

The Principal Effect:

How Investing in Principals is Key to Solving Today's
Education Challenges

Since the Pandemic, Students and Schools Have Experienced a Torrent of Challenges

Mental health
issues
Learning loss
Chronic
absenteeism
Educator
shortages



While we often seek individual solutions to school problems,

there is a unifying factor that can influence them all.

Principals matter for everything in schools



“It is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership.”

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. (p. 43). The Wallace Foundation.



The Principal Effect

How Investing in School Leaders Is Key
to Solving Education's Challenges

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Research shows that principals affect student and teacher outcomes by:

- ▷ Supporting effective instruction
- ▷ Retaining teachers, thereby strengthening school stability and expertise
- ▷ Creating a positive climate that welcomes and connects staff, students, and families

Effective principals support strong instruction, and consequently student learning, by:

- ▶ engaging with teachers around instruction: enabling successful practices, observing, coaching, providing feedback, and reviewing data together;
- ▶ working with staff to develop a cohesive educational program with strong curriculum and shared practices;
- ▶ investing in high-quality staff development;
- ▶ enabling teacher collaboration for planning and professional learning; and
- ▶ developing shared instructional leadership and shared decision-making.

Effective principals retain teachers by:

- ▶ developing a safe, nurturing environment that supports well-being and fosters belonging of students and staff;
- ▶ supporting teachers at all experience levels with resources and caring;
- ▶ buffering teachers from external demands while protecting their time and agency; and
- ▶ fostering teacher collaboration and involvement in decision-making.

Effective principals create a positive school climate by:

- ▶ adopting policies and practices that undergird positive teacher–student relationships characterized by warmth, acceptance, and support;
- ▶ building a welcoming, inclusive, communicative school culture that builds trust between students, teachers, and families;
- ▶ creating structures and expectations for engaging families regularly;
- ▶ establishing high expectations for student learning for both teachers and students; and
- ▶ employing democratic school principles such as shared decision-making.

In schools with positive climates,

- ▷ Students have improved behaviors, engagement, academic achievement, and graduation rates. They attend at higher rates.
- ▷ Teachers have less emotional exhaustion and burnout and greater feelings of personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. They stay at higher rates.

Study Spotlight:

- ▶ A study comparing Chicago principals in improving schools compared to those in stagnating schools found that those in improving schools:
 - built a culture of shared organizational learning around the school vision
 - helped teachers understand how their collective efforts contribute to the larger purpose;
 - set aside time for staff to regularly work together productively; and
 - shared leadership across their staff.

Gordon, M. F., & Hart, H. (2022). How strong principals succeed: Improving student achievement in high-poverty urban schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60(3), 288–302.

Why Teachers Say they Stay



[We are] a shared learning community. We are very involved with each other in planning, learning ... lots of team preparation. We all hold the same vision. We believe in our mission and work together to achieve that.

Waddel, J. (2010). Fostering relationships to increase teacher retention in urban schools. Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 4(1), 70–85.

Principal retention also matters



About 1 in 5 principals leaves their school each year.


Typically, when principals leave, teacher attrition increases and student achievement declines.

Principal Turnover is Related to:

- ▶ Salaries
- ▶ Working Conditions
 - School Size
 - Staff Qualifications and Turnover
 - District office support
 - Decision-making authority
 - Accountability approach
- ▶ Preparation, Professional Learning, and Coaching



