GREAT LEADERS, GREAT SCHOOLS

A Closer Look at The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools'
Model of Support for School Administrators

PARTNERSHIP
FOR LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

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About the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools

Established in 2007, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools is an independent non-profit managing 18 Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified) schools serving 14,000 students in Boyle Heights, South Los Angeles, and Watts. We are one of the nation's largest in-district school transformation organizations. Our mission is to transform schools and revolutionize school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education. The Partnership school transformation model consists of three core elements that work together to promote lasting success that can be duplicated: Great Leaders; Highly Effective Teaching; and Engaged and Empowered Communities.

We combine rigorous and innovative instructional leadership programs with community partnerships and family engagement to transform district public schools and lead system-wide reforms. As part of this work, we advocate for more equitable policies and practices to better support high-need schools and communities. Our staff includes experienced educators, advocates, policy analysts, community organizers, attorneys and other experts who are dedicated to improving outcomes for all students.

The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools' Model
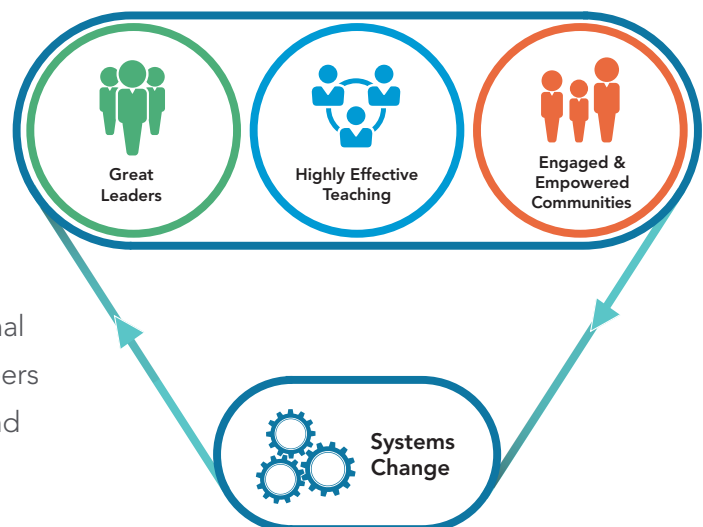
Great Leaders

We provide principals and assistant principals the professional development, leadership guidance, and coaching needed to establish a shared school vision with effective, sustainable systems.

Highly Effective Teaching

We provide educators with integrated professional learning and one-to-one support to lead their peers in building excellence in classroom instruction and school culture.

Engaged and Empowered Communities

We engage school stakeholders, especially families and community partners, to realize a vision for their neighborhood and school that actively supports student success.

School Leadership Matters

Great schools simply cannot exist without great leadership. Conventional wisdom, along with some notable research, suggests that in the context of school-related factors, the impact of school leaders — defined as principals and assistant principals — on student learning is second only to effective classroom teaching.[1] While the effect of teaching on student outcomes has been researched more closely and is arguably easier to disentangle than the effects of school leadership on student outcomes, at the Partnership we recognize that strong leadership is critical to school transformation. Teachers attempting to dramatically improve their impact on students cannot do so without the support and vision of strong leaders who are responsible for hiring the right teachers, and creating environments where those teachers are fully supported in achieving positive student outcomes.

In a world where the purpose of schooling has shifted to ensuring college and career readiness for all, as opposed to for some, effective school leaders can't simply focus on operational management of school sites or attending to bureaucratic functions related to district regulations. Instead, they focus on five key practices[2]:

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students

2. Creating a climate hospitable to education

3. Cultivating leadership in others

4. Improving instruction

5. Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement

We believe these practices are beneficial for all schools, but are critical to transforming high-need schools.

[1] Leithwood K. et al., (2004). "Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning." University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

[2] The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning. (January 2013). The Wallace Foundation.

"The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools stands out as a stellar example of how organizations should be governed, how schools should be supported, and how to build a culture of excellence throughout an organization. While many organizations have words that describe places for students, parents and all adults to grow and thrive, few of these missives are actualized in reality. The Partnership is the rare exception."

—Antonia Issa Lahera EdD
School Leadership Co-Director
California State University Dominguez Hills

High-need, underserved urban schools face significant challenges in countering long-standing societal norms and practices that have created persistently low outcomes for students of color growing up in poverty. Neighborhood conditions related to poverty such as exposure to trauma, crime, food instability, substance abuse, parental unemployment, and low parental educational attainment, among others, combined with school resource disparities can negatively impact student achievement, dropout rates, absenteeism and mobility.[3]

Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom find that the effects of successful school leadership are most apparent at high-need schools and that "there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.[4] "School leaders must be equipped to make the best use of resources to create positive working conditions that both support the adults working in the school[5], while also addressing students' needs.

There is evidence that school leader development and intensive support is invaluable in empowering principals to lead schools effectively. Yet, in practice, providing leaders with an effective mix of development and support can be difficult since resources allocated to these functions are often limited, and what is offered to school leaders often lacks coherence. Individual states have adopted standards for leadership practice, such as California's Professional Standards for Educational Leaders[6], and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) released in 2015 an updated

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[3] Prince C. D., "Attracting Well-Qualified Teachers to Struggling Schools," (August, 8, 2014). American Federation of Teachers.

[4] Leithwood K. et al., (2004). "Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning." University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

[5] Horng, E. L. (2009). "Teacher Tradeoffs: Disentangling Teachers' Preferences for Working Conditions and Student Demographics," American Educational Research Journal 46, no. 3: 690–717.

