

Balanced Leadership®

Intervention Report | School Leadership Topic Area

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Research has shown that school leaders can substantially influence student outcomes, including student achievement, and that some school leaders improve student outcomes at a much faster rate than others do.¹ The strong influence of school leaders on student outcomes has led to the creation of student outcome-focused professional development programs for current and aspiring school leaders. *Balanced Leadership®* is one such professional development program. Current and aspiring school leaders participate in professional development sessions with trained facilitators over one or two years, practice what they learn between sessions, and can receive additional coaching and online support. McREL International, the company that developed the *Balanced Leadership®* program, based the framework

and content of the professional development on research identifying key actions and behaviors of school leaders that are associated with improved student outcomes.^{2,3}

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC's School Leadership topic area, explores the effects of *Balanced Leadership®* on student, teacher, and school leader outcomes. The WWC identified three studies of *Balanced Leadership®*. One of these studies meets WWC standards. The evidence presented in this report is from one study of the impact of *Balanced Leadership®* on school principals in schools with a range of grades—from kindergarten to grade 12—in rural school districts in the state of Michigan.

What Happens When School Leaders Participate in *Balanced Leadership®*?⁴

The evidence indicates that implementing *Balanced Leadership®*:

- May increase school leader retention at the school

Findings on *Balanced Leadership®* from the one study that met WWC standards are shown in Table 1. For the one outcome in this study that met WWC standards, the table reports

on the performance of the *Balanced Leadership®* intervention group relative to the comparison group and the number of studies and principals that contributed to the finding.

Table 1. Summary of findings on *Balanced Leadership®* from the one study that meets WWC Standards

Outcome	Effectiveness rating	Average performance (study findings)		Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 4.0)	
		Intervention group	Comparison group	Number of studies	Number of principals
School leader retention at the school	Potentially positive effects	76% retained	60% retained	1	124

Note: The average performance (study findings) values are based on an analysis of one outcome measure that meets WWC standards, reported by Jacob et al. (2015). The effects of *Balanced Leadership®* are not known for other outcomes within the School Leadership topic area, including student achievement, student progress in school, social-emotional learning and behavior, instructional practice, leadership practice, teacher retention, or measures of school leader retention in the district, state, or teaching profession.

BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria the WWC uses for evaluating evidence are defined in the [Procedures and Standards Handbooks](#) and the [Review Protocols](#). The studies summarized in this report were reviewed under WWC Standards (version 4.0) and the School Leadership topic area protocol (version 4.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and the number of studies that tested the intervention. The higher the effectiveness rating, the more certain the WWC is about the reported results and about what will happen if the same intervention is implemented again. The following key explains the relationship between effectiveness ratings and the statements used in this report:

Effectiveness Rating	Rating interpretation	Description of the evidence
Positive (or negative) effects	The intervention is <i>likely</i> to change an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially positive (or negative) effects	The intervention <i>may</i> change an outcome	Evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence
No discernible effects	The intervention <i>may result in little to no change</i> in an outcome	No affirmative evidence of effects
Mixed effects	The intervention <i>has inconsistent effects</i> on an outcome	Evidence includes studies in at least two of these categories: studies with positive effects, studies with negative effects, or more studies with indeterminate effects than with positive or negative effects

How is *Balanced Leadership*® Implemented?

The following section provides details of how *Balanced Leadership*® was implemented. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing *Balanced Leadership*® and determine whether implementing this intervention would be feasible in their district or school. Information on *Balanced Leadership*® presented in this section comes from the study that meets WWC standards (Jacob et al., 2015) and from correspondence with the developer.

- **Goal:** *Balanced Leadership*® aims to improve student outcomes by helping current and aspiring school leaders understand and implement a set of actions and behaviors of school leaders that may be associated with improved student outcomes.
- **Target population:** The *Balanced Leadership*® program reviewed in this report is intended for principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and others responsible for school-level leadership in schools serving kindergarten through grade 12. A separate *Balanced Leadership*® program offered by the developer seeks to engage district-level leaders.
- **Method of delivery:** *Balanced Leadership*® instructional specialists provide professional development to groups of school leaders during in-person sessions offered at a location the school district provides or in a central location if multiple districts are participating together (referred to as the consortium model). School leaders can receive additional

Comparison group: In the study that contributes to this intervention report, principals in the comparison group received their school or district's standard professional development offerings. Several comparison group principals described attending a program with content similar to *Balanced Leadership*®.

one-on-one coaching and online support. In the study that contributes to this intervention report, the sessions took place in two central locations close to the participating school districts.

