
NEWS

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NEW RESEARCH PROJECT LOOKS AT THE CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF PRINCIPAL TURNOVER, AND SOLUTIONS

Report indicates high-poverty schools hit hardest by principal churn

[Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research](#)

Principals are a key in-school factor associated with student achievement. When principals leave, it can disrupt school progress, increase teacher turnover, and stall student achievement. A new study developed by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) reviews existing research to identify why school leadership matters and the impacts of principal mobility on student achievement. The study looks at the data on principal mobility and ways that policymakers can improve principal retention, especially in schools with higher percentages of students from low-income families, students of color, and low-performing students where turnover is highest.

The report, [Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research](#), was released today in Washington, D.C., at the [2019 NASSP Advocacy Conference](#) and is the first release of an intensive project by the two organizations to explore the causes of and solutions to principal attrition.

The report reviews 35 major studies on principal turnover. It provides guidance to policymakers, district administrators, and school stakeholders interested in improving the stability of school leadership, recommending five key evidence-based strategies drawn from the research:

1. Providing high-quality professional learning opportunities, both initial preparation and in-service, in order to give principals the necessary skills and competencies for school leadership.
2. Improving working conditions to foster principals' satisfaction with their role.

3. Ensuring adequate and stable compensation for principals, commensurate with the responsibilities of the position, to value principals' contributions and to attract and retain effective leaders.
4. Supporting decision-making authority in school leadership to allow principals to shape decisions and solutions to address the specific needs of their staff and students.
5. Reforming accountability systems to ensure that incentives encourage effective principals to stay in challenging schools to support teachers and improve student learning.

"The research consistently highlights the relationship between principal effectiveness and student success," said NASSP Executive Director JoAnn Bartoletti. "It also highlights our nation's consistent underinvestment in principal effectiveness. The findings and this report and those forthcoming as this project continues will provide clear direction on the ways NASSP can provide guidance in how to retain and continue to support our best leadership talent."

The brief notes that several studies have found a clear relationship between principal turnover and student test score losses across grade levels and subjects. This relationship is stronger in high-poverty, low-achieving schools—the schools in which students most rely on education for their future success.

The authors suggest that higher turnover in these schools is likely because they tend to have fewer resources, more challenging working conditions, and less competitive salaries compared to better-resourced schools,

While the national average rate of principal turnover is approximately 18 percent, turnover is higher in schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty (21 percent). In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, for example, 28 percent of principals in the highest-poverty schools leave each year compared to 18 percent of principals in the lowest poverty schools; and in Philadelphia, 33 percent of principals working in the highest-poverty schools leave each year compared to 24 percent of principals in the lowest poverty schools. While the bulk of turnover is due to voluntary retirements or such factors as principals seeking less-challenging schools, better prepared principals (including those who have had internships and/or mentors) are better-equipped to manage challenges and stay longer, even in under-resourced schools.

"The research is clear: Schools with the fewest resources, which are usually those with the most underserved students, are more likely to see high principal turnover," said LPI President Linda Darling-Hammond. "Because principals are so critical to student success, this is a priority issue that policymakers must address if they are to ensure that all students learn in schools led by strong leaders who are well-supported to stay and lead their schools for the long run."

The brief was released as more than 350 principals from across the country prepared to meet with members of Congress in Washington, D.C., at the 2019 NASSP Advocacy Conference and 2019 NAESP National Leaders Conference. This first brief provides direction for more intensive

research, which will take place through fall 2019. The second brief will be released in summer 2019, coinciding with the [2019 National Principals Conference](#), July 18–20 in Boston. Additional original quantitative and qualitative research will be conducted throughout 2019, and a third brief and final report are scheduled to be released in the fall.

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About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.

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About NASSP

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student’s potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the [National Honor Society](#), [National Junior Honor Society](#), [National Elementary Honor Society](#), and [National Student Council](#).