[6] See the California Administrative Performance Expectations and California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders at: https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/asc/2017-cape-and-cace.pdf?sfvrsn=f66757b1_2

set of national standards as well.[7] However principal preparation programs, as well as in-service supports, vary widely across states and school districts. And while these standards exist, there remain challenges in capacity building for school leaders, particularly those tasked with transforming low performing schools and schools serving the highest-need communities. Funding for principal supports is often in competition with funding for teacher professional development. There are also challenges with achieving coherence between the array of offerings that are provided for leaders and teachers. In addition, there is limited research on the effectiveness of principal supports to date.[8]

At the Partnership we aim to hire, develop, and support strong administrators to serve in our network of schools and we believe the work we do is scalable to most mid- to large-sized school districts nationally. The Partnership operates on a few core beliefs about what is critical in the context of effective school leadership:

- **Focus on building sustainable systems at school sites.** Effective school leaders build and sustain effective systems that support school transformation. Systems, not just the efforts of individuals, are what create sustainable change over time.

- **Invest in coherent and systematic school leader development.** Leading a school is among the most complex occupations that exist. Effective leadership is a process of continuous improvement, not a fixed trait of any individual.

- **Hire the right talent.** Ensuring the right person is hired at the right time is critical. Different phases of

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[7] See the National Policy Board for Educational Administration's 2015 standards (formerly known as the ISLLC standards) at: https://ccsso.org/resource-library/professional-standards-educational-leaders

[8] Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr. M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute

school transformation require different strengths and skill sets over time. The hiring process must prioritize finding a leader whose strengths are well suited to the needs of a school as it takes its next steps in school transformation.

- **Differentiate resources for leaders charged with transforming student outcomes in the highest-need schools.** Investments in school leadership development are typically insufficient to effectively support school leaders in the highest-need schools and communities. Not unlike the way we expect schools to differentiate for students with particular needs, more intensive supports for school leaders will be required to achieve transformation in the schools and districts of greatest need.

"We believe our experience over the last 11 years, and our track record of growth, make a case for greater investments in school leader development as a major driver of school success."
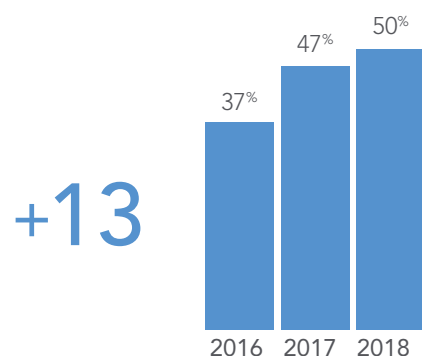
— Joan Sullivan
Chief Executive Officer
Partnership for Los Angeles Schools

From its inception, the Partnership has provided professional development for school leaders to support the development of core leadership skills, as well as strategic practices[9] designed to support school transformation. Our practices for supporting school leader development have grown and evolved over the past 11 years. Although we know there remains much to be done to achieve our mission of transforming all of our schools, given the progress in student achievement
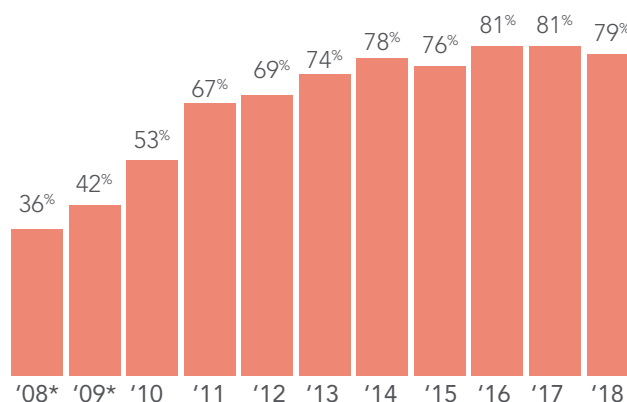
[9] The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning. (January 2013). The Wallace Foundation.

PARTNERSHIP NETWORK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

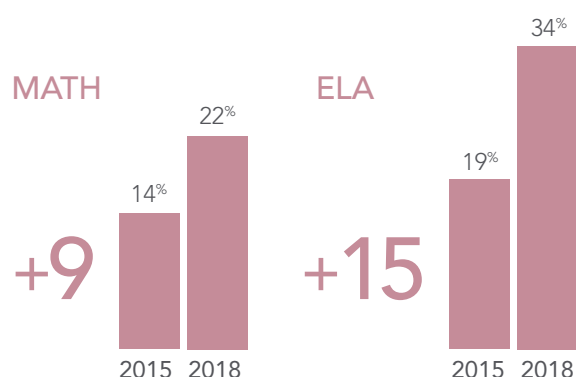### 4-Year College Acceptance Growth from 2016–2018

+13

2016	2017	2018
37%	47%	50%

High School Graduation Rate since 2008

'08*	'09*	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18
36%	42%	53%	67%	69%	74%	78%	76%	81%	81%	79%

Data for class of 2008 and 2009 reflect LA Unified's calculation of graduation rate. The CA Department of Education began calculating cohort graduation rates in 2010.

Partnership Schools' CAASPP Growth

MATH **+9**

2015	2018
14%	22%

ELA **+15**

2015	2018
19%	34%

Results include the percentage of students in the Partnership network scoring at the 'Meets or Exceeds Standards' level on Math and English Language Arts exams. Growth data are rounded to the nearest whole number. Actual three-year Math growth was 8.88 percentage points, and for ELA was 15.25 percentage points.

Closing the CAASPP Gap

Percentage Points Growth

MATH

CA	Partnership
+5	+9

ELA

CA	Partnership
+6	+15

Partnership Schools' Growth on CAASPP (Smarter Balanced) exam from 2015 (baseline year) to 2018 vs. California average.

we have seen[10], we believe we have gained valuable insights to share with school districts, charter management organizations, the academic community, and school transformation organizations like ours who are interested in questions around school leader development, hiring, and sustainability in high-need, urban communities.