- **Frequency and duration of service:** The program is customizable, and the number of sessions offered depends on what the school or district requests. In the study that contributes to this intervention report, principals attended 10 sessions, each of which was offered over 2 days. Though the program is offered over 2 years, the sessions in this study took place across parts of 3 school years. The study does not describe any additional coaching or online support provided by the program.
- **Intervention components:** *Balanced Leadership*® includes several components, as noted in Table 2. A separate program for district-level leaders, which can be bundled with the school-level leader program, is also described below, but was not the subject of the study that contributes to this intervention report.

Table 2. Components of *Balanced Leadership*[®]

Key component	Description
Framework for actions and behaviors of school leaders	The professional development focuses on 21 specific actions and behaviors of school leaders that may be associated with improved student outcomes, including designing and implementing school curriculum, instruction, and assessment; fostering shared beliefs and community; and monitoring teaching and student learning.
On-site professional learning for school leaders in year one	During the first year, current or aspiring school leaders are offered between one and four two-day on-site professional learning sessions focused on the 21 specific actions and behaviors that may be associated with improved student outcomes. The first session provides an overview of the program and each of the actions and behaviors of school leaders. The second through fourth sessions, in turn, focus on learning how to initiate and lead school change, maintain a focus on school performance, and foster shared beliefs and a purposeful school community. The structured training sessions are offered using a case study approach, in which participants read about and reflect on real-life applications of the leadership framework.
On-site professional learning for school leaders in year two	For schools that participate in 2 years of the program, sessions in the second year focus on extending and refining the topics covered in the first year through group discussions, case studies, and action plans. These activities are offered over two to six professional learning sessions, each offered over 2 days. Coaching and additional online supports are available throughout the program as requested by the school or district.
Training for district staff	The program can also include professional development for district-level leaders, for example, superintendents or assistant superintendents, who oversee multiple schools. The district-level training, provided over 1 to 4 days, focuses on setting goals, strategies for supporting school leaders, and effective management practices. District staff can also become trained facilitators in the <i>Balanced Leadership</i> [®] program themselves, in order to sustain the program in their districts over time.

What Does *Balanced Leadership*[®] Cost?

The cost of participating in *Balanced Leadership*[®] varies depending on the number of school leaders being trained and the extent of program customization. The program can be implemented using a consortium training model, in which school leaders from multiple districts attend the training in a central location, to lower program costs to individual districts. The preliminary list of cost drivers in this section is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it provides educators an overview of the major resources needed to implement *Balanced Leadership*[®]. Actual program costs are only available in consultation with the developer. The information described below is based on the information available as of July 2019.

- **Equipment and materials costs:** Participants receive activity guides, manuals, and access to online resources as part of the contracted cost.
- **Personnel costs:** McREL provides facilitators to lead *Balanced Leadership*[®] professional learning sessions and

coaching activities. Each participating school leader joins up to 10 professional learning sessions over 2 years, and additional coaching sessions are available as part of the contracted cost.

- **Facilities costs:** Professional development activities occur in a school or administrative building in the school leaders' district. For the consortium training model, the training occurs in a centrally located facility provided by one of the districts, or a regional education agency. Schools and districts are responsible for transportation to and from these locations.
- **Costs paid by students or parents:** None.
- **In-kind supports:** None.
- **Sources of funding:** Schools and districts usually cover the contracted costs for *Balanced Leadership*[®] using general funds or any grant funds they may have available.

For More Information:

About *Balanced Leadership*[®]

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4601 DTC Boulevard; Suite 500
Denver, CO 80237-2596
Email: info@mcrel.org. Web: www.mcrel.org/balancedleadership/. Phone: (800) 858-6830.

About the cost of the intervention

Actual program costs are only available in consultation with the developer.

