

WHITE PAPER

Accelerating School Success

*Transforming K-12 Schools by Investing
in Leadership Development*



Center for
Creative
Leadership®

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INTRODUCTION



Why Invest in K-12 Leadership Development?

In-depth studies in the field of K-12 education confirm that investments in high-quality, research-based leadership development for school systems can directly impact student success—in the classroom and beyond.

And now more than ever, meeting the complex challenges of a rapidly changing world requires schools to equip young people with the skills they need to become productive workers, engaged citizens, entrepreneurs, and lifelong learners.

“The goal of our nation’s education system should be to prepare every young person to become an engaged and thriving participant in society,” notes the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.¹ This results in the need to learn beyond content mastery and develop deeper learning skills. Students need to be able to adapt quickly, be continuous learners, and able to collaborate across many social boundaries. Success in the 21st Century depends on critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Building students’ capacity for this new era requires investments in teacher and administrator professional development to create the educational ecosystems that foster students’ mastery of these skills.

These days decision makers in K-12 education face myriad choices when deciding how to spend their limited capacity-building dollars. Many invest in technical resources such as literacy training, new curriculum, or the latest student assessment tools.

But does this approach yield the lasting improvements that schools want—and need—to achieve? Can these dollars be used in ways that leverage all the other investments instead of adding one more discrete investment that divides attention and overwhelms leaders rather than builds capacity.

A growing body of work by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL[®]), a global nonprofit with a 50-year track record of innovation in developing leaders, shows that investments in leadership development for principals, teachers, staff, and students play an essential role in creating the transformational change needed in education today. That’s because leadership development focuses on the single most important part of any school system, public or private—its people.



Lynn Fick-Cooper, managing director of CCL's Societal Advancement Group, which encompasses K-12 education as an area of focus, explains it this way:

“All of the critical work happening in schools is happening between people. Certainly, you need to invest in technical resources, but your investment will be fully realized when you pair it with how people can work more effectively together and give them the tools to build that capacity. If you want a valuable return on technical investments, you need leadership development, too.”

Not only does it accelerate impact in the short term. Like compounding interest on a savings account, an initial investment in leadership development can also be the catalyst for a significant payoff over time.

CCL's findings and other cutting-edge research show that investments in such training can:

- Improve Performance of School Leaders
- Create a Culture of Trust within School Communities
- Build Student Engagement in School and Beyond

3 REASONS FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO INVEST IN **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**



Improve Performance,
Retention of
Principals & Teachers



Create a Culture
of Trust in
School Communities



Increase Student
Success in
School & Beyond

 Center for Creative Leadership



Improving Performance of School Leaders

Research shows that effective leadership cascades through a school, instilling a culture of greater collaboration and trust, driving more effective instruction and, ultimately, impacting student learning.²

A key finding highlighted in a 2017 Learning Policy³ Institute report on this subject revealed that any effort to improve schools—raising academic standards, adopting new curricula, attracting and retaining top-notch teachers, and the like—requires, first and foremost, a strong principal.

“In fact, principals have been found to be a crucial school-lever factor associated with student achievement—second only to teachers’ classroom instruction,” the report says. “One study noted that there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.”

Given that teachers cite principal support as critical to their job effectiveness and satisfaction, then investing in strong leadership is, quite simply, a must.

CCL has delivered leadership programming to more than 80 groups of principals and superintendents in Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina, and Vermont since 1994, helping to equip school leaders with the skills they need to drive change and succeed.

In one of CCL’s first partnerships, the state of Ohio funded the Buckeye Association of School Administrators to select a partner to design, develop, and deliver a comprehensive leadership development institute for superintendents from across the state. The goal was to provide the state’s chief education leaders with innovative, proven strategies of effective leadership that would result in continuous improvement in the state’s school districts. CCL was selected to be this partner, and since 1994 we have facilitated 33 cohorts of superintendents through this innovative program, positively impacting more than 800 superintendents.