Partnership schools have seen significant gains in student achievement over the last decade of our existence. Most schools that have entered the Partnership did so performing in the bottom

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[10] Julie Kim, Elaine Hargrave, and Veronica Brooks-Uy, "The Secret to Sustainable School Transformation: Slow and Steady Wins the Race." Public Impact, 2018. https://partnershipla.org/resources/additional-resources/full-report-secret-sustainable-school-transformation-slow-steady-wins-race/

5% of schools in the state, and since then have undergone significant transformation. But those gains have not always been uniform, nor have they been linear over time. Some schools have seen periods of tremendous growth, and then plateaued. Others have seen only modest movement in outcomes. Overall, however, we believe the stories of our schools' journey towards transformation and providing every student with the high-quality education they deserve, in schools and communities that have been long underserved, offers an example of what is possible when it comes to school leader development.

"Great Leaders" Model

At its core, the Partnership is a capacity-building organization charged with meeting the individual and often widely varying needs of each school and community in which we work. While capacity building is integrated into nearly all aspects of the Partnership's work, the key to the Partnership's Great Leaders Model is fundamentally in our focus on developing leaders' capacity to build, develop, and sustain effective systems in schools. Those systems in turn, must be driven by a shared school vision, created by the school's leadership team.

> Unlike some other rubrics geared towards assessing individual practice, the Partnership Implementation Framework focuses on systems that contribute to improved student outcomes and the prescribed actions of groups within the school to enact them.

Given that our schools are in various stages of transformation, we established criteria for success at the stages of implementation of school systems outlined here. Drawing upon a breadth of educational research, including the five key practices previously noted, as well as best practices from school districts across the country[11], we developed the Partnership Implementation Framework (PIF), which names the six systems we believe are essential to school transformation success. Unlike some other rubrics geared towards assessing individual practice, the Partnership Implementation Framework focuses on systems that contribute to improved student outcomes and the prescribed actions of groups within the school to enact them. These include:

- **Instructional Leadership:** The practice of shared leadership at a school site by an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT includes school administrators, teachers and other key stakeholders and is collectively responsible for setting a clear instructional vision for the school, developing and progress monitoring school-wide academic and culture goals, guiding

[11]Sources for the Partnership Implementation Framework include the LA Unified Public School Choice rubric; Teaching and Learning Framework; and School Leadership Framework; Charlotte Danielson; Robert Marzano; New York City Department of Education; New Haven Public Schools; and Denver Public Schools.

curriculum and instruction, executing the system for capacity building of adults, and using data to make informed, strategic leadership decisions.

- **Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century:** The implementation of the school's vision for high-leverage practices in daily instruction, and the work of teacher teams. This includes planning, delivery of instruction, assessing and providing feedback to individual students, and attending to the development of disciplinary literacy.

- **Data-driven Instruction:** The implementation of the school's comprehensive plan for assessment[12], including varied types of assessment, data cycles that engage teachers and other stakeholders with summative and interim assessments, as well as common formative assessments for teacher teams.

- **School Culture and Restorative Communities:** The implementation of the school's vision for a healthy and restorative culture for staff and students, including systems for discipline and support, social emotional learning, and the creation of a college-going culture.

- **Family and Community Engagement:** The implementation of a school's vision for family engagement that ensures a welcoming environment, as well as strategic engagement with community partners to support student learning, and inform school decision making.

- **Operations and Talent:** The implementation of effective systems for maximizing the use of resources, attracting and retaining top talent, and ensuring the school operates in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

[12]Summative, interim, and formative assessments that include state mandated assessments, network wide interim assessments to monitor progress, and more frequent teacher team adopted/created assessments that measure learning of what was taught.

The PIF functions as a comprehensive rubric, with 27 components across six Focus Areas. Annually, the Partnership creates a more focused set of network-wide priorities called the June Outcomes. This document creates foci for all of the professional development facilitated for Partnership school leaders and teacher leaders throughout the year, as well as school site based coaching and supports.

What We Do

The Partnership invests significant resources to provide intensive and customized coaching, professional development, advocacy and supports for principals and assistant principals. These supports extend beyond what is offered by most districts and include the following components:

Leadership Institute

- Instructional Leadership Team Institutes (Summer and Winter)
- Principal and Assistant Principal Leadership Conferences
- Level-Alike Meetings

School Site Supports

- Side-by-side Leadership Coaching
- Progress Monitoring Support
- Organizational Leadership Support
- Supervision and Evaluation

Operations Supports and Advocacy

- School Level Advocacy to Remove Barriers and "Unstick" Challenges
- Maximizing School Budgets
- District Advocacy: advancing policies that support high-need schools

Strategic Hiring and Retention

- Identifying and Selecting Great Leaders
- Differentiated Compensation to Work a 12-Month Calendar
- Sustainability and Retention
- Pipeline Development

Leadership Institute

The Partnership's Leadership Institute is a comprehensive program of leadership development that combines a variety of activities that ensure school leaders continuously experience high-quality, relevant, job-embedded, and learner-driven professional development. Through the Leadership Institute, school leaders continuously build and refine their skills to best support teachers, staff, and students with effective systems and practices at their school sites. Principals and Assistant Principals from all Partnership schools participate in the Leadership Institute, created and facilitated by Partnership staff with a track record of proven success in school leadership. The Leadership Institute includes:

> Through the Leadership Institute, school leaders continuously build and refine their skills to best support teachers, staff, and students with effective systems and practices at their school sites.

- **Instructional Leadership Team Summer and Winter Institutes:** Twice annually (four days in August and one day in January) the Partnership gathers the ILT from each school for full-day professional development and strategic planning seminars.

- **Leadership and Assistant Principal Conferences:** Seven times throughout the school year, the Partnership gathers school principals and APs for professional development. These seminars focus on one or more of our collectively agreed upon June Outcomes, which support the development of high-leverage systems that support school transformation.

- **"Level-Alike" Meetings:** Four times annually, the Partnership gathers principals and leadership team members from each level (elementary, middle school, high school) for half-day learning experiences that involve visiting school sites, observing classrooms and school practice in action, as well as a structured debrief and planning for implementation of learnings at their school sites.

Instructional Leadership Team Institutes

The Partnership conducts semi-annual ILT Institutes to kickoff each school semester with a sense of purpose and direction. Built around the concept of shared leadership, ILTs are

composed of administrators and teacher leaders[13], and are responsible for implementing schoolwide initiatives for instruction, and modeling cultural norms that align with the team's vision for the school.

Supports for ILTs coincide with the development, refinement and monitoring of a school's strategic plan, called the Call-to-Action (CTA). This happens on a recurring, annual rhythm, including the following stages:

- **Spring:** Data-driven assessment of the current year's progress and drafting of the next year's CTA goals.

- **Summer:** Final reflection on end-of-year data, finalizing CTA goals and building shared ownership of goals and action plans for the upcoming school year.

- **Fall:** Implementation of action plans and early data-driven progress monitoring.

- **Winter:** Mid-year, data-driven progress monitoring and mid-course corrections on action plans.

To support ILTs in carrying out this sequence of events and the related systems at their school sites, we conduct two ILT Institutes each year. Summer Institute brings together the ILT of each Partnership school for common strategic planning, learning, and team-building time, so that the ILT assumes shared ownership of school-wide goals and action plans. Using high-leverage data, ILTs complete the development of their school's CTA, a unifying strategic planning document that outlines each school's specific goals and action plans, and supports rigorous, ongoing progress monitoring of their work throughout the school year.

Our Winter Institute provides ILTs and Partnership staff the opportunity to come together to reinvigorate themselves and renew their focus on goals and norms before the the start of the Spring semester. Similar to our Summer Institute, Winter Institute is a time for reflection, team-building, as well as data analysis. ILTs gather to monitor their progress towards CTA goals, celebrate successes, and refine strategies and action plans.

While CTA planning and team-building activities occur within individual school ILTs, the Institutes also serve as a central location for Partnership school and office staff to network and develop a sense of community across the entire network of Partnership schools. We recognize the experience and expertise of our school leaders in implementing research and best practices, and actively create opportunities to showcase and celebrate their successes and lead relevant workshops for their peers during our Institute sessions.

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[13]We recruit qualified teachers into our teacher leader programs, which support teachers in developing their own practices while leading the growth of colleagues. In these roles, teachers serve as peer coaches, leaders of grade level teams or departments, content specialists, and specialists in school culture and restorative practices.

The Partnership also uses these Institutes to establish and reinforce Partnership norms, values, and culture across the network. We integrate our core values into all activities and model effective practices in meeting facilitation and presentations to create an engaging and action-oriented professional development event that sets the tone for the school year.

Leadership Conferences and Assistant Principal Conferences

In addition to the Summer and Winter Institutes, the Partnership provides year-round professional development for principals and assistant principals (APs). Administrators from our 18 schools come together at our Leadership Conferences seven months out of the school year to gain skills, reflect on successes and areas for growth, and build a system of support among peers. We believe that school transformation relies on the relentless pursuit of excellence from school leaders and we approach our monthly professional development events as regular opportunities for leaders to learn, reflect, consult, and plan through structured interactions with colleagues, and content area experts from the Partnership staff.

Our conference content is derived from a scope and sequence and is intentionally aligned with our June Outcomes and the priorities for learning for our teacher leaders. For principals the conferences are full day, for APs they are half day, and typically consist of:

1. Three hours of morning learning sessions (sometimes broken into two 90-minutes sessions) focusing on:

   - Practicing and refining core leadership skills
   - Learning theory and best practices
   - Data analysis

- Individual and group brainstorming of solutions and implementation practices

- Time for reflection and planning of next steps to apply learning at school sites

2. A 30-minute session focused on operational topics such as student talent management, testing administration and budget development.

3. Sharing critical updates from the Partnership to ensure school leaders remain informed about recent changes at the Partnership or LA Unified.

4. Principals only: Two hours for principal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in level-alike groups, where principals engage in high-interest and high-leverage topics chosen based upon principals' needs and interests. PLCs encourage principals to creatively and collaboratively problem-solve through reflective conversations and public practice, allowing them to rethink and challenge assumptions in a safe and collegial environment.[14]

The Leadership and AP Conferences constitute the bulk of the formal professional development for Partnership network school leaders. They are distinct from traditional school leader professional development in a few important ways:

- They are intentionally focused on the most challenging parts of school leadership. Namely, instructional leadership, culture change, and problem solving.

> "Providing time to meet as an Instructional Leadership Team twice a year is an invaluable opportunity that allows our team time to collaboratively plan — then reflect on — our goals, strategies and data."
>
> *— Katherine Nelson, Principal 107th Street Elementary School and STEAM Magnet*

- The content of the sessions is informed by the school leaders themselves. This is achieved through gaining their voice in the development of the scope and sequence of learning for the year, as well as principal voice in determining the foci of their Professional Learning Community.

- Learning for principals and assistant principals is intentionally aligned, as is the learning of our teacher leader pathways. One of the primary challenges of external professional development nationally is a lack of coherence across roles it breeds in a school. Partnership professional development is intentionally designed to interrupt this pattern.

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[14]Rhonda Barton and Jennifer Stepanek, "The Impact of Professional Learning Communities," Principal's Research Review 7, no. 4 (July 2012): 1–7.

- A premium is placed upon strong facilitation of learning experiences. The Partnership hires a staff member whose primary role is to coordinate the development of high-quality, impactful learning experiences for school leaders. In addition, the smaller ratio of Partnership Senior Directors to schools in the network ensures that formal PD is created and facilitated with intimate knowledge of each school and leader in mind.

Level-Alike Meetings

The Partnership spends considerable time engaging leaders in professional development, and we believe that real-world application and reflection is critical to cementing the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained during professional development sessions. To complement principals' skill development from Leadership Conferences and to reinforce CTA goals, the Partnership holds "Level-Alike" Meetings for principals approximately four times per year at each level (elementary, middle and high school leaders are grouped together). This is an opportunity for principals, and occasionally APs and other ILT members, to take a deep dive into the practical application of recent professional development.

"Level-Alike" Meetings are facilitated by Partnership Senior Directors and content experts, and are usually conducted at school sites. They generally include classroom observations, or observation of key practices in the school (e.g. coaching conversations with teachers, or teacher team meetings). Level Alike meetings are distinct from the model of most traditional formal professional development. Learning takes place at school sites and is always rooted in analysis and discussion of observational data from seeing work in action. School leaders are supported through a structured debrief, in the process of creating meaning and identifying takeaways for

their own practice and school. This structure creates more opportunity for principals to be self directed learners rather than passive recipients of information.

School Site Supports

In addition to our formalized professional development offerings, the Partnership also provides significant school site support. These supports ensure that learning from our professional development opportunities is appropriately leveraged and implemented.

Side-by-Side Leadership Coaching

To complement formal professional development sessions, school leaders receive individualized capacity-building support from Partnership Senior Directors who have proven experience as transformative principals and administrators in high-need schools, and provide expertise to the school leaders they supervise, evaluate, and coach. Partnership Senior Directors provide one-on-one support for principals at significantly smaller ratios than is traditionally offered at most large, urban districts. Our principal-to-director ratio is on average 5:1, a departure from the average 16:1 ratio observed at most LA Unified schools.[15] A 2013 Wallace Foundation report surveyed 41 school districts across the country and found that school directors oversaw an average of 24 schools each, with a median of about 18 schools.[16] In some districts such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina and the New York City Department of Education, principal managers may oversee as many as 40 and 67 principals, respectively.[17] While the Partnership's reduced ratio of Senior Directors to principals may not be achievable system-wide for most districts, this could be possible for many districts using an equity-based approach. Comparable ratios could be achieved for schools that have been persistently low performing, schools facing extraordinary hardship, and schools serving the most-underserved communities. It is in these contexts in which differentiated supports are needed in order to effectively support school transformation.

The deep experience of our Senior Directors combined with their ability to carry out a "high touch" relationship with each school allows them to truly get to know and understand the needs

> "The Partnership team grounds our work in the development of best practices, and continuously encourages us to find the transformational leader within."
>
> *— Rocio Ortiz, Principal*
> *Robert Louis Stevenson College and*
> *Career Preparatory Middle School*

[15] District average calculated for the 2017-2018 school year.

[16] Corcoran, A. et al., "Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors" (2013) New York, NY: Wallace Foundation.).

[17] Ibid.

of individual principals and schools. Partnership Senior Directors work as thought partners who support execution of the school's strategic plan (CTA). They also support school leaders to face adaptive leadership challenges with a growth mindset, regularly monitor progress, and to develop a sense of urgency in their work.

Partnership Senior Directors engage with principals in the core areas of classroom observation and calibration around effective teaching practice, capacity building of adults in the school building, and managing the systems to support effective daily instruction in each classroom (planning, delivery of instruction and assessment).

Progress Monitoring Support

Senior Directors facilitate a variety of progress monitoring processes, including structured one-on-one check-ins, and quarterly CTA check-ins during which the school's leadership team is guided through a formal reflection on their plans, data reflecting progress, and strategic planning to address remaining needs.

Organizational Leadership Support

Principals regularly struggle to protect time to engage in instructional leadership responsibilities. Partnership Senior Directors support principals in this effort by providing guidance and supports with the development of systems that make operational and organizational issues easier to manage (e.g. performance evaluation, facilities, hiring, recruitment, Title III compliance, etc.). With the help of their Senior Directors, Partnership principals are able to maximize the contributions of others on staff to manage responsibilities and demonstrate leadership.

Supervision and Evaluation

Partnership Senior Directors meet with principals consistently to provide a variety of tailored supports. To ensure support is on target, they conduct ongoing assessments of principals and schools. This approach also shapes our evaluation of principals, which aligns with the district's collectively bargained process, and includes the following components:

- Set goals

- Identify individual communication and work styles

- Identify strengths to be leveraged

- Identify growth areas in leadership and design intentional support plans

- Progress monitoring and reflection

In keeping with our shared leadership model, principals collaborate in identifying areas of focus for coaching sessions to ensure personal investment and accountability. Principals also may experience differentiated support from their Senior Directors and the Partnership team depending on the principal's experience and expertise, as well as school needs and priorities.

Operations Support and Advocacy

While strong operational management of a school is necessary for effective functioning, we believe that school leaders must have sufficient time to focus on the higher-leverage goals of building systems and supporting the shared vision for their schools. To enable focus on these functions, we provide an additional level of support to school leaders in operations

and advocacy not typically offered at other district schools. Utilizing our long-standing relationships and deep understanding of school and district procedures, specialized staff dedicated to operations, compliance, and advocacy provide differentiated assistance to address specific needs of each of our schools.

While we assist with compliance and operational school needs, we do so with a service mindset. Our goal is to ensure our students' and our schools' needs are met, while maintaining compliance with state and district mandates. This added layer of support ensures school leaders don't spin their wheels figuring out operational management issues on their own. Partnership operational supports focus on two areas, removing barriers that interfere with the achievement of our mission, and strategic budget supports to ensure maximum impact for every dollar at the school site.

> "Knowing that the Partnership advocates and supports is an added layer of peace of mind. When situations arise that require a greater degree of advocacy than the principal can provide, the Partnership steps in."
>
> — *Luis Barraza, Principal*
> *Sunrise Elementary School*

Removing Barriers

The Partnership removes barriers that interfere with a school leader's ability to successfully manage their school and ensure outcomes for students through the following strategies:

- **School Level Advocacy and "Unsticking" Challenges:** Too often, principals at high-need, urban schools are forced to dedicate large quantities of time to activities that, while important, detract from other high-leverage needs for their time and attention. For example, a school may have a facilities issue involving a broken fence that has made the school susceptible to break-ins, vandalism, or intruders gaining unauthorized access. The Partnership's Operations Team supports the principal in effectively navigating the district's system to get a timely response, and can help escalate the concern as appropriate to ensure smooth operation of the campus.

- **Lightening the Load:** Often the myriad of operational tasks for which principals and APs are responsible can be the most time consuming. Navigating the broad and complex landscape of district operations supports and keeping abreast of (often changing) policy recommendations or best practices can feel so overwhelming that administrators feel a disincentive to think in innovative ways, as simply remaining compliant is a large enough task. Our Operations Team

can step in to support completion of these tasks, filling in gaps as needed, and helping to build capacity at school sites to lessen the burden on school leaders.

- **Side-by-side Coaching:** While Partnership staff may step in to lighten school leaders' operational management load, in the spirit of continuous improvement and collective action we also work with schools leaders to increase their capacity in operations and advocacy. We supplement district training by working with school leaders to further explain processes, and to operationalize plans in a way that meets the individual schools needs.

Maximizing School Budgets

California continues to rank near the bottom nationally on per pupil funding to public schools. In order to achieve their charge to educate all students to be college and career ready, including students with a vast array of needs, language abilities, and experiences with schooling, leaders must maximize every dollar in the school's budget. The Partnership supports school leaders to budget strategically in two primary ways:

- **Maximizing Flexibility:** We work with school leaders to understand the vision for their schools and think creatively about how we can achieve that vision utilizing the school's existing budget. Our specialized staff help school leaders maximize flexibility in their budgets by identifying and restructuring unrestricted and carry-over funds. Bringing this strategic lens to the budgeting process allows schools to better meet their individual priorities regardless of their particular needs.

- **Advocating for Equitable Funding:** We also advocate on behalf of school leaders to ensure that every available dollar that could, and should, be allocated to meeting the needs of our students is allocated. High-need schools, like ours, bear the brunt of equity challenges that face our school systems at the federal, state and local levels. Our schools are sometimes subject to the unintended effects of policies that result in there being inadequate resources in place to meet the needs of students and teachers. Whether it be funding for nurses, attendance counselors, or supplemental funding to support hiring or retaining a teacher, the Partnership provides additional bandwidth that principals could not muster alone to ensure their schools are served well.

District Advocacy

Our relationships with LA Unified district leadership and school board members also provide us with the opportunity to elevate issues we see impacting our network adversely. As an intentional in-district partner, we are uniquely positioned to be able to recognize and identify potential

solutions for systemic challenges that adversely impact our schools and similar schools serving communities where the need is greatest. As an independent non profit organization, we are also well positioned to effectively advocate for systems change that would address these issues. Our mission, which obviously drives our service-oriented approach towards Partnership schools, is also to impact all schools serving high-need communities.

In a large system like LA Unified, sometimes rules that are applied equally across a system have the inadvertent effect of undermining equity. When the loss of just a few students could potentially mean the displacement of a teacher, requiring a school to have to redo their master schedule and disrupt classroom relationships mid-fall, we advocate for schools to be protected from this sort of destabilizing consequence. This type of advocacy is particularly important in the highest-need schools and communities where stability on campus and healthy development of relationships between students and their teacher are the foundational building blocks of learning.

> As an intentional in-district partner, we are uniquely positioned to recognize and identify potential solutions for systemic challenges that adversely impact our schools and similar schools serving communities where the need is greatest.

Strategic Hiring and Retention

A key autonomy that supports the Partnership's model for leadership development is the flexibility to recruit, hire, and retain administrators. We use a rigorous selection process to identify leaders with proven success, including recruiting from a wide pool as well as promising candidates from within our network of schools. Our hiring process for principals is a collaborative one that involves multiple rounds of interviews with a committee of key stakeholders at the school site, including school leaders, teachers, parents, students (high school only), to ensure that the school leader is an appropriate fit with the entire school community.

Identifying and Selecting Great Leaders

Finding the best fit for our schools is our top priority when identifying and selecting school leaders, and staff in general. We seek out candidates with proven track records of achieving student growth, and who possess a range of leadership experiences, including administrative,

coaching, and teaching experience. We value having a diverse candidate pool with leaders who come to the table with significant experience working in low-income communities and communities of color, including in the three specific communities we serve. With this in mind, we have developed several strategies to identify and recruit top talent based on our experience and current research on best practices.

- **Use of data:** As a school transformation organization, we are looking to hire talent uniquely suited to our context. This includes leaders with a proven track record of success in seeing growth in student outcomes over multiple years, while serving high-need communities. Our talent team analyzes school performance data to identify and conduct outreach to promising candidates. By evaluating these data points, the Partnership makes independent evaluations about the effectiveness of administrators in previous positions, which we use as a starting point to further evaluate during interviews a candidate's knowledge of instruction, analytic use of data to make decisions and drive outcomes and school vision.

- **Use of our network:** We have found that many of our most successful leaders are ones that have significant experience serving our communities specifically, or are people with some similar professional background to our existing high-performing leaders. Principals must understand the cultural context of the work, including strengths, opportunities, and challenges that urban schools, serving low-income, historically underserved communities or color face. They must be able to communicate this understanding to the school community to create buy-in and trust. To this end, we use our trusted networks within and outside of our schools and the school district to advertise open positions and solicit quality candidate referrals.

Differentiated Compensation to Work A 12-Month Calendar

There is little doubt that being a school leader is a challenging endeavor, particularly in our high-need schools. The Partnership acknowledges and values the great effort involved in

school transformation overall and particularly the high demands and expectations of pursuing our mission. Partnership principals, while district employees, are paid by the Partnership to work additional days throughout the year (a year-round schedule) to support the rigorous work of school transformation. While many districts around the country have 10 or 11 month work calendars for principals, we believe that supporting school transformation requires more time to meet the intense challenges of the work.

> Our retention efforts include a two-pronged approach focusing on collaboratively identifying threats to sustainability, and creating individualized plans of support.

Sustainability and Retention

Poor principal retention is a crisis that merits greater attention. Estimates vary, but approximately 50% of new principals transfer from their schools after three years.[18] In schools serving high-poverty communities, that figure is often worse, with only one quarter of new principals in these schools making it to the five-year mark.[19] The work is complex and challenging in our context, and attracting ambitious, talented leadership also runs the risk of higher turnover as successful candidates are sought out for promotion, or they seek new opportunities elsewhere.[20] With this sobering data in mind, the Partnership works intentionally to sustain and retain principals in our schools. Our retention efforts include a two-pronged approach focusing on collaboratively identifying threats to sustainability, and creating individualized plans of support.

Through research and experience, we've come to understand that the factors that influence sustainability are highly individual. There are some factors for principals that are universal (e.g. grueling work, long hours, and stress), but for most people, the best way to identify threats to retention is through proactive conversation. We have found that these conversations serve the dual purposes of helping to identify threats to retention, and also clearly communicating interest in retention from the Partnership. While we are not able to address all of the issues that may come up, the conversation affords the opportunity to think creatively about what might be done.

Through conversation with principals we are able to learn about their interests, ambitions, and collaboratively develop a plan that can support their longevity in the role. Some examples of

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[18]Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover. (2014). School Leaders Network.

[19]Young, M., Fuller, E. (2009). "Tenure and Retention of Newly Hired Principals in Texas," Texas High School Project Leadership Initiative Issue Brief 1. Austin, TX: University Council for Educational Administration, University of Texas.

[20]Doyle, D., Locke, G. (2014). "Lacking Leaders: The Challenges of Principal Recruitment, Selection, and Placement" Washington D.C.: Thomas B Fordham Institute.

> "The new tools I've developed will allow me to be the best possible school leader for my community. Our PLI program understands the needs and marginalization challenges faced by the communities we serve. We've been presented with various social issues and topics that have awoken an equity-driven mindset among all of us…"
>
> — *Mario Juarez, PLF@PLI Graduate Cohort 1*
> *Dean, Robert Louis Stevenson College and*
> *Career Preparatory Middle School*

creative solutions include things like supporting the principal in managing their schedule to ensure they have better work life balance, or ensuring that they are able to attend a child's basketball games regularly. It might also include things like providing opportunities for leadership or to take on strategic projects with the network that offer new learning and growth opportunities outside of their school. These sorts of customized solutions are best discovered through a collaborative process of engaging with principals about their needs, desires and goals, and working together to create a plan to achieve them.

Pipeline Development

The best candidates for leadership in our context are often the emergent talent working within our schools who most intimately know the school community and who carry with them a strong drive for excellence. In addition to the professional development investments we make in our Assistant Principals and teacher leaders, since 2015 we have also invested in a unique aspiring leaders program in partnership with the University of California Los Angeles' (UCLA) Center X Principal Leadership Institute (PLI). The program specializes in the preparation of school leaders who can lead transformational work to address issues of marginalization and inequity in historically underserved urban schools.

"When the opportunity came to the UCLA Principal Leadership Institute to design a program to prepare leaders for the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, it was an opportunity to experiment and refine how our two organizations could collaborate around issues of social justice, equity and access," says Nancy Parachini Ed.D., Director Principal Leadership Institute, UCLA Center X. "This model of collaboration between our two entities exemplifies how, together, we can create a successful pathway to prepare future leaders for the schools that we are dedicated to serving."

The Partnership Leadership Fellows at UCLA's Principal Leadership Institute (PLF @ PLI for short) accepts a small cohort of exceptional teachers, guidance counselors, coordinators and coaches from Partnership schools seeking to pursue school administration. Through the program, aspiring leaders earn an M.Ed. and Tier 1 administrative credential in the state of California. Through the on-campus curriculum, field study at their school site, and through supplemental training from the Partnership, Fellows gain a deep understanding of the fundamentals of school leadership.

As we continue to develop this program in the coming years, we hope to study and share our results on how internal pipeline development programs that involve strategic partnership with districts, school transformation organizations like the Partnership, and university partners, can be leveraged to contribute to the success of high-need urban schools.

Conclusion

At the Partnership, we know that the quality of school leadership is critical to improving student outcomes. We also firmly believe that great leaders are made, not born. While we aim to hire the most qualified and well-matched talent for our schools, there is always room for professional growth and school improvement.

"We have high expectations for our schools and we hold school leaders accountable for moving towards excellence, but we don't expect them to do it alone," says Ian Guidera, Chief Academic Officer, Partnership for Los Angeles Schools. "Our Great School Leaders model is centered on intensive coaching and support to increase the capacity of school leaders to build great systems

and make effective decisions that address the specific needs of their schools."

While we focus on coaching, professional development, training and support, building effective systems and developing leaders in high-need schools requires us to be intentional about how we support schools and leaders in meeting their individual needs. Through a variety of assessments we determine each school's stage of development, then set and track measurable goals. Based on need, we target our resources equitably for maximum impact. Similarly, our professional development sessions are planned with input from leaders to ensure relevance, and sequenced to meet strategic outcomes.