Research Summary

The WWC identified three studies that investigated the effectiveness of *Balanced Leadership*® (Figure 1):

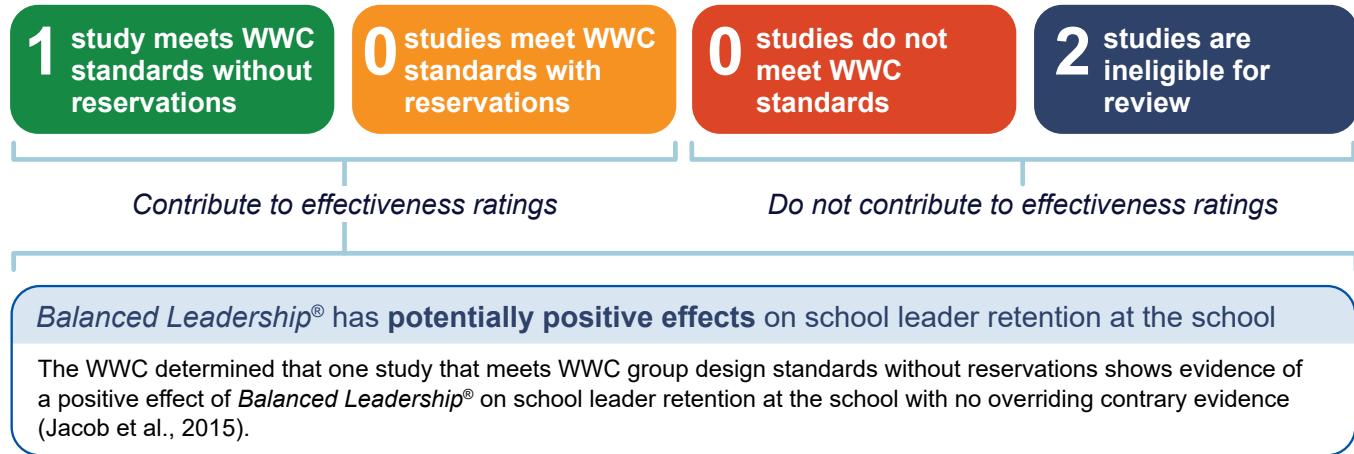
- One study meets WWC group design standards without reservations
- Two studies are ineligible for review

The WWC reviews findings on the intervention's effects on eligible outcome domains from studies that meet standards, either with or without reservations. Based on this review, the WWC generates an effectiveness rating, which summarizes how the intervention impacts, or changes, a particular outcome domain. Findings from studies that either do not meet

WWC standards or are ineligible for review do not contribute to the effectiveness ratings.

The one study of *Balanced Leadership*® that meets WWC group design standards reported findings on school leader retention at the school. No other findings in the study within any outcome domain included in the School Leadership topic area met WWC group design standards.⁵ The citation for the study reviewed for this report is listed in the References section on page 8. Citations for the two studies that are ineligible for review and the reasons the WWC determined they were ineligible are also listed in the References section.

Figure 1. Effectiveness ratings for *Balanced Leadership*®



Main Findings

Table 3 shows the findings from one *Balanced Leadership*[®] study that meets WWC standards. The table includes WWC calculations of the mean difference, effect size, and performance of the intervention group relative to the comparison group. Based on findings from this study, the effectiveness

rating for school leader retention at the school is potentially positive effects, indicating evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence. This finding is based on 124 school principals.

Table 3. Findings by outcome domain from the one study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] that meets WWC Standards

Measure (study)	Study sample	Sample size	Mean (standard deviation)		WWC calculations				p-value
			Intervention group	Comparison group	Mean difference	Effect size	Improvement index		
Principal turnover at the school after 3 years (Jacob et al., 2015) ^a	School principals	124	24%	40%	-16	0.45	+17	.10	
Outcome average for school leader retention at the school									
						0.45	+17		