OSLI has been one of the BEST leadership development courses I have experienced in my 25 years of education. The course made me grow as a superintendent, leader, father, and husband. OSLI makes you reflect on who you are as a person and provides peer support to help you grow in weak areas. I would recommend this training for any new or seasoned superintendent. Awesome experience!”

Dr. David Hall
Superintendent

International Baccalaureate® (IB): Pre-K–12 District,
Oberlin, OH, City Schools



My school moved from a Focus School to a Distinguished School in one year. We experienced gains in all five accountability areas and are labeled a high-performing school.”

Amy Waggoner
Principal
Marshall County High School
Benton, KY

Recognizing that strong, stable leadership would be key to improving not only education but also the economic competitiveness of its state, the Kentucky Chamber Foundation took the bold step of partnering with CCL to launch The Kentucky Leadership Institute for School Principals in 2011.

CCL customized its world-renowned leadership training for top-level educators to meet Kentucky’s specific needs, creating a ground-breaking, highly competitive program built around small cohorts, classes, 360-degree assessments, and professional coaching by CCL-certified trainers.

More than 250 school principals across Kentucky attended the yearlong program between 2011 and 2016, funded by donations totaling more \$2 million from the state’s business community. This innovative collaboration between business leaders, educators, and CCL paid off in measurable results. According to education analyst Susan Perkins Weston of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, assessments at Kentucky schools led by institute alumni “clearly show schools delivering stronger improvement than the state as a whole.”

The overwhelming majority of Kentucky Leadership Institute alumni reported the program:

- prepared them to lead effective change at their schools (89%).
- increased their ability to influence others to ensure student success (91%).
- resulted in a change in their school’s culture (88%).
- led to more positive outcomes for students, schools, and community (93%).

An impressive 100% of principals who participated in CCL programs described the experience as relevant to their job.



Creating a Culture of Trust Within School Communities

Research highlighted in *Educational Leadership* magazine demonstrates just how key trust among teachers, parents, students, and school leaders can be to achieving successful reforms.⁴

An intensive study of 400 elementary schools in Chicago examined the changing quality of relational dynamics in the schools alongside student reading and mathematics achievement during the same six-year period. The results were remarkable:

“Our overall measure of school trust . . . proved a powerful discriminator between improving and non-improving schools,” the report says, noting that improving schools recorded increases in student learning of 8% in reading and 20% in mathematics. “Most significant was the finding that schools with chronically weak trust reports throughout the period of the study had virtually no chance of improving in either reading or mathematics.”

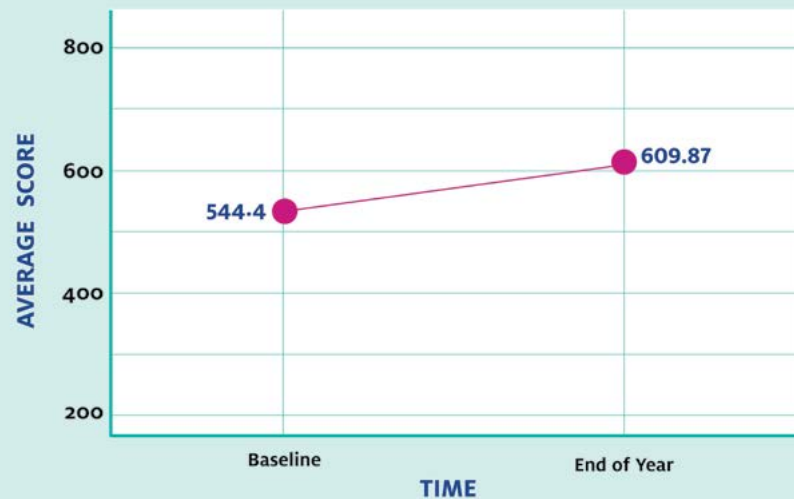
Another key finding in the research: the central role principal leadership plays in developing and sustaining a culture of trust. CCL’s own longitudinal data, measured from the perspective of teachers, shows that principals who participate in leadership training create more collegial environments that engender trust and professional teacher behavior.



