



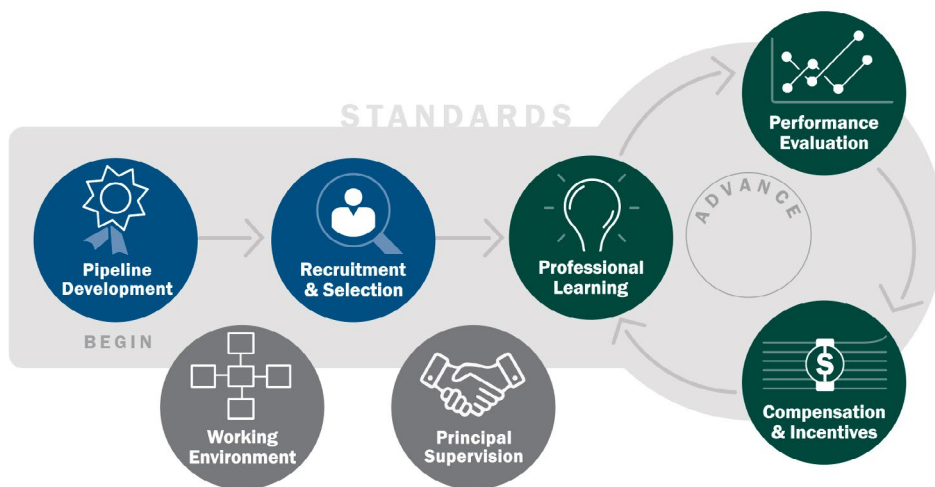
## Strong Principal Talent Management Increases Principal Retention

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School principals are more important now than ever. Strong school leaders build great school cultures and support excellent instruction, work that is critical to mitigate the profound learning loss experienced by so many students across the country during the pandemic. The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, more commonly known as the Nation’s Report Card, showed the largest drop ever measured between 2019 and 2022, an average decline of eight points in math for eighth graders and five points for fourth graders. Reading scores for fourth and eighth graders dropped significantly too, wiping out two decades worth of progress.

Being a principal is a hard job in normal circumstances, but COVID-19 made the job of leading campuses nearly impossible for many. According to a recent NASSP survey, one out of two principals say their stress level is so high that they are considering career change or retirement. But districts can take steps to support and retain their principals – and recruit new ones – to ensure that their campuses are led by strong school leaders.

We spent five years working with four school districts to better understand the impact of Principal Talent Management on school leaders. At the outset of this work, called the School Leadership District Cohort, we believed that if districts improve their Principal Talent Management policy and practice, principals will stay longer in their jobs. Over time, those school leaders will help to develop and retain strong teachers, which will ultimately help improve student academic outcomes. What we learned with our cohort partners can help other districts take effective action.



## OUR FINDINGS:

**The district that most improved its Principal Talent Management practices also retained the most principals.**

**Increased principal retention was linked to the districts improving in areas such as the following:**

- [Evaluation](#), including how it drives [professional learning and supervision](#) priorities.
- [Working environment](#), which includes elements like earned autonomy for principals.
- [Effective implementation](#), which includes change management.

**Compensation must be fair, but it does not always link to job embeddedness and retention.**

- Pay matters, of course, but principals report that they are more likely to stay in their roles when they perceive that the district is improving its talent policies and practices.

**Slow and steady progress matters, not perfection.**

- The district teams that were most successful worked steadily over time, staying focused on annual goals, and remaining committed to better supporting principals. That commitment carried through even while the pandemic upended their campuses because the team members valued, and understood, the positive impact that principals can have on students.

**Conditions for change matter.**

- Making changes in complex human environments like school districts is difficult, but not impossible. Our most successful districts improved their implementation capacity alongside improving their Principal Talent Management policies and practices. We identified four specific buckets of conditions for required for change to occur. [Those buckets - leadership, capacity, culture, and performance – each include several indicators.](#)

**The cohort design mattered.**

- The combination of an annual diagnostic report (which reflected the district's own data and feedback), coaching from a dedicated expert advisor, and a series of convenings attended by the district teams was powerful, according to the district participants.