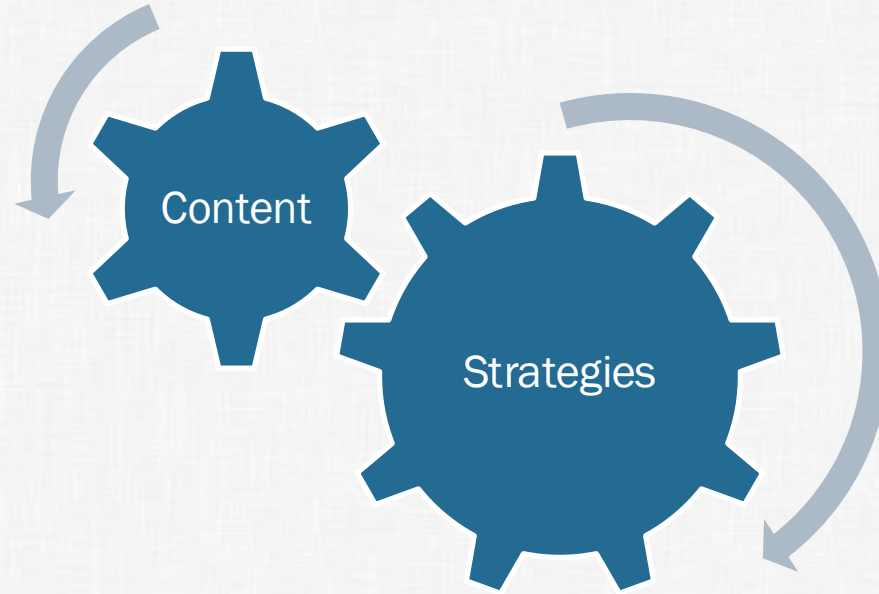
High-quality principal
learning matters for
effectiveness and retention



Features of high-quality principal learning

Two key components of effective learning

- ▷ Instruction
- ▷ School improvement
- ▷ School conditions
- ▷ Staff development
- ▷ Meeting students' needs



- ▷ Applied learning
- ▷ Internships
- ▷ Coaching & mentoring
- ▷ Cohorts & networks

High-quality principal learning is positively associated with:

Principals

- ▷ Perceptions of effectiveness
- ▷ Attitudes
- ▷ Skills
- ▷ Efficacy

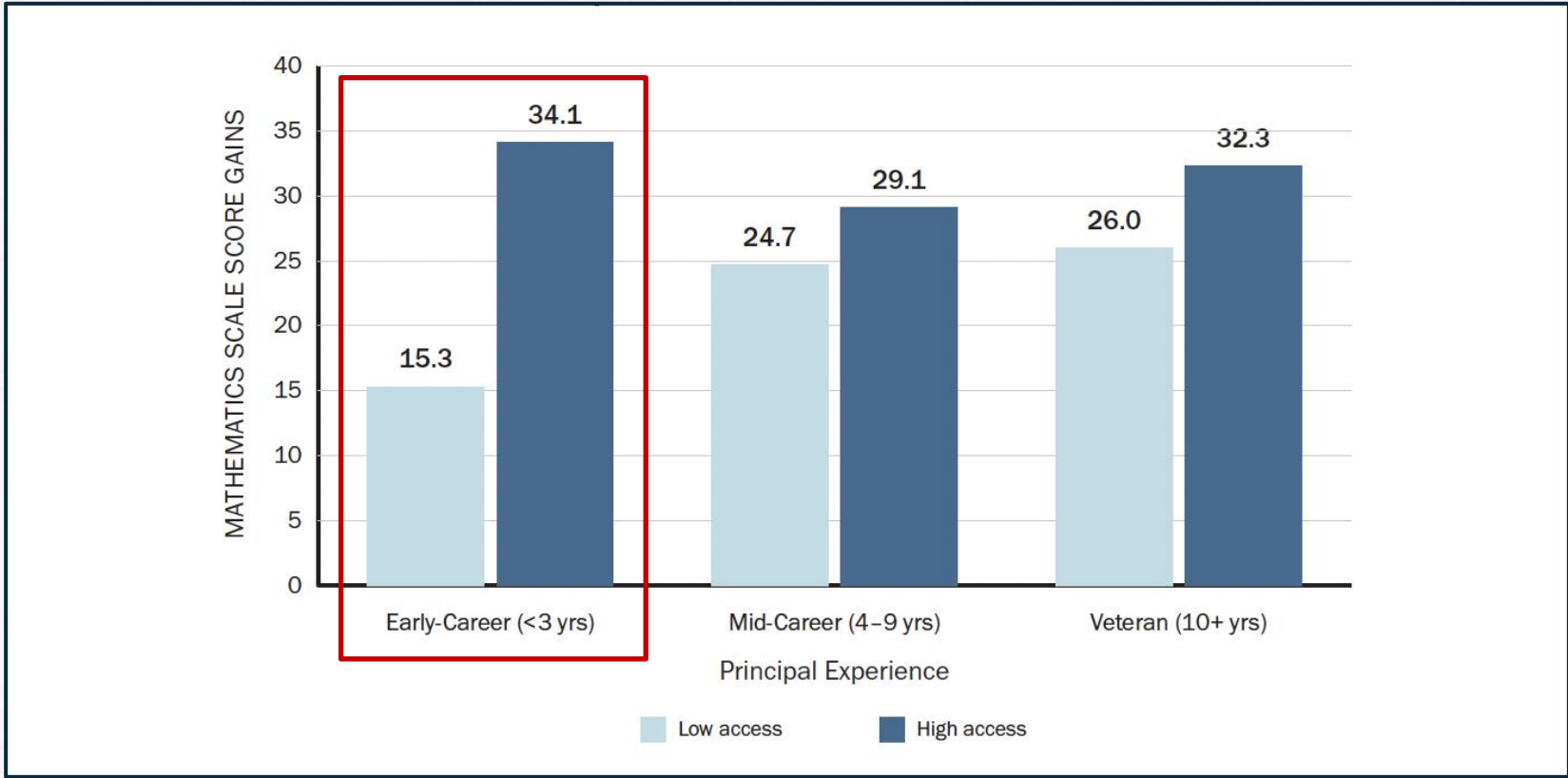
Teachers

- ▷ Satisfaction
- ▷ Retention

Students

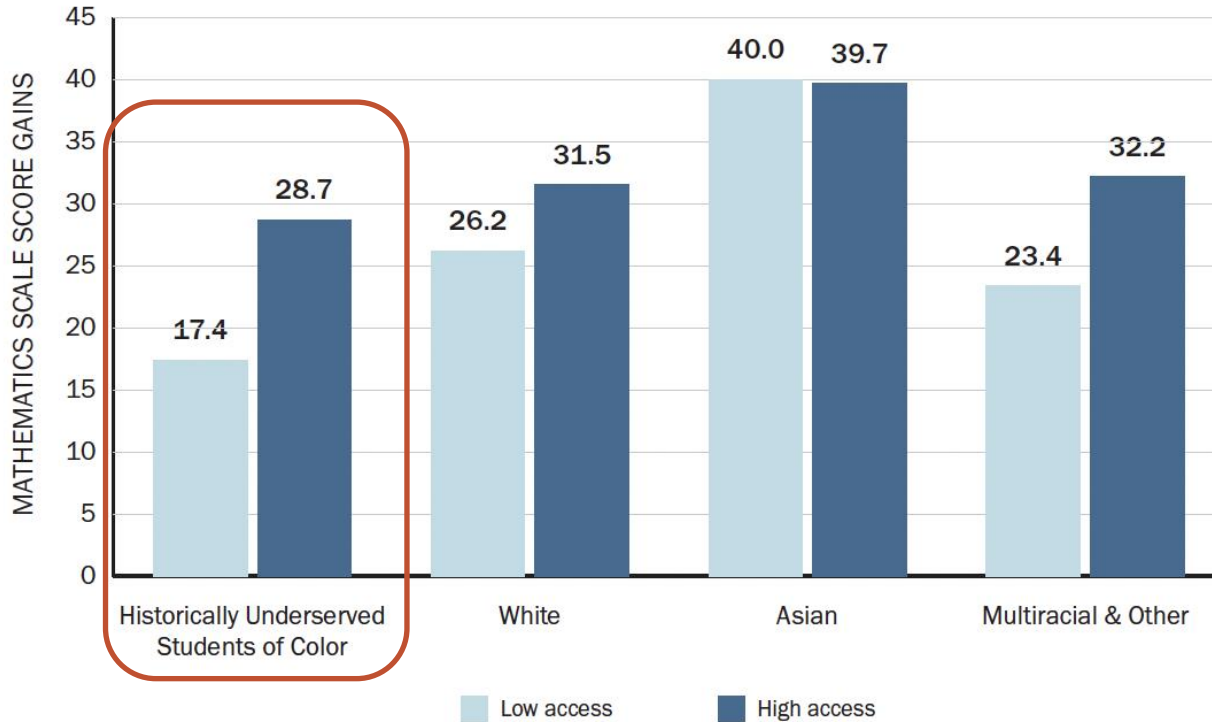
- ▷ Attendance
- ▷ Achievement
- ▷ Graduation rates

