



REIMAGINING



Accelerate Institute®

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PRINCIPAL SUSTAINABILITY

Principals have a near-endless number of responsibilities: overseeing all school operations and finances, coaching teachers, fostering relationships, and driving school improvement to ensure that goals are met. All while handling the big and small emergencies that arise each and every day. Recent [research](#) proves the magnitude of principals' far-reaching impact: a principal in the top 75th percentile of effectiveness has the potential to elevate student achievement in reading and math by almost three months. But the job of principals has become unsustainable, and the COVID-19 pandemic added an overwhelming number of stressors and pressures. [Preliminary data](#) from this past year show that principals retired or resigned at double the pre-pandemic annual rate, which had already been cause for concern. The nationwide principal turnover rate for high-needs schools was 21%, as compared to a rate of less than 10% at the schools we partner with at Accelerate Institute. Our research indicates that barriers to longevity in the role include a lack of school support staff, a leadership model that doesn't effectively distribute roles and responsibilities, and inadequate resources and supports. Turnover is a critical issue not only because of the cost and time to districts to replace principals, but also the negative impact on student learning.

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Our students depend on us retaining our best school leaders and training the next generation of great leaders. Achieving a significant shift in principal sustainability data will take more than band-aid supports and tweaks to a broken education system. We must prioritize principal support and retention by:

- **Instituting distributive leadership and succession planning for every school so that there is a strong and supportive team around every principal.**

Principals can't manage everything alone. We must reimagine the roles and responsibilities of leaders in various positions within a school, not only to make the job of principals more sustainable,

but also to build a leadership bench and positively affect school climate and student learning. This should be paired with intentional succession planning that happens well before principals plan to leave and minimizes disruption to students.

- **Employing needs-based funding, staffing, and resource allocation that leads to equity across schools.**

Adequate funding is a necessary component of an education system's success. When we spend money for students to be in safe, functional classrooms with smaller class sizes, support services, and exposure to a broad range of subjects and extracurriculars, they perform better. In many states, high-poverty districts are far below the "adequacy" level for funding. We ask a lot of principals but put them at a disadvantage when we don't give them the necessary resources to successfully run their schools, which then negatively impacts students.

- **Creating a pipeline of leaders that reflects our country's public school demographics and welcomes, includes, and values the experiences and expertise of leaders of color.**

The teaching and leadership representation in our nation's schools should be reflective of the students that are in them. Over the past two decades, the changing demographics of educators has not kept pace with the changing demographics of students. We must do more to increase interest and opportunities for young people of color to enter the teaching profession and step into leadership positions, while simultaneously working to create education spaces that lead to their retention.

- **Offering continuous professional learning for school leaders that helps them grow through the day-to-day challenges of the job.**

The job of a principal can feel isolating, and principal preparation programs do not give them all of the expertise and key competency development they need for the job; they need ongoing coaching and peer support within their own school context to improve their efficacy and longevity. We need to expand the number of high-quality programs in leadership development – for principals and leadership team members – so they can grow their skill sets and competencies, and maximize their impact on their school and their students.

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Read the full report on
Reimagining Principal Sustainability