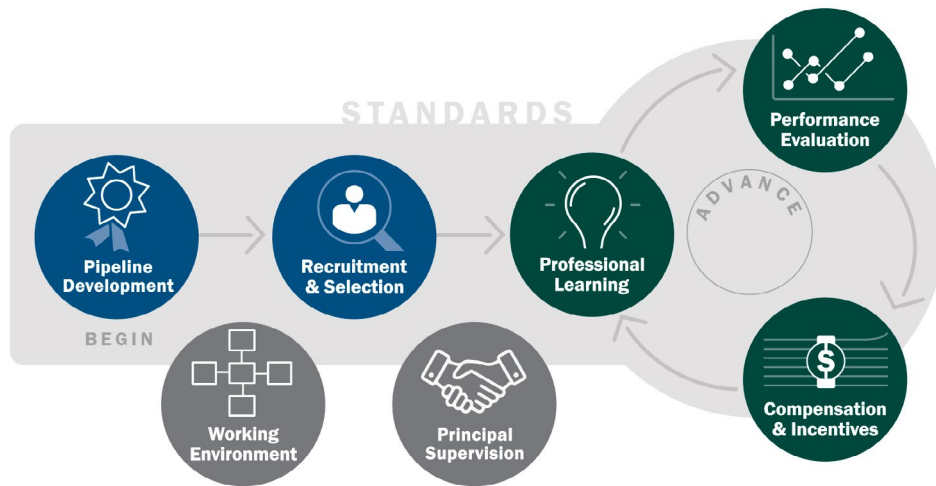
**Principal voice is essential.**

- Our district teams all included principals – and we surveyed principals and did focus groups with principals. Their collective input about how principals experience current or proposed policies mattered greatly in improvement.

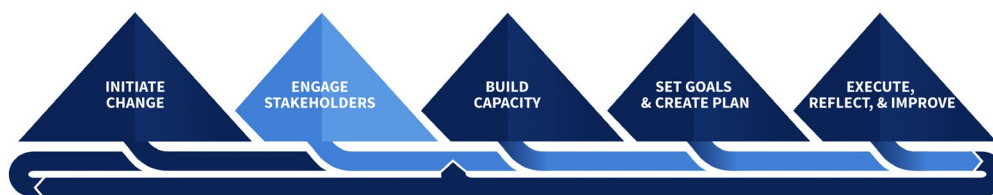
## THE PROJECT:

The School Leadership District Cohort, which ran from 2017-2021, included four school districts –Austin ISD, Chesterfield County Public Schools, Ft. Worth ISD, and Granite Public Schools - that served as learning and research partners. We tested two frameworks – Principal Talent Management and Effective Implementation – with those districts, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand how to equip school districts to recruit, support, and retain highly effective school leaders. Our project consisted of an annual diagnostic process to measure progress, an expert coach dedicated to each team, nine cohort convenings, and resource material.

The [Principal Talent Management Framework](#) defines the components of a principal's professional experience.



The [Effective Implementation Framework](#) describes how to make complex changes to practice and policy.



Principals are the leaders closest to the essential work of schools – educating children and preparing them for their next step. Great teachers want to work for a great boss. Children and adults alike want to be part of a school with a welcoming and positive culture. Principals make all that happen.

Improving Principal Talent Management policies can help keep our best school leaders in their roles and build up a pipeline of leaders over time. Doing this well is within reach for most districts. It requires an intentional look at the policies and practices that impact principals most, and it requires a commitment to change what gets in the way of principals' ability to be effective. Our school leaders deserve this support – and our children need to benefit from their expertise and leadership.

*All our resources, including Frameworks, district guidebooks, and reports, can be found at [WWW.BUSHCENTER.ORG/TOPICS/EDUCATION/SCHOOL-LEADERSHIP](http://WWW.BUSHCENTER.ORG/TOPICS/EDUCATION/SCHOOL-LEADERSHIP)*