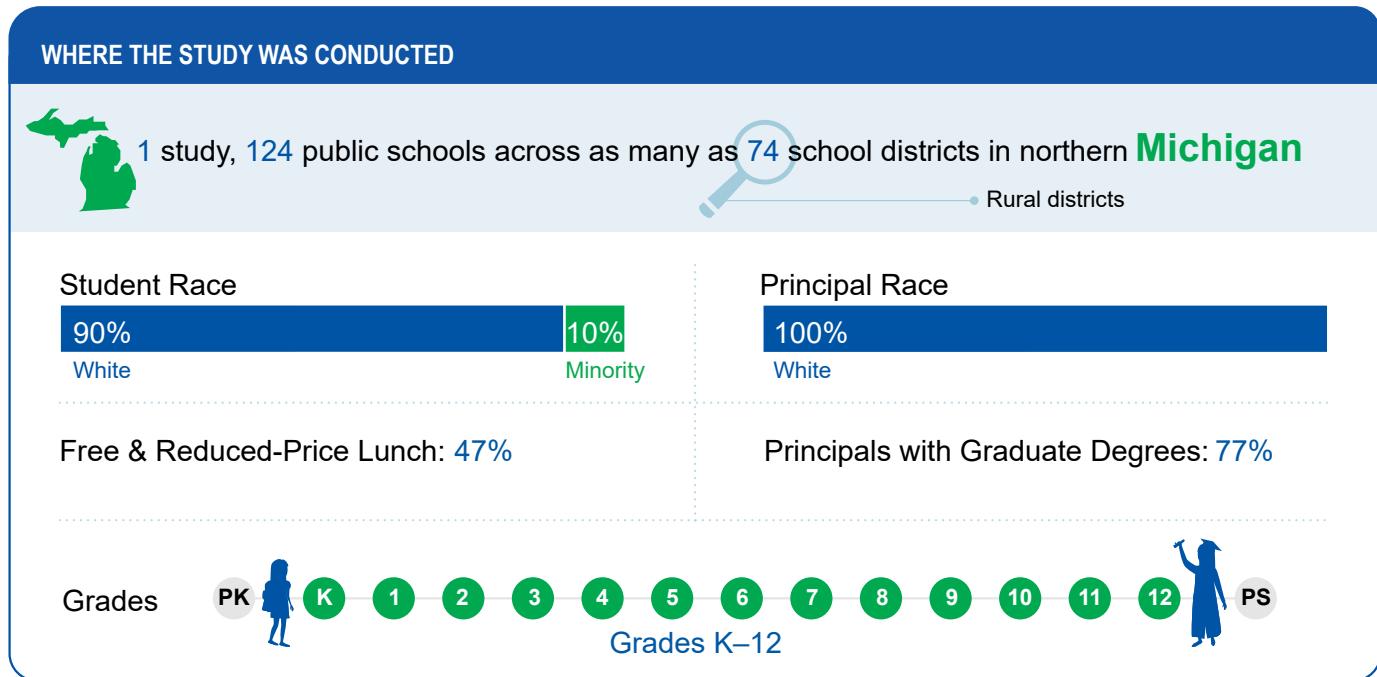
Notes: For principal turnover, lower mean scores indicate more favorable results; the WWC-calculated findings on school leader retention in Table 1 and the effect size and improvement index reported in this table are adjusted so that a positive number favors the intervention group. The effect size is a standardized measure of the effect of an intervention on outcomes, representing the average change expected for all individuals who are given the intervention (measured in standard deviations of the outcome measure). An indicator of the effect of the intervention, the improvement index is a standardized measure of the relative performance of the intervention group to the comparison group in percentile terms. A positive number favors the intervention group. For example, an improvement index of +17 means that the expected percentile rank of the average comparison group principal would increase by 17 points if the principal received *Balanced Leadership*[®]. A positive improvement index does not necessarily mean the estimated effect is statistically significant.

^a The findings in Jacob et al. (2015) did not require corrections for clustering, multiple comparisons adjustments, or difference-in-differences adjustments. The unadjusted means and sample sizes presented here were provided in response to an author query. This study is characterized as having a potentially positive effect on school leader retention at the school because there is evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence. For more information, please refer to the WWC Procedures Handbook, version 4.0, page 22.

In What Context Was *Balanced Leadership*[®] Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting of the one study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] that meets WWC standards, and a description of the participants in the research. This information can help educators understand

the context in which the study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] was conducted, and determine whether the program might be suitable for their setting.



Details of Each Study that Meets WWC Standards

This section presents details for the study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] that meets WWC standards. These details include the full study reference, findings description, findings summary, and description of study characteristics. A summary of domain findings for the study is presented below, followed by a description of the study characteristics. These study-level details include contextual information around the study setting, methods, sample, intervention group, comparison group, outcomes, and implementation details. For additional information, readers should refer to the original study.

Research details for Jacob et al. (2015)

Jacob, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Miller, R., & Goddard Y. (2015). Exploring the causal impact of the McREL Balanced

Leadership program on leadership, principal efficacy, instructional climate, educator turnover, and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(3), 314-332. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1072764>.