The Kentucky Leadership Institute Program was a dynamic and powerful educational experience that transformed my life and work. I received world-class training equivalent to a corporate CEO. This program provided me not only with tools for the trade . . . they also taught me about a leadership mindset . . . [Leaders] at any stage of life would exponentially benefit from these strategically crafted leadership programs.”

Tara L. Isaacs
Principal
Dixie Magnet Elementary
Lexington, KY

Change in Professional Teacher Behavior



Over the course of our program, teachers' perception of Professional Teacher Behavior within their school increased. Professional Teacher Behavior is marked by respect for colleague competence, commitment to students, autonomous judgment, and mutual cooperation and support."

The Margaret Waddington Institute for School Leadership—an innovative leadership development program created and facilitated by CCL in partnership with the Vermont Principals' Association—focuses on building a principal's capacity to create a positive school culture by:

- cultivating psychological capital, i.e., the mental and emotional resources needed to meet the demands of a changing environment.
- increasing capacity for building trust.
- strengthening collaborative social networks to make principals feel more connected to and supported by their peers across the state.

The principals receive 7 days of face-to-face leadership development work delivered over several months, as well as executive coaching sessions, leadership tools, and support from CCL faculty, executive coaches, and peer-learning partners.

In assessments given before and after the program, participants in 2017-18 cohorts reported an increase in skills that can lead to greater employee retention, higher job satisfaction, and improved organizational citizenship:

- **efficacy:** a principal's belief he/she can succeed at the job (up 8%)
- **hope:** a principal's ability to persevere and redirect paths toward a goal (up 7%)
- **resiliency:** a principal's ability to bounce back when beset with problems or adversity (up 5%)

Additional results suggest that the Waddington program is successful in improving key indicators related to positive school cultures. Principals reported a huge increase in their networks of support and collaboration among school leaders across the state (on average, the number of collaborative relationships increased 8 times for each cohort over the course of the program). Additionally, teacher-principal trust, as reported by teachers, increased in 71% of schools led by participating principals.

Research shows that climates with stronger teacher-principal trust provide for the proliferation of effective teaching practices. A 2017 report by the Learning Policy Institute,⁵ titled "Effective Teacher Professional Development," confirmed that 35 methodologically rigorous studies over the past 30 years have demonstrated a positive link between effective teacher development programs and student outcomes. Among the key features of effective efforts are those that support a culture of collaboration.





The report notes:

“By working collaboratively, teachers can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school and/or district.”

In one whole school intervention led by CCL, 91% of teachers reported that their classrooms reflected the practices of facilitation they had learned after 8 months of structured professional development. The same intervention resulted in an increase of 1,635 collaborative connections—averaging 13 per faculty member—within the whole school network. Such connections include sharing ideas and resources and jointly implementing activities.



Building Student Engagement in School and Beyond

For the next generation to thrive in the 21st century, schools also must equip students with the skills they need to become engaged citizens who can lead and effect change throughout their lives. Skills learned through leadership development—perseverance, conflict-management, and the ability to engage and mobilize others—can be as important as academic prowess in addressing the challenges of an uncertain, fast-changing global environment.

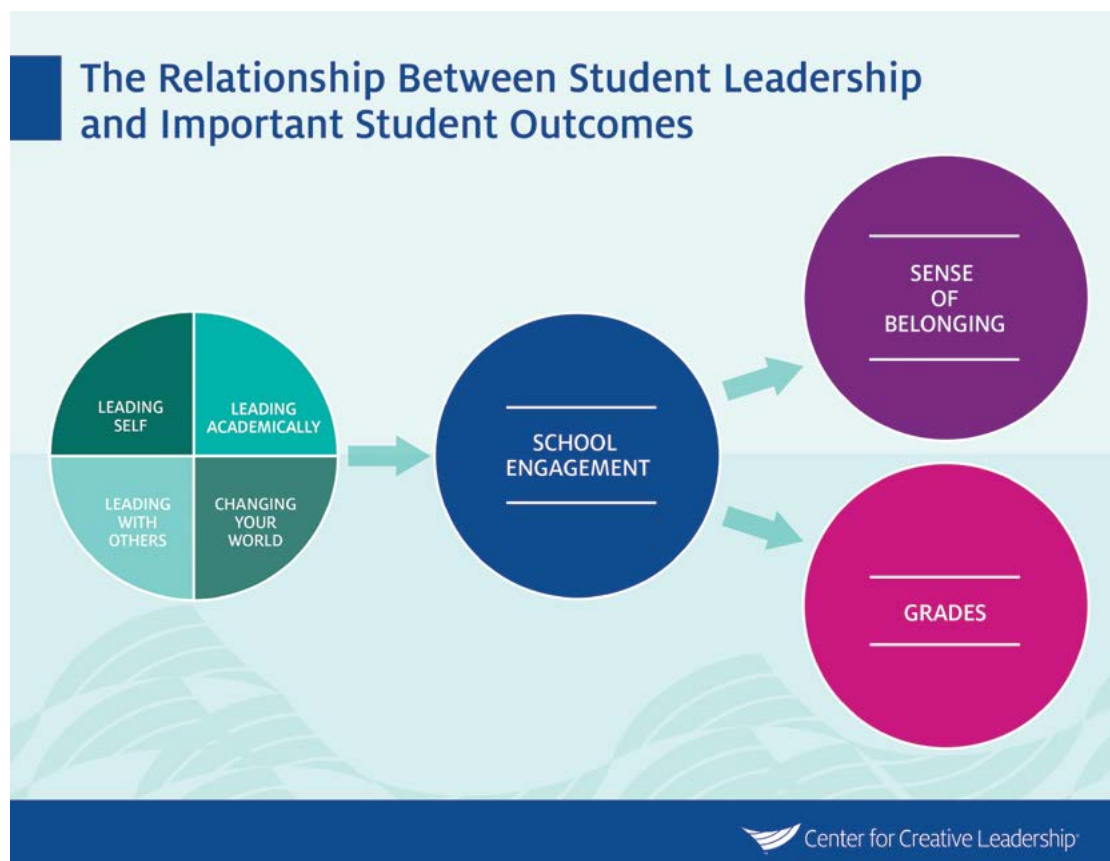
Extensive research shows that student engagement is related to increased academic motivation and achievement.⁶ So what can schools do to more fully engage their students?

Researchers at CCL believe that developing student leadership is a key for engagement. An overwhelming majority of professionals echo this sentiment. One CCL survey found that 90% of the 462 business, government, nonprofit, and education leaders who responded believed that leadership development for youth should begin before age 18.⁷

Through multi-year research with more than 9,000 students in grades 3-12, CCL has developed a Student Leadership Framework that focuses on four dimensions of leadership: *Leading Self*, *Leading Academically*, *Leading With Others*, and *Changing Your World*.⁸ We are able to measure these attributes for students through our Leadership Indicator for Students and have been able to statistically link them to drivers of school success: engagement, sense of belonging, and grades.

After more than a decade of delivering leadership development to students, CCL has found that leadership approaches taught and modeled during the school day by educators who have positive relationships with their students produce the most sustained impact.

The powerful lessons learned through CCL's work with young people could transform the shape of education in the future. Developing student leadership builds the capacity of all young people to have a greater impact on themselves, their school, their peers, and their world.





The Ravenscroft School in Raleigh, NC, a pre-K through grade 12 independent day school, joined forces with CCL in 2011 in a unique “research incubator” partnership that holistically integrates leadership development at every grade level. As students progress from pre-K through high school, they take part in a similar framework of development themes to foster leadership competencies.

This collaboration, dubbed “Lead from Here” (LFH), involved the entire school community—students, teachers, staff, leadership, and parents—in a systemic change initiative that has transformed curriculum, teaching, and culture.

“[Lead From Here] has had a major impact on all three of my children, but watching my senior embrace it and use it is amazing. He is now willing to take ownership of mistakes, take risks so he doesn’t stay in his comfort zone, learn from mistakes, be FAR more collaborative. I believe LFH helped him differentiate himself from other kids during the college application process as well.”

— Ravenscroft parent

A critical component of LFH is how students mature into responsible citizens and leaders. Student response has been overwhelmingly positive, with 78 percent reporting that they see themselves as leaders after participating in the program.

In continual evaluations to measure progress and drive improvements, Ravenscroft faculty, staff, and administrators who have taken part in CCL workshops overwhelmingly say the experience resulted in further developing their leadership potential and equipping them with knowledge that immediately impacts their work.



CONCLUSION

Leadership Development: An Investment That Delivers Impact

The challenges facing school leaders are immense, and the drive to improve student achievement is the ultimate motivator for everyone in education. Leadership development can create the needed culture change necessary to improve outcomes for students.

It's no secret that many school districts struggle with teacher shortages and that teacher turnover comes at an enormous cost, not only in terms of student achievement. Another recent report by the Learning Policy Institute notes teacher attrition in the United States is nearly double that of high-achieving school systems in other countries.⁹ Retirements account for some turnover, but about two-thirds of teachers leave for other reasons, most citing dissatisfaction with the profession. The report estimates that the departure of just one teacher can cost an urban district as much as \$20,000.

More effective school leaders who can create more trusting environments for their faculty and equip them to cultivate leadership development for students in their classrooms can be a key antidote for these challenges. Additionally, more trusting school environments lead to higher retention rates for teachers.

High-quality, research-based leadership development for school leaders is a wise investment that not only can help districts close that revolving door but also build a strong, stable workforce equipped with skills to increase student engagement and drive student success.

Delivering on the potential and expectation of schools to provide expanded opportunities for all students requires strong leadership. And strong leadership requires an investment. CCL's novel programs deliver measurable results in return—real results that can transform K-12 education for years to come.

LEARN MORE

If you're ready to invest in strengthening your K-12 schools through leadership development, we can help. We can provide you with unparalleled insight into your schools—including what's working and what needs to be improved. And we work at multiple levels with multiple budget arrangements. The question is how can we work together to drive the improvement you want to see? Learn more about us here: <https://www.ccl.org/education>



Endnotes

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Michael DePass is portfolio leader of the K-12 Education sector in the Societal Advancement Group at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®). He also is a CCL faculty member, designing and delivering transformational leadership development programs. A former school leader and school network leader, Michael has 20 years of experience leading change, designing and delivering professional development, and coaching and mentoring leaders. He has an MBA from Harvard University's business school, a bachelor of theology from Hope Bible College, College Park, Md., and a BA degree in liberal arts from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Valerie Ehrlich, PhD, is evaluation and research lead for CCL's Societal Advancement Group. She leads a team that focuses on evaluation and applied research within K-12, higher education, population health, and the nonprofit sector. Her background is in adolescent development and applied research. A former educator, she has worked with teachers, administrators, boards, and higher education professionals to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of their leadership solutions. She holds a PhD in Social-Personality Psychology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Micela Leis, PhD, is a research associate in CCL's Insights and Impact group. She leads research and evaluation for K-12 clients. Her expertise is in helping design and evaluate school culture change initiatives. She led the effort to develop the Leadership Indicator for Students, a tool for examining youth leadership in schools or organizations, and is currently working on an accompanying book. She holds a PhD in Education from the University of Virginia.

To learn more about this topic or the Center for Creative Leadership's programs and products, please contact our Client Services team.

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The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations, and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's top providers of executive education by the *Financial Times*, CCL has 12 offices in 10 countries worldwide.

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