Student gains in math (points), by principal experience, for principals with low-quality and high-quality professional development (CA)




Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, and Levin, 2023

Gains most notable for Black, Latino/a, and Native American students

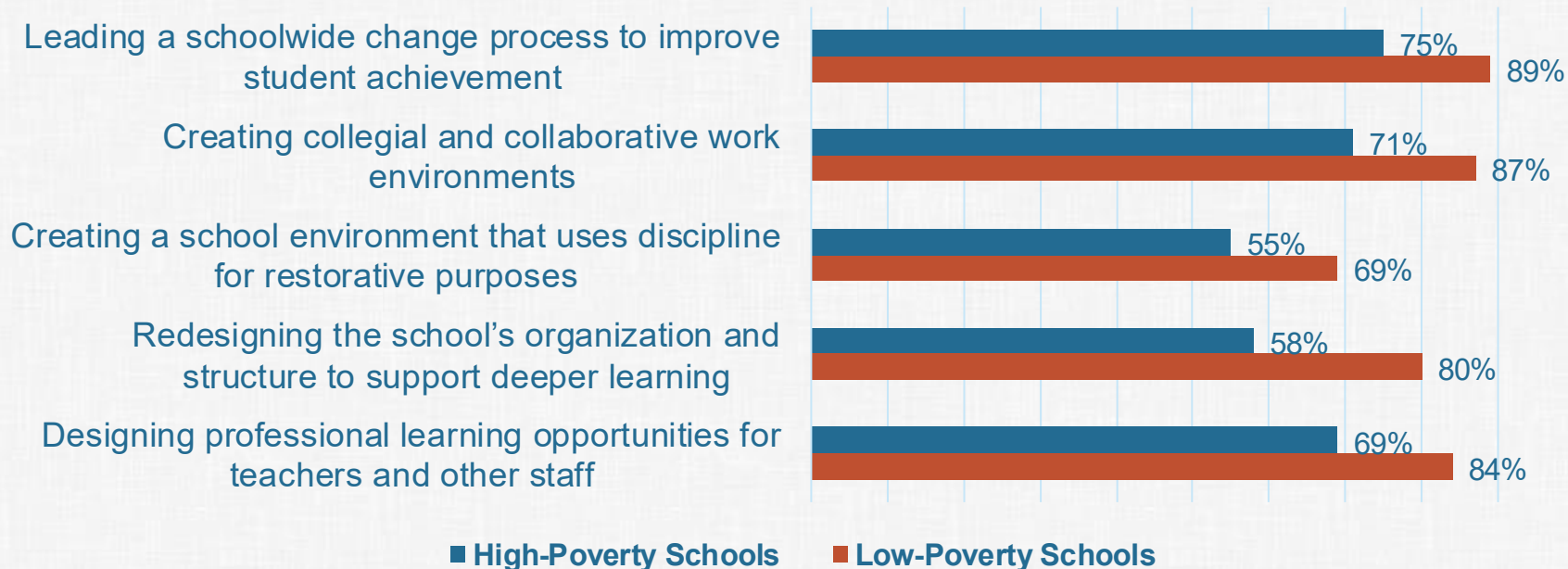


Source: Campoli, Darling-Hammond, Podolsky, and Levin, 2022



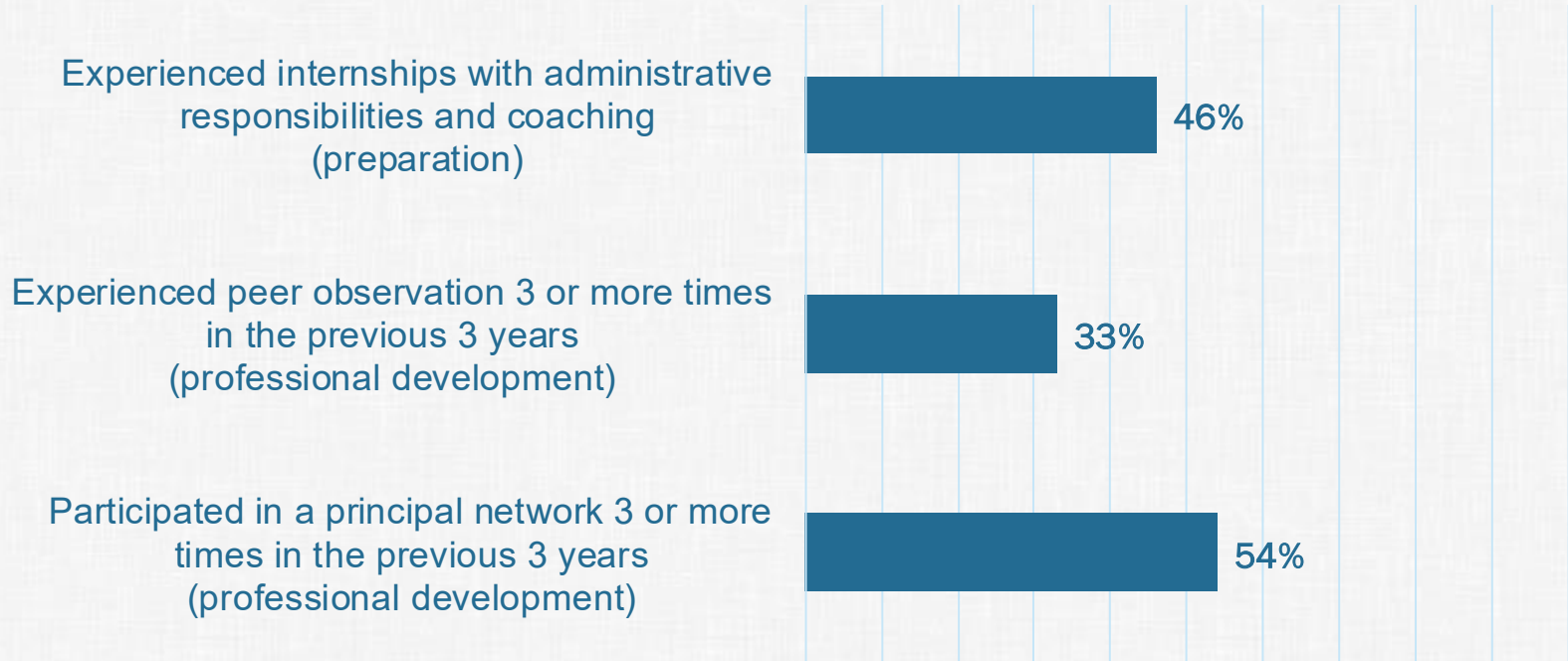
Access to high-quality
principal learning

Access to principal learning is inequitable



Source: National Principal Survey

Lower access to high-leverage learning strategies



Source: National Principal Survey



Policies that support high-quality principal learning and principal retention can make a difference.

Implications for policy

- ▶ Ensure high-quality preparation
 - Improve state licensing and program approval standards
 - Subsidize costs for principals, especially for internships
- ▶ Invest strategically in professional learning
 - Support high-leverage approaches (cohorts and networks, PLCs, shared learning, coaching),
 - Build robust local pipelines to develop and place principals

Implications for policy

- ▶ Attend to working conditions and compensation
 - Decision-making and support
 - Competitiveness and reliability
- ▶ Establish principal stability as a goal, and create productive mechanisms for principal feedback, evaluation, and mentoring

Supporting Principals is the Starting Point for Solving Our Education Challenges