Findings from Jacob et al. (2015) show evidence of potentially positive effects of *Balanced Leadership*[®] on school leader retention at the school (Table 4). This finding is based on an outcome analysis that includes 124 principals. The finding and research details summarized for this study come from two related citations, including the primary study listed above. See the References section on page 8 for a list of all related publications.

Table 4. Summary of findings from Jacob et al. (2015)

Outcome domain	Sample size	Meets WWC Group Design Standards Without Reservations		
		Study findings	Improvement index	Statistically significant
School leader retention at the school	124 principals	0.45	+17	No

Table 5. Description of study characteristics for Jacob et al. (2015)

WWC evidence rating	<p>Meets WWC Group Design Standards Without Reservations. This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with low attrition.⁶ For more information on how the WWC assigns study ratings, please see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbooks (version 4.0) and WWC Standards Briefs, available on the WWC website.</p>
Setting	<p>The study includes 124 rural schools spread across as many as 74 school districts in northern Michigan, including the Upper Peninsula. Only schools that were public (including charter or magnet) and served grades 3 to 5 inclusively (for example, K–5 or K–12) were eligible to participate in the study.</p>
Methods	<p>This study is an RCT that assigned schools and their principals to intervention or comparison conditions. Of 126 schools and principals recruited for the study, approximately half were randomly assigned to an intervention group in which the principals participated in the <i>Balanced Leadership</i>[®] program, and half to a “business as usual” comparison group. Recruitment was conducted by contacting superintendents who then signed a letter of agreement allowing their principals to participate. Principals were then contacted and invited to participate in the study.</p> <p>Random assignment was conducted using a stratified approach. Researchers placed the 126 schools into 12 groups based on proximity to an urban center (the degree of rurality) and socioeconomic status. Schools within each group were assigned a random number and then ordered accordingly from lowest to highest. The first half of the schools in each sorted list was assigned to the intervention group; the second half was assigned to the comparison group. After assignment, 62 schools were in the <i>Balanced Leadership</i>[®] intervention group and 64 schools were in the business-as-usual comparison group.</p> <p>The sample loss after random assignment (attrition) was within the acceptable threshold for the review: the overall attrition rate was 2% and differential attrition was 3 percentage points. A total of 124 schools and principals remained in the analysis after 3 years.</p>
Study sample	<p>One hundred twenty-four schools participated in the study for all 3 years. This included 124 principals, as many as 1,764 teachers, and more than 30,000 students. Outcomes using the analytic samples of teachers and students did not meet WWC group design standards to be included in this review.</p> <p>In study schools, which averaged 300 students each, approximately 47% of students were eligible for the free- or reduced-price meal program and 10% were minorities. Forty-three percent of principals were female, 77% had advanced degrees, and all were White. No descriptive information was provided for the sample of teachers.</p>
Intervention group	<p>Principals in the intervention group were offered 10 <i>Balanced Leadership</i>[®] program sessions, each of which took place over 2 days. These sessions were spread across 3 academic years, starting in January 2009 (the 2008–09 school year) and ending in October 2010 (the 2010–11 school year). The consortium training model was used, with principals attending training together at one of two locations closest to their districts.</p>
Comparison group	<p>No alternative intervention was designed for the comparison schools. Principals in those schools received their school or district’s standard professional development offerings. Of the school principals in the comparison group, 12% reported attending a program with content similar to the intervention.</p>
Outcomes and measurement	<p>Study authors reported findings on one outcome measure that is eligible for review under the School Leadership topic area and met WWC group design standards. This outcome, principal turnover at the school, was reviewed in the school leader retention at the school domain. Principal turnover between the baseline year (the 2008–09 school year) and the end of the third year of the study (the 2010–11 school year) was assessed using administrative data from the Michigan Department of Education.</p> <p>The study also reported findings for teacher turnover, which was reviewed in the teacher retention at the school domain. This outcome did not meet WWC group design standards because teachers joining study schools after random assignment may have posed a risk of bias, and the authors do not present information to confirm that the analytic sample of teachers in the intervention and comparison groups is equivalent at baseline.</p> <p>In addition, the study reported findings for a survey of principal leadership and school climate as reported by principals and teachers. These findings were not eligible for review in the leadership practice domain. Eligible measures in this domain must demonstrate a link between the measure and a student outcome (for example, student achievement), but this information was not available.⁷</p> <p>Finally, the study reported findings for student achievement on math and reading standardized tests in grades 3–5. These outcomes did not meet WWC group design standards because the authors do not present information the WWC needed to assess the risk of bias due to nonresponse of students.</p>
Additional implementation details	<p>The <i>Balanced Leadership</i>[®] professional development sessions were facilitated by full-time training consultants employed by the program developer. Training consultants were required to complete practice training sessions with more experienced facilitators before they were allowed to facilitate sessions in the field. No additional information on support for implementation is described in the study.</p>

References

Study that meets WWC group design standards

Jacob, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Miller, R., & Goddard Y. (2015). Exploring the causal impact of the McREL Balanced Leadership program on leadership, principal efficacy, instructional climate, educator turnover, and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(3), 314-332. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1072764>.

Additional source:

Miller, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Jacob, R., Goddard Y., & Schroeder, P. (2016). Can professional development improve school leadership? Results from a randomized control trial assessing the impact of McREL's Balanced Leadership program on principals in rural Michigan schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(4), 531-566. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1112412>

Studies that are ineligible for review using the School Leadership topic area protocol

Koonce, F. (2006). *A journey in instructional leadership using the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework as a vehicle: A beginning principal's efforts to grow in her instructional leadership* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3227712) The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a study design eligible for review under the WWC's group design standards, regression discontinuity design standards, or pilot single-case design standards, as described in the [WWC Standards Handbook \(Version 4.0\)](#).

Miller, G. L. (2007). *Effects of professional development on administrators and school climate* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3287986) The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a study design eligible for review under the WWC's group design standards, regression discontinuity design standards, or pilot single-case design standards, as described in the [WWC Standards Handbook \(Version 4.0\)](#).

Endnotes

¹ Several studies describe differences across school leaders in their impacts on student achievement, including [Dhuey and Smith \(2018\)](#); [Branch et al. \(2012\)](#); and [Leithwood et al. \(2004\)](#).

² The research that McREL International used to identify the actions and behaviors of school leaders associated with improved student outcomes includes *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* ([Marzano et al. 2005](#)). A review of this research by the WWC is beyond the scope of this review.

³ The descriptive information for this intervention comes from Jacob et al. (2015) and the intervention developer. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) requests developers review the intervention description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The WWC provided the developer with the intervention description in July 2019 and the WWC incorporated feedback from the developer. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this intervention is beyond the scope of this review.

⁴ The literature search reflects documents publicly available by June 2019. Reviews of the studies in this report used the standards from the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 4.0) and the School Leadership review protocol (version 4.0). The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions could change as new research becomes available.

⁵ Student, teacher, and school leader outcomes can be reviewed under the School Leadership topic area protocol. The study that met WWC group design standards did not report findings that met standards in other outcome domains. For student outcomes, these domains are general literacy achievement, general mathematics achievement, general science achievement, general social studies achievement, general achievement, English language proficiency, staying in school, progression in school, completing school, student social interaction, observed individual behavior, student emotional status, and student engagement in school. For teacher outcomes, these domains are instructional practice, teacher attendance, teacher retention at the school, teacher retention in the school district, teacher retention in the state, and teacher retention in the profession. For school leaders, these outcome domains are leadership practice, school leader retention in the school district, school leader retention in the state, and school leader retention in the profession.

⁶ This study meets WWC group design standards without reservations because one outcome (principal turnover) is from a low-attrition RCT where the risk of bias from individual nonresponse is low. Other measures in this study do not meet standards as described in Table 5. This review of Jacob et al. (2015) assigned the same study rating as the prior review of the study conducted for the IES grant competition (based on a previous version of the publication released online in 2014 prior to print). This prior review was conducted under the version 3.0 standards using the Single Study Review Protocol (version 2.0).

⁷ The survey measure was also reviewed as a supplemental outcome; however, no survey findings from the analytic sample of principals met WWC group design standards because of high cluster-level attrition from survey nonresponse and non-equivalence on several baseline measures from within the outcome domain. The analytic sample of teachers did not meet WWC group design standards because of high cluster-level attrition from survey nonresponse. Though the authors present information to demonstrate equivalence of the clusters at baseline, they do not present information the WWC needed to assess the risk of bias due to nonresponse of teachers at follow-up.

Recommended Citation

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