

July 17, 2015

Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Director Shaun Donovan
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
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Secretary Duncan and Director Donovan:

The FY2017 budget process represents a tremendous opportunity to create positive, lasting change in our education system. By signaling key priorities and other critical investments, the Administration can continue making progress against our shared commitment to ensuring all American students achieve the highest levels of academic success. We hope to provide useful insights on how school leadership investments can advance President Obama's education priorities.

New Leaders is a national nonprofit dedicated to enabling high academic achievement for all children by developing transformational school leaders and advancing the policies and practices that allow great school leaders to succeed. Since our founding in 2000, we have helped to train and equip more than 1,600 principals and teacher leaders across the country, positively impacting more than 14,000 teachers and 350,000 students—most of whom are students of color and come from low-income backgrounds. Like you, we believe that educational equity is the civil rights issue of our time.

New Leaders is committed to making every school a place where great teachers love to teach and all students love to learn. We can reach this goal by paying more attention to how our schools—not just individual classrooms, but all classrooms within a school—are organized and led. The current budget process is an opportunity for the Administration to reinforce its focus on improving student outcomes by making meaningful investments in programs that enable and empower great principals to create schools where teachers can thrive and students can excel.

LEADERSHIP AS A CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITY

Everything that happens in schools—setting high expectations for what students must learn, ensuring well-rounded teaching and learning is high-quality and engaging, providing teachers with feedback that helps them get better, making time and space for teachers to work together to help kids, engaging families and communities, *everything*—depends on a great principal, supported by a strong instructional leadership team, to make sure it gets done and gets done well.

We strongly urge the Administration to include school leadership as a cross-cutting priority in the FY2017 budget.

School leaders—including principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and other school-based leaders—play vital roles in efforts to strengthen teaching and elevate the teaching profession, ensure all students are college- and career-ready, promote equity across schools and school systems, and support other shared goals across the P-12 learning continuum, from expanding access to high-quality preschool to getting more students to and through postsecondary educational pursuits or into a fruitful career. A cross-cutting priority on school leadership would signal to Congress and other stakeholders that investments in building educators' leadership capacity and creating systems that support leadership

at all levels, from the classroom to the school and system levels, represent an efficient and effective strategy for ensuring strong implementation of current reform initiatives as well as the testing and replication of innovative new practices.

Moreover, this cross-cutting priority would build on a year of unprecedented federal focus on school leadership—a focus that resulted in robust engagement with principals (*e.g.*, the Principal Ambassador Fellowship program and the annual “Shadow a Principal” week) and teacher leaders (*e.g.*, the Teacher Ambassador Fellowship program and Teach to Lead summits) as well as the inclusion of diverse school leader voices in federal policy conversations (*e.g.*, the three “Principals at ED” events and leadership roundtables with turnaround leaders in New Orleans and Memphis). The Administration has made important strides in raising and reinforcing the importance of school leadership. Now is the time to build on this momentum to encourage an even stronger focus on and even greater funding for school leadership in the years ahead.

PRIORITIZING LEADERSHIP INVESTMENTS

As you, Secretary Duncan, have reflected many times, one would be hard-pressed to find a great school without a great school leader. This is particularly true in underperforming schools, where improvement simply does not occur without strong leaders who take innovative steps to get the work done.¹ Yet the role of the principal has become vastly more complex and demanding, and neither pipeline-building efforts (*e.g.*, teacher leadership initiatives), pre-service preparation programs (for aspiring school leaders), professional development and support (for sitting school leaders), nor other key strategies related to principal and school effectiveness (*e.g.*, instructional leadership team development) have adequately changed to address the new realities of today’s school leaders. Seventy percent of principals indicate their responsibilities have changed dramatically over the past five years and 75 percent of principals now report the job is too complex.² More than 90 percent of educators report participating in workshop-style professional development each school year³ despite the fact that such training has not been found to positively affect student achievement⁴. Moreover, while districts report an ample supply of certified school administrators, superintendents struggle to find candidates who are truly ready to lead and only 41 percent of urban superintendents are satisfied with the performance of their current principal corps.⁵ Finally, staff turnover is highest in the schools most in need of strong, consistent teaching and leading: on average, more than one-quarter of principals leave high-poverty schools each year.⁶ In some high-need districts, this figure is significantly greater. Such leadership transitions have negative, snowballing effects on their schools as 97 percent of teachers list school leadership as essential or very important for their retention—more than any other factor.⁷ Not surprisingly, great teachers want to work for great leaders. Truly, a great deal is at stake for our students, teachers, schools, and communities.

