

# FOUR WAYS TO FOSTER Successful School Leadership

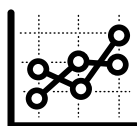
A good principal is essential to a successful school. In fact, principals are second only to teachers as the most important school factor affecting student achievement. As school leaders, principals influence student achievement in many ways, including monitoring instruction, evaluating teachers, managing staff, maintaining student discipline, establishing a school culture, and engaging with the community. Principals' skills in these areas are certainly important, but skills alone are not enough to ensure that principals are effective school leaders. This is because school and district contexts set the stage for principals' performance and strongly influence their effectiveness.

**States and school districts can help principals be more successful by taking action in four key areas.**



## 1. Implement effective hiring practices

- Take school context into account.
- Consistently and proactively cultivate the candidate pool.
- Assess the hiring process to determine whether those responsible for hiring have the information they need.
- Help orient new principals quickly to combat early turnover.



## 2. Build evaluation systems that foster strong principals

- Identify the purpose of the evaluation system.
- Select multiple measures of performance that are aligned with standards.
- Provide actionable feedback based on evaluations.
- Take continuous steps to ensure a high-quality evaluation system.



## 3. Entrust principals with the autonomy to lead schools

- Consider options for autonomy levels.
- Provide professional development and other supports.
- Consider the burden of decisionmaking for the principal as well as efficiencies from district-wide systems.
- Take the principal's expertise into account.



## 4. Give principals the resources and supports they need

- Enable principals to share or delegate responsibilities.
- Reduce the administrative burden on principals.
- Support data-driven decisionmaking through investments in training, coaching, and planning time.
- Provide professional development tailored to principal capabilities and school needs.



For more information, see *Laying the Foundation for Successful School Leadership*, Susan Burkhauser, Susan M. Gates, Laura S. Hamilton, Jennifer J. Li, and Ashley Pierson, RAND Corporation, 2013, [www.rand.org/t/RR419](http://www.rand.org/t/RR419). This work was conducted as part of our RAND-Initiated Research program and was funded by the generosity of RAND's donors and by fees earned on client-funded research. Infographic by Erin-Elizabeth Johnson and Dori Gordon Walker.

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