



School Leadership: Key Investments to Support the Success of the American Families Plan

Overview

President Biden's American Families Plan presents a vision of increased access to higher education, a well-compensated and diverse teacher and early childhood educator workforce and increased access to a high-quality early childhood education. We specifically appreciate President Biden's plans to address teacher shortages, improve teacher preparation, and strengthen pipelines for teachers of color. We believe this proposal can be further strengthened and supported by including school leaders. We propose recommendations to build on the strong vision in the American Families Plan and invest directly in improving school leadership for the 52 million students in America's public schools.

The importance of school leadership

More than a decade of research shows that well-prepared, well-supported principals have a huge influence on teacher practice and student success. School leaders account for a quarter of a school's impact on student learning.¹ A recent study found that top-performing principals generate nearly three months of additional learning for students in both reading and math annually.² This effect is similar to the most effective teachers, which is especially powerful given that principals influence the teaching and learning environments of every educator and student across a school. Moreover, outstanding school leaders attract and retain great educators: fully 97 percent of teachers list principal quality as critical to their retention and career decisions — more than any other factor.³

Principals' primary job is to serve as an instructional leader, creating the learning conditions that support high-quality teaching and learning. Inadequate and uneven educator pre-service preparation hurts student

¹ Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004, September). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf>

² Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., and Lindsay, C. A. (2021.) *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*. The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis>.

³ Scholastic Inc. (2012). *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/pdfs/Gates2012_full.pdf.

achievement and increases churn rates. Research affirms clinical-based practice can enhance diversity and attrition rates currently plaguing the profession. At the same time, over 80 percent of Black students and 74 percent of Latinx students graduate college with some type of student debt.⁴ The American Families Plan can address these two critical and interdependent goals: reducing financial barriers while improving the quality of school leader training and support.

This year has also required principals to make public health decisions and quickly figure out how to prioritize student and teacher health without sacrificing learning outcomes. According to a poll conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), **45 percent of principals report that pandemic working conditions are accelerating their plans to leave the profession.**⁵ The need for better preparation and support is urgent. Additionally, directly supporting school leaders will support teachers to ensure that all children are prepared to succeed in tomorrow's economy, affording them real opportunities in life and fostering a more just, equitable world.

Recommendations

Given principals' critical role in supporting teachers, students, and school communities, we recommend that school leaders be included throughout the relevant portions of the American Families Plan:

- **Include school leadership as a “high demand” field and make aspiring school leaders eligible for two years of subsidized tuition at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).** While 52 percent of U.S. students identify as people of color, just over 22% of principals identify as leaders of color and, a national analysis found that the average cost to recruit, prepare, and hire a new principal is \$75,000.⁶ By directing resources to school leader preparation programs at HBCUs, TCUs and MSIs we can not only strengthen the pipeline of school leaders but also diversify the profession. The American Families can achieve this by:
 - Including school leadership as a “high demand” field as part of the \$5 billion in expanded institutional aid grants for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, and target 2% of that funding specifically for developing or strengthening school leadership programs.
 - Making aspiring school leaders eligible for subsidized tuition at HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs.
- **Address teacher shortages, improve teacher preparation, and strengthen pipelines for teachers of color through direct supports for diverse school leaders. Principals of color are a key strategy to diversifying the teacher workforce.** The transition from a white to a Black principal is estimated to increase the number of Black teachers working at the school by three percentage points. A similar shift is noted in the other

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Debt After College: Employment, Enrollment, and Student-Reported Stress and Outcomes*. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018401.pdf>

⁵ National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2020). *Principals Say Pandemic Conditions Are Accelerating Their Plans to Leave the Principalship*. Retrieved from <https://blog.nassp.org/2020/08/21/principals-say-pandemic-conditions-are-accelerating-their-plans-to-leave-the-principalship/>.

⁶ School Leaders Network. (2014). *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover*.

direction if a school moved from a Black to white principal.⁷ In order to ensure that diverse school leaders are supported so they, in turn, can successfully support teachers of color, we recommend:

- Including school leadership in the \$2.8 billion in support for Grow Your Own programs and year-long paid school leadership residencies.
 - Identifying school leadership as a separate and allowable use of funds or eligible grantee for the \$400 million identified for teacher preparation at HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs.
 - Including prospective school leaders as TEACH grant recipients in the plan to double the maximum grants and make other enhancements to the program.
 - Funding a one-time \$16m School Leadership Revolving Loan Fund to create a revolving pool of guaranteed low-interest capital for institutions of higher education (IHEs) to fund the transformation of their school leader preparation programs. IHEs would recapture funds to repay loans by securing partnerships with LEAs willing to pay a nominal placement fee for graduates of effective programs.
- **Help current teachers earn in-demand credentials.** Excellent and experienced teachers should have leadership opportunities that allow them to remain in the classroom. Teacher leader certifications should be included in the certifications supported by the \$1.6 billion allotted for the American Family Plan’s initiative to support teachers in earning in-demand credentials.
- **Invest in educator and school leadership.** We commend President Biden’s call to invest \$2 billion to support programs that leverage teachers as leaders, such as high-quality mentorship programs for new teachers and teachers of color. Teacher leaders play a critical role and build the pipeline for principals. To boost teacher leadership, school leaders—who help identify and provide ongoing support to those teachers seeking an expanded leadership role—must be leveraged. To that end, we recommend adding \$400m in additional funds focused on school leadership to recruit, prepare, train, and support school leaders. This funding will help ensure that every school is led by a well-prepared and supported principal who creates the school-level conditions for the success of every teacher and classroom, builds a strong school culture, and supports teacher leaders as they advance in their careers.
- **Invest in the early childhood education workforce.** More investment is needed to support job-embedded coaching and professional development for early childhood care educators and leaders. Namely, the lack of adequate preparation hinders pre-k-5 principals’ ability to support developmentally appropriate teaching which in turn limits their ability to support early childhood educators.⁸ We recommend that there also be a specific investment for the school leaders in early learning environments, who are key in supporting teachers and often do not receive adequate support.

⁷ Bartanen, B. & Grissom, J. (2019). *School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers* (EdWorkingPaper No.19-59). <http://edworkingpapers.com/ai19-59>.

⁸ Kauerz, K., Ballard, R., Soli, M., & Hagerman, S. (2021). *Leading learning communities: A principal’s guide to early learning and the early grades (Pre-K–3rd Grade)*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals.