provide evidence that principals are capable of effectively identifying and encouraging teachers with strong leadership potential to enter the principal pipeline, although additional training and a succession management plan may help ensure that teachers are selected based on clear leadership competencies. (Contains 5 notes, 6 tables, and 2 figures.)”

Turnbull, B. J. (2015). Renewing the principal pipeline. *State Education Standard*, v15 n3 p8-13. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1074898>.

From the ERIC abstract: “The work principals do has always mattered, but as the demands of the job increase, it matters even more. Perhaps once they could maintain safety and order and call it a day, but no longer. Successful principals today must also lead instruction and nurture a productive learning community for students, teachers, and staff. They set the tone for the school's academic focus and ever-improving professional practice. This article describes how six school districts are taking up the challenge of ensuring their schools have a supply of effective principals, and their experiences can point other district and state leaders to how to do it. The six districts are: (1) Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; (2) Denver Public Schools, Colorado; (3) Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; (4) Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; (5) New York City Department of Education, New York; and (6) Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Syed, Sarosh (2015). Building Principal Pipelines: A strategy to strengthen education leadership. Update. *Wallace Foundation*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569115>.

From the ERIC abstract: “School leadership is second only to teaching among school influences on student success, according to research. So what can a school district do to produce a large and steady supply of top-notch school principals--and support their effective supervision? This Wallace Update describes two related Wallace Foundation initiatives seeking answers to that question. The Principal Pipeline effort, begun in 2011, provides funding to six school districts around the country to help them put in place sturdy principal "pipelines," systems aimed at developing strong principals for schools districtwide. Each district is instituting the four components of such pipelines: (1) Clear standards that detail what principals must know and do; (2) High-quality pre-service training programs that recruit high-potential candidates and provide them with training suitable for district schools; (3) Selective hiring procedures that match well-trained principals with the right schools; and (4) Regular evaluation of principals along with the

provision of professional development and other support that helps them build on strengths and overcome weaknesses. The initiative is being studied to see, among other things, what impact the pipelines have on schools, including whether they affect student achievement. Among the early lessons are that assistant principals, as the people most likely to step into the top school leadership slot, need development and support, too, and that data systems tracking principals' training, qualifications and performance in schools can help districts in hiring and, potentially, other areas, such as improving pre-service training. The Principal Supervisor Initiative, launched in 2014 and at work in eight additional districts, seeks to strengthen school principals by ensuring that they are effectively managed. That requires shifting the job of the principal's supervisor so it focuses less on compliance matters and more on supporting school leaders, especially in their efforts to bolster classroom instruction." NOTE: This source was not peer reviewed.

Turnbull, B. J., Riley, D. L., & MacFarlane, J. R. (2015). Building a stronger principalship, vol 3: Districts taking charge of the principal pipeline. *The Wallace Foundation*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED555869>.

From the report's abstract: "This report documents ways in which six districts are working to improve school leadership districtwide. It is the third in a series of reports evaluating The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative. This six-year effort is testing whether the districts' efforts to set standards for principals and then improve how they are trained, hired, evaluated and supported on the job can lead to more effective principals and improved student achievement.

Among the observations by the researchers as they examine the initiative into its third year is that standards have "proved to be a more powerful policy instrument than many expected," having been "put to work in job descriptions, in the curricula of preparation programs, and, crucially, in assessments and support systems for aspiring and novice principals." The report also finds the districts are putting systems in place to ensure current assistant principals receive the attention they need to become effective principals in the future. In addition, "leader tracking systems," databases initially established to help evaluate the effects of the initiative on student achievement, are emerging as important tools for principal hiring and may bear additional benefits." NOTE: This source was not peer reviewed.

Volumes 1, 2, 4 and 5 of this report can be accessed at:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED555867>. (Vol. 1)

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED555868>. (Vol. 2)

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570471>. (Vol. 4)

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570472>. (Vol. 5)

METHODS

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Searches:

Talent pipelines in school districts; Impact of talent pipelines on school success;
Leadership pipeline

Search of Databases and Websites

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) website (<http://www.ies.ed.gov>) and IES sources: Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Center for Education Research (NCER), What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)
- ERIC database (www.eric.ed.gov)
- Google Scholar (scholar.google.com)
- Google (www.google.com)
- Bing (www.bing.com)

Criteria for Inclusion

REL Southwest selected resources that provide research on how talent pipelines strengthen schools and school systems. When REL Southwest staff reviewed resources, we considered – among other things – three factors:

1. Date of Publication: The most current information (primarily published from 2010 to the present) is included.
2. Source and Funder of the Report/Brief/Article: Priority was given to publications written in relevant, peer-reviewed journals or reports or produced by well-known research organizations.
3. Methodology: sources include reported studies, literature reviews and policy reports.

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