¹ Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Aladjem, D. K., Birman, B. F., Orland, M., Harr-Robins, J., Heredia, A., Parrish, T. B., & Ruffini, S. J. (2010). *Achieving dramatic school improvement: An exploratory study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings Learning from Leadership Project*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

² Metlife, Inc. (2013). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf>.

³ Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., and Richardson, N. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from <http://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/nsdcstudy2009.pdf>.

⁴ Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W.-Y., Scarloss, B., and Shapley, K. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

⁵ Farkas, S., Johnson, J., Duffett, A., and Foleno, T. with Foley, P. (2001). *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk About School Leadership*. New York, NY: Public Agenda. Retrieved from http://www.publicagenda.org/files/ahead_of_the_game.pdf.

⁶ Battle, D. (2010). *Principal Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2008-09 Principal Follow-up Survey* (NCES 2010-337). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁷ Scholastic Inc. (2012). *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on the Teaching Profession*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/pdfs/Gates2012_full.pdf.

At a time when our schools desperately need great leaders, supported by strong instructional leadership teams, the Administration has an important opportunity to encourage and signal support for districts committed to leveraging leadership—at the classroom, school, and district levels—to address critical challenges facing our nation’s schools. **It’s time for a bold new vision for Teacher and Leader Pathways and a renewed commitment to the School Leadership Program.**

- The Teacher and Principal Pathways program, proposed by the President for FY2016, would create an important new focus on ensuring that aspiring teachers and aspiring principals are prepared for success. For FY17, we propose an expanded vision of this program – one that adds *teacher leaders* and *sitting principals*. Investing in teacher leadership is triple win: it expands the instructional leadership capacity of a school, is a smart retention strategy for great teachers, and builds a bench of future principals. In the Pathways program, this could include support for districts looking to innovate, while being careful not to create additional seat time or other bureaucratic requirements. And, any investment in teachers, teacher leaders, and aspiring principals is wasted if sitting principals are ignored – the best training in the world won’t keep a great teacher in a school with a struggling principal. Supporting sitting principals – with their instructional leadership teams – is the best way to ensure that all educators are able to grow in their jobs. **This expanded vision would benefit from a higher funding request than the original \$138.8 million; we recommend \$200 million with at least \$50 million dedicated specifically for principals.**
- The School Leadership Program (SLP) is the only federal program specifically dedicated to school leadership. SLP gives high-poverty districts the resources to prepare and support dynamic leaders who have a measurable, positive impact on student achievement. Take Principal Alison Harris and Assistant Principal Erica Jordan-Thomas at Ranson Middle School in Charlotte, North Carolina. After training and support from New Leaders, an SLP grantee, Principal Harris and Assistant Principal Jordan-Thomas led Ranson to become the second highest performing Title I school in the district in terms of student growth. SLP also can provide resources to support sitting principals and speed the pace of improvement by ensuring that changes to the profession aren’t only for new entrants.

Investments in principal preparation and support are cost-efficient. They save money in decreasing the high costs of principal turnover, when each year, 25,000 of our nation’s principals leave their schools and half of new principals quit by the end of their third year on the job⁸. And principals’ critical role in developing and retaining great teachers ensures that the billions spent on teachers are not wasted. While we appreciate the Administration’s efforts to streamline programs and initiatives, we have seen time and time again – from competitive grants to ESEA flexibility – how a focus on principals is “added in” to meet requirements and is the last area of focus for on-the-ground implementation. These requirements should be maintained as they focus thinking, planning, and action on school leadership where it’s essential but might otherwise be overlooked. However, there remains a need for a dedicated source of funding that sparks new innovation and scales effective practice *specifically* to support future and sitting principals and meet the urgent need and growing demand for top-notch leaders, like Harris and Jordan-Thomas. **We recommend the Administration request \$50 million for a School Leadership Program that will prepare and support great leadership.**

Finally, we would be thrilled to discuss other ways the Administration can signal the importance of leadership investments and encourage Congress to include dedicated funding for school leadership in a future appropriations bill.

⁸ School Leaders Network (2014). *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover*. Retrieved from http://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf.

OTHER KEY LEADERSHIP INVESTMENTS

Drawing on our experience developing, supporting, and advocating on behalf of great school leaders, we have identified the following additional leadership priorities for the FY2017 budget. As detailed below, these investments are critical for improving outcomes for students, particularly economically disadvantaged and other at-risk students. As you work through the budget development process and negotiate important policy and fiscal decisions, we hope you will consider these priorities:

- The Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) supports the development, validation, and scaling up of innovative strategies and interventions for addressing persistent education challenges. The Department has established priorities for i3 relating to (1) developing and implementing models for principal preparation that deepen proven leadership skills and (2) increasing equitable access to effective teachers and principals for students from low-income families and other high-needs students. I3 can play a key role in identifying and expanding school leadership development programs that truly have a positive effect on student achievement and school performance, especially in predominantly low-income districts. Take Green Street Academy in Baltimore, Maryland: New Leader Principal Crystal Harden-Lindsey is hyper-focused on the success of her teachers in this innovative secondary school. Since assuming the principalship in 2012, Principal Harden-Lindsay has supported the development of five Emerging Leaders, teacher leaders who learn to lead teams of teachers to meet school improvement goals, and two Aspiring Principal Residents, educators on the path to becoming transformational principals. This “leadership lab” approach is enabling Principal Harden-Lindsey and her team to turn around one of the lowest-performing schools in the area and has been supported, in part, by New Leaders’ i3-funded leadership programming. **We recommend the Administration request \$300 million for i3.**
- The Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) provides for the development and implementation of sustainable, performance-based compensation systems for teachers, principals, and other personnel in high need schools in order to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement. This program has been instrumental in helping schools and districts move from a pay system based primarily on seniority to one that focuses on student outcomes. TIF helps send the message that the ultimate goal is to enable meaningful learning for all kids—regardless of their background, zip code, native language, or developmental needs. Take Memphis City Schools in Memphis, Tennessee: recognizing the need for strategic compensation to recruit, support, and retain great teaching talent, the district sought out data. Based on local survey information from New Leaders’ EPIC Knowledge Management system (created in part with TIF funding) they saw that 81 percent of school leaders and 77 percent of teachers said that higher salaries are “very important” or “absolutely essential” in retaining effective teachers and 96 percent of teachers said that supportive leadership was critical to their decision to continue teaching. The district developed a compensation structure with higher salaries tied to performance rather than years of experience or education. The district also recognized the critical role of the principal in creating and maintaining a supportive context where teachers want to work by providing incentives, including greater autonomy, to encourage effective leaders to move into the highest need schools. As a result, high-performing New Leader Principal Jaron Carson was motivated to take the helm of an iZone school beginning in SY2015-16. **We recommend the Administration request at least \$350 million for TIF and that the program continue to focus on broader human capital systems in schools.** The deeper focus of these human capital systems on school leadership could be recognized by re-naming the program as the *Teacher and Leader Incentive Fund*.
- Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) makes grants to national nonprofit organizations for projects that recruit, select, and prepare, or provide professional development activities for, teachers or principals. The importance of recruiting, training, and retaining effective school leaders cannot be overstated; principals can

account for as much as 25 percent of a school's effect on student achievement⁹, and 97 percent of teachers say that the principal is responsible for determining if a school can attract and retain great teachers¹⁰. It is imperative that we make the necessary investments in evidence-based programs that help develop and retain these leaders. **We recommend the Administration request \$117.5 million in set-aside funds for SEED in FY2017.** We also recommend that these funds continue to be used for non-profits that support either teachers or leaders or both.

- **School Improvement Grants (SIG)** provide funding to state education agencies (SEAs), which the SEAs use to make competitive subgrants to districts that demonstrate the greatest need and the strongest commitment to using the funds to support students in their lowest-performing schools. The SIG program is designed specifically to support the lowest performing schools—those most in need of strong leadership. In fact, research has shown that improvement simply does not occur without strong school leadership.¹¹ Take Fenger High School in Chicago, Illinois: in 2011, Fenger received a 3-year school improvement grant totaling more than \$5.5 million. New Leader Principal Elizabeth Dozier used the turnaround model framework and federal funds to completely re-staff the school and bring in supplemental academic, social, and emotional support services for her students. The results of Principal Dozier's school improvement strategies were profound: the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards more than doubled in just three years. **We recommend the Administration request \$555.8 million in FY2017 funding for SIG; in particular, New Leaders supports the Turnaround School Leaders Program, which funds efforts to select, prepare, support, and retain school leaders in SIG schools.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the FY2017 budget. If you would like to discuss our recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me at jgran@newleaders.org.

Sincerely,



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Chief Policy Officer
New Leaders

Cc: Dennis McDonough, White House Chief of Staff; Cecilia Munoz, Director of the Domestic Policy Council; Roberto Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the President for Education; Emma Vadehra, Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of Education; Amy McIntosh, Acting Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, U.S. Department of Education; Thomas Skelly, Director, Budget Office, U.S. Department of Education

⁹ Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. New York, NY: Wallace Foundation.

¹⁰ Scholastic Inc. (2012). *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession*. New York, NY: Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

¹¹ Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Aladjem, D. K., Birman, B. F., Orland, M., Harr-Robins, J., Heredia, A., Parrish, T. B., & Ruffini, S. J. (2010). *Achieving dramatic school improvement: An exploratory study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings Learning from Leadership Project*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.