Effective school leadership is, perhaps, equal parts art and science. So too, is the work of school management and developing school leaders to maximize their impact on a school and the community it serves. While we are the first to admit that our work remains unfinished, we believe that what we have seen to date offers concrete ideas about what a system for school leader development can look like, particularly one that considers the equity argument for differentiated supports in schools and communities where the need is greatest.

> "We have high expectations for our schools and we hold school leaders accountable for moving towards excellence, but we don't expect them to do it alone."
>
> — *Ian Guidera*
> *Chief Academic Officer*
> *Partnership for Los Angeles Schools*

School leader development, like school transformation, is an intensive and dynamic process that requires a flexible, yet coherent framework. Our work has evolved since our founding in 2007, and we continue to make adjustments based on our learnings to most effectively support our school leaders where and when they need it most. This work is challenging but we've seen that with the right people and a strong plan, we can create significant improvements at the most challenging schools and improve outcomes for the most marginalized students.

While there are many important ingredients to the work of school transformation, when it comes to ensuring we see change in our schools, nothing is more important than effective school leadership. Principals create the conditions in which teachers and staff can thrive. As such, we believe our model of leadership development that provides differentiated supports for leaders at the highest-need schools, is attainable for most districts, and necessary if we are to see equitable outcomes in our public schools.

Implementation Checklists

The following checklists are intended to support policy makers, practitioners, and implementers of all sorts who are interested in applying the Partnership's model to their own systems for school leadership support and development. These checklists may be used both for planning purposes (are we prepared to implement well?), and for reflection (did we implement as well as we'd hoped? If not, how can we improve?).

Formal Professional Development for School Leaders

☐ With school leader input, create/adopt/identify clear success criteria for implementation of effective systems and school leader practice.

☐ With school leader input, identify a narrowly focused set of success criteria that professional development will address.

☐ Create a scope and sequence of learning for school leaders that aligns with the success criteria.

☐ Ensure coherence: ensure that the scope and sequence of learning for school leaders aligns with that of teacher leaders, teachers, leadership teams, and other relevant school staff.

☐ Ensure that the content foci for professional development will directly impact classroom instruction, including planning, delivery of instruction, coaching of teachers, use of data to inform instruction, as well as school culture and social emotional learning.

☐ Learn by doing: ensure at least a majority of learning time is spent with school leaders actually working on their practice in the most challenging and complex aspects of leadership (e.g. practicing skills, building or refining systems, preparing for implementation at their site).

☐ Ensure adequate time and resources are in place to achieve high-quality facilitation and execution of learning experiences for school leaders.

Coaching of School Leaders

☐ Clarify school goals: ensure the school has clearly identified, meaningful goals and action plans to achieve those goals with broad ownership across the team.

☐ Implement a growth-oriented progress monitoring system that supports strategic and data driven leadership that meets the needs of the school in service of its goals.

☐ Clarify the leader's goals: ensure that the school leader has clear, meaningful goals and action plans to achieve them, that align with school goals.

☐ Ensure a high-touch relationship with school leaders and principal managers. A 5:1 ratio of school leaders to managers is preferrable.

☐ Focus the attention of principal managers on coaching school leaders on the most complex and challenging aspects of leadership (e.g. building systems, changing culture, instructional leadership, etc.) and only minimally on compliance items.

☐ Emphasize coaching and development, not evaluation. Ensure principal managers spend the vast majority of their time together supporting principals in developing their leadership practice, rather than engaging in a formal evaluation process.

Operational Support and Advocacy

☐ Ensure the orientation of the school leader's operational support team is one of customer service rather than compliance (e.g. "how can we help you implement your vision with the resources and tools available to us?").

☐ Identify equity challenges that most adversely impact the highest-need schools and communities.

☐ Identify opportunities to provide relief to high-need schools where otherwise neutral policies would create equity gaps and perpetuate low performance and create undue hardship for school leaders to achieve their goals.

☐ Ensure the resources are in place to help the highest need schools and school leaders "unstick" challenges and interrupt patterns of systemic inequity that perpetuate achievement and opportunity gaps (e.g. poor facilities, high staff turnover, limited talent pool, limited social and emotional supports, etc.).

☐ Support the school leader in maximizing every dollar within their budget, including flexibility in use of all funding, and the development of systems to ensure all available dollars are allocated to the school.

☐ Reduce barriers for school leaders to leverage resources from external partners to meet the needs of the school community.

Hiring, Retention and Sustainability

☐ Ensure a broad talent pool for each vacancy, including when necessary, providing targeted relief from policies or practices that might unnecessarily limit the talent pool at the highest-need schools.

☐ Find the right leader for the job - whenever possible include stakeholder voice in the hiring process to create buy-in around the hiring decision.

☐ Value diversity in the hiring process and ensure school leaders have knowledge of the cultural context in which they are going to work, including how to leverage the strengths and assets of the staff and school community.

☐ Provide time and resources to enable success for school leaders including adequate time and compensation in their annual calendar to accomplish the work.

☐ Engage proactively with school leaders about sustainability and retention. Identify their long-term plans and things that might be done to support them feeling that the job of school leadership in a high-need context is sustainable.

School Leadership Development Bibliography

Since our founding, the Partnership has drawn upon relevant research to understand and implement effective practices in service of achieving our mission for the students and families we serve. Captured here are a number of scholarly works, professional journals, and relevant texts that have both informed our work, and provided the research-based foundation upon which our model for school leadership development rests. We believe these texts offer a strong evidence base for the model of school leadership development described above, and substantiate the distinctive aspects of the Partnership's approach to leadership development that may be of interest to school districts, local, state and federal policy makers, the higher education community, school funders, and charter